

Thanksgiving and Faithfulness in the Gospel

II Timothy 1:1-7

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This is a sermon that's been sitting on the shelf for a number of weeks. And as it turned out, those who come at night know that I've preached here and there through II Timothy because of thematic importance. I thought, oh, John Haines is getting ordained tonight so this kind of fits in ordination. So would you stand for reading God's Word? This is the Word of our Lord and King from the mouth of the Apostle Paul.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,

² To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to^[a] a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,^[b] ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹² which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.^[c]

Let's pray for a moment.

Father, I pray that we would have a right reverence both of calls to the gospel and endurance in the gospel, which Paul describes here and may we hear your call in our life, whatever our life might be, and may we endure in it.

We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

What I'm going to suggest is that in this passage, which I'm just going to go through, verse by verse, we have pictures of a hard but blessed life. Pictures or ideas about a hard but blessed life. I say hard because Paul was about to die. He was going to be martyred by Emperor Nero and his officers although everybody knew he was an innocent man. He'd been charged with causing trouble, but he hadn't caused trouble. People had caused trouble in his vicinity but he'd been charged. And he was condemned because he didn't have the right allies. Not because he was guilty. And he is looking at the end of his life. And in II Timothy he doesn't have long to live. Can you imagine it? We don't know, three months, six months. Let's imagine 100 days to live. What would you say if you had 100 days to live and you knew you would be put to death unjustly? You forged lifelong friendships. Timothy is a friend and a son. He is called My beloved son more than once. He also has been betrayed by people in this era, this era of his life when he's in jail. Because in Roman society, it was just shameful to be jailed. And there was a sense in which it didn't really matter if you were innocent or not. But the judicial system there didn't work the way it does here. You're in jail. You're presumed to be either guilty or powerless, and we don't want to hang around with guilty or powerless people. Paul mentions in the letter some of the people who betrayed him, Demas, others who left during his hardships. Now Paul is not bitter, although he's dying for a cause he worked on because the work stretched him and pulled him and gave him moments of glory and strengthened him, and also almost crushed him at times. And now he wants to write his last words, his last words to Timothy, his beloved son. He is aware that he is dying soon, and he's going to pass the mantle to the next generation of Christian leaders.

Now, John (Haines), you're kind of my generation. You're a little bit younger than me, but not a lot. But you're younger, and every time we ordain anybody to anything, there's a certain passing of a mantle and Paul's mind is on fire with it. He just he wants to pour out his thoughts to Timothy, to anybody who's going to read this letter because he's zealous for the next generation, for the continuation of the work that he's begun. He has already used Timothy and Titus and others as what people sometimes call apostolic delegates. An apostolic delegate is someone who does Paul's work when he can't, when he can't be there. And so Paul would send people to Colossia, Philippi and Ephesus and Crete as if as if he were there, and he would give them instructions. And these are the last instructions. And he says it this way. At the end of the letter he says, the time of my departure, he means his death has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

Now, in the original language, it's about as emphatic as it can get. What he says, really the way it sounds is the good fight I fought and the way expresses it, it means to the end. Couldn't fight it anymore, fought it to the end. The race I finished, it's done. The faith I have kept. He only has a few days left and so he's giving these directions to someone he loves so dearly, to someone he calls his beloved child his dear child. Dear child because of affection, because of time spent together. Paul always had somebody, sometimes as many as three, four, five, six, seven, somebody. But the big two were Timothy and Titus, and Titus seemed to be older than Timothy and so there's this fatherly affection that's not only for Timothy. He also says late in the letter, bring John Mark too, if you can. I love him also. He also says, bring my cloak because it's kind of cold in the prison. He also says, bring my parchments, which means bring my books because I've got work I still want to do. I mean, the fact that I'm dying soon isn't going to keep me from doing the work I can do from prison. By the way, you know that a number of Paul's letters were written from prison, but somehow reminds me of John Calvin on his deathbed. He was still writing, trying to finish a manuscript, and somebody said, John, put down your pen. You're dying. And John Calvin said, What? And have my Lord, find me idle when he comes?

Paul is unshaken. He's going to continue to work. It's a beautiful thing. Why is he unshaken? Well, verses 8, 10 and 11 tell us why. If you have your Bible open, you can peek at it. First thing, he says he's not ashamed of the gospel. He's not ashamed, even though he could be ashamed. Even though it was a shameful thing to be put to death. It meant no one came to your side. No one powerful enough. Today, of course, we're not ashamed of the gospel because we're in prison. We're ashamed of the gospel because it's unpopular, because Christianity is passé, because Christians are on the outs in our society. They don't have enlightened views of proper things. And so it's tempting to fall silent about the gospel, but we too should be unashamed of the gospel. That is to say, we continue to tell people about our faith. I work on the plane when I go back and forth and people look and they ask me, what are you, an author or something? Are you a professor? Are you a pastor? What are you? Because I was looking at your screen. I don't deny it, I affirm it, I say, yes, yes, I teach the Bible. I preach the Bible. Would you like to talk about it? No, they would not. 😊 Once in a while they would like to talk about it. But I'm willing. You should be willing to. Verse 10 he says, I'm cheerful, although I'm headed for death because the Savior, Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought immortality to light through the Gospel. I'm going to die in this flesh and I'll shuck off this body. But it's not the end for me.

It's painful to be executed. Of course it is. But he's not terrified because he's going to live forever. Verse 11. How does Paul stay positive even in prison? Because he knows he's been appointed by God to be a preacher, an apostle and a teacher, and he's still doing it in prison. As I said just a moment ago, we long for this kind of attitude today, don't we?

The primitive church just grew and grew and grew without resources. The buildings without allies just grew and grew and grew because of confidence in Christ. How we long for that again and to be unashamed of the gospel of our Savior. Paul is unashamed. He's positive. He's happy as he looks at the last parts of his life, and he gives a charge to his son, and it's a charge we get

to over here and it works for John tonight. Applies to you, brother. Some applies to all of us. Applies to everybody who's in ministry, whether officially or unofficially, when the first thing he says is that he's an apostle, he just wants to say, you know, God appointed me to this. I'm not just writing what I think. I've been appointed as a messenger by Christ himself, by the will of God meaning that this is not my idea. I didn't volunteer for this. If you know his story. Paul did not volunteer to be an Apostle. And in fact, probably most of you who were in ministry did not have it in mind. It's high school graduation today and we all had our high school graduation. It's a wonderful, wonderful time -- just on this platform a few hours ago, probably somebody in that group, 136 grads will go into ministry, whether full time ministry, business ministry or discipleship ministry. It's probably not in their minds right now, but the will of God calls people into ministry, and we take it as a as a testimony that God is always calling people to himself. Maybe some of you are being called more now to ministry than before.

So he writes to Timothy, his beloved child. He loves him. This beloved child. They did things together. Did you know that five of Paul's epistles were coauthored by Timothy? He says Timothy had a hand in writing it. Here's some of the places they visited together. Macedonia. It's a pretty big area. Corinth, a big city. Philippi, another big city. Ephesus, another big city over there. Third biggest city in the empire. That's just a few of them. And Paul says, you know Timothy, he writes with me. He travels the world with me. And when he delegates them, he says to people, when he writes a cover letter, I have nobody like him. You respect Timothy. And now he writes to him, what? He writes something that I find worthy of meditation.

Would you look at your Bible? I love the eye contact you give me. It's beautiful, but break eye contact, would you please? Look at verse one where he says, there is an Apostle by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, the promise of life. Now here's Paul in a situation of death, impending death and he says, I'm telling you that I describe the promise of life. So, when you're facing death, when I'm facing death, Paul saying, I think of the promise of life and Paul does this kind of thing a lot in his letters. He says, if we're in conflict, can I tell you what we call the Gospel? Sometimes we call it the Gospel of peace. When you're in conflict with somebody, if you're a believer, disciple, you have the gospel of peace, the gospel peace is the remedy for conflict, as the gospel of life is the remedy for death. And then if guilt is your problem, then we have the gospel of the grace of God. That's the remedy for guilt. If you're unloved. There's always people that feel unloved, and probably everybody who's ever lived this felt unloved at some point. If you're unloved, you are God's son, God's daughter, and brought into the family of God. You're adopted. The problem of being unloved is solved by the love of God. If you're betrayed as Paul was, just remember that Jesus was betrayed first. If you're accused, remember that that Jesus has silenced the accuser. There are lots of accusers, but there's one accuser who throws our sins before God and they're silenced by the blood of the lamb. If you're estranged from your family and some of you probably are, you have brothers and sisters in the family of God. And so I encourage you to explore the ways in which the gospel is powerful and true.

Now, John (Haines), you do that. If I may address you again for a moment, you do that, and I hope you all know that John does that the way he picks music. Have you noticed, have you noticed the way he makes everything work together? If you haven't, I want you to. It's a ministry of the word by the words other people use. So we will see the way the riches of God hang together.

Now the riches of God are described also in verse two. Paul says, I give you grace and peace. That's a traditional greeting -- grace means the grace of God. It's kind of Paul's little fun with changing a tradition. The tradition in Greek was to start, a letter by saying greetings, and the word is *chairein*. And Paul says, I give you grace, which is *charis* just changes a couple letters. It's kind of having a little humor. It's not very funny to us, but it was a little wee bit of humor tweaking conventions. And he also offers peace, which again, I find remarkable for a person who's in prison.

One of my daughters has a baby and a child who wakes up in the middle of night. Lots of sleepless nights make you unpeaceful. But in the gospel we have grace and peace. There's an election coming up. I don't know if you know that or not. And elections make some people unpeaceful. But the Lord gives us peace. We have to appropriate that. Paul was deserted by Demas. As I mentioned earlier, Alexander the coppersmith, he said, did me much harm. But Paul still has peace even as he remembers these hard moments.

Sometimes peace is strongest for us when the hard moments are strong. in Hebrews 10, the author, we don't know who wrote it, said, you know, one of the best things you can do when you're in a hard spot is to remember the former times that were difficult, that God carried you through. Let me read it to you,

The author of Hebrews says, recall the former days when after you were enlightened, that means after you received the gospel, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, like Paul, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property because you knew you had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence in which there is great reward. That is to say, if you're worried about the present, look at how God carried you through, how you endured the past. So says Hebrews 10.

The next thing Paul says is he gives thanks for Timothy. Now, we've already covered that to some degree, but he gives thanks and he prays. He says, I pray for you night and day. And he says, not only do I give thanks for you, I give thanks you come from a family of faith. I remember, he says, your grandmother and your mother. People of faith. That's a good thing. He also says, is a clean conscience.

Let's talk about remembering our parents. Let me invite you to do what Paul wants us to do -- to meditate on those who went before us in the faith. Can you think of a person in your life that

really set you a good example, maybe from your lineage, maybe your mother or father, maybe your mother, father did not give a great example, but maybe if not, maybe you had an uncle or a grandfather or an aunt or a cousin.

My mother is a pretty godly woman. She died a couple of years ago. Most striking thing that I think I ever saw as an adult with my mother came after my father had had Alzheimer's for a few years, and it was impossible for him to stay at home. And so he went to an assisted living situation, and my mother would visit him a lot. And my mother and father, my mother had a had a similar degree, a master's degree. And so she would go and have a Bible study there. And she also played the piano led choirs and musical. And so she would go and round up all the people who were willing at this home, a small home, 24 people, she'd get 12 or 15 to them, to a Bible study, and they would say, well, I'm an atheist. And she would say, this won't hurt you. And then people would say, well, I'm a Lutheran. And she would say, I think Luther was a great guy and I'm a Catholic. And, you know, we share the same view of Jesus. Just come on. And the Bible study would go, and what I would visit, my mother would appoint me the substitute Bible study teacher. And then my father's condition got a little bit worse, and he had to move to another home. And I knew my mother was still holding this Bible study in the first home where my father does my father's 13 miles this way, and she's going four miles the other way to hold a Bible study where he lived for two years. So I go to visit her and I'm thinking, well, she'll get a sub. Yes, I'm the sub once again. And I said, well, mom, dad's that way and I don't have a lot of time. This is a quick visit. She said, I know, I know, but we got to go to this place, this Bible study. They expect us. And by the way, they expect you just want you to know. And so I'm going to play the piano. You're going to lead the singing. You're going to give a devotional from the word. And afterwards you're going to juggle for them. I looked at her. I knew what was going on. She said, you know, you juggled four of them last July 4th, and they liked it. And she said it in a way that cut off all additional discussion. So then we, you know, we we'll the people and we had the Bible study, we have a juggling presentation. And then we go off to see my father in the opposite direction. And I said, mom, you know, this is remarkable. I mean, dad hasn't lived here for a couple of years, and you're driving over here at night and then going over there to see dad. She said, well, I don't really think of it that way. I just came to love these people. That's all. I'm just loving people. That's my mom. I want you to think about the people that blessed you from your family, people who set you an example of love and godliness and care and kindness.

Paul says to go back a little bit. He has a clear conscience. He has a clear conscience about his ministry. Doesn't mean he's perfect. It means that he looks at his life. He's fearless. He's fearless. Conscience is a gift of God. It tells us we've done things wrong or right when we're not sure. The conscience is as follows. Any other faculty. Your math faculty is fallible. You make mistakes when you multiply in your head. Your emotions are fallible. We saw that this morning, and your will is fallible and your conscience is fallible. But it's all part of what God gives us. Give us direction. He gives us parents. He gives us grandparents, a grandmother, and he gives us a conscience. And he says, these are the things you can use to stay firm in your faith as you strive to live out your faith. Walking in a path is difficult. Like my path. Like Paul's path. There's a

couple more things to say that he thinks will help Timothy stay cheerful, even in the hardships of ministry.

The next thing he says is you need to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of hands. Now when he says, fanning the flame, the gifts of God. He's not saying Timothy is lazy. He was not lazy. What he means is you can get tired. And when you're tired and you know you have something important to do, you need to drink coffee or run around the house a couple times, or do some push ups or eat, you know, do something to gear yourself up because there's a time to indulge tiredness and there's a time not to indulge tiredness. Paul says to Timothy Fanning the flame, the gift of God. It was given to you.

There's a debate about what this exactly means, given in the with the laying on of hands can be translated different ways usually. And John with you, brother usually ordination is a confirmation of what people see. That is to say you're teaching, you're leading, you're directing, you're carrying, you're shepherding. So let's make you an elder. You've studied theology, you've taught it various ways. Let's make you a pastor and so forth.

Usually it's a confirmation, but Paul seems to say that it's also possible for gifts to come to you as you're being ordained, he says, fanned into flame. The gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self control. Seems like Timothy was already recognized. And then something extra happen. John, I hope that happens for you. I hope that happens for everybody who becomes an elder deacon that you say, you know what? That was a meaningful experience. That wasn't just somebody laying hands on me. When those hands were laid on me. Something happened.

I remember my ordination, a man who was part of it and not known for kindness, said to me just a few words. He knew me. I was ready for a critique or a warning. He said, I know you will be diligent. I'll never forget it. It stirred me to be more diligent because I had a lazy streak at times in my life. I know you'll be diligent. That stirred me, John. May you be stirred tonight. But you have joy tonight. May something happen in your life tonight.

The Lord gives us not a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power. He gives us love. Paul says he gives us self-control. These are the traits of character that adorn our work in ministry. And they adorn your life. One of the favorite passages I have right now are those three that tell us, as Christians, we should adorn the gospel. We should beautify the gospel. We beautify the gospel by a life of hope instead of fear, self-control instead of self-indulgence, which is so common in mankind, love instead of anger, hate or criticism or whatever the case might be, these are the things that Timothy should show more and more, and we should too. And so we come to the ordination. But I hope we all will hear encouraging words to us, not just to someone being ordained tonight. There is a way to be joyful when things are hard, and Paul has described the way to keep on working, to be fearless, to refuse to let shame weigh you down.

To hold fast to the gospel which is the word of life. May it be so for all of us. Let's pray together. God, I thank you for your work in the life of the Apostle Paul, in the way we get to over here his

final words to his beloved son and beloved coworker. May we take these pictures of a hard but blessed life.

The heart so much here in this passage, so much to meditate upon. Gasp of life in the face of death. Gospel peace in the face of strife. The courage to live out our convictions. The belief that something special can happen when God calls us and even sets us apart in a special way. May each one here be encouraged in some way by your spirit.

Lord, this is called Pentecost Sunday. By your Spirit come upon us, direct us, give us joy and strength, self-control and love. And we pray that especially for everyone and for our brother John.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.