

1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20

(Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 1:3-7)

Hold On!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Think about how it is that you're motivated to do something radically different.

Which way do you become moved to do certain actions – things that you might not even have thought about before that time?

How are people called to go across to the other side of the world to serve the Lord?

As Christians, we say it's the Spirit's work.

But in what way did the Spirit come to work that way then and there?

If it is the Lord's doing how did it come about?

Ah, that's through the Word, isn't it?

Perhaps it was that challenging talk given by a visiting missionary.

Or it was a particular sermon that stirred up something.

Maybe it was a devotion one day which struck you.

For Timothy it had been the preaching and influence of Paul himself.

The apostle had known him since he was quite young.

He had been instrumental in bringing Timothy's grandmother, mother, and Timothy, to faith in Jesus.

And now Timothy's been struck by the Lord's words through Paul again.

In fact, I don't think any of us who have seriously read and understood the words of the verses 12 till 17 can go away unchanged.

Whether those words challenged you to faith, or they confirmed you in the faith.

And certainly they are words which encourage us to continue on in the faith.

So we come to the first aspect here.

This is the part that verse 18 and the first part of verse 19 deals with.

For here we see, **THE CALL TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS.**

The apostle comes back now to his main point.

After having had that inspired burst of praise and thanksgiving in the verses 12 till 17, Paul takes up the main theme.

This is where the NIV could've been a little clearer.

The word "instruction" in the NIV is quite general.

By translating the word as "command" in the NASB, or the word "charge" in the New King James, it is more specific.

“Charge”, in particular, makes it personal.

We know that from the process of ordination where a man is given a charge in terms of how he must biblically perform the functions of his office.

There he is given a mandate – an official order to do that specific task.

In a similar way, Timothy is charged to stay on at Ephesus in order to teach certain people not to make misuse of the law but to use it lawfully.

And what is the proper way to use the law than to preach and teach for conversion to Christ Jesus?

He alone can save from sin, and He does that through the conviction of sin.

And let’s notice the way Paul conveys this “instruction” to Timothy.

While it is the most serious charge it is yet wrapped up in a warm and supporting way.

“Timothy, my son,” verse 18 begins.

This brings back to mind the opening greeting in verse 2.

There Paul writes, “To Timothy my true son in the faith.”

Thus there is a close relationship.

We know this is a relationship which was instrumental in Timothy being called to the vital office of preaching God’s Word.

But let’s also note that these relationships in the faith are quite different than what is around us in society.

Take, for example, the business world.

Don’t we find increasingly how cut-throat it is out there?

CEO’s aren’t hired because they’re committed to their wives and are raising fine children.

They are paid huge salaries to cut back people.

In some cases, the more they can do that the more they get in their bonus package.

Even when so many in society are suffering from the global financial crisis, as long as they maintain the company profit line, they’re doing fine.

Well at least financially, though not always personally!

And neither is the way Paul addresses Timothy here what you’ll hear in the armed forces.

There you are given an order in the sharpest way.

No room for sentiment there.

But there must be a place for loving here, congregation.

We are all in the family of faith.

And even if you don’t have much of a family physically in this world, there is what you have here.

Didn’t our Lord say this to those around Him?

In Mark 3 he replies to those telling Him his mother and brothers were outside seeking Him by looking at those seated in a circle around Him and saying, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

"Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (vv33-35.)

Well, Timothy is definitely doing God's will!

He has received here, after all, THE CALL TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS.

Paul then goes back to when Timothy was first set aside.

He ties in what Timothy is being called to do here with when he was ordained.

Now, the way that's described to us might be a bit puzzling.

Paul speaks of "the prophecies once made about you."

And, if you're like me, you're a bit wary if people around us start talking about prophecies they've had or have been given.

Isn't our experience of those occasions mostly negative to the work of the gospel?

Weren't those people often preaching a different gospel?

This is why to properly understand the text we have to put ourselves in the situation of the early New Testament church.

Because then they did not have the completed canon of Scripture.

They had what they called the Scriptures.

But that was the Hebrew Scriptures – the Old Testament.

There was no New Testament as such.

What the Lord did give them, though, were the apostles and certain men called prophets.

The prophets were men gave guidance in terms of the church's direction and warning if things were going the wrong way.

One example would be Agabus who appears in Acts 11.

There he warns about a severe famine about to take place.

And later he appears in Acts 21 where he warns Paul of the imprisonment that lies ahead of him.

Now we have the completed Scriptures.

Now we have such guidance as this letter to Timothy which lays out the Church's direction in the way of the Lord.

Now we can depend on the prayerful and Spirit-enlightened reading of the Scriptures for guidance on what we're to do.

And that applies to us altogether as a church and individually.

There are no longer any prophets or apostles.

Any one calling himself either name is definitely a false teacher!

They were only for this special time.

What this means for Timothy, though, is that he's reminded about who has brought him to this point.

Because it's clearly the Lord who has called and empowered him for this.

That's what Paul's referring him back to.

It's a good thing for us to remember also.

In fact, we don't think back often enough to when we were baptised and when we professed the faith.

And even if you can't recall anything of your baptism, because you were a baby, you should reflect on the Triune God whose Name was spoken over you.

The promises said at that time should be an ever-present strength and guide for us.

The Word that has been spoken over Timothy is what he will need to carry out his call.

To fight the good fight he needed the Lord's power.

He dare not do this on his own!

And especially as a leader in the church, Timothy had to be aware of the threat from Satan.

As Paul says in his second letter to him, chapter 2 verse 3, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

This is why the military analogy is a helpful one.

There is a war out there – and in here!

That's why Paul goes on in verse 19 to speak about holding on to the faith and a good conscience.

These two qualities had been brought together in verse 5.

And they are quoted again because of how vital they are.

You think about it: Faith is the most important Christian grace.

It's only by believing in Jesus Christ, through the Word of God, that fellowship with God can continue.

And while that faith is the channel the Spirit opens up between us and God it is also the way we respond back to Him.

Because by faith you do works of righteousness.

The famous Hebrews 11 has the repeated refrain that it was "by faith" that the saints of old were able to live before God.

At the end of that chapter in verse 39, it says "these were all commended for their faith."

Another word for this faith would be "truth".

This is clear from 2nd Timothy 2 as it speaks of those who have wandered away from the truth.

And this is where "a good conscience" fits in.

For a good conscience witnesses to how sincere you are in the faith.

A good conscience is not an excuse we use when we're feeling uncomfortable about something – it's actually being determined to do things God's way!

Putting faith and a good conscience together gives us a balance.

The truth is spoken and lived out in love.

This is what Ephesians 4 verse 15 declares.

As the apostle says there, "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ.

"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Sadly, however, this had not been subsequently worked out in the Ephesian congregation.

Verse 19 goes on to speak of those who no longer fight the good fight and hold on to the faith and have a good conscience.

This is where we come to the second aspect to this text.

For this is about THE FALL OF THOSE TELLING BAD NEWS.

Congregation, the language is very strong and very negative.

They have "rejected" those things and so they "have shipwrecked their faith."

Let's have a look firstly at this rejection.

And allow me to do this by asking this question: How would we know those people if we met them?

Often it can be hard to tell, for they know all the right words and actions.

But one thing that comes through here is their impatience.

They are not holding on to the faith because that's taking too long.

They want something **now!**

So they become lax morally.

They drop their standards.

The end of this letter describes them as having turned to godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge.

That's what they've come to believe and in doing so have wandered from the faith.

This is where we come, in the second place, to the word "shipwreck".

The word "shipwreck" had disastrous connotations then.

Invariably it meant the loss of valuable cargo and the ship, let alone the likely loss of human life as well.

Many families would have lost loved ones in such calamities.

The imagery is vivid.

As it has to be!

To compare it to our modern day this is the motor vehicle that's written off with yet another road toll statistic.

With a shipwreck there is nothing left that is redeemable.
It becomes the driftwood that floats across the seas.

Michael Bentley gives an example of what happens when people turn aside from the clear teaching of God's Word.

He says, as we noted before in their impatience, they often slide morally.

And the case he mentions concerns the so-called 'Gay Christian Movement'.

He goes on, "These people have rejected many of the doctrines of God's Word.

"They have let their feelings and desires override their adherence to the Bible.

"And, as a consequence, their lives are morally corrupt.

"They do not worry that their lifestyle is in clear opposition to the teaching of Romans chapter 1 and other scriptures.

And he sums up by saying, "If we are to avoid spiritual shipwreck in our lives then we must make sure that we all hold on to faith and a good conscience."

If you get the idea that shipwrecking your faith is the worst thing that could happen you're spot on!

So terrible is this that Paul even names two such shipwrecks!

Now, naming such people is not something Paul does in a hurry.

We can see that with the obviously immoral situation in 1st Corinthians 5.

While there the incest is quite blatant and public, the apostle doesn't name the person involved.

You see, there was still an opportunity of repentance.

And, indeed, in his second letter to the Corinthians Paul expresses his thanks that that is exactly what has happened.

In this instance, however, there is clearly no hope of return.

And Paul knows the situation there well enough.

Acts 20 verse 31 tells of how he taught there for three years, and he has had other visits and contact as well.

So Paul names the two key ringleaders of the breakaway group – Hymanaeus and Alexander.

And troublesome men they certainly are.

Hymenaeus is mentioned again in 2nd Timothy chapter 2.

There in verse 17 and 18 his teaching is described as gangrene – that terrible wasting disease that leads to death.

There part of what he is falsely teaching is also mentioned.

For he was declaring that the resurrection had already taken place.

And you could imagine how much that would lead to immorality!

And while Alexander was quite a common name then, there's a high likelihood that the Alexander Paul says caused him much harm in 2nd Timothy 4:14 is the same man.

Certainly there would have been a grudge against Paul because of the discipline he would have been placed under.

And it's this discipline we turn to now.

Paul concludes verse 20 with stating that he has handed them over to Satan to be punished.

It's an interesting phrase the apostle uses here.

He also uses it in 1st Corinthians 5 verse 5.

In that situation of incest he tells the church to "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

As we heard earlier, it appears his soul was saved.

2nd Corinthians 2 verse 7 speaks of his sorrow.

But what is this about handing over to Satan?

Well, it is understood that Satan is here as the prince of this world.

So to consign any man to Satan is to put him out of the church.

Then we see the end result of the process begun in 2nd Thessalonians 3 verse 14.

Because this is expulsion from Christ's Body.

This is excommunication.

It's the ultimate punishment done by the Church and it's done to show the gravity of the situation.

Perhaps through it that person might wake up to themselves?

The Holy Spirit could stir their hearts.

But it's also likely that at the time of the text this also involved some kind of physical illness or other suffering.

In the same way there was healing gifting present in the early church so we can know that the opposite applied also.

And so it is that commentators note there is likely to be a physical punishment from God working as an extra spur to turn these men back to the Lord.

Now, it doesn't seem the Lord's rebuke brought repentance.

From what we read in Paul's second letter to Timothy they became hardened against the Lord.

They were more and more caught up in the way of this world.

Congregation, it is clear that those who don't teach or live by the gospel don't belong in the church.

A faithful church will deal biblically with them.

And it does that not only for the sake of their souls but also for the sake of the souls of every one else in the congregation.

There is a similar analogy we can draw for our physical families.

Because when there is a child who is no longer a child and who is rebelling against the order in the family, he has to go.

To try and keep excusing his behaviour will only endanger the other children in the family.

He has to go.

And perhaps through that firm and decisive action he might come back in the right mind.

Whatever the case, you have to stick by God's principles.

It might not make you feel good but it is for your good – and theirs!

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

Lord Jesus, we pray for the leaders in Your Church who keep to Your Word.

We thank You that in times past You have blessed us with such leadership.

But also we pray that each of us will follow Your Word.

Even if that means alienation from family or friends, remind us that we are always in Your Family and You are the very best Friend!

In Your ruling Name, we pray, Amen.