

MBC – 1/10/2021 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 2 TIMOTHY – THE LAST WORDS OF PAUL
“Guard the Gospel”
 1 Timothy 1:1-7

Martyn Lloyd-Jones pastored the Westminster Chapel in London during WWII. In the Fall of 1940, the German Luftwaffe systematically bombed the city for 57 days, day and night, but Lloyd-Jones kept preaching.

As people evacuated the city, he kept preaching! Once Sunday morning a bomb fell only a few yards from the church during a service, and plaster from the roof fell on the heads of the congregation. When the bomb hit, Lloyd-Jones was praying. He paused for a moment, finished his prayer, and went on to preach his entire sermon.

My dear church family, the best thing we can do during these difficult times is to stay the course and keep doing what God calls us to do Sunday after Sunday, and that is: gather as His church, worship God, and hear His Word. And we should do it all the more urgently and intensely the crazier things get. I’m sure no one was bored and snoozing at Westminster Chapel when the bombs were falling! They didn’t know if they would see another Sunday – Truth is, neither do we. So let’s hear God’s Word this morning with great urgency, and great joy. We’re beginning a new study, so turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Timothy. Let’s read all of ch.1—

- 2 Timothy 1 ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, ²To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I 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. ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. ⁸Therefore 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, ⁹who saved us and called us to 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, ¹⁰and 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, ¹¹for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹²which 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. ¹³Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. ¹⁵You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, ¹⁷but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— ¹⁸may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

("Father, what we know not, teach us; what we have not, give us; what we are not, make us." -Old Anglican Prayer)

Intro: *What will you leave behind?*

When you leave this life, what will you leave behind? Money? Property? Some family heirlooms? All of that will be gone within just a couple generations. Your name, your reputation? Years ago I heard someone say that 100 years from now, no one will remember that you were even here! That's brutal. But it's true: You might be a branch on a family tree, maybe a picture in a family album, but even that will fade with time.

- Better question: what will you leave that will last forever? Well, look around: what do you see that will last forever? Not this building, not any stuff – but *people* will last forever – and they will last forever either in heaven or hell.

The question that every Christian should ask daily is this: “What will I do today; how will I live, speak, spend my time and my money, my energy and talents – so that others will follow me to heaven?”

This is the thought that consumed Paul in his final days: he would soon be leaving this world for the next one and he wanted to exhort and encourage Timothy not to drop the baton, but to keep on proclaiming the Gospel, which is the only message that prepares people for eternity. The theme verse of 2 Timothy is —

- 2 Timothy 1:14 ¹⁴By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

That good deposit is the Gospel. For 30 + years, Paul had faithfully preached the Good News, planted churches, suffered over and over again for the sake of the Gospel. He says in 4:7, that he had “*fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith.*” He was a prisoner and would soon be a martyr.

But what would happen to the *Gospel* when he was gone? Nero had launched a horrible persecution against Christians, many Christians had fallen away, even some of Paul's closest friends. One church historian says that “humanly speaking, Christianity trembled, on the verge of annihilation.” Who would battle for the truth when he was gone? So in this letter he says to Timothy—

Ch.1: Guard the Gospel

Ch.2: Suffer for the Gospel

Ch.3: Continue in the Gospel

Ch.4: Preach the Gospel

Second Timothy is different than First Timothy. That letter concerned how to shepherd the church in Ephesus. It's like a manual for church leadership. But this letter is personal. It's emotional. Paul is pouring out his heart to Timothy. Calvin said that this letter wasn't written to Timothy in ink, but with his own lifeblood. Paul didn't leave any physical children, so this really is his last will and testament to his child in the faith - Timothy. He writes with urgency. Timothy *must* take up the baton and continue the ministry of the Gospel: “*fan into flame the gift of God,*” “*guard the deposit*” of the Gospel,” “*preach the word the Word in season and out of season,*” and maybe the most important command of all is—

- 2 Timothy 2:2 ²and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses *entrust* to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

“Timothy, what I am passing to you, you must – must – pass along to others! You can’t let it die with you! The Gospel *must be intentionally* passed from one generation to the next. You can’t just hope it will somehow happen, Timothy: find faithful men, entrust this message to them, and instruct them to repeat the process – otherwise, there will be no MBC in 2000 years!” Well, he didn’t say that, but it’s true.

- We remind you regularly, that we have 4 priorities as a church: **Upward** deals with our worship; **Inward** deals with loving and growing our church family; **Outward** takes the Gospel to unbelievers; and **Forward** keeps it all going, from one generation to the next. This letter is all about the **Forward**, right? I’ll tell you, this is a timely message, isn’t it?
- A year ago our church family celebrated 40 years of having a witness for Christ in Middletown. But I don’t have to tell you, we face serious challenges with the coronavirus, with people fleeing the state because of politics, the economy, fires, etc. – if we don’t intentionally prepare for the future, we won’t make it to 50. Second Timothy is exactly what we need to hear as a church, right now.

So let’s dig in. I want us to get our bearings by looking at the author and recipient of this letter:

I. Paul – the prisoner.

At the end of Acts, Paul was under house arrest in Rome. This is what Luke said—

- Acts 28:30–31 ³⁰He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Yes, he was chained to a Roman guard, and he couldn’t come and go, but all things considered, this wasn’t a bad gig for Paul! He had a steady stream of friends who cared for his needs. He had the time to write 4 prison epistles, he evangelized, he taught and disciplined, and he even proclaimed the Gospel to Nero at some point. He told the Philippians that his imprisonment was actually advancing the Gospel: people were being saved in the emperor’s palace!

- We don’t know the details, but at some point, Paul was released, and went on the road again for a 4th missionary journey. He went to Crete and left Titus there, he went back to Ephesus (which he thought he would never do – remember Acts 20?) – and he left Timothy there – he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus during this time.

Maybe Paul actually made it all the way to Spain – we know he wanted to go there. At some point, he was rearrested, and taken to Rome again, not as an annoyance to the Jews, but as an enemy of the Rome because of his Christianity. And this second and last imprisonment was nothing like his first: By this time, Nero had lost his mind, and was slaughtering Christians. Church tradition says that Paul was thrown into the Mamertine prison, which was a damp, dark underground dungeon, with a hole in the ceiling to let in some light and to lower food to the prisoners. If you were in Mamertine, you were on death row – you only left there for your execution. It was a horrible place.

Paul was cold, lonely and discouraged— In 4:13, he asks Timothy if he could please bring him his cloak he left at Troas. In those days, if you were in jail, you only had what friends brought you. And he says in—

- 2 Timothy 1:15 ¹⁵You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

Apparently when Paul was arrested the second time – churches in Asia abandoned Paul – he had planted those churches and taught them God’s Word, but now he was an embarrassment to them. They dis-owned him and stopped supporting him. And he goes on to say—

- 2 Timothy 4:16 ¹⁶At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!

He’s talking about standing trial for the charges against him. No one came to his defense. No one came forward to vouch for his integrity. He was left on his own before Nero’s court. Sounds like what happened to Jesus, doesn’t it? But still he didn’t bear a grudge – isn’t that something?

And as he shivered in that dark cell, Paul could see that hard times were coming for the church—

- 2 Timothy 4:3-4 ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

So discouraging. The worst part of this imprisonment was the loneliness. It was a dangerous thing for people to visit Paul, because they could be arrested too. But he pleads with Timothy—

- 2 Timothy 4:9–10 ⁹Do your best to come to me soon. (And here is one of the saddest verses in the NT) ¹⁰For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Jesus’ Disciples scattered when He was arrested and taken to be crucified. He had to face His whole ordeal without His friends. That’s being kicked while you’re down. So Paul hoped that Timothy could come before the winter weather prevented any sea travel. We don’t know if that happened. It could be that Paul was alone until his execution – makes me think of all the poor souls who are isolated in nursing homes, and care centers who can’t see any family or friends because of the virus.

- Tradition has it that Peter was also in Mamertine during this time and both of them were executed by Nero – Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified upside down, because he didn’t feel worthy to be crucified the same way Jesus was.

So all this to say that Paul didn’t end his life and ministry on a high note! My wonderful church family honored me for 30 years at MBC – I got encouraging notes and gifts, which I didn’t deserve. Paul got none of that. But still, he wasn’t negative or pessimistic. I love what he says in 2:9: *“I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the Word of God is not bound!”* I love that. His faith in God and his confidence in the Gospel was as strong as ever.

Paul’s sole concern was just to be faithful to Christ to the very end, and encourage Timothy to do the same: don’t give up, don’t slow down or let down. Just stay faithful. Keep at it. Don’t swerve to the right or the left (you can take that how you want!)

Now let’s talk about—

II. Timothy – in over his head.

Timothy had been Paul's faithful ministry partner for over 15 years. He became a Christian when Paul came to his home town of Lystra, back in Acts 14, and his mother and grandmother came to Christ then too—

- 2 Timothy 1:5 ⁵I 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.

Even before they became Christians, they had been faithful Jews who knew the OT Scriptures, which God used to bring them to faith in Jesus—

- 2 Timothy 3:15 ¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings (the OT), which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Five years later, Paul returned to Lystra, saw how much Timothy had grown as a Christian, and asked him to come with him on his missionary journeys. From that point on he was with Paul almost constantly. And in all his letters, Paul had nothing but good to say about Timothy. Look at what he said about him in —

- Philippians 2:19–22 ¹⁹I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

So we're not surprised that after his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to lead the church there – but Ephesus was a tough, tough gig. Some of you remember our study of that letter: Timothy had to deal with false religions, the occult, and intimidating false teachers within that church – even among the elders. There was a feminist movement in the church that was causing trouble. So humanly speaking, Timothy was in way over his head. For three reasons—

1.) *He was still a young man.*

In his first letter Paul said, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness." And in this second letter he says, "flee youthful passions." Best guess is that he was in his mid-30's, and that's young to be shepherding a church. No doubt, his elders would have been older than him – which would have been intimidating since he had to rebuke and even remove some of them.

- I was 29 when I started pastoring, and I felt like a baby! I was 36 when we came to Middletown, and I still felt too young. I'm sure that Timothy felt inadequate for all the stuff going on in the church in Ephesus.

2.) *He was often sick.*

- Paul makes this comment in 1 Timothy 5:23 ²³(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)

To be above reproach, Timothy had completely abstained from alcohol, but Paul said he needed to take some, medicinally, because he had "*frequent ailments.*" He was sick a lot. We don't read *anything* about Paul *ever* being sick – so can you imagine how frustrating and embarrassing it would be to Timothy to feel like he was slowing Paul down when he was frequently sick? So his youth and ill health explain why —

3.) *He was timid in his personality.*

We call him Timid Timothy – and that’s true. From what we read, he seems to be an introvert, he avoided conflict, and he lacked confidence. Paul told the Ephesians to *stop* looking down on Timothy because he was young. And he told the Corinthians—

- 1 Corinthians 16:10–11 ¹⁰When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. ¹¹So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

It sounds like Timothy was afraid to face the believers in Corinth. There’s a reason Paul talks to him the way he does in this letter—

- 2 Timothy 1:7–8 ⁷for God gave us a spirit *not* of fear but of power and love and self-control. ⁸Therefore 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.
- 2 Timothy 2:1 ¹You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,
- 2 Timothy 2:3 ³Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

So Timothy is young, sickly, shy, seems to avoid hard stuff – and his father in the faith will soon be leaving this earth – he needs some serious encouragement! This letter was to Timothy what John 13-16 was to Jesus’ Disciples – it’s preparing him to carry on after Paul is gone. So let’s work our way through the first 7 verses and see how Paul does that—

III. Paul’s encouragement to Timothy.

- 2 Timothy 1:1 ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,

Paul was Timothy’s friend and spiritual father, but he was also an Apostle of Jesus Christ. And it didn’t come by his own choice, or by any church, but it came by the will and command of God. He groups himself with the Twelve. That is quite a statement! (By the way, anyone who calls himself an Apostle today is a liar and is dangerous – that office ceased with the Twelve plus Paul.)

These men had the delegated authority from Christ Himself to speak and write His own words. So Timothy isn’t just reading Paul’s personal thoughts in this letter – he is reading the Word of God to him!

- And beloved, this is the Word of God to us this morning, 2,000 years later – Heb.4:12 says it is *living and active* = *energ_e_s* – effectual – it will do it’s work in His people!

Paul is an Apostle, “*according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.*” I.e., this is what Christ appointed him for: to proclaim the promise of eternal life for all who believe – to tell people how to get to heaven. But eternal life is more than going to heaven when we die, it is the life of God in us, right now, when we believe—

- John 6:47 ⁴⁷Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes *has* (right now) eternal life.

This *“life that is in Christ Jesus”* is what transforms us daily – it’s what keeps you believing, and fighting against temptation, hoping for heaven. It’s not just some impersonal force, it is Jesus’ *own* eternal life in us – amazing! And His life in us is the guarantee of life with Him after we die.

Paul needed to hear that again, Timothy needed to hear that again. We do too, don’t we? Everything in this world shouts at us that this is all there is: you die and you cease to exist, so grab whatever you can, here and now. No wonder the world is so afraid of this coronavirus if this life is all they have!

- When I was in India a few years ago teaching with Stephen Williams at a youth conference, I was having lunch and sitting across from a young girl wearing a shirt that said **YOLO** in big letters. I asked her what that meant, and she sheepishly said, “You only live once.” I said, “Interesting,” and I shared the Gospel of *“the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus”* – and she became a Christian at that conference.

Jesus promises eternal life, now and after this life. Now let’s look at V.2, the recipient—

- 2 Timothy 1:2 ²To Timothy, my beloved child:

Paul reminds Timothy that he has a new family in Christ. Paul led Timothy to Christ. He was his spiritual father and together they are part of God’s family, and it’s a *forever* family. In this family, the relationships goes deeper than skin color or ethnicity or our neighborhood. We don’t just share genes and chromosomes, we share *the life of God* – these relationships last even beyond death, into the next life –

- Jesus said: “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” He was saying that your spiritual family is your *first* family because it’s eternal. Your physical, flesh and blood family is precious, but it’s temporary – like marriage, it’s just for this life. You’ve seen the Mormon slogan: *“Families are Forever.”* That’s the opposite of what Jesus said! The Gospel often *divides* our earthly families, but our Christian family is forever. If you want to be with your earthly family forever, *you* and *they* need to know Christ!

But death wouldn’t separate Paul and his beloved Timothy. Just what Jesus said to His beloved Disciples: *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”* That’s for every of you who know Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives us life beyond this world, and family beyond this world. Then Paul gives this blessing to his spiritual son—

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

Don’t let those three words slip by. They are just the encouragement we need to keep going: through the Gospel God gives us *Grace to the worthless, Mercy to the helpless, and Peace to the restless!* And nothing can take that away, change it, or diminish it.

What Paul says next to Timothy isn’t doctrine or theology. It’s warm and it’s personal – we feel like we are reading someone else’s mail – because we are. But the Holy Spirit put it here because you and I need to hear it this morning – so let’s squeeze out the juice—

- 2 Timothy 1:3–5 ³I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

IV. His thankful prayer.

Paul really did pray without ceasing. That wasn't just a saying. We see it in all of his letters, he prayed for his churches, he prayed for individuals in those churches, and he was always thankful to God for what He was doing in His people—

*How much do you pray for other believers? For their spiritual growth, that they would resist temptations, that God would use them for the Gospel? How much do you pray? We should pray without ceasing – like we're in a crisis and it's urgent? Oh, yeah, we are, and it is. I *need* your prayers, and you *need* my prayers! I can't tell you how many times in a week I hear from folks in our church family: "Thank you, thank you, for your prayers – I feel the prayers of my church family!"

- If you take away nothing else from this morning, take this home: pray more for your church family, and major on their spiritual needs. And remember to give thanks to God!

V. His clear conscience.

- ³I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience,

Does this sound familiar – does it ring any bells?

- Acts 23:1–2 ¹And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." ²And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

*Old smash-mouth didn't want to hear about his clear conscience, but it was so important to Paul! Paul wasn't sinless but he was blameless. He wasn't perfect, but he was faithful. That's why he had a ministry – and that's why so many Christians and pastors *lose* their ministries: it's not because of sin – we will always be sinners – but it's when we don't confess and repent of our sins, but cover them up, let them fester and get all infected. You and I won't be *sinless*, but we *can* have a clear conscience when we deal with our sins and take them to the cross for forgiveness. And when we do, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Is God speaking to you this morning?

- ⁴As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.

He probably means the tears that Timothy shed when Paul was hauled off to jail for this last imprisonment. Those tears hurt Paul more than they did Timothy. He cried out to God that He would comfort His son, and that he could see him again.

VI. Timothy's sincere faith.

- ⁵I 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.

Timothy had been brought up in a godly Jewish home that prepared him and his mom and grandma for the Gospel when it came to Lystra. His father was a Greek and apparently, never came to Christ. Timothy might have been shy and fearful, but his faith was *sincere* – the Gk. word means "*without hypocrisy*." It was the real deal. There was nothing phony about it. It wasn't an act. And Paul is saying that this is the way he was raised: he wasn't just taught rules to look good to people, he was taught to *be* right with God.

By the time Paul returned to Lystra, 5 years after his conversion, Timothy was “*well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium*” (Acts 16:2).¹

VII. Paul’s exhortation.

And he closes this opening greeting with this exhortation—

- 2 Timothy 1:6–7 ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,

At some point in his life Timothy had been ordained, commissioned into ministry – we did that recently with the Browning. We commissioned and sent them to their word at Hartstone. We did that with Ashlee Trenergy. We do it when we ordain elders and deacons. We pray for God’s blessing for a fruitful ministry. This probably happened with Paul and the elders from the church in Lystra before Timothy left to minister with Paul. He mentions it in—

- 1 Timothy 4:14 ¹⁴Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

The gift is the Holy Spirit’s power to fulfill his ministry – it’s what we would call his spiritual gift. And Paul tells Timothy to “Fan the flame! – Stir up the embers, Timothy! Don’t let it die down. You’ve been entrusted with gifts and abilities and resources for the sake of the Gospel – you have a stewardship entrusted to you! Use it or lose it. Exercise what you’ve been given just like exercising a muscle.”

*God says the same to each of you this morning who know Christ: If He saved you, He *gifted* you to serve the Gospel: each one of you have a unique gifting from God – no exceptions. And along with the gift comes the supernatural power to use this gift from a supernatural Person—

- ⁷for God gave us a spirit (I think that should be a capital ‘S’ – God gave the Holy Spirit) not of fear (cowardice) but of power and love and self-control.

So when you think of some opportunity in your path to serve – to share the Gospel – to counsel a friend – to teach or preach God’s Word – you don’t look at your fears, your inadequacies, your weaknesses. You don’t look there. You lean on the mighty power of the Holy Spirit who is in you. Listen—

- **“What matters is not what is true of you but what is true of Him!”**

Do you have power, love, are you always self-controlled? No, but the Holy Spirit **is** power, love, and self-control – so humble yourself and surrender control to Him! He wants you weak, so He can be strong! Didn’t Paul say in 2Cor.4:7 that “we have this treasure of the Gospel in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us?”

Years ago, Oswald Chambers wrote this—

- “God can achieve His purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used *nobodies*, because their unusual dependence on Him made possible the unique display of His power and

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). [2 Timothy](#) (p. 8). Chicago: Moody Press.

grace. He chose and used *somebodies* only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources.”