

Leaving a Legacy of Faith
(Week 1)
2 Timothy 1:1-8
“Letters From Prison”

Introduction

In AD 64, the Roman Emperor Nero started a fire in the slums of Rome. At least that is what most of the Romans believed. Nero apparently had plans to renovate these areas, so rumor has it that he had them set on fire to make way for those developments. Of course he made sure that he was far away when it happened. What he didn't plan on was the uncontrollable way that the fire spread and raged throughout the city for six days, destroying several homes and taking the lives of many. With his plan backfiring in a monumental way, Nero needed a scapegoat as a way to appear innocent of the accusations of the people. He funded a massive relief effort to aid those affected by the fire, and he placed the blame for setting the blaze upon an already unpopular group of people in Rome... The Christians! Christians were rounded up and persecuted by the score. Many were nailed to crosses and set on fire to be used as lamps to light portions of the city. Church tradition tells us that the two most influential leaders of the Church were also arrested. Their names were Peter and Paul. Simon Peter was crucified upside down, but Paul, being a free Roman citizen, couldn't be crucified, so instead he was thrown into a dark and foul dungeon to await his execution by beheading. It is from this horrible Roman prison, that the beloved apostle wrote to his dear “son in the faith” to give him encouragement. We now know this famous correspondence from Paul's prison cell today as 2 Timothy.

Paul was approximately 60 years old when he was imprisoned. He knew that his time on earth was almost over. He had endured so many hardships for preaching the gospel (**2 Corinthians 11:23-26**), and yet, he never wavered in his devotion to Christ. In 2 Timothy, we find him cold and lonely, many of his closest friends having deserted him for fear of the Romans. And yet, he is completely focused upon the mission of seeing the gospel spread throughout the region, and the world. The Apostle Paul was the real deal. How different would this world be, if everyone who calls themselves “Christian” was likewise devoted to the cause of Christ? Our churches would be aflame with passion and zeal. No longer would we be concerned with our own meaningless agendas, but rather, with laser focus, we would strive to make disciples of the lost and dying. We would pray without ceasing, petitioning Christ to empower us to turn this world upside down for His glory. Power struggles within the church would cease, for everyone would realize that He(Jesus) must increase and we must decrease (**John 3:30**). Wouldn't you LOVE to go to a church where agape was truly lived out, and the people cared more about you than themselves? I know that I would.

If any one had the right to complain about his lot, it was Paul. He had only lived to serve God, and yet, there he was, chained to the walls of this foul smelling pit, suffering unimaginable hardship, all the while knowing that every passing sunrise might just be his last. Does he complain? No, he prays, and offers encouragement to others! That kind of attitude doesn't come naturally, it comes from the supernatural. It comes from being dead to self and filled with The Spirit of Almighty God! I want this attitude, I want to be that kind of Christian. I don't know about you this morning, but as for me, I've got some work to do! That work can begin for us all by examining the heart of the Apostle Paul and striving to emulate him. In this series, we are going to be discussing how to “leave a legacy of faith”. As Christians, we should earnestly desire to bear fruit that will last (**John 15:16**). In order to do this we must empty ourselves and be filled with Christ. This is how we can leave a legacy. Freedom Fellowship is ten years old today! My prayer is that it will still be changing lives long after we are gone (that is, if Christ doesn't come first). I want to leave a legacy, just like Paul did with Timothy and many others. Let us begin our study of this wonderful letter from prison by seeing Paul's CALLING, his CONCERN, his COMMUNION and his CONFIDENCE. All of these things came as a result of a Spirit-Filled life that was all about Christ, with nothing to do with self. It is the requirement of every Christian to live this kind of life and to leave this kind of legacy.

The Calling

Paul begins his letter by introducing himself as “**an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God**”. This was to remind Timothy that Paul did indeed have the authority of an apostle. Christ had called Saul (Paul) by name and in person on the road to Damascus some thirty years prior (**Acts Chapter 9**). Many had criticized Paul and even questioned his rights as an apostle, but God had in fact called him to the ministry and the callings of God are irrevocable (**Romans 11:29**). It did not matter what people said, it did not matter if the Romans sentenced him to death. All that mattered was that Paul had been called by Christ to be an ambassador (the word apostle means ambassador), and that was exactly what Paul was. His CALLING gave him the authority. I fear that many people today have entered into the ministry because they feel that it is a good “career choice” (which is ridiculous by the way, unless you become a televangelist!). Being a minister of the gospel is a calling, not a career path. When we are born again, The Holy Spirit endows each of us with spiritual gifts, and it is those gifts that should determine our calling. There is nothing more destructive and counterproductive than someone trying to serve the Church in “their flesh”. If God wants you to do a ministry, He will equip you for that ministry. It is incumbent upon every believer to find just what God has equipped them to do, and then go and do it.

Many had given up on Paul once he was imprisoned by Nero, but God had not. Paul's time of service was nearing an end, but Jesus still had a few more loose ends for him to tie. One being to make sure that Timothy would carry on the ministry in Ephesus when Paul was gone. Paul had planted the church there and had led most of young Timothy's family to Christ. He had laid hands on Timothy, acknowledging the young man's spiritual gifting right from the start. Paul had taken Timothy under his wing to help develop him into the minister of the gospel that Christ had intended him to be. Paul had no children so he pretty much adopted Timothy as his own, for the boy's father was a pagan Greek (**Acts 16:1**), but his mother and grandmother were Jewish converts to Christianity (**vs. 5**). It was these Godly women who had also helped to nurture Timothy's fervent and un-hypocritical faith. God had great plans for Timothy. He was the pastor of the Church at Ephesus, and Paul wants to reaffirm that his calling was on solid ground. Timothy, like Paul, had been set apart by God for a purpose. Every believer also has a purpose that is ordained of God. None have been chosen to sit idle while others sacrifice all that they have for the kingdom. We have been called and equipped. We have been set apart to serve as a royal priesthood. We are required to **present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, for this is our reasonable service (Romans 12:1)**. The word the Paul uses in this verse for “service” is *Latreia* in the Greek. It is a word used to describe the service of a priest. You see, we are ALL called to be priests in Christ's kingdom (**1 Peter 2:9**). We must have this calling in order to accomplish anything that will last. If you truly wish to leave a legacy of faith, then you must first make sure that you belong to Jesus and have received the authority of His holy calling. Otherwise, you are just another hypocrite, playing at religion. You have got to get real, before you can make a real difference! Paul did not want Timothy to forsake his very real calling of God in the face of such dreadful persecution. Timothy needed to see Paul as an apostle, even while in chains.

The Concern

Do you want to know how to truly tell if someone has Jesus inside them or not? Well here is a foolproof test. If they put the needs of others ahead of themselves. Paul was in chains, but concerned about Timothy's welfare above his own. As I stated earlier, this just doesn't come natural. The most depressed people that I have ever met are constantly focusing on their own problems. Christ has called us to be dead to self. I remember once, when I was whining and complaining to my younger brother about how tough the ministry was, he listened patiently until I was finished, and then he said, “Dead people don't feel anything!” At first I got angry, and then I got convicted. If a man is dead to self, then he doesn't focus on his own problems. He doesn't go around whining all the time. He doesn't quit when things get uncomfortable, but instead he pays little attention to life's distractions or discomforts because his focus is totally upon completing the tasks of the KINGDOM! Genuine Christians are “Kingdom first” kind of people. Paul didn't want his life to count nothing. He had resigned himself to the fact that his allotted time was up. His concern wasn't for himself, but for

Timothy to continue in the furtherance of the Kingdom. He was concerned with what Christ was concerned with. He wasn't about the easy life. He was about leading others to everlasting life.

I believe that every believer ought to have a "Timothy", an adopted son or daughter of the faith that we can pour our faith and encouragement into, so that when our time is up, we can rest assured that the work of the kingdom will be carried on without even the slightest pause. This is actually what it means to fulfill the great commission and "make disciples". Remember what Jesus commanded in **Matthew 28**? **"....Teaching them to obey EVERYTHING that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20)**. Now I'm not the smartest guy that ever lived, but I have learned one thing in this life: to teach someone EVERYTHING that Christ has commanded me will take a longterm commitment. You can't teach someone *everything* that Christ has commanded in a five minute conversation in line at the grocery store. To make disciples the way Christ intends for us to do, means to INVEST ourselves long-term into the life of someone else. In short, we all need a Timothy to pour our faith into. That being said, allow me to ask a question. Who is YOUR Timothy? Do you have someone in your life right now that you are investing in to leave a legacy of faith? If the answer is no, then I pray that you will be convicted this morning to find someone. It is the only way to leave a legacy of faith. So find your Timothy and get to it! Be concerned for the generation that is coming up behind you. You're not gonna live forever ya know (not on this earth anyway)! Make it your life's purpose to be CONCERNED about those you'll leave behind. Make disciples.

The Communion

"I thank God, whom I serve as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers." (vs.3). Just picture that, the Apostle Paul in a dungeon down on his knees praying for you day and night! If that didn't give Timothy the motivation to stick with it, I cannot imagine what would. Prayer. It is our greatest weapon, and yet sadly, the least used by many. I mentioned earlier that you cannot do spiritual things in the flesh. Well that is exactly what happens when a believer tries to minister without an effective prayer life. For it is our prayers that keep us in constant communion with The Father. It is our prayers that move heaven and earth to bring us into the very presence of the throne. It is our prayers that keep us connected to "The True Vine", so that we can bear fruit that will last.

Too many churches today are more worried about the "wow factor" than the effective prayers of righteous men (**James 5:16**). In short, the modern day church has become big on entertainment and small upon communion with Christ. Apart from Him, we can do nothing (**John 15:5**). Have you ever been to a church service where the music was great and the message was "informative", and yet nothing seemed to touch your soul? That happens because of one or two things. It could be that you are out of touch with God, or it very well could be that those who are leading the service are! Lot's of Christians go through the motions. Effective Christians, those who leave a lasting legacy of faith, are a PRAYING people.

Paul tell us that we should "**pray without ceasing**" in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**. This doesn't mean to just throw up a prayer before meals or bedtime, but rather to be in a constant state of communion with God. "Praying without ceasing", means to be seeking God's will in our every decision. Alone in his dark and musty prison cell, Paul still had constant fellowship with the One who had called him so many years before. You see, it doesn't matter if everyone on the face of the earth turns their back on you, The Lord Jesus Christ is always just a prayer away. He will never leave you.

Paul knew what every Christian should know, if you're going to be effective for the kingdom, you must have a good prayer life. Prayer and The Word go hand in hand and should be an integral part of every believer's daily life. If you don't have time for prayer and the Word, then you don't have time to make a difference in anyone's life (including your own). Leaving a legacy of faith is dependent upon an effective and fervent PRAYER LIFE! Nothing lasting will ever happen apart from constant COMMUNION with God. Are you struggling and frustrated that you're not making much of a difference? So, how's your prayer life these days? Paul wasn't about to let that filthy dungeon rob him of his communion with Christ. For in the long run, he knew that was the one thing that he couldn't make it without. There's not much time for depression and anxiety, when your constantly talking with Jesus! He can give you joy, even in a dungeon!

The Confidence

There were two emotions that Paul wanted to drive as far away from his young protege as he possible could. Those emotions being fear and shame. Paul wanted Timothy to understand that God was in control, in all things, and every circumstance. He didn't want Timothy to abandon his calling as others had in the face of such severe persecution. Though many had abandoned Paul to his fate, and had run for the cover of anonymity, Paul desperately wanted Timothy to stand firm. He told the young pastor that God had not given them a spirit of fear, but rather a spirit of power, love, and self discipline (**vs.7**), the latter being a word used to describe having complete control over one's mind and emotions. Paul wanted Timothy to hold fast in his faith and trust God to give him exactly what he needed to be effective. He wanted him to minister in the CONFIDENCE that comes from relying fully upon Christ for the outcome. God had allowed Paul to suffer, but from his suffering, Christ would be glorified, and to Paul, that was all that mattered.

Paul instructed Timothy to stir up the spiritual gifts that were within him (**vs. 6**), to rekindle them as one stirs the coals of a flame to bring about a more intense heat. This was no time to fear. It was a time to be emboldened. Paul invited Timothy to join with him in his suffering for the gospel (**vs. 8**). I imagine that if we used that as a strategy to grow the church today, we'd see few results. However, if more Christians approached their calling as a way to bring glory to Christ through suffering, what a revival we would have in this wicked world. I am constantly hearing a barrage of reasons why people can't serve in the church. Everything from, the inconvenience of it all, to the fact that its just not "enjoyable" for them. Wow! We sure have come a long way from the first century disciples who counted it as joy that they were deemed worthy to suffer for The Lord's Name sake (**Acts 5:41**). Maybe we've just heard to many sermons from the TV preachers, but suffering for the glory of Christ doesn't come up much these days!

The Apostle Paul understood this one simple truth: When a man is fully surrendered to the will of God, he can rely in complete confidence that God will receive glory from his life. There is nothing to fear, for those who are sold out to Jesus. God WILL see to it that they leave a legacy of faith, or as Jesus said it so perfectly, **"You WILL bear fruit" (John 15)**. Those who rely upon God can rest in bold assurance that He will provide the lasting results. I don't know about you, but I want to leave a legacy of faith behind when I leave this world.

Paul entreated Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus, and on a personal note, he implored Timothy not to be ashamed of him as he languished in that Roman dungeon (**vs. 8**). It was all part of God's plan and would bring Him glory. When Paul wrote this personal note to Timothy, I'm pretty sure that he had no idea that God would still be using the letter to encourage believers today. You see, God did use Paul's suffering to bring honor and glory to the name of Jesus. I'll bet the old Apostle looks back on it all now and says that every bit of his trials and tribulations were worth it! The frail old preacher in the Roman prison has taught us a great deal about leaving a lasting legacy of faith. We must be CALLED to follow Christ, CONCERNED for others more than ourselves, in constant COMMUNION with Christ through continuous prayers, and finally, we will have the CONFIDENCE that God will empower us to bear fruit that will last. He has given us the Spirit of power, love, and discipline. And THAT is how we WILL leave behind a legacy of Faith!

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!