

Fan the Fires of Faithfulness!

2 Timothy 1:1-7

In a world that's increasingly hostile to the gospel, Christ calls us to fearless faithfulness.

LTS: 1 Pet. 2:13-25

When we read the epistle of 2 Timothy, we are actually reading the last words of a man who knows his time is up. The apostle Paul is preparing to die. It won't be long before the order will be signed for his execution. While he still has time, however, he pens one last letter to his faithful disciple and comrade in ministry; a man we know simply as Timothy.

We should remind ourselves here that Paul is writing out of the worst possible circumstances. The words we are going to consider over the next several weeks and months are words written from prison. Now, when I say "prison", the picture that probably comes to mind is one of a medieval jail like the one John Bunyan lived in for 14 years. It's bad, but at least he has a bed, a chair, and a desk to write on. And certainly, Paul had experienced that kind of incarceration in Rome before when he was under house arrest. But now it's different. Now, it is possible that he is living in a dark underground holding cell in Rome's Mamertine Prison. This was not a correctional facility but merely a place to keep convicted enemies of the state until such time as they could be executed.

But whether he is in a hole in the ground or some place a little more accommodating, we know one thing for certain: Paul knows his time is limited. He also knows that he is not leaving the churches he has planted at an optimal time for growth and expansion. To the contrary, the church in this historical moment is in decline. Humanly speaking, things have not been going well. There was division in the church. False teachers were deceiving the weak. Nero was on the throne in Rome and was actively blaming Christians for the great fire that every student of history is familiar with. Christians were being singled out almost exclusively for persecution. They were hated by the people. They had to worship in secret – often underground, in the catacombs, among the tombs and under cover of darkness. They were being cast into the arena at Rome to be devoured by wild beasts or run through by the gladiators or doused in pitch and set ablaze simply to provide light for Nero's nighttime chariot rides.

Under that pressure, many professing believers were apostatizing – turning their backs on Paul, his gospel, and even Christ himself.

Paul's last letter, therefore, contains his final words of encouragement and exhortation to the man who would take up Paul's mantle and continue the ministry of Gospel proclamation and church planting at a time when hostilities toward the gospel were at their peak. And Paul knew Timothy was the man for the job.

Let me take a few moments to introduce you to Timothy. In this letter Paul refers to Timothy with such names as (2) "My beloved child." In 1 Tim he calls Tim "My true child in the faith." Now that doesn't mean that Paul had personally led Timothy to faith in Jesus. It seems apparent from this first chapter that his grandmother Lois and his Mother Eunice were the agents the Spirit used to accomplish his salvation. In fact, Paul alludes to that again in chapter 3 when he mentions "that from a child he had been taught the sacred writing which are able to make one wise for salvation."

Nevertheless, Paul became his personal discipler. Paul was probably twice Timothy's age when Timothy was ordained to ministry and sent out to work with Paul. From that moment onward Paul was Timothy's spiritual father; teaching him, correcting him, modeling for him what it means to be a true man of God; Paul was the one who gave Timothy opportunities to fail and succeed, and always to grow in grace and in his ability to effectively serve and minister both the gospel and the whole counsel of God. Over the years He became Paul's fellow laborer and official representative.

Timothy's character has been described as a blend of amiability and faithfulness in spite of his natural timidity. (1 Cor. 16:10). In that sense he was someone dissimilar to the Apostle who, it seems, was never timid. Timothy also suffered from some kind of physical problem ("frequent ailments" 1 Tim. 5:23). But even though Timothy was not the equivalent of Paul's towering personality and giftedness, he had some characteristics that other men didn't possess; namely, loyalty and faithfulness to Paul and to Christ no matter the personal difficulty involved.

Paul loved Timothy and admired his character. When he wrote his letter to the church of Philippi, he said this of Timothy,

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon,

²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. (Phil. 2:19-22)

None of Paul's other companions are mentioned as often or are with him as constantly as is Timothy.¹ Paul knew that he could count on Timothy because they had traveled together all over Asia Minor. Occasionally, Paul would send Timothy to churches by himself as Paul's representative. When Paul experienced his first Roman imprisonment, Timothy was with him, helping, serving, and laboring by his side. He repeatedly served with Paul in Corinth, Philippi, Macedonia, Jerusalem and Ephesus. In fact, Timothy was serving on Paul's behalf in Ephesus when the letter before us arrived.

One of the major themes of this letter is Paul's longing for Timothy come to Rome to see him one more time. Whether Paul and Timothy actually saw one another again is uncertain. That Timothy attempted to get there in time is beyond doubt.

This morning I want to look briefly at the first 7 verses of 2 Timothy. Since this is the beginning of the letter there are several – seemingly disconnected – thoughts and statements to consider. It's a rather simple text so I have given it a simple outline. Just three words, really...

- I. Greeting
- II. Gratitude
- III. Giftedness

Let's begin by considering Paul's...

I. Greeting

Read vv. 1-2

1. The first thing that we observe in this letter is that, while Paul is certainly in jail, he does not see himself as a prisoner. Rather, in keeping with his mission he views himself ever and always an apostle of Jesus Christ and a minister of the gospel. No matter where Paul is or what circumstance he may face, he is always on mission with the gospel. And he is on this mission NOT because it was something that he set out to do or desired to do, but because it was something God called him to do.

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1967), 855

2. Paul didn't apply for this position. The Lord never posted a "help wanted" sign hoping some qualified applicant would come along to help him accomplish his mission. No! Paul became an apostle of Jesus Christ when he was suddenly confronted and arrested by Jesus Christ himself. It was in that sense that he was an apostle "by the will of God."

3. Someone may ask: Why is Paul making this point in a personal letter to Timothy? Surely, he already knows this! And that's true. But Paul also knew that his letter would be circulated among all the other churches, and it would be appropriate and necessary to remind them by whose authority he is writing and laboring among them.

4. Notice the next phrase: "According to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus." This is simply Paul's way of affirming that he is an apostle of the Gospel. He is a messenger of the good news for sinners that God has promised salvation - he has promised eternal life - through Jesus Christ.

A. "The" promise – speaks to the gospel's exclusivity. ("I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me Jn. 14:6).

B. That it is a "Promise" speaks to its certainty. (Whoever believes in him Will Not Perish but have everlasting life (Jn 3:16)

C. That it is "In Christ Jesus" -speaks to the Gospel's authenticity – And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The very essence of our salvation is our spiritual union with Christ.

5. This is how Paul sees himself whether imprisoned or free. He is on mission with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is calling all men everywhere to repent, to believe and become a joyful partaker of the promise of the life that is in Jesus

6. Now look at the 2nd verse. (Read v. 2)

7. There is an unmistakable warm affection in these words. Paul doesn't really speak this way of his other companions in ministry. No doubt he loved them all uniquely, but to Paul, Timothy was his "beloved child." In Chap 2:1 he calls Timothy "My child." Timothy may have benefitted from a number of biblical teachers and spiritual examples, but he only had one spiritual father. And this spiritual father was always looking out for Timothy's wellbeing. Notice the blessing Paul pronounces: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. This is very much like other blessings Paul often weaves into his letters, but Timothy was probably never in more need of grace mercy and peace than he was now that his dear Father, mentor and friend was about to leave him to carry on the work without him.

8. Coming to v. 3, Paul pours out more affection on Timothy. But the context in which he does it is remarkable. And this brings us to the second point...

II. Gratitude:

1. Remember, Paul is in prison. Indeed, this is likely the worst prison circumstance he has experienced since the time he and Silas had been beaten with rods in Philippi and cast into the “inner prison”[the darkest, most hopeless place] where their feet were fastened in the stocks (Acts 16:24).

2. Paul is probably in just such a place now. But notice his first words... “I thank God...” What? I mean, what does he have to be thankful for? I realize that Paul normally offers a statement thanks giving after his introduction, but there had never been a more likely occasion when you would think he would give himself a pass to complain about his circumstances - even just a little. But no. Paul is thinking about how good God had been to him; the unmerited blessing he had received from God’s gracious hand.

A. Eph. 5:20 Paul teaches that we must “always giving thanks FOR all things.

B. 1 Thess 5:18. Paul teaches us that we are to give thanks “In everything... for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

3. You see, my friends, one of the marks of a mature follower of Jesus is that he/she is a thankful person. Thankfulness (rather than complaining or exhibiting a sense of entitlement) distinguishes those who belong to Christ from those who belong to the world. For believers, thankfulness is NOT a throw-away virtue. As Christians we give thanks to God before we eat a meal, no matter how meager or full. And, like Paul, we look for things to thank God for in the midst of trial.

4. Listen, my friends; the reasons Christians are thankful in all things and for all things, is because we know something about God that the world doesn’t know. We understand that God is

- Completely sovereign
- Infinite in wisdom
- Perfect in love

And because this is true, we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. We may NOT understand how a particular circumstance is for our good, but we believe God’s promises and his revelation of his own character.

4. Stop and think about it for a moment. What difficult circumstance are you facing right now that you have yet to thank God for? Let me give you an assignment. When you go home take a few moments to give thanks to God for your present trial. Then, identify three things you can be thankful for outside of your trial and tell someone about those things for which you are thankful. Paul thanked God even from a Roman prison cell!

5. Next, Paul says “I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience.”

A. God has always had his remnant in Israel who were faithful to his Covenant and obedient to His word. Paul may have been thinking of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Rehab, Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, David, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, just to name a few.

B. To be sure, most of the Israelites in O.T. times were unfaithful to the Lord, but Paul identified himself with those who trusted God, believed His word, and obeyed his commands with a clear conscience.

C. None of those O.T. saints obeyed God perfectly, but Paul could say, I serve God with a clear conscience. In other words, he was striving to live by repentance and faith.

6. What did Paul thank God for in the middle of his trial? Listen to how he says it.

Read 3-5

7. Behold the self-forgetfulness of Paul. If I were writing this letter I would have been tempted just to cry out for help. “Dear Timothy. Get up here fast! I’m in Jail again and they’re talking about execution. Bring money, guns and lawyers if you have to, just get me out of here! Not Paul.

8. Rather, Paul writes a letter of thanks giving because of how blessed he feels to have been given such a friend, co-worker in ministry, and son in the faith as Timothy.

9. Once again, notice Paul’s deep affection for Timothy. And as he sits in that ransid prison cell his mind turns to his fond memories of Timothy

A. (3) “I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.”

B. (4) As I remember your tears I long to see you so that I will be filled with joy.

Perhaps at the most recent separation from Paul, Timothy had reason to believe that it might be the last time he would see his father in the faith alive, and he parted from Paul in tears.

C. In Paul's mind Timothy's were tears of devotion, loyalty, and love. Paul longed to see him again. We know from this letter that Paul had been forsaken by nearly everyone! At his trial, no one stood with him, but all deserted him. Paul knew, however, that Timothy was his loyal companion in the ministry. He would not be ashamed of Paul's chains. Seeing him again would bring him great joy

D. (5) Paul also remembered Timothy's sincere faith. It was a faith that began when his grandmother trusted in Christ. Then his mother trusted in Christ, and finally (no doubt by their faithful, maternal ministry to their beloved son and grandson) Timothy came to trust in Christ.

10. Ladies, can I just say a word to you younger women? Don't ever let the world devalue your role (or potential role) as a mother. Children are not an inconvenience. They are God's gift to you from the Lord. It is the mission of God to fill the earth with the glory of the Lord as the water covers the seas. And he means to accomplish that purpose by the ministry of the gospel. I would dare say that no one is more used of the Lord to bring about the salvation of little humans like their faithful, believing mothers and grandmothers (not to mention fathers and grandfathers).

11. If you don't have a vision for how you can change the world by raising godly children, I pray God will cultivate it in you and that you would cultivate such a vision in your own heart. Your role as a mother (either through birth or adoption) is profound in the extreme in Christ's mission to build his church and redeem a world full of sinners. That old axiom comes closer to reality than you may think; that "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Rules the World."

12. And this brings us to the third and final point:

III. Giftedness: (or Guidance).

Read v. 6-7

1. The NAS says, “Kindle afresh.” The ESV reads, “fan into flame” The original word used here denotes the kindling of a fire, as by a bellows.²

- a. Years ago, when we were enjoying one of our annual church family campouts, I walked over to the campsite where Rodney and Dana had set up camp and made the observation that Rodney’s fire had really dissipated and looked like it was would soon go out.
- b. When I said something to Rodney about it, he simply leaned back in his chair, reached over into the darkness and pulled out a large electric leaf blower. Pointing the mouth of the blower at the base of the fire he said “It won’t go out. Watch this!” At which time he proceeded to flip the switch of the leaf blower and instantly the little embers licking the bottom of the logs burst into flames creating a roaring fire!
- c. That’s what Paul is encouraging Timothy to do.

2. Now I realize Paul’s words here were designed specifically for Timothy. You get the impression when reading this letter that Timothy - faithful and loyal as he was - struggled to maintain his zeal for the work of the gospel. He was called to be a preacher. He was gifted to be a preacher. Paul had been one of the leaders who had actually “laid his hands” upon Timothy at his ordination to the ministry of gospel preaching. But Paul knew that from time to time Timothy needed to be encouraged to rekindle his gift.

3. There were times when Paul sent Timothy to do things that provoked within him a sense of faithless fear. But the fear that kept him from being faithful to his calling was not from God. “For God has given us a spirit NOT of fear but of power, love, and self control.”

- Power that makes us useful. (“apart from me you can do nothing”)
- Love that makes us approachable. (“No one is helped by a theological data-dump).
- Self-control to that makes us believable. (The ministry of the gospel is not a carnival side-show. Its blood-earnest warfare for people’s souls. God hasn’t called us to be everyone’s friend, and the call to ministry is not an invitation to happy-slappy showmanship. Eternity is at stake).

² Albert Barnes, *2 Timothy*.

4. I suspect that sometimes Timothy felt all alone in the world when he was far from his mentor and the problems were thick and steep. But just when his hand began to become slack, a letter would arrive from Paul saying, “I love you brother. I’m so thankful for you. You’re a gifted minister and my dear son in the faith. Now, get out the leaf blower and fan those embers back into flame.

5. I realize most of you have NOT been called or gifted to serve as preachers and teachers of God’s word. But he has gifted you to serve the body. Are you using your gifts? Are you using the simple abilities you have – even outside your giftedness – to serve others in the body? You don’t have a formal, theological education.

- Perhaps you can just meet with someone and read scripture together.
- Maybe you can offer to meet with someone for a few weeks and work through the “Partners” material together.
- Maybe God has gifted you to give, or show mercy, or to administrate, or evangelize.
- Perhaps you are a man or woman of prayer (as we all should be)
- Listen to me: Calvary Bible Church will only be as fruitful and effective as its members are faithfully serving within and without their specific areas of giftedness.

5. Then again, all of us are responsible for ministering the gospel as we have opportunity. As in Timothy’s day, our time is becoming increasingly hostile to the gospel and those who openly say they believe it. But that just means we must share it all the more! It is still the sinner’s only hope of salvation. So, beloved, I urge you to...

- Cultivate the gifts God has given you.
- Cultivate obedience to his word.
- Cultivate a thankful, self-forgetfulness
- Cultivate a heart for personal ministry
- And refuse to let fear keep you from faithfulness.

