

1 Timothy

Prayer *Father in Heaven, we thank you that in your great wisdom you caused these Scriptures to be written down and preserved for your people at all times and at all places. Further we thank you that they are as fresh and relevant today as they ever were and that in them we have the only sure and reliable guide for our lives here as your people. Please help us to receive this Word as YOUR Word and to sit gladly and humbly under the authority with which it is invested. And Lord please encourage and nourish your people so that we might worship you truly.....*

I Opening Comments

This morning we depart from our series on 1st Corinthians, having worked our way to about the half-way point, and take up now the study of Paul's First Letter to Timothy. Now, while this is a *short* letter it is also a *dense* letter, combining a lot of ideas in very few words and, as such, will take us a little while to unpack.

But that's okay. This is not the sort of letter you *want* to hurry through. There are too many important subjects addressed here, and ones which typically have only been given a cursory reading in the church such as, for example, the roles and relationships between men and women in the Body of Christ. Frequently these matters, when they are not simply dismissed, are only talked about in a very superficial way which often creates the *illusion* that they have been dealt with when, in fact, they have not been addressed at all.

Now, let me be the first one to say that some of the things in this letter are not easy to talk about. There certainly *are* some challenges before us if we are to understand this letter rightly.

But we shouldn't be afraid or frightened off simply because a portion of the Bible is hard for us to grasp, let alone accept. On the contrary, precisely because ALL SCRIPTURE has been given to us for our benefit, for our understanding, for teaching, correcting, training and rebuking - because scripture has been given to us for all these purposes and IS inspired by God we MUST look carefully and *reverently* at the whole of the Bible - including and especially those parts which are hardest for us to come to grips with.

In thinking about this whole matter of scripture, and the attention we pay to it, a couple passages come to mind - passages written by another apostle, from another letter - 2 Peter 1:19-21,

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they

were carried along by the Holy Spirit....

And, in this same letter, Peter later adds the comment,

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

As we read Paul's letter to Timothy, we must remember that we are not reading a mere record of one man's opinions about God. We are reading the "prophetic" word of Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, as he spoke and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We are reading, as Peter himself describes Paul's writings, Scripture. True, it is Scripture that is in places hard to understand and which, therefore, is open to the distortions of "ignorant and unstable" people - as Peter describes it. But we must be diligent and persevere to understand rightly what God is saying to US. And so, as we read, we must not distort these words, because the end result of distorting these or *any other* Scriptures is, as Peter says, *destruction*.

II Rationale

Now you may wonder why are we studying *this* book of the Bible and why are we studying it *now*... And the answer is simply that we are a new church and we are a steadily *growing* church. And the time is rapidly coming when we will need to set apart elders to serve and lead this congregation on to wherever it is the Lord is taking us.

As part of that process we are, as has been announced earlier this morning, embarking on a course of training that is open to all but which is designed to especially prepare those men who, potentially, may become elders in this congregation. That is one part of the process. The other part of the process involves preparing you, the congregation, for the very important role you will be playing. This is because the burden of responsibility lies upon *you* to recognize and then set apart only those who are biblically qualified to serve in this capacity.

And in order to do *that* you need to know what the Bible says about who should and should not be an elder, and why. Further, you need to have some understanding not only of what *qualifies* a person to be an elder but also what being an elder is all about, what pastoral ministry involves, what sorts of things *do go on* as well as what sorts of things *ought* to be going on in the local church.

With all this in mind, it makes sense that we take some time to hear what Paul has to say in his letter to Timothy because it is a letter which is addressed to a young

man who is a pastor of a young church - a church which also needs some instruction on choosing elders and on how the church ought to be operating as it waits for Christ's return. And so, in this letter, and in the one which follows - 2nd Timothy - we get a great glimpse into the pastoral heart of Paul as he deals with difficulties, as he anticipates needs and issues they will face, and as he addresses matters both great and small.

III The Relationship Between Paul and Timothy

Well as the letter before us is FROM the Apostle Paul and TO his favorite disciple, TIMOTHY, it is probably helpful to have an understanding of this relationship between Paul and Timothy and how it all got started.....

During Paul's ministry he made 3 "round trip" missionary journeys that we know of and then a fourth journey to Rome, after which we have no more comment in the biblical record. It is possible that Paul never left Rome and was executed there and then.

However, if you reconstruct the evidence of the NT, then what seems *most* likely is that while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he was later on released, possibly went on from there to Spain, and then on his way back through Rome, was imprisoned again and finally executed.

Anyway, it was during Paul's SECOND missionary journey that we first *read* of his meeting Timothy. However, it is likely that Timothy's first exposure to Paul would have come during the FIRST missionary journey (Use overhead here - optional).

You see, Timothy's home town was a place called Lystra, which was the second to last stop on Paul's first missions trip. Acts 13 and 14 describe in detail this first trip. Well, while in Lystra, Paul and Barnabas had a disturbing experience.

After God was pleased to heal a man through Paul and Barnabas - a man who had been crippled from birth - after this healing the local people, not being Christians, began jumping up and down and *worshipping* Paul and Barnabas. Evidently, they thought that these two men were the so called "gods" Zeus and Hermes, come down to visit them in human form.

Now, for Paul and Barnabas who firmly believed that there was only one true God, this was a blasphemous idea and they begged the people to stop doing what they were doing.

Well, not long after that incident, and while Paul and Barnabas were still trying to have an influence there for the sake of the Gospel, some Jews came along and took advantage of the situation to sway this fickle crowd of people in the opposite direction - moving them from a position of wanting to worship Paul and Barnabas to wanting to do away with them. Clearly these were quite emotional and volatile people!

And so, having been persuaded that Paul and Barnabas were not to be honored but instead to be hated, feared and destroyed, the people of Lystra took out their anger against Paul in particular and stoned him, dragged him outside the city, probably to the garbage dump, and left him for dead.

Miraculously, God revived Paul soon after this and Paul, who was nothing if not courageous, got up and went straight back into the city and on the following day he and Barnabas left Lystra for the last stop on their journey - a city called Derbe.

Now, taking the chronology of Paul's life - as given to us by the Bible - it must have been during this first journey - when all these crazy things happened - that Lois, Timothy's grandmother, was converted to the Christian faith. You read about her in 2 Timothy 1:5. Not long after that Timothy's mother, Eunice, was also converted.

Now, since it was during the very *next* missions trip that Paul took Timothy as his disciple, it must have been the case that Timothy was in Lystra as a young man when Paul and Barnabas caused such a stir. If Timothy did not actually see Paul get stoned, he would have at least *heard* about it from his mother Eunice and from Grandma Lois. But that is not all he would have heard from his mother and grandmother.

2 Timothy 3:15 tells us that from Timothy's childhood he had been taught the Scriptures of the Old Testament which, as Paul says, "are able to make a person wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" - which is a remarkable statement about the Old Testament - and which is also strong evidence of the FRUIT of Paul's ministry.

And what an encouragement all of this must have been for Paul. During his first pass through the city Lois is converted and her daughter Eunice as well. And then sometime between then and his second time through, they are busy teaching and encouraging young Timothy in the Scriptures and pointing him, through them, to Jesus. And then Paul comes through town and gets to meet this godly young man who is, in fact, a kind of "spiritual grandchild" to him. That must have been a great moment for him.

Anyway, Paul "recruits" Timothy to join him, guided as he was by the strong recommendations of other believers from Lystra and Iconium, as Luke records in Acts 16:1-3. Timothy was then set apart by the local elders in a service in which Paul himself participated and which he alluded to in both 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6. From there he went on to accompany Paul and became his most trusted and faithful companion in the ministry.

Now, Timothy and Paul were the first two Christians to set foot on European soil. Together they began missions - "planted churches" in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. In addition to planting new churches together, they also ministered, in subsequent journeys, to previously established churches, sometimes together and sometimes

separately as Paul would from time to time send Timothy to take care of a particular church on his own.

It is obvious from Paul's writings that he depended a great deal upon Timothy, especially when there was a crisis. And, contrary to some viewpoints which, based upon some things said in Paul's next letter, have concluded that Timothy was a rather shy, timid and fearful fellow - contrary to that, it seems to me that Timothy must have been quite a strong and courageous person. And any comments that Paul made to him about fear and timidity are not a reflection of something lacking in Timothy but are simply a reflection of how very difficult and intimidating some of the situations were. They were *so intimidating* that even one as mature and faithful and trustworthy and courageous as Timothy would struggle.

One of those churches that Paul sent Timothy to was Corinth which, if you have been here for that series, you will know was an absolute train wreck of a congregation. Another congregation to which Timothy was sent was Thessalonica - which was no picnic either. Timothy was also sent to Philippi where, among other things, there were two women who were struggling with one another. And he was sent to Ephesus as well, where he was ministering when he received these letters from Paul. Clearly, Paul counted on Timothy to be a strong and faithful companion in ministry.

IV The General Purpose of 1 Timothy

Well, after thinking for a bit about the relationship between Paul and Timothy, we need to think for a minute about why *Paul* sent this letter to *Timothy*, during his time as the pastor of the Ephesian congregation. What was Paul's reason for sending this letter?

Thankfully, the answer to that question is not too difficult to find. Paul states it fairly plainly somewhere around the middle of 1 Timothy (3:14-15) where he says that he is sending this letter,

"...so that, if I am delayed [says Paul], you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God...."

These words are quite telling since, in fact, one of the main problems in the Ephesian church was the "behavior" of some people among them - specifically the behavior of certain *false teachers* who were promoting all sorts of crazy ideas that were having an unsettling effect upon the whole congregation.

Which explains why there is such an emphasis in this letter on the matter of leadership - both true and false. In a situation where false teaching and its effects were all around, it was vitally important that if Paul wanted to promote the good order and functioning of the church he would have to address both the false teachers as well as spend some time talking to Timothy about what good leadership was all about and how one went about recognizing it.

And so, as you examine the contents of the letter, you will find that they tend to gravitate around this main idea of ***promoting the good order and functioning of the church of God***. Doing that will mean putting a stop to the false teachers, as well as dealing with the false ideas they are teaching. Doing that will mean being very careful in choosing and setting apart good leaders, who will not go the way of the false teachers. Doing that will mean addressing issues like how they are to take care of and treat one another. All these things and more can be found in this letter as Paul seeks to promote the good order and functioning of the church of God through his disciple Timothy.

That, in a nutshell, is what I believe this letter is about. Let me encourage you then, in the week ahead, to spend some time reading through this letter and asking God to give you understanding and, more than that, to give you a glad willingness to believe and embrace the many great and wonderful truths that are to be found in this letter....