

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (19-9-1999 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Acts 16:1-5

Additional Bible Reading: 2 Timothy 1:1-7; 3:14-17

A disciple named Timothy

Introduction

Following the quarrel between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark, Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul went to visit the newly founded churches with Silas. Paul needed to find a suitable replacement for Mark, and he found Timothy. In Paul's wisdom, he needed to train others to carry on the work for he would not last forever. The next generation had to be prepared to take over one day. Timothy was an outstanding example of one of the men whom Paul trained for the future. Timothy became Paul's right hand man, and he probably hoped the young man would succeed him and assume the reins of leadership.

We know more about Timothy than any of Paul's other companions. There was a great bond of affection between the two, and Paul referred to him as "my son". This may have been because Paul led him to the Lord, but it certainly referred to their close bond of understanding and affection.

There is a lot to be learned here about Christian service. We differ in many ways in background and gifts but essential principles here are ever applicable.

Timothy's home background

Timothy's background was not exactly straightforward. He was the product of a mixed marriage. His father was a Greek and therefore a Gentile. His mother was a Jewess. She had not been brought up in a strict Jewish family, because such a marriage would not have been acceptable to strict Jews. The Jewish partner in such a marriage would have been treated as dead, and a funeral would have been carried out. They would never again have been allowed into the home, and they would have inherited nothing. But Jewish homes outside Palestine were not so strict, and a mixed marriage would have been allowed, even if it were not welcomed.

Regardless of the father, Timothy's mother Eunice gave her son good early training with the aid of the grandmother Lois. **From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures** (2 Timothy 3:15), Paul reminded him. A good foundation had been laid. Jews claimed that their children learned the Law even from their swaddling clothes, and drank it with their mother's milk. The unfeigned faith of grandmother and mother was possessed by Timothy at an early age.

How important homes and parents and grandparents can be. They have influenced us all. It is true that children do not inherit the faith of their parents as they inherit other facets of personality. But the influence of their example and teaching will be seen. Sadly some children still reject the truth despite the best teaching, but they have had a start in life that others have not had, and it may yet bear fruit in later life.

Christian history has ample testimony to the influence of the Christian home. Augustine sowed his wild oats like a few young men, and was quite old before he was converted. His mother Monica prayed and wept for years. Thomas Carlyle said that what kept him straight in life was his mother's voice still coming from the kirkyard in Ecclefechan saying to him "Trust in God and do right." A young soldier during World War I admitted to his Padre that he was full of fear and worry all day long – except around 10pm every night. The Padre suggested that maybe this was the hour when his mother was praying for him. The soldier wrote home, and indeed it was exactly so.

What a privilege and responsibility being Christian parents and grandparents. To be prayed for and taught by Christian parents is a better start in life than having parents of position or wealth. At times children find it irksome, but they ought to be grateful and show gratitude in the best of ways.

Equipment for Christian service

So Timothy had the great advantage of a Christian home. Presumably Paul led him to Christ on his first missionary journey, when he was still quite young. N.B. We must never despise childhood conversions. There was a minister in a Scottish church 200 years ago who lamented that in recent years the only conversion had been that of "wee Robbie". "Wee Robbie" later became Robert Moffat, pioneer missionary in South Africa, and father-in-law of David Livingstone!

Not all great leaders have had that great start in life. However God still equips them for His work. What other things marked Timothy out?

- (a) He was of good character and reputation. **The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him** (Acts 16:2). He was already proving himself by the quality of his living, before he joined Paul. Acts stresses this quality in Christian leaders. **Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom** (Acts 6:3). **Ananias was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there** (Acts 22:12). Quality of life needs to be proved before assuming leadership and responsibility for Christian work. Integrity, consistency, reality of faith and prayer life, are essential marks.
- (b) He was adaptable. He submitted to being circumcised by Paul. Although circumcision was not essential for salvation, he was prepared to undergo it if it made him more acceptable to Jews, and opened doors that would have otherwise been closed. C.f. Hudson Taylor wore Chinese clothes in order to help him win the Chinese. Many have taken up a sport or hobby just as a means to reach other people with the Gospel. So Timothy was circumcised so that he would be able to enter Jewish homes and preach in synagogues.
- (c) He was equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit. **Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline** (2 Timothy 1:6,7). The Holy Spirit richly endowed Timothy for his work. The laying on of hands was a symbol of the gift of the Holy Spirit to him. It was part of the official setting apart for his work. The gift of the Holy Spirit is vital for service. He must be the senior

partner. We must not put our hope in schemes, plans, men, their gifts or techniques, but in the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. **You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth** (Acts 1:8). John Stott describes the Holy Spirit as the “chief evangelist”. It is He who anoints the messengers, confirms the Word, prepares the hearer, convicts the sinful, enlightens eyes and gives life to the dead, enables men to repent and believe, and unites us to the body of Christ.

The usefulness of Timothy’s life and ministry

It is impossible to give a detailed account of Timothy’s life and the way and extent to which God blessed his ministry. But year by year he proved to be a reliable, dependable companion and minister of the Gospel. He accompanied Paul on the second and third missionary journeys, visiting various towns, helping, preaching the Word, and sharing in the trials and dangers. His name is often bracketed with Paul’s at the start of Paul’s letters (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Thessalonians). He was Paul’s companion and sharer in ministry.

Later on, Timothy had his own ministry when Paul was in prison, helping and advising and supporting the Apostle. In his loneliness, just before the end of his life, Paul looked to Timothy for support and sympathy, and hoped he might be able to join him. We do not know if Timothy ever reached Rome before Paul was executed. But clearly he meant a lot to Paul. **Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord** (1 Corinthians 4:17). **Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the Gospel of Christ** (1 Thessalonians 3:2). **I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel** (Philippians 2:19-22).

Putting all these comments together, and putting his life side by side with them, we see that Timothy was beloved, faithful, worked with God, took genuine interest in people’s welfare, proved himself, was genuine, was Paul’s deputy to the churches, always willing to go anywhere for the Gospel. He is the only man in the New Testament to be given the old prophetic title “man of God” (1 Timothy 6:11). This supreme title gives away Timothy’s secret – he was not just a man of the church, a man of scholarship, a man of weight, or a man of character, but he was a man of God. He was the Lord’s entirely. He belonged to Him entirely. He existed just to please Him. He had no interest or ambition or activity outside of Him.

The perfect messenger is like a postage stamp – (i) he sticks to his job, and (ii) he goes wherever he is sent. God’s messenger never gives up till the message is delivered, as did Timothy.

Conclusion

Timothy's life demonstrates the value of a Christian home. It has a place in God's purposes. God properly equips His servant for service. Like Timothy, he must prove himself and be adaptable, and most importantly endowed with the Holy Spirit. At rock bottom, at the deepest level, he must be a "man of God".