

2 Timothy

1. The Book and apostle Paul

February 21, 2010

It is doubtful that we could find more emotional and nostalgic letter written by apostle Paul than this one. After all, he was all alone in a cold, dark and damp Roman dungeon and did not know if he would have another day on earth. It seems as though his life totally depended on a flip of the crazy Roman emperor Nero's thumb.

Nero wanted to be known to everyone as a great emperor with poems and music. But he was known as a serious sociopath murderer and an enemy of Christianity for all the persecutions he committed against the believers of Jesus Christ. While people name their son 'Paul', they name their dog 'Nero.'

I never turn to 2 Timothy without trying to picture myself as a silent observer in apostle Paul's dungeon cell. In my mind's eyes, I can see this old man wrapping his cloak around his shoulders a little tighter to stay a little warmer for the night under a flickering candle light. I can even hear him cough and wheeze and groan as well as watch his tears quietly rolling down on his deeply lined face and sighing as he feels the loneliness of being separated from his friends.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

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

Here is the last letter by a rugged and tired warrior, the apostle Paul. It's an essential piece of biblical literature we need in order to construct an accurate and complete mental portrait of Paul and a spiritual understanding of our times.

Many Bible students believe that this letter was written 66-67 A.D. shortly before Nero's death. Nero ordered Paul's execution before his own death.

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

I find this pastoral letter from Paul "to encourage, warn and charge Timothy regarding God's truth." It is Paul's Swan Song, his last will and testament. He was coming to his final end here on earth.

In his own words, he "fought the good fight" and "finished the race" and "kept the faith." Rather than simply to die in obscurity and silence, Paul chose to write a final note to his spiritual son, his protegee, Timothy. He wanted to pass the baton, if you will, to his successor who was pastoring in Ephesus. Timothy was not having an easy ministry in that place. But then again, who has an easy pastoral ministry anywhere if he is following the Lord Jesus wholeheartedly and teaching the Word of God faithfully?

C. LOCATION

Nowhere in this letter does the apostle mention the location he was writing from, but many reliable biblical scholars believe that it was the ancient Mamertine Prison in Rome – a dreadful and horrible underground dungeon.

Can you imagine yourself spending any length of time in this hole? No windows to look outside, no companionship, nothing except just a cold, little cell that would have been especially hard to bear for an aging man in winter.

According to the Scripture, the situation was worse. He was bound like a criminal. I like New International Version's rendering better:

NIV 2 Timothy 2:9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

D. THE LETTER FROM HIS HEART, NOT HEAD ONLY

In addition to that horrible place, he was lonely. We've never been imprisoned in a dungeon as a criminal, certainly not suffering for our faith as Paul did. Here you can feel his loneliness in this paragraph:

2 Timothy 4:9-13 Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica--Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. 12 And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come--and the books, especially the parchments.

He felt a profound sense of being abandoned. Yet the Lord did not abandoned Paul. We see more emotion of this great apostle in v21:

2 Timothy 4:21 Do your utmost to come before winter.

Some of you may wonder, "Why are you spending so much time on apostle Paul's emotion? Let's get to the meat." I will tell you why. How can we really understand what Paul is saying to us if we don't care to understand what is going through his mind. We can not.

I really don't think we should pass hurriedly over the feelings woven through a passage like this. I want you to remember a lonely place you have been in your life. Maybe it was a time when you've felt cold and forgotten. Perhaps you saw yourself as removed from the scene, placed on a shelf, alone and useless. Maybe you're there right now. While in that place it's very easy for us to feel completely abandoned, overlooked and isolated.

At times like that how desperately we need friends! We have the Lord, but we need friends. The grace of God is magnificent but it does not turn us into Superman or Wonder Woman. God's faithfulness and mercy do not deliver us from our human needs – needs like companionship and intimacy – the need to belong, to love and to be loved. Loneliness is a terrible thing with which to cope.

E. THREE REASONS WHY PAUL WROTE THIS LETTER

1) To equip Timothy for a tough task

Timothy was to pick up the baton of proclaiming, guarding and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul was prepared to hand that baton off in the relay before he died. Timothy was to take it and run with it with all his might during the time he himself had left on earth.

2) To stir up and to encourage Timothy

Timothy had three things working against him. He was young. He was prone to sickness. He was passive by nature – timid and fearful may be better words. And so Paul wrote to stir him up and to tell him not to lay back but to develop his gifts and do the job with all the strength he could muster.

I can understand how timid and fearful Timothy was. When I started a prison ministry in 1988 at the AZ State Prison Tucson Complex, I just started to go out to the prison as a fellow believer in Christ every Saturday night. Then about a year later, the Lord put me in the spot where I could not escape but to teach the Word of God. I was fearful and timid. But one thought comforted me – “They are a captive audience.” For the next 11 years, that was my Bible College and Seminary where I learned to study the Bible and to teach it in expository manner.

From 1996, I started to fill in for other Calvary Chapel pastors in AZ while they were gone on their vacations. You may wonder why they did. It was because I was available and they didn’t have to pay me anything. Probably I had a cardboard sign somewhere that said, “Will teach the Bible for food.”

Finally, the Lord spoke to my heart and confirmed it through others that I was to start a church in Sahuarita. For the first few years, in my weakness, I was timid, fearful and had a lot of complexes about not having degrees from a Bible college and Seminary. To make the matter worse, the Lord chose a guy with broken English. What a great combination, come to think of it! If anything good comes out of this church, you know that it is from the Lord, not me.

Some of you may say, “You don’t look timid anymore.” The Lord toughens my spiritual skin a lot last ten years and makes me to realize that I am called to be a pastor by the Lord. I’ve been shunned, put down, jeered at, gossiped, including for not having degrees from a Seminary. Now, I chuckle and try to let it roll over my back. Sometimes, it still gets me, but not like before.

Listen, if you are disappointed that your pastor does not have a degree from a fancy Seminary, I am sorry that you feel that way. You have two choices: You can see how God uses a foolish thing of the world to confound the wise or you can try to find happiness chasing a certificate on the wall, like some have.

By the way, if that is your mindset, I suggest you not read any of the OT and NT Books of the Bible, including the four Gospels, with the exception of Paul’s letters. Because none of the writers of the Bible including Jesus has a seminary degree.

Don’t get me wrong, I am NOT against seminary or Bible college degrees. If you have them, good for you. But that is not THE qualification to be a pastor. The real qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy and Titus.

3) To wrap up some final personal matters before his death

Paul had some needs to communicate to Timothy, and he did so in a powerfully transparent way in his final requests and greetings.

F. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

I find a key verse from each chapter:

1) Hold fast

2 Timothy 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

Everything Paul wrote in chapter 1 had to do with that great mandate.

2) Endure hardship

2 Timothy 2:3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Paul was telling Timothy, in effect, to roll up his sleeves and prepare for a battle: “if you think it’s bad now, hang on. It will only get worse. Endure. Be tough. Be strong.”

3) Continue

2 Timothy 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them

Paul was urging Timothy to continue in his effort of preserving the same message he preached before. He doesn’t need anything new or clever, or cute. Like an old song says, “An old time religion, good enough for me.”

4) Preach the Word

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

Preach the Word of God – not a man’s opinion with allegorical interpretations that can make any garbage doctrines out of God’s simple truth. No one can find godly truth and wisdom from what men made, because we are absolutely wicked without Jesus.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Hold fast, endure hardship, continue and preach the Word. A good set of marching orders, don’t you think?

G. A GREETING AND REMEMBRANCE

2 Timothy 1:2-5 To Timothy, a beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, 4 greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, 5 when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.

What an encouragement to know that the great apostle was praying for him! Paul, who knew Timothy’s weaknesses and problems, was able to pray definitely and with a real burden on his heart. His praying was not routine. It was done with compassion and concern. Paul made it a regular practice to pray with a list and to at least mention in prayer those who were precious to him.

Remember this, please know that your prayer knows no geographical boundaries, knows no language or cultural differences. Because you are praying to God Almighty who can do all things and knows all things and is at all places. He will receive your prayer requests and will get the job done according to His will for His own glory.

Note v5 how mom and grandma’s influence made Timothy to grow up to be a godly young man. Moms and Dads, don’t neglect your teachable moments with your children whether they are still young or older – from your Bible stories to them on your laps to daily life. You can influence them like no one in the world.

Grandmas and grandpas, no matter how far you are from your grandchildren, you have very special places in their hearts. Go into their hearts in the shape of Jesus’ love and care.

Our children, once of age to be accountable before God, must have their own relationship with Jesus Christ. Mom's and dad's relationship with God will not bring them eternal life. It has been said, "God has no grandchildren." No one can go to heaven on somebody else's coattail.

H. NO FEAR, BUT SOUND MIND

2 Timothy 1:6-7 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Through Paul, God had imparted to Timothy the spiritual gift he needed for his ministry. The laying on of hands was a common practice in apostolic days. Today, when we lay hands on people for the ministry, it is a symbolic act and does not necessarily impart any special spiritual gifts to them.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to serve God, and through Him we can overcome fear and weakness. It is futile for us to try to serve God without the power of the Holy Spirit. Talent, training and experience cannot take the place of the power of the Spirit. That's why I realize that being filled with the Holy Spirit is more important than having a seminary degree without the call of God.

'Self-discipline' is a better translation of 'sound mind' in v7. It describes a person who is sensibly minded and balanced, who has his life under control. Timothy did not need any new spiritual ingredients in his life. All he had to do was "stir up" what he already had. The Holy Spirit does not leave us when we fail. But He cannot fill us, empower us, and use us if we neglect our spiritual lives. It is possible to grieve the Spirit and quench the Spirit.

What about you? Do you have any reason why you should be timid or fearful? You have a written Word of God as your counselor, the Holy Spirit lives in you. If it is any comfort, know that I pray for you everyday.

I. APPLICATIONS

1) Rather than desiring other spiritual gifts that we don't have, we should ask the Lord to fill our hearts with His Spirit that we can be used by Him with the already-given spiritual gifts.

2) If God is for us, who can be against us? No fear, but fear God.