

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

Second Letter to Timothy

Readings: *2 Timothy 1:1-4:22*

Reflections:

- Second Letter to Timothy: Again liberal and conservative scholars are divided on whether 2 Timothy is authentic or is a second century letter dedicated to Paul. Like the other Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy and Titus) the strongest evidence in favor of it being authentic is that the early church as of 180 CE accepted it as authentic. Conservative scholars agree that 2 Timothy is Paul's last letter probably written around 64 to 67 CE. He is back in prison in Rome and references making a legal defense. Key supporters have deserted and he is seeking support from Timothy. Tychicus is carrying this letter to Ephesus to retrieve Timothy with the warning that things are getting very tense. Throughout the letter we get the sense that Paul knows he will soon die. Paul as church tradition tells us was executed in Rome as a martyr for the faith during the reign of Nero.
- Salutation: Paul's greeting follows his normal greeting with a particular emphasis on the "promise of life that is in Christ Jesus." Paul may be holding particularly dear to this promise as he is facing his own death. He includes "mercy" again in his standard greetings of "grace" and "peace". Since this is consistent with both letters to Timothy, the theme of mercy may have been of particular importance to their relationship.
- Exhortations to Timothy – Concern for Timothy: Paul again affirms how much he is constantly praying for Timothy. We see Paul model again tremendous ownership for Timothy as a spiritual father. This ownership results in a constant concern expressed through continual prayer, day and night. Paul also longs to see Timothy and like a parent knows he will be filled with joy to see him. Paul recalls Timothy's tears. Timothy apparently had a soft heart and was easily moved to tears by God's work in his life and in relationships. It is encouraging that men can have soft hearts and that God can be blessed by those moved to tears. Paul connects the dots between Timothy's sincere trust in Christ and his own family legacy of a grandmother Lois and mother Eunice who were also deeply committed Christ-followers. There is no mention of Timothy's father and so possibly Timothy's father left his family or died or simply wasn't a believer. In any case, Paul became his spiritual father and yet pointed to his own mother and grandmother as being the real inspiration for Timothy's faith. This is a good reminder of the power of parents to stir within their children true trust in God. Paul again reminds Timothy to use his spiritual gifts and to keep them red hot as he

uses them. It is clear Paul laid hands on Timothy and the Spirit came on Timothy as Paul prayed for him. The gift we discovered in 1 Timothy was the gift of preaching and teaching. Paul underscores for Timothy that this Spirit is not a spirit of timidity but of power, love and self-discipline. The first two words were commonly associated with the Spirit in Paul's writings. The last word means "to make the most of every opportunity." It is a self-control that results in being ready to respond to a moment's notice. Paul knows that Timothy is naturally more fearful and so in these dangerous times he encourages Timothy to remain fully filled up with the Spirit and to follow Christ courageously through the power, love and self-discipline of the Spirit.

- Encouragement for ministry: Paul as in other writings encourages Timothy with his own journey and his own convictions. He challenges Timothy to not be ashamed but bold in proclaiming the message of Jesus. Paul notes here he is in prison again and suffering. Yet Paul is secure in his calling before Christ as a herald, apostle and teacher. He is also secure in his relationship with Christ and Christ's power to protect him through death. "Yet I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed (we see here the close relationship) and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day (the day Paul stands before Christ)." In this quick recap of Paul's own calling and understanding of the message of Jesus he highlights the fact that through Jesus we have immortality. Again the life beyond is top of mind for Paul.
- Importance of doctrine: Paul encourages Timothy again to maintain sound doctrine with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught that the Spirit's role is to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). Truth is not just defended by clear rational thought but also through an active dependence on and listening to the Spirit within community.
- Many have turned away: Paul notes those who have abandoned him. These two leaders are only mentioned here.
- Onesiphorus' faith: Paul is deeply encouraged by a leader, probably a home church leader in Ephesus, who visited Rome and kept searching until he found Paul. We see the importance of solidarity with those who are suffering. People who suffer feel deep encouragement when others do the hard work to find them in their pain and simply look for ways to support them. Isolation is one of the most painful parts of suffering.
- Dedication and discipline: Paul now gives Timothy a list of excellent encouragements that apply to all leaders at all times. First, multiply yourself into reliable people who can pass your insights and skills on to other people. Too often we are content to do the work ourselves and don't focus on multiplying ourselves in others. We see in this one statement four generations of leaders. Paul invests in Timothy. Timothy invests in reliable men and women. They invest in others. Second, adopt a military mindset when going through tough times. Keep your priorities clear and stay on focus. Third, use the image of a champion athlete to sharpen your dedication and desire to align fully with the calling of Christ in your pursuit of the ultimate trophy. Fourth, remember the principle of sowing and reaping and

the harvest that is promised to all those who labor in God's field. Rather than giving a long list of behaviors Timothy is to remember, Paul simply recalls his and Jesus' most common leadership images and simply says, remember and reflect on these things. Sometimes we get buried in a thousand and one "to do" items rather than to simply keep in focus some key principles and images that we can apply to the many different challenges we face.

- Remembering Christ: Ultimately Timothy must remember Jesus Christ. He is our ultimate role model and inspiration. Although Paul is chained as a criminal for the message of Jesus he is confident that no one can chain or hinder the word of God. God's word is powerful and unstoppable. Paul now seems to quote a saying or even possibly a hymn of the early church. This is common to his writing and so many scholars believe this is a hymn. The theme of this writing is to encourage us with our security in Christ particularly in the face of suffering. There is a clear distinction made between disowning Christ and being faithless. Those who willfully and intentionally reject Christ because they simply don't believe are those who will not be owned by Christ. Yet those who simply fail in their faith due to suffering and persecution or deep struggle will not be abandoned by Christ because Jesus knows their true heart of hearts. This gives us security to know that even in our weakness and frailty we can be secure in Christ's love for us and his ownership of our lives.
- Handling truth carefully: Paul again warns against one of the most common religious tendencies – quarrelling about words. Again Paul encourages Timothy to be bold and to grow in that boldness from doing due diligence in his study of Scripture. Paul warns against false teachers who are messing with people's beliefs. Within Ephesus was apparently a sect of Christianity that was moving towards Gnosticism. Hymenaeus, Philetus and Alexander are mentioned as key leaders (See here, 1 Timothy 1:19 as well as 2 Timothy 2:14) and was likely a part of the group referred to as the Nicolaitans in Revelations 2:5-7. It is interesting some were suggesting the resurrection had already taken place. The teaching was based in a super-spiritual worldview that would suggest that a form of spiritual resurrection has taken place and that people are now spiritually resurrected and that there will be no physical resurrection from the dead. Gnosticism rejected the resurrection similar to the Sadducees yet for different reasons. The Sadducees were a sect of Judaism that rejected a more spiritual worldview (no demons, angels, resurrection from the dead) and preferred a more ritualistic and rational understanding of Judaism. The Gnostics were a Greek sect of Christianity that viewed the body as evil and therefore rejected Christianity and promoted seeking spiritual enlightenment. The rejection of the body as evil also led them to believe that people could be physically involved in all kinds of sexual activities without it having any spiritual impact on their lives because the body and physical realities were inherently evil. This split between physical and spiritual is something fundamentally opposing to the Biblical worldview that sees these both as intimately united within God's creative order (e.g. God breathed his spirit into dust to create humanity, his Spirit fills our bodies as we are united with him in Christ).

- Teaching about quarrelling: A picture is worth a thousand words. Paul uses a simple image of different types of pots in a house to drive home the importance of getting the junk out of your life. Essentially he is saying, "Timothy, clean house!" Then you will be ready for any good purpose. He then gives Timothy a simple strategy. Run away from those things that cause you to have unhealthy desires and run towards those relationships that stir within you the work of the Spirit – faith, love, peace and serving the Lord with a pure heart. Rather than fighting against the temptations, admit your weakness and simply run away. Again we are reminded that the battle is not to be fought in our exterior world but within our hearts. Paul follows this up with a warning against quarrelling and getting into endless debates about spiritual matters, particularly with these false teachers in Ephesus. Paul points out the value of gentleness and kindness as laying a foundation for being able to truly teach the message of Jesus. Debates have a way of making us angry and defensive. Again Paul just says, "Don't get into that mindset or habit. Don't become an angry, frustrated teacher." The emotional tone we set when we teach is vital to expressing truth in love. We are on the world's most important rescue mission and so we must do everything we can to save as many people as possible.
- Prediction of godless times: Paul reminds Timothy of the warning Jesus gave about how bad things are going to get in the last days. Paul lists about every bad attitude you can imagine. He concludes with two key summary statements. People will be lovers of pleasure not lovers of God. They will be fundamentally self-centered. Yet, they will have a form of godliness but deny its power to change them from the inside out. They will be religious on the outside but self-centered and self-serving on the inside. It is interesting to compare Paul's list of what to avoid with large segments of church history. Unfortunately those who have claimed to follow Christ have too often been better described by this passage than by the fruit of Spirit outlined in Galatians 5:22.
- Evil teachers to be exposed: Paul puts something out there that is again controversial. He points out that these teachers had a strategy of trying to take over home churches where they could gather the loyalty of easily led women. This is not to say that men can't be easily manipulated or that all women are easily led astray. Paul is saying that these men are predators looking for vulnerable women who have issues in their lives and unresolved baggage. Remember these particular teachers were trying to tell people that you could have deep spiritual enlightenment and that it didn't matter what you did with your bodies and so go ahead and have as much sex as possible. You can see why these men wanted to zero in on women they could persuade to have sex with them. Paul now offers a key insight into the human heart: there are those who are always learning new spiritual truths but never ultimately submitting to those truths. The issue is not knowledge but the submission of the will. You can be an expert on truth and still fundamentally self-centered and not submitted to God. Paul says that these guys are bad news, not the women, but everyone will be able to see through their thinly veiled ploys.

- **Respect for Scripture:** Paul reminds Timothy again of his own spiritual journey and the cost that comes with following Christ. If we fully align with the teachings of Jesus, we will ultimately stand aligned with the poor and persecuted of the world and we will also be confronting and speaking the truth against the persecutors and those who cause injustice. We can't help but be persecuted as Jesus was. If we teach an irreligious message, guess who is going to get very upset? Paul then continues on to encourage Timothy to remember his spiritual heritage (his spiritual father in Paul as well as Timothy's mom and grandmother) and to remain anchored in Scripture. Paul gives us one of the clearest statements about the authority of Scripture. Scripture is breathed by God, inspired by the Spirit and is useful for four things. These words form a chiasm, a Greek word structure used for memorization (1,2,2,1 is the basic pattern of a chiasm). Teaching, rebuking, correcting, training. The first two deal with the positive and negative side of sharing the truth. The second two deal with the negative and positive side of putting truth into action. Here we see that true discipleship includes both mind and action, both sharing the positive and correcting the negative. Often times we don't want to do all four but Paul challenges us with being that thorough and practical in our application of the message of Jesus in our thoughts and our actions.
- **Preach the word:** Paul tells Timothy to take a big picture, eternal perspective on what is going on in the world. Let ultimate spiritual reality shape how you view your life and the opportunities God gives you. The starting point to advancing the kingdom is proclaiming the message of Jesus, the Word of God. As people hear the truth they can respond in faith and the inside out process can begin. Now people often want to hear messages that reinforce their own preconceived ideas and so it is doubly important those who follow Christ remain constant in their efforts to get the truth out there. We have to take a soldier's mentality into this spiritual battle.
- **Reward for faithful ministry:** Paul knows his death is near. He feels satisfied that he has gone the distance in serving Christ and so he can't wait for the blessing and reward that awaits him. He has fought the battle of peace. He has won the spiritual Olympics. He has kept the trust of God. He is now stepping from the battlefield into the throne room to be welcomed as a prince of the king. What awesome images to inspire us as we serve Christ. This purpose and hope for eternity is for anyone who commits to following Jesus with everything they have. When we consider the amazing love and grace we will receive when Jesus appears, it is easy to understand why we end up just longing to be with Christ.
- **Concluding thoughts – Paul asks Timothy to join him:** Although these details may seem insignificant, there are actually a number of key insights found in these verses. First, we see that Paul had been deserted by a close friend. Persecution and trouble will separate those who love Christ and the kingdom and those who simply love the things of this world (like comfort and security). We also see that some of Paul's team has been deployed and only Luke is with Paul. It is quite possible Paul and Luke worked on Luke and Acts together. Maybe most importantly we see Paul request Mark to join him because he would be helpful to Paul. Mark was a capable writer (as we see with his biography of Jesus). Maybe Mark

could help Paul with some writing he was hoping to do. In any case, the rift between Mark and Paul (see Acts 15:36-40) has obviously been reconciled. Although we don't know when or how, Barnabas' investment in Mark has resulted in restored relationship and Mark becoming a key leader in the early Jesus movement. Finally we see that Paul is asking Timothy to bring some parchments, scrolls and a cloak. Paul had a passion for Scripture and no doubt at the end of his life as he faced his own death there in prison he would have wanted to have the Scriptures that had provided so much security throughout his life.

- How Alexander opposed him: Here we see Paul modeling enemy love. He does not need to take revenge for the harm this man had caused, possibly even stirring up trouble for Paul with the authorities. Paul leaves that with God. Paul does warn Timothy though and speaks the truth about this leader who is opposed to the message of Jesus. Alexander was a key leader in the growing movement that would be later called Gnosticism. (See notes on 1 Timothy 1:20)
- Paul alone in his defense: We see again how alone Paul was. We also see how closely he felt Christ's presence right there beside him. See Acts 18:9-11 and Acts 23:11 as examples of how Christ did this. Here in Rome Paul almost was used as sport for the lions in the Gladiatorial games. Paul remains secure in Christ. Paul was supposedly martyred for his faith and yet he sensed the security of his life being in Jesus' care: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely (spiritually speaking) to his heavenly kingdom."
- Greetings and benediction: Paul greets the wife and husband duo, Priscilla (named first and apparently the better known leader of the two) and Aquila. Paul also mentions that he left Trophimus sick in Miletus. Even though Paul could heal many people through the power of Christ, we should not view the power to heal as something magical that can be turned on and off. Sometimes God heals. Sometimes he doesn't. In all things we are simply to trust in Christ, even as Paul models in his final words in his final letter.