

Timothy Chapter 1A

Many of us were reminded this week (*through the death of our dear friend Tom Rivera*) that there is nothing like the prospect of death to clarify the important issues of life.

- Being confronted with our own mortality forces us to evaluate our priorities:
- Although I have stood by the bedside of a number of individuals as they were passing from this mortal existence into eternity I have never once heard anyone say that they wished that they could have spent more time at work.
- No one has ever told me that they wished they could have lived in a bigger house or driven a more luxurious car.
- Without failure those who face the final day of their life confess that they would like to have spent more time with the people that they loved, they lament the long hours that they spent away from their children. Many express remorse for not serving the Lord.
- At the close of life it is our relationships and not our possessions that matter most.
- In the final evaluation of life most wish that we would have lived in the fear of God rather than the fear of man.
- Sadly these sentiments often come too late to make any real difference in the heritage we will leave behind.

I am happy to say that this was NOT the case for Tom Rivera.

- His last words to me were a reflection of the way in which he lived his life: “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*”
- His last words to his dear wife were, “I love you more.”

When someone has a limited time to live, and a decreasing ability to communicate, words become very weighty and very meaningful.

As we open the book of 2 Timothy we find ourselves evaluating the final words of the great Apostle Paul. In my eyes he was the greatest Christian theologian to ever live.

What is it that consumes Paul’s mind when he realizes that his end is approaching?

- He longs to see Timothy SO HE urges him to come to Rome. Timothy was like a son to Paul.
 - If I were facing my last days, I would want to be with my children.
- Paul is deeply concerned about the state of the church.
- For more than 30 years he has labored to establish healthy churches and proclaim the Word of God and now the church is under attack from within and without.

The time in which this letter is written was a truly dark time for the church of Jesus Christ.

Threats against the church were continually arising:

- False Teachers – like ravenous wolves were seeking to devour the flock of God.
- Persecution – The Roman government turned against Christianity and Nero relentlessly tormented the believers.
- Apostasy – In light of the persecution believers who were half-hearted abandoned their initial confession. (This actually brought about a purification of the church)

Allister Begg, *“The very prospect of there even being a Christian church in the subsequent generation was in question. Christianity trembled on the verge of annihilation.”*

- How could that be possible? Didn't Jesus say that *He would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail over it?*
- As a matter of fact he did. AND *he is not a man that he should lie.* The church indeed will prevail but it will be embattled until the very end.

Since the fall of man into sin, from the days of Cain and Abel this world has been a dangerous and even violent place for God's chosen people.

History is full of examples: Even though God promised that the seed of the woman would arise and crush the serpent's head, the serpent stands against God's people.

- At birth of Moses: Pharaoh decreed, all Hebrew baby boys should be cast into the Nile
 - BUT God protected Moses
- Haman and Mortachai (Book of Esther) Haman schemed to annihilate all of the Jews in the Medo-Persian empire, but God preserved his people.
- The early church faced 10 major persecutions at the hand of the Roman Empire and multitudes of believers were martyred.
 - And yet God continues to build his church.

In July of the year 64 AD, there was a devastating fire in the city of Rome, 10 of the 14 districts of the city were affected and 4 were totally destroyed.

Historian Tacitus writes: “There was a sinister belief that the fire was the result of an order by Nero. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.”

The Apostle Paul was arrested and put to death during the persecution that was initiated by Nero.

- Paul is concerned about the state of the church in the time when he wrote this letter.
- I will use this opportunity to tell you that I am concerned about the state of the church in our time.

Here in America we are not presently in a season of outright persecution. However I do not believe that season is far away and I feel that it is my responsibility to prepare you for that time.

- Public opinion of the Evangelical church has dramatically changed over 20 years.
- IN the 1980 and 1990's it was not only acceptable, it was desirable to be “born again.”
 - Being conservative was right, today it is the “Far Right Wing.”
- TODAY: Those who are certain of what they believe - those who give the appearance of being dogmatic in their faith have become suspect and are now viewed as posing a threat to society.

WHAT are we to do IF we face persecution, imprisonment even death?

Do we panic? Has God lost control of the circumstances? Are the gates of hell prevailing? NO God is still on the throne, he remains Sovereign over all things.

- Historically, in the church, seasons of persecution have been used to purify the Body and strengthen true believers.

- We can learn much from Paul's last words to his own dear son in the faith Timothy:

This morning as we consider Paul's opening words in the 2nd Epistle to Timothy we will consider 3 simple points:

1. The call of God - and we will consider how *the working* of his will may land us in a season of tribulation.
2. The Provision of God - In the midst of tribulation God provides abundant grace, mercy and peace.
3. The Privilege of Prayer and Partnership - The sustaining power of prayer and fellowship as we walk through suffering.

1. The call of God - the working of his will may land us in painful circumstances.

2 Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,

- Paul was confident that he had been called and commissioned as an Apostle by the Lord.

He repeated the testimony of his calling throughout the book of Acts.

He boldly defended his Apostleship in many of his Epistles.

- Confident that his calling and his present condition were the will of a Sovereign God, he was content in the midst of tribulation.

Paul's calling and identity were grounded in the promise of eternal life that is in Christ:

“According to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,”

The source of Paul's strength and contentment in times of hardship was “*the promise of THE LIFE that is in Christ Jesus.*”

- The LIFE that Paul speaks of, (ZOE) describes the fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which belongs to God. It is the word used for eternal life.

Our endurance in times of hardship is directly affected by our confidence in the life that is to come.

Romans 8: 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

John Kitchen, “Paul awaits execution (4:6) It is the salvation of God, the call of God and the will of God that landed him in this dungeon and with a death sentence upon him. Nevertheless, while facing death, Paul is fixated - not upon his impending beheading, but upon the promise of life in Christ Jesus.”

Paul knew that the end of his physical life was NOT the end of his existence. Even if he was separated from his earthly body he still possessed “The Life that is IN Christ Jesus.”

- He declared to the Philippians: “to live is Christ to die is gain.”

- He wrote the Corinthians: 2Co 5:8 **Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.**
- He knew that the time of his departure had come and that a crown awaited him. (4:6)

We have much to learn from the Apostle Paul; far too often when we are in the grip of difficulty that we lose sight of the prize.

- We become fixated on our circumstances, languishing in the grip of fear.
- How unnecessary are the torments that we yield ourselves to, the worries consume our minds and the winds of emotion that knock us off of our foundation.

Despite Paul's extreme hardship he doesn't lose sight of the prize. His trials have not incapacitated him. He continues to GIVE all that God has given him to young Timothy. When Paul could have been demanding he was still giving.

It was almost as if Paul is saying here Timothy God has given me an abundance of grace, mercy and peace so I am holding it out to you.

2. The Provision of God - In the midst of tribulation God provides abundant grace, mercy and peace.

2 Timothy 1: 2 **To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**

- You will note that Paul is NOT crying out to God for MORE grace, He is not seeking God for additional mercy or struggling to find peace.
- NO he is actually holding OUT grace mercy and peace to Timothy.

John Kitchen: "In this trinity of blessings "GRACE" points to God's dealings with sin and guilt itself, "MERCY" points to God's concern for the misery and pain that sin creates, and "PEACE" points to the reordering of the chaos sin leaves behind."

- The enduring quality of God's grace, mercy and peace are UNCHANGED by the circumstances that we face.
- These things flow from God the Father as a continual provision for our daily living.
- Consider Paul's words to the church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 4:8 **We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;**

10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

When I think of God's abundant grace, mercy and peace in times of unthinkable hardship I remember his provision for Stephen, the first Christian Martyr:

- Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin in Israel falsely accused of speaking blaspheme against Moses:
- After his moving testimony the crowd was enraged against him:

Acts 7:54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. 55 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

- At the time when Stephen needed it the MOST God's grace was abundantly provided.
- The heavens were opened and he SAW the portals of glory. We sing:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

3. The Privilege of Prayer and Partnership - The sustain power of prayer and fellowship as we walk through suffering.

2 Timothy 1:3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.

- In my own life the times when trials and persecutions arise I "circle the wagons."
 - You might recall that phrase from those ole time westerns. When the pioneers come under attack they circle the wagons for protection and preservation.
- Crying out to the Lord in prayer is an essential part of circling the wagons.
 - Often we pray without ceasing when we feel threatened BUT I would draw your attention to the fact that Paul is NOT praying for HIMSELF but for Timothy.

Paul expresses a LONGING to see Timothy. Their fellowship was a source of great JOY.

Please consider what I have to say:

- I do not understand why it is that some Believers STAY AWAY from the church when they are going through a season of difficulty.
- In my view by doing so they remove themselves from the Means of Grace that God has provided as a source of our comfort, strength and our joy.
- Worship and the teaching of God's Word renew my mind.
- Prayer and Fellowship help me to know that I am NOT ALONE.
- The Lord's Table brings me back to the cross and reminds me that I am loved with an everlasting love.

Consider the suffering of our LORD, as he faced the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane. Although He was the Eternal Son of God and he lived in a face to Face relationship with the Father,

- He took Peter James and John with him in his time of need.

In Gethsemane the ONE who ever lives to make intercession for the Saints, on this night wanted the Saints to make intercession WITH HIM!

Mark 14:32 And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. 34 And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch."

Since we are being transformed into HIS image,

- Let's remember His love and His commitment for his Brethren;
- let's remember that He is the one who is seated at the right hand of God, the place where he lives to pray for US.
- IF HE felt it necessary to share his hardships with his brothers shouldn't WE who are fleshly do the same?

As our society becomes more and more intolerant of Evangelical Christianity let's purposefully draw the wagons a bit closer.

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.