

Quick question this morning: Do you have a favorite? Are you allowed to have a favorite? Most say no, but I do? No, I'm not talking about kids... or preachers... I'm talking about Bible books. Certainly they are all inspired and from God and equally valuable, but one has always hit me with an extra amount of emotional weight.

I'm talking about the Apostle Paul's second letter to his brother Timothy.

Let's begin by investigating their relationship:

- 1) **Acts 16:1-3** – Paul is about 55 and takes this approximately 20 year old young man with him.
- 2) They traveled together and preached together for the next 15 years.
- 3) **II Timothy 1:1-2** – And now Paul writes this second letter to Timothy. He is not Timothy's father, but he considers him to be his "beloved son."
- 4) **II Timothy 4:6-8** – But this letter carries something with it that is not in any of the others: a sense of absolute finality. Paul is now about 70 years old, and he is going to die. He sits down to write one more letter, a letter to one of his closest friends, Timothy, now in his mid 30's.

Any time I preach from this letter I want to call it: "**Letters From The Brink Of Death.**" This is the final words of a dying man; his last chance to impart wisdom to Timothy so that the work may move forward to glorify the King.

How much would this letter have meant to Timothy? Would he have put it aside and read it when convenient? Would he have skimmed it once and moved on? No. He would have quickly read, then more slowly reread and then kept it with him throughout his life. No letter has the emotional weight and passion of this one.

It makes me think of my mentor, Mr. Steve Fontenot. He is now 70 and I am now in my mid 30's. When he first started teaching me to preach, it was 15 years ago. What if he wrote me a letter, sent it to me, and passed away before I received it? These are his last words of advice on how to glory God with a local church. How much would that mean to me? This letter is that, but infinitely multiplied by the fact that it is the direct will of God from heaven.

We cannot examine it all this morning, but I would like to share with you a few things from the first 25 verses or so. Paul's final letter: Lessons from the Brink of Death.

- I. **(v3-5) – Build Great Memories.** So make good ones while you can.
  - a. *"I constantly remember." "Even as I recall." "I am mindful of..."* – Paul remembered vividly, even years later, the choices, emotions and faith of Timothy. Even as Paul is suffering in a Roman prison, with death around the corner, he can draw on their conversations, and Timothy's great faithfulness.
  - b. **1:16-18** – Paul also reflected on the kind deeds of other godly people, like Onesiphorus.
  - c. And why wouldn't he do this? In **I Corinthians 11:28** Paul wrote about his "daily concern for all the churches." He cared about God's people intensely. And they cared about him.
  - d. **W.R. Jones** – This preacher remembers division in the 1950's, and even fifty years later he recalled with incredible detail the men and women who stood by him and stood for Truth.
  - e. *Times changes things. Time separates people.* In years to come, as my family is doing, so may yours – you may be in another place and not have the face to face friendships you do today. And while there may be much happiness ahead, there also may be much trial.
  - f. But hear this – Your choices and my choices and our efforts and conversations and godliness create *permanent memory imprints* in the minds of one another. And those memories can become powerful encouragers in this ever changing and uncertain life.
- II. **(v6-7) – Fan the Flame.** Keep that fire of faith and burning desire alive in working for Christ!
  - a. The very best way to make good memories and encourage others is to keep ever faithful!
  - b. Even in Timothy's case, with the power of the Holy Spirit to aid him, it was easy to take the road of timidity and cowardice in a world that ever the more demands our silence.
  - c. Kindle Afresh, reevaluate often, never give in to doing too little – God has given us a spirit, a character, a heart of power and love and discipline – Passion and Action under Control!
  - d. **II Timothy 4:10** – Some give up. Some are just too busy, too enticed, too worldly. Demas was a powerful worker who loved this world too much. His fire went out.
  - e. **Romans 12:1-2, 6-8** – Be about His service with all your might. Find what is your brightest burning flame of faith and cultivate even greater influence for Him.
  - f. Paul is almost gone from this life. He did not end his life by writing to a younger man telling him to stay healthy or stay fun or stay cool --- but stay on fire for the Christ!

- III. **(v8-12) – Never Be Ashamed.** Never be ashamed of the Gospel. Never hide it. Never consider it less than what it is. Never be silent about it when it is truly the only thing that matters.
- a. Paul loudly proclaims that he will never be ashamed. Not by threat of loss or even death. Because the Gospel is too great; worth living for, worth dying for.
    - i. By it God calls us to salvation **(v9)**.
    - ii. The message of grace through Christ is found within it **(v9)**.
    - iii. Jesus appearing, abolishing death, deliverance to immortality – all found here! **(v10)**.
  - b. **Romans 1:16-17** – Nothing. Not a single thing in this life. Not a single accomplishment. Not a single person. Not a single relationship is as valuable and astounding as this Message.
  - c. Question: How would one go about being ashamed of the Gospel?
    - i. **2:2** – Don't be a teacher. Let people learn and grow on their own.
    - ii. **2:3** – Don't speak out for truth when error is spouting its folly.
    - iii. **2:4** – Don't be a soldier, who is more dedicated to whom he serves than even self.
    - iv. **2:5** – Don't be the athlete, who is so devoted to winning that he lives for the rules.
    - v. **2:6** – Don't be the farmer, who prepares his field and tends his crops, rain or shine.
  - d. It is easy to be ashamed. All we have to do is: NOTHING. The Gospel is more valuable than that. Don't get to the end and count what you didn't do, but what you did in Jesus' name!
- IV. **(v13-14) – Guard the Treasure.** That is, build an ever closer relationship with God's Word.
- a. We say, "know it inside and out." Often times we wonder why we don't have this passion to stand up for and spread the Gospel. But when we look more closely we see that our attachment with the Gospel is more intellectual than actual.
  - b. I mean, I know this teaches me about Jesus and I need to read it and talk about it, but it is just important information. But Paul is telling Timothy: "It has to be more than that."
    - i. It is the pattern by which you build your life. The blueprint for building you.
    - ii. It is the great treasure, the ultimate knowledge and possession in this life.
  - c. **II Timothy 4:1-4** – Know it. Learn it. Feast on it. Then talk about it. Spread it. Preach it. In all situations. Because there will be people whose connection with God is superficial or built simply on emotions, you "hunger and thirst" for this and build your emotions on it.
  - d. **II Timothy 2:15** – Make it your goal to know, to memorize, to naturally live by the words of life from heaven, the only eternal thing (other than souls) on this earth, and the only thing that will be there between you and Jesus in the judgment!
- V. **(v15-18; 2:1-2) – Build Personal Faith.** That is, enjoy Christian family, but be prepared for a time, a situation, when you must stand alone!
- a. When I look around this room I see what Paul was privileged to see much of his life – a support system. Fellow brothers and sisters, devoted to God, building great memories.
  - b. But it may not always be that way! Sometimes people we trust will desert faith and desert us. Sometimes the people we trust the most will not be right beside us. Paul's message to Timothy – you must learn how to stand with Jesus, even if no one is with you in it.
  - c. **II Timothy 2:1** – Be Strong in Christ. You be strong in Christ. Learn of Him. Talk with Him. Know Him well. Find strength in knowing that no matter what anyone else around you does, no matter how the enemy attacks, the smallest the number on your side ever gets is 2: It will always be you and it will always be Jesus right beside you!
  - d. **II Timothy 4:16-18** – No commentary needed. This must be you. When someone is that invested in Christ, even so much as to go it alone, what an amazing benefit He becomes to others, and what a strong team we can build in times of togetherness!

Conclusion: **II Timothy 4:7-8** – Are you fighting the good fight? Finishing the Course? Keeping the Faith?

- 1) in how you love and serve others
- 2) in the way you exercise the gifts God has given you
- 3) by standing boldly for Christ
- 4) By learning and guarding the Word of God in your heart
- 5) Through the development of personal, deepened faith in Jesus Christ?

-- I assure you, and Paul is telling you, that when you get to the brink of death, and many other things have been revealed to be pointless and vain, it is these elements of your life that will still matter. --