

Letters From My Father
Week 21
2 Timothy 1:1-8
“Prayers From The Pit”

Introduction

Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff — they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord as long as I live. **Psalm 23:4-6**

The Roman Emperor Nero was a petulant child. He came to the throne in AD 54 at the age of sixteen. He was wicked and self-serving to his very core. Nero fancied himself the great architect, and his lavish construction projects nearly brought the empire to financial ruin. Sometime around AD 64, Nero had his mind set to revitalize the entire city of Rome. And this meant that all the existing structures in the city would need to be destroyed in order to make room for his grandiose architectural design. This was to be his greatest achievement. However, according to historians there was a great deal of push-back on his plans.

“Mysteriously” on July 18, AD 64, a great fire broke out in the city of Rome. The fire raged for over a week, and when it was done, seventy percent of the massive city lay in ruins. The citizens were outraged and many began to blame Nero for the fire, knowing that it was he who wished to remake the city. As the public outcry grew, Nero desperately needed a scape-goat. So he chose arguably the most hated group of people in all of the empire: The Christians. The followers of Christ were considered to be the lowest of the low in Rome. So, a great deal of the populace were all too happy to see the blame for the fire laid upon their doorstep.

As a result of Nero’s blaming Christendom for Rome’s demise, Christians were rounded up by the hundreds. They were crucified, fed to the lions in the coliseum, and Nero even had some covered with pitch and lit on fire to illuminate his gardens at night. It was the beginning of three hundred long years of church persecution in Rome.

Nero demanded that the leaders of the so-called “Christian cult” be rounded up and executed. Among these was quite possibly the most famous and influential Christian of the time, namely, the Apostle Paul. Paul was tried and sentenced to death. And as he awaited his execution, he was sent to the dungeon known as the infamous “Mamertine Prison”.

Unlike the house arrest that Paul had suffered years before, the conditions at Mamertine were deplorable. The prison was built above what once was a cistern, and the prisoners who were scheduled to die were lowered through a hole in the floor to the pit of the cistern below. There was no heat, and since these people were considered enemies of Rome, they were given only enough food to survive until their execution. Paul would have slept on a stone floor with possibly a bit of straw for a bed. His toilet would have been a bucket. And as he awaited his execution, he did not know if his Roman citizenship would spare him from the cross, or even the torture of fire in Nero’s garden. The best that he could hope for was to be beheaded with the sword. As it turns out, this was to be the method of his death.

From the pit at Mamertine, we have the last known writing from the great apostle. He wrote a final letter to his son in the faith, Timothy, at Ephesus. He longed to see his young friend one last time. And not only that, Paul wanted to officially pass the torch, as it were, to the one he knew that he could count on to continue his work of spreading the gospel. Paul’s final letter is both inspirational and heart-breaking as we see the humanity of this great man of God. He refuses to feel sorry for himself, but rather, he focuses upon others, in order to be a source of encouragement to them in his final days. The

letter is a great testimony from a great man of faith. And in his opening statements, we see Paul pouring his heart out to Timothy, *Remembering* him in prayer, reminding him to *Rekindle* his faith, and to *Rely* on our great Savior for strength in the difficult days that lay ahead.

Remember (vs. 1-5)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, for the sake of the promise of life in Christ Jesus: To Timothy, my dearly loved son. Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanksgiving

I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience as my ancestors did, when I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day. Remembering your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and now, I am convinced, is in you also. **2 Timothy 1:1-5**

We can only assume that Paul was able to write to Timothy because Luke, who was ministering to him in prison was there to take down Paul's message (**2 Timothy 4:11**). For the most part, all of Paul's friends had deserted him, once he was arrested. Perhaps they were afraid of sharing in Paul's fate. But as a result, the faithful apostle was feeling very much abandoned in that horrible place. And undoubtedly his poor eyesight, as well as, his chains would have greatly hindered his ability to write in the darkness of his cell. He was allowed visitors from time to time, and this is why Luke probably acted as Paul's secretary, so that he could send this final message to the young pastor that he loved so dearly.

Paul introduced himself as he always did, as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He knew that **all things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)**. He had faithfully served his LORD up until this time, and he had no intentions of leaving Him now. Paul was committed in life and in death to be a worthy ambassador for Christ. And how could he do this in that horrible place? **"For the sake of the promise of life in Christ Jesus" (vs.1b)**. Even in the darkest circumstance, Paul continued to hope in the promises of God. Christ was with him for every moment that he spent in the pit, and soon, he would see his Savior face to face. This is the hope of every Believer, who truly takes hold of eternal life. The things of this world no matter how difficult are merely transitional. Eternal life awaits those who place their hope in Jesus.

I am certain that in these last days of his life, Paul had plenty of time to do one of two things. First, he could feel sorry for himself. Or second, he could focus on the blessings he had been given in his life and upon those who had been so dear to him. He chose the latter. And in his final moments, his mind went to Timothy, his son in the faith. The one he loved as no other. Paul knew that his time was over, but Timothy's was just beginning. The time had come to pass the torch. No one knew the hardships that Timothy would face better than Paul. So he prayed. He prayed earnestly for Timothy's safety and steadfastness in a world that despised The Savior they both served. Paul remembered Timothy in his prayers, night and day, even though in the darkness of his confinement he probably couldn't tell the difference. He prayed God's grace, mercy, and peace for his dearest friend. For he knew that in these dark days, Timothy would be in desperate need of all three.

His mind went back in time as he remembered Timothy's faithful mother and grandmother, who introduced Timothy to their shared faith. How important it is to have a godly family to encourage us in our walk with God. Timothy's father was Greek, and more than likely a non-believer, but the women in the young man's life set a godly example for him to follow. Paul then took Timothy in as an apprentice when he was still a teenager. They traveled the known world together planting churches everywhere they went. There was no one closer to Paul's heart than Timothy. He was the closest thing to a son that Paul would ever have, and therefore, it stands to reason that in his last moments on this earth, his remembrance was focused upon the pastor at Ephesus.

As a pastor, I have had a front row seat to a lot of tragedy. I have been in the room many times when someone took their last breath here on earth and stepped out into eternity. And I can tell you this firsthand; the death of a child of God is far different than that of an unbeliever. Paul demonstrated his faith by thinking of others instead of thinking of himself. He didn't have time for all the "why me's" of suffering, but instead, he wanted to make sure that those he left behind could carry on the mission. For it was the mission that mattered above all else. The only thing that Paul wanted for himself was to see his son in the faith one last time before his final exodus.

Apparently, sometime before his arrest or immediately afterward, the two had had a brief encounter, for Paul remembered Timothy's tears at his departure. Possibly the young man was concerned for his mentor, and the fact that he would never see him again (**vs. 4**). But one thing that shines above all in the words of this Paul's final letter; To love Christ is to love others and to esteem them as more important than ourselves (**Philippians 2:3**). When you get squeezed, what is truly inside you comes out. So when your time comes to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, where will your priorities lie? If you are led by the Spirit of God, your remembrance will center upon your blessings and those who mean the most to you. We trust in Christ for our safe passage homeward. Paul's conscience was clear. He had fought the good fight. He had finished the race, knowing that he had run with all his strength. Now, it was Timothy's turn. All that remained was to cheer the next runner on to victory. Our purpose in life is to make disciples, and for those disciples to in turn, make more disciples. And the race continues on.

Rekindle (vs. 6-7)

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

We know from Paul's letters that Timothy was not a strong man, neither physically nor emotionally. He had health issues, as well as, a timid persona. But God uses the weak things of this world for His glory. None of us have the capability to serve Christ in our own strength. If Timothy was to be able to function in Rome's anti-Christian environment, he would need to be reminded from whence the real power comes. And Paul was determined to remind him.

Paul had personally ordained Timothy to the ministry and witnessed firsthand the Spirit's power come upon his young friend. Timothy had been endowed by The Spirit with the necessary spiritual gifts to enable him to carry out his mission. Paul just needed to remind him of the fact. Perhaps due to Paul's imprisonment, Timothy was considering giving up his calling. After all, fear of Roman extermination could very well have shaken the young preacher to his core. But Christ doesn't make allowances for retreat. Remember His words to those who followed Him.

Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather fear Him Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. **Matthew 10:28**

When Paul told Timothy to "rekindle" his spiritual gifts, he wasn't telling him to "pull himself up by his own bootstraps", as it were. He was telling him to refocus on God's calling by letting The Spirit move within him afresh. This is not done by human effort, but by prayer and The Word of God. All of us need to rededicate ourselves from time to time. This world has a way of distracting our focus away from the things of God. I'm sure that severe Roman persecution tempted many a Believer to look for the exit. But the callings of God are irrevocable (**Romans 11:29**). We do not have the option of quitting, when times are difficult. But here's the good news: If we allow ourselves to be controlled by The Spirit, then we have nothing to fear. He will finish what He began in us (**Philippians 1:6**).

Paul reminded Timothy of The Spirit's power, saying that God has not given us a spirit of fear (the word Spirit should actually be capitalized for he is referring to the Holy Spirit). The word used here for "fear" is not the usual Greek of *The New Testament* (*phobeo*), but instead Paul used the word "*deilia*", which literally means *cowardice*. It is the only time that this word is used in the entire *New Testament*. What a reverberating message to be sent from the dark dungeons of Mamertine! "Timothy, this is no time for cowardice, but rather, to go forward in the boldness and power of The Spirit of The Living God!"

The Apostle used three words to describe the working of The Spirit: Power (*dynamis*), love (*agape*), and a sound mind (*sophronismos*). The message is simple, *dynamis*, from which we derive our word *dynamite*, is a description of God's mighty working power within us. As Paul had previously explained to the church at Ephesus, the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead now lives within every Believer (***Ephesians 1:18-20***)! So how can we fail, when we have been granted access through Christ to such immeasurable power?

Second, we are to continue serving in The Spirit with *agape*, which is the same love that compelled Christ to die for lost sinners. So how can we, in the face of persecution, abandon our calling to love those for whom Christ died? Our mission to go and make disciples far outweighs our own personal comfort and satisfaction. We cannot abandon our mission, for love demands its fulfillment.

And thirdly, we, by The Spirit, are of "sound mind" *sophronismos*, which literally means "*self-controlled*". The one who is controlled by The Spirit will not run away in the face of hardship for they are self-disciplined enough to stay the course. Just as the seasoned soldier runs toward danger, while everyone else runs away; we follow after Christ in spite of hardship, for our minds have been thoroughly trained to do so. To Timothy, and all the other devoted followers of Christ out there, the desperation of these days demands we stand firm as pillars of the truth. To run away or cower in fear is not an option. We are soldiers of the cross. And the mission is far more important than even our own lives. God has not given us a Spirit of fear, but rather One of immense power! Maybe its time we rededicated ourselves to Him, rekindling the fire to burn within us and the cause to which we have been called.

Rely (vs. 8)

So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.

2 Timothy 1:8

I find this plea to be both powerful, as well as, heart-wrenching. "Timothy, don't be ashamed of the gospel... or me." Paul had given his life to the furtherance of the gospel of Christ for which he was now chained in a dungeon. He did not want Timothy to be embarrassed by his own calling, nor by his mentor's imprisonment. Many others had abandoned Paul in this his time of need. He would have been heartbroken, if Timothy had followed suit. He could not bear the thought of it. Many of our so-called friends are wont to abandon us when the hard times come our way. They often say that misery loves company, and I fear it is because when we *are* in misery there is so little company to be had.

We must never shy away from people when they are hurting. For that is when they need our encouragement and consolation the most. We are commanded to "**rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep**" (***Romans 12:15***). The key word being "*with*" in that verse. The child of God has been joined with the body of Christ, and it is the body that should give aid and comfort when we need it. And trust me, sooner or later, we all will need it. Paul needed Timothy to share in his suffering, not shy away from it. Never underestimate the power of the holding the hands of the downtrodden. No one really expects us to remove their burdens, but oh, how comforting it is, when they are simply shared.

Some of us in this life have what I like to call "three in the morning friends". These are the people who would get out of bed and come to your aid at "three in the morning". If you have these kinds of people in your life, treasure them, for they are few and far between. Your church ought to be filled with three in the morning friends. For that is what *agape* is all about. It draws us closer in times of trouble.

Paul needed Timothy to be his “three in the morning” friend. Paul was imprisoned for spreading the gospel, and nothing more. The only fire he had set in Rome was the fire of The Holy Spirit. And for this he was abandoned by many of those who had claimed to share his faith and passion. How painful that must have been for him. And yet, he refused to abandon the faith which he had so passionately defended. Instead, he doubled down. And what’s more, he asked Timothy to join him in his never-ending zeal.

Notice that Paul does not refer to himself as a “Nero’s prisoner”, but rather, as a prisoner of The LORD. For he knew that apart from Christ’s will, Nero nor any other earthly power could have any sway over his life. He was a prisoner, because Christ, for His own glory and purpose, had willed it so. And so, Paul accepted his death sentence willingly, and with gratitude. If Christ would be glorified by his life or by his death, then so be it. This is what a surrendered heart looks like. Paul would rely upon the wisdom of God to sovereignly rule over every fibre of his being. He would rely on God to the very end. And because he was so willing, he had no qualms about asking Timothy to do the same as well. All that Timothy needed to do was stir up the gifts that were already within himself, by the power of The Spirit. He must yield himself to The Spirit’s power to stand firm as a defender and protector of the truth, sharing in the suffering of the persecuted, while relying upon the matchless power of Almighty God. This same charge comes to us today as well.

If anyone wants to follow after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it. For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life? For The Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will reward each according to what he has done. ***Matthew 16:24b-27***

Would you be willing to risk it all to follow Christ? If you found yourself in the darkest of dungeons would you still praise His Name, willing to lose your life to see that His mission is completed? When we get squeezed, what’s inside us will come out. Will this world see Christ in you, when the storms come and the end is near? Or do you need to rekindle the gifts that are within you, so that you may pray in all things, “Thy will be done.”

Truth!!!