

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (12-1-1997 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

2 Timothy 1:1-5

Additional Bible reading: Acts 16:1-5

Introduction

This is the last letter Paul ever wrote. Clearly the Pauline epistles in the New Testament are not arranged in chronological order. The arrangement dates from 300AD, and the 9 letters to the churches come first, in order of length, followed by the 4 personal letters, in order of length.

Paul was writing from Rome, very close to his death. The Acts of the Apostles closes with Paul in Rome, imprisoned but in the freedom and comfort of his own hired house. There is evidence to suggest that he was set free from house arrest, and went on further personal journeys. Maybe he fulfilled his personal ambition to visit Spain. But then he was rearrested and put back in prison. There was no escape from the dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air. He was in chains, suffering from loneliness, boredom and cold. The preliminary hearing of his case had already taken place, and he was awaiting the full trial, but death seemed inevitable. Full-scale persecution was taking place by Nero. Tradition says Paul was most likely condemned to death, and beheaded as he was a Roman citizen, and that Peter was martyred on the same occasion by crucifixion, head downwards.

While under the shadow of his execution, Paul sends his second personal message to Timothy. This is also his last will and testament to the church. It is a very moving document. Bishop Henry Moule said he could not read this epistle without finding “a mist gathering in the eyes”. On the last occasion Paul and Timothy had said goodbye, Timothy had wept: **I remember your tears** (2 Timothy 1:4). Paul wanted to see him once more and hold his hand. But he must come soon, before winter, or else it would be too late.

2 Timothy is a remarkable little book, divided into 4 chapters in our English Bible, with 83 verses. We are on holy ground. This is the farewell message of a mighty man of God.

The author Paul

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:1). This is very interesting and typical description. The Lord chose 12 Apostles to represent Him and teach in His name. They were unique for three reasons – they were personally appointed by Jesus, they were eye-witness of the Resurrection, and they received the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit to guide them in all truth, to remember His teaching and learn about the things to come. And to their number Paul was added as a result of his experience on the Damascus road. His was a unique qualification. There have been no apostles since. There were no successors to the Apostles.

The truth they learned and taught is recorded in our New Testament. The Gospel records tell of Christ’s life and ministry. The Epistles give us an interpretation of

Christ. Revelation tells us of things to come. The Apostles' writings give authoritative guidance for belief and practice. For evangelical Christians, our foundation point is the supreme authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

Then Paul points out that he is in this position, not because he chose it or because the church appointed him, but because God appointed him and equipped him. In 9 out of Paul's 13 letters he says he is an apostle "by the will of God" or "the call of God". He had a sustained conviction that divine purpose was being carried out through his life.

How important that we have firm and unmistakeable conviction about being in the will of God – whether our career, Christian service, marriage, or place where we live. Such a conviction is an enormous strength and rock for us, especially when trouble or difficulties come.

In this post, it was Paul's responsibility to point men to eternal life, that they might know life and know it more abundantly. He was to witness to it. His own life was in Christ, and a fuller life awaited him beyond death.

The reader Timothy

To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (2 Timothy 1:2). Paul had been responsible for leading Timothy to the Lord. He was the last link in a long chain of events. This had happened over 15 years earlier, when Timothy lived in Lystra. Then Timothy had travelled with Paul on most of his second and third missionary journeys. Paul had sent Timothy on several special missions to various towns (1 Thessalonians 3:1ff; 1 Corinthians 4:17). Timothy had been with Paul in Rome during his first imprisonment. Timothy's name was included when he wrote his three prison epistles (Philemon, Philippians, Colossians). Now Timothy was at Ephesus leading the church, but Paul longed to see him one more time.

Paul clearly had a strong affection for the young man, describing him as **Beloved and faithful child in the Lord** (1 Corinthians 4:17), a fellow-worker (Romans 16:21), a brother and God's servant in the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 3:2), a man of sincere faith (2 Timothy 1:5). He was very special to Paul: **I have no one like him** (Philippians 2:2). Timothy was unique as far as Paul was concerned.

The greeting he sends to Timothy is the customary one, and is by no means an empty one – Grace, Mercy and Peace. Grace to the worthless, mercy to the helpless, and peace to the restless. Then he gives a most interesting picture of Timothy's home life. His father was Greek and not a Christian as far as we know. But his mother Eunice was Jewish, and she and her mother Lois were believers. So this sincere faith ran through three generations. Undoubtedly mother and grandmother were links in the chain of Timothy's conversion. He had been brought up to know the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15). "He had been reared in infancy in such a way that he could suck in godliness along with his mother's milk" (Calvin).

How important are the early beginnings for children. The most powerful influence is parents and home. Hence most good biographies begin, not with the subject, but with the parents or grandparents. Their influence is critical in what follows. An

experienced minister in the city of London recently wrote, “I want to encourage parents who have teenagers or older renegade children. Time and again during my ministry I have met young people who have renegade against Christ and against their parents for years, and have then come back to the faith. Part of the reason is the anchor of faith that had been built in the early years.”

Augustine, the greatest of the early fathers, a great theologian and leader, in his younger days sowed his wild oats and had his mother distracted. She prayed for him so much that it was said, “It was impossible that a child of such tears and prayers should perish”.

It is such a blessing to be born and live in a Christian home – though sadly many do not appreciate it while they are young. It is a wonderful beginning, and the best way to launch into life. Young people, thank God for the privilege of a Christian home. Four pieces of advice for you – (1) Come to Christ, (2) Seek God’s guidance for every step of your life, (3) Marry a believer, and (4) Establish a Christian home of your own.

Homes have the strongest influence, and the next strongest if friendships. How fortunate Timothy was to have Paul for a friend. Paul was Timothy’s spiritual father, and would never forget him or abandon him. **Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers** (2 Timothy 1:3). He wrote him letters of wise counsel and encouragement, and no doubt this all had a powerful moulding effect on Timothy, strengthening him and sustaining him in his Christian life and service.

One of England’s greatest preachers speaks of the man who led him to Christ, and who then went on to write to him every week for seven years, and to pray for him every day for a lifetime. What a prayer list Paul must have had – so many churches and individual he remembered!

Thank God for all those who nurtured you, and were extraordinarily patient, and who prayed and who wrote – and who still do! And remember your own responsibility for those who you have helped in their Christian walk, and have promised to pray for. Wise pastoral care must long continue.

The letter

Why was the letter written? Paul’s career was almost over. For 30 years he had been preaching the word, establishing and planting churches, writing letters and travelling. Soon he would become a martyr. What would happen next? The Emperor Nero was bent on destroying the Christian Church. Heretical teaching was on the increase. Humanly speaking, the Christian faith was on the verge of annihilation.

Timothy did not have very good prospects for his future leadership. He was comparatively young, and vulnerable to youthful passions (2 Timothy 2:22), he was prone to sickness, timid by temperament, not a strong personality, an introvert, who shrank from difficult tasks that involved suffering and controversy. Perhaps he lacked commitment. He found it easier to lean than to lead, and like Moses and Jeremiah was reluctant to accept responsibility. (“Some are born great, others achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them”) The future did not look hopeful.

Therefore Paul wrote to encourage Timothy. He reminded him of the resources that were his in Christ Jesus, **a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline** (2 Timothy 1:7), so he need not fear. Paul reminded him **to fan into flame the gift of God** (2 Timothy 1:6), to use his gifts to the full, and to be strong, be a good worker, and handle God's Word with boldness. He was to share the work with reliable men (2 Timothy 2:2), and seek to be a real man of God – which was more important than all the techniques and skills.

Paul gives Timothy four charges regarding the Gospel itself: in chapter 1, to guard the Gospel against its many enemies; in chapter 2, to suffer for the Gospel as Paul had done; in chapter 3, to continue in the Gospel even though things were getting worse; in chapter 4, to preach the Gospel at every opportunity.

These charges are so relevant today to all Christians and all churches. Too many Christians are not clear about what they believe and where they stand. They are compromised, and weak when under attack. Those who ought to be preaching and defending the Gospel are falling down on the job. There is a need for a new generation of Timothys who will preserve the Gospel interest, preach it even if they suffer for it, and pass it on without watering it down to the following generation.