



2 Timothy 1:1-7

My Beloved Child

3rd Sunday After Epiphany – January 22, 2017 (am)

INTRODUCTION

From time to time as we read our Bibles, we can feel like we're listening in on a private conversation. We felt that way, for instance, when we studied Jesus' prayer to the Father before going to the cross (Joh.17). We can feel like that when we're reading David's prayer of confession (Psa.51). 2Ti. is like that, too, much more than 1Ti. In both letters *Paul* is talking to *Timothy* about his shepherding responsibilities in the Ephesian church. But 2Ti., probably written a couple or three years later, finds *Paul* in very different circumstances. He probably wrote 1Ti. after being released from his imprisonment in Rome that's described at the end of Acts: 28³⁰ *He lived there two whole years at his own expense, Luke wrote, and welcomed all who came to him—held captive, yes, but in some sort of house arrest that wasn't entirely unlike normal life. But here in 2Ti. he is 2⁹... suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. ... This difference in description is a big reason why some believe Paul was imprisoned in Rome more than once, and that he really is on the verge of being executed as a martyr as he writes 2Ti. His closing words in c.4 just magnify this impression. Listen to the emotion: 4⁶ ... I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.... 9 Do your best to come to me soon, Timothy. ...*

With this setting in view, we can hear similar emotion in (*Paul's*) opening words. This letter is much more than just pastoral instruction! This is Kingdom collaboration wrapped in personal relationship! This is spiritual family! This is *Paul* getting *Timothy* ready to carry on without him—in ministry, and in life. This is *Paul* reminding *Timothy* who he is *in Christ*, and reminding (*Timothy's*) hearers that he's worthy of being heard. He's part of the family and he's been called to this work by *God*! Both *Timothy* and the Ephesians need to *remember* this. And it also seems like *Paul* needed to say it just as much! So, let's make one observation, then ask one question.

A RELATIONALLY WARM AND VOCATIONALLY RICH GREETING

Paul begins a bit stiff (Guthrie 137), affirming his (*apostleship*) as usual, but to one who really didn't need any reassurance of it. Still, this immediately sets the context as centering in on their shared calling in gospel ministry. But it also gives *Paul* opportunity to mention the overall aim of this calling, and a theme in this letter: ¹... *the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus*. *Paul* is shackled in prison (2:9) and nearing death (4:6-8). And he's urging *Timothy* to press on in a calling that in all likelihood will lead him to the same fate (3:12). Yet, as he does so, he's reminding *Timothy* of *the promise of life... in Christ...!*

(1)

And from there he immediately warms up: he calls *Timothy* ²... (*his beloved child*). He pronounces (*God's*) blessing of *grace, mercy, and peace* (2) upon him. He expresses his heart for *Timothy*, and his confidence in (*Timothy's*) standing before *God* (5) and his ability *in Christ* (6). That must have left his younger friend feeling strengthened in his work. Look what he says about *Timothy*. First, *I thank God* (3) for you. Then, *I long to see you*, knowing that when I do *I (will) be filled with joy* (4). There's no feeling in the world quite like that, is there—knowing that someone is *filled with joy* when they see you? We spending a fair amount of time these days on *FaceTime* with our twenty-one-month-old grandson in CA. When his picture first appears on the screen we express our joyful greeting—communicating how (*we*) *long to see (him), that (we) may be filled with joy!* And you know what he does? He immediately starts bouncing and running around and squealing! That (sort of) is how we all respond when we know someone is *filled with joy* in (*seeing us*). Finally, *Paul* said, *I am reminded of your sincere faith*.

The Apostle *Paul* is reminded of (*Timothy's*) *sincere faith! Paul (serves) God with a clear conscience* (3). He prays for *Timothy* somewhere between regularly and constantly. And as he prays, he's (*thankful*) to *God* for *Timothy*. As mentor and father in the faith, he's proud of *Timothy!* The work they'd done together had borne fruit of all sorts and, *in Christ*, *Timothy* was up to his calling! Plus, (*Timothy's*) legacy of *faith* (5) is similar to (*Paul's*) (3). Both have a faithful ancestry that is interwoven with their story. Neither of them is *his own man*. Both had models and mentors in the *faith*, entirely apart from one another, who helped make them who they are. They're both part of a family that is more important here because of its spiritual legacy than because of its physical line. There is a family resemblance of *sincere faith* that exceeds the miracle physical resemblance. For *Timothy* it was from his (*mother's*) side—his father was likely not a believer (cf. Act.16:1). But *Paul* sees in *Timothy* a spiritual resemblance to his *mother* and *grandmother* that has to be spotlighted.

This spiritual resemblance is still a remarkable thing to note in our day. Here at Grace Church, our second pastor, Rich Kerns, was so committed to discipleship that his name still comes up as we talk on the subject today. His spiritual resemblance lives on in a generation of men in this body, and he passed away back in 1994! That is a remarkable spiritual legacy. But also, imagine, then, what it would mean to the men who knew and loved Rich—strengthening *joy* it would bring—to know that Rich was proud of them in their growth in and service of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his body, the church! *Timothy* was hearing here of his mentor's heart for him. And his mentor was the Apostle *Paul*!

Yet, it is possible that (*Paul's*) imprisonment was unsettling to *Timothy*. It may even have been a bit embarrassing to him (8). But *Timothy* needed to put that aside and continue on in the work he'd been called and equipped to do. He had received a spiritual *gift (from) God... through the laying on of hands* (6) that needed to be put to use in his current assignment. It seems like *Timothy* may have been relying on other abilities or approaches there in Ephesus, and so needed to be (*reminded*) not to be afraid to use the spiritual *gift* he'd been given (7). And *Paul* used some vivid imagery in that (*reminder*): ⁶ ... *fan into flame the gift of God which is in you.... Blow on the embers! Carefully tend to the fire that God has ignited in you! Paul is telling Timothy to trust God that the gift he's been given is the one he most needs in this ministry assignment. And he should be putting it to use. It seems like at crunch time Timothy may have been forgetting that the best he can do is to exercise the gift(s) he's been given by God to serve Him and strengthen the body! Far too often we can do the very same thing.*

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS WARM, RICH GREETING ABOUT GOSPEL MINISTRY AND LIFE IN THE CHURCH?

Two observations: first, clearly we can learn what *Timothy* is learning here. *When God calls us, He equips us.* And we shouldn't move away from that equipping when times get tough. *You've got to go with your strengths. You dance with the one that brung you.* There are all sorts of clichés that express conventional wisdom and common sense on this point. But this isn't just common sense! This is the work of God in us. 1Co.12⁷ *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* God gives us (*gifts*) to be used for the *good* of the body and the achievement of His purpose. And these are no ordinary (*gifts*). They're tools. We may even say they're *weapons* fit for war. And 2Co.10⁴ ... *the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.* God (*gifts*) us with just what we need for the calling we've received, and we need to use those (*gifts*) in our calling!

What (*gifts*) have you received from God? Are you using them for His glory in the assignment He's given you? And when ministry gets tough for a season, do you keep pressing on, using those (*gifts*)? Or, like *Timothy*, do you need to ⁶ ... *fan into flame the gift of God...? When God calls us, He equips us.* And we need to use that equipping!

A second lesson we can learn from this introduction to 2Ti. comes from observing how *Paul* presented this greeting, this encouragement of *Timothy*. *We're called and equipped to function in community.* This passage is saturated with relationship. We're reminded of the spiritual father/son relationship between *Paul* and *Timothy* (2), and also of ² ... *God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord, the Son.* We're reminded of (*Paul's*) *ancestors* (3), and also of (*Timothy's*) (5). We're reminded of the intimacy of *Paul* and (*Timothy's*) relationship as we hear of (*Timothy's*) *tears* and (*Paul's*) *joy* (4). We're reminded that (*Timothy's*) calling and gifting for ministry, so front-and-center here, was identified and affirmed in community (6. ... *the laying on of hands*...). Neither *Paul* nor *Timothy* are what they are on their own. Other have not only made contribution to who they are, but are part of who they are on every level. As one person summarized in Preaching Team meeting this week: *Of course I need you, because you're part of me!*

CONCLUSION

Relationally warm and vocationally rich though this letter is—targeted to prepare *Timothy* to carry on in life and ministry without his beloved spiritual father, *Paul*—it is also a *reminder* to the church in every generation of what it looks like, what it takes, to keep pressing on in our gospel calling even when the days grow dark and lonely. And while the content of this letter will surely give us faithful direction and correction regarding sound doctrine and teaching and the reliability of Scripture, clearly it is also Kingdom collaboration wrapped in personal relationship! It also shows us spiritual family, and (*reminds*) us that we—each of us—are not alone in this work! We're bound together by our common *faith* in *Christ*—*the promise of life that we've received in Him*, and by the gifting we've received to *fulfill our (calling) in Him* (cf. 4:5).

So, *God* is present with His people—saving, calling, gifting, guiding..., and granting us *grace, mercy, and peace* (2). He places us in community with one another such that, even if we have no faithful *ancestors* according to the flesh (cf. 3, 5), we're folded into a spiritual family with an exceedingly rich heritage—past, present and future! We're placed in community with others who (*fill*) us *with joy* as we see them, (*pray*) for them, *remember* them. We're placed in community with others with whom we serve, (*gifts*) fitting together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle—with others who can *remind* us to *fan into flame the gift of God* whenever the fire dies down!

This is the body of *Christ*, my friends. *Paul* is leaning hard into the richness of relationships within the body as he begins to give his final instruction to *Timothy*. And we need to hear this instruction today. Our lives need to center around the instruction we hear in this letter. How much darker do the days need to get than those we are seeing right now in order for us also to see that it is not time for alternative abilities and approaches? These are the days for (*God's*) people to *fan into flame the (gifts) God* has given, and put them to use together!