

1 TIMOTHY 1:1-2

(Reading: Philippians 3:1-11; 2 Timothy 1:3-14)

The Heart Is In the Start!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

These two verses of Paul's first letter to Timothy might seem the usual perfunctory greeting.

So, they appear to be something like what most people would write at the beginning of their letters in that time.

It looks like a well-used formula.

We can see that in the various other letters in the New Testament.

Don't they all kind've begin this way?

You could wonder why we would bother looking at these verses at all.

And then to make a whole sermon out of it!

That's taking it a bit too far isn't it?

I mean, it's no different to any of us writing, "Dear John, how're you going?," is it?

If you thought this you haven't really looked at this opening greeting of Paul's.

Indeed, you only need to compare this greeting of the apostle's with the other greetings at the beginning of letters – whether Paul's or John's or Peter's or any other – and you see already, at the start, the heart of the letter.

Still wondering?

Well, let me take you through these two verses.

And then you see if this initial greeting doesn't tell us so much already of what we're going to see further in this letter!

The first aspect to seeing this is to note **WHO THIS LETTER IS FROM**.

For this is what verse 1 touches upon.

Naturally we think of the one who this letter is from as being Paul.

Paul the apostle.

But who was Paul?

And what does it mean that he calls himself here an apostle?

Paul itself is a Latin name.

This indicates that Paul was a Roman citizen.

And he certainly was, by reason of his being born in Tarsus, a multi-cultural and sophisticated city in the Roman province of Cilicia.

But he was at first known as Saul, his Hebrew name.

He was from the tribe of Benjamin, although, like many Jews, his forebears had found better employment elsewhere in the Roman empire.

Indeed, the Roman authorities often encouraged Jews to migrate to other parts of the Empire because of their industriousness.

But don't think for a moment that living away from Palestine meant any less adherence to the faith of their fathers!

Didn't we read of how Paul was raised up in Philippians chapter 3?

There he tells of how Jewish he is.

In verses 5 and 6 there we read, he "was circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

This is why so much of his education was in Jerusalem.

There he was trained up within the strict Pharisee religious order of Judaism.

There were two major orders then in Judaism – the Sadducees, who were the more liberal, and the Pharisees, who were the more conservative!

Reading through the gospels you'll find our Lord had debates with both these groups.

And He very clearly exposes where both miss the real message of Scripture.

It's in Acts 22 verse 3 where we read that Paul was a student of the great Gamaliel, one of the most revered teachers in Judaism at that time.

He had been one of the most zealous for Pharisaiism, even to the extent of persecuting the early New Testament Church.

He had been there looking on when the first martyr, Stephen, was stoned outside Jerusalem.

So he was well versed with the rules and regulations of Judaism.

It was this religion he broke with when the Lord Jesus broke him on the road to Damascus.

Acts 9 tells the story of how, while on the way to persecute more Christians, Jesus blinded Paul.

There a believer called Ananias had declared to him a completely new calling.

He was now to proclaim Christ and not declaim Him.

And later God told him he was to declare the gospel to Gentiles, because the Jews would not accept his testimony – especially because of what he had been (Acts 22:18).

Remember, it was the Jews who constantly tried to kill Paul.

They many times tried to beat him up and stone him.

This is why the name 'Paul' was useful for his calling.

It was a name the Gentiles could relate to.

But this letter is not simply from a man named Paul – a man who had been through some incredible experiences.

This letter is from “Paul, **an apostle** of Christ Jesus.”

With the phrase, “an apostle of Christ Jesus” we are opened up even more about WHO THIS LETTER IS FROM.

For an apostle was a special person.

There were only ever a small number of apostles and it was a position unique to the early New Testament Church.

You see, what characterised these men called apostles was their being called personally by the Lord Jesus and their having seen Him alive after His resurrection.

Acts 1 verse 22 is clear about this when the Church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit chose Matthias to take Judas Iscariot’s place in the Twelve.

Now, while Paul was not numbered among the Twelve, he yet fulfilled both the qualifications.

He saw Jesus on that road to Damascus.

And He was divinely called to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul refers to this in 1st Corinthians 9.

There he says in verses 1 and 2, “Am I not free?

“Am I not an apostle?

“Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

“Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?

“Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you!

“For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

Indeed, if you look at the lives of any of the apostles after Judas’ death in fulfilment of prophecy, all of them were faithful to the end.

In fact, most of them sealed their testimony to Jesus with their own blood.

Congregation, it is because they were specially chosen to receive, convey, and to define the gospel, that they hold a key place here.

They were the authoritative teachers and pastors at this stage of salvation history.

And it’s through their inspired writings that they continue to guide us today.

It’s at this point we must note even more as to WHO THIS LETTER IS FROM.

For once we realise the special calling and equipping the apostles had we must immediately see what that was for.

Because it certainly wasn’t to promote those men – in fact it couldn’t be more the opposite.

Those men were simply representatives for another man – the One no other than the God-Man!

Congregation, Paul is “an apostle **of Christ Jesus.**”

He is but a servant.

Indeed, “apostle” means simply “one sent forth, a messenger,” or “an ambassador.” It was this word Jesus used in John 13 verse 16.

There He says to His apostles, “I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”

The idea of an apostle as one sent is confirmed in the very same first sentence in 1st Timothy.

As Paul goes on to say, he is an apostle “by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.”

This command refers to his divine commissioning.

A command that came from God the Saviour.

Because that’s what Paul knew he was now – a saved sinner.

As he said just 15 verses further on in this chapter, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.

“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”

Philippians 3 told us of how dedicated Paul was to serving His Master.

In verse 10 there he declares, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

There can be no doubt that ultimately this letter is from Christ Jesus Himself.

By His Spirit He is inspiring His messenger to write it.

So, we have noted WHO THIS LETTER IS FROM.

Next we follow the order in the text to see, WHERE THIS LETTER GOES TO.

And that’s pretty clear, isn’t it!

Verse 2 definitively states the recipient of this correspondence: “To Timothy my true son in the faith.”

Obviously this is for Timothy.

But as we considered with WHO THIS LETTER IS FROM there is another side to that as well.

We deal with the obvious first, however.

And while there is a lot less about Timothy in the New Testament there is still enough for us to have a clear idea of who he is.

The earliest reference chronologically to Timothy is in 1st Corinthians 4 verse 17.

To help deal with that deeply divided and sinfully shattered congregation Paul tells them he is sending Timothy to them.

Of Timothy he declares that he is “my son, whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord.

“He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”

So we note there Paul’s high regard for his young colleague and also the suggestion that Paul had been part of Timothy’s conversion.

The father-son analogy in the spiritual sense raises a close connection in this.

What we read of in 2nd Timothy 1 about Timothy’s mother and grandmother being converted to the gospel when Paul visited Lystra supports this view.

Through his mother and grandmother Timothy had godly role models.

He grows in the faith.

And as he grows he is noted for the gifts he has for teaching and leadership in the church.

Acts 16:2 speaks of the local churches’ recognition of his gifting.

On his second missionary journey, Paul co-opts Timothy to join him in his ministry.

He is circumcised to help him in that work, as his mother was Jewish but his father a Greek.

That shows how Paul is divinely guided to prepare Timothy for where and how he will serve in the future.

Tracing what we can find about Timothy, we see him faithfully serving alongside Paul and, on occasion, going off to help in special situations.

He was Paul’s right-hand man.

And it is this much-trusted colleague whom we find at the beginning of this letter serving in no less a congregation than Ephesus.

This was where Timothy had been left in charge while Paul went into Macedonia.

It was a position of much responsibility and difficulty.

We will certainly see this further on in this letter.

Ephesus was a church in Asia Minor, which is nowadays western Turkey.

It was one of the seven churches written to in the book of Revelation.

And while by then it had become quite formalistic it was yet still thoroughly orthodox in its teaching.

We know of this church also because of the letter written to her – the letter of the apostle Paul to the Ephesians.

That is the great letter dealing with the theme of the Church as the Body of Christ.

So close is the relationship between Paul and Timothy that when the apostle is near death he asks Timothy to be with him.

At the end of his second letter to him, Paul pleads in chapter 4 verse 9, “Do your best to come to me quickly.”

We have only had a brief biography of Timothy but we've already seen so much!

He is a genuine second-generation Christian.

He is one of the true children in the faith.

He is a man Paul can look to for carrying on the work and witness of the gospel.

And it's exactly to help him do that that he writes this letter to him.

And yet Timothy is not the only addressee for this letter.

As much as we saw that it was one greater than Paul who wrote this letter so we see that it is one greater than Timothy to whom it is written.

Because this is for the Church of Jesus Christ.

Timothy is merely the one who teaches the Church about this.

In fact, this letter is all about the how the church is meant to be organised.

It is a type of early Church Order or Code.

That's why we will find in the next six chapters instructions regarding false teachers, the manner of public worship, qualifications for office bearers, discipline in the church, the help to be given to those needy in the church, the respect for leaders, the avoidance of the world in the church, and the charge to keep what is truly essential in the Church – the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It will be a comprehensive set of guidelines.

And it has to be!

For here we come to the third aspect in the text this afternoon.

Congregation, now we come to see **WHY THIS LETTER APPEARS HERE.**

You see, every letter we find in the New Testament has a reason.

And each reason is unique.

It will be related to what was facing the particular congregation or congregation at that time.

But 1st Timothy, together with 2nd Timothy and Titus, is different.

Because in these so-called 'Pastoral Letters' we have what they need for much of what has not yet happened!

You only need to reflect on the most likely date when Paul wrote these letters to see this.

For the strongest possible option is after the end of the book of Acts.

That would make it after 62 AD.

And notice who receives these letters.

Timothy and Titus were among those Paul had been preparing for the future leadership of the Church.

It would be a time when the apostolic presence in the Church's leadership was no longer around.

Neither he nor Peter, or John, or James, or Jude for that matter, would be able to respond directly to issues in congregations as they arose.

So there needed to be something in place that would help the churches in the same way.

Something that was part of God's Word to always stay with them.

What we have in this letter, then, is a divinely ordered framework for the government of the church.

That theme is very clear in the letter itself.

In chapter 3 verses 14 and 15 Paul says, "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

Mind you, perhaps you're thinking here, how do we get this out of the opening two verses?

Where does this theme connect with the opening greeting?

Well, it does come out of this because there is obviously going to be a divine direction coming through this letter.

Paul always wrote with a distinct purpose in mind.

We noted too that it came to Timothy, a second-generation leader in the church.

That meant it was going to involve something which needed to continue being passed on – just as the gospel had been passed on to him in the first place.

And certainly after you have received a salutation from the Lord, you know you're going to receive guidance.

Whenever Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you," you know He's about to teach the people.

But let's consider the wording in the salutation.

What does this greeting tell us?

"Grace, mercy and peace" are three special divine qualities.

"Grace" is that which really puts us in our place.

Because our being in this relationship with God was completely God's choice to make!

"Grace" is His free and undeserved favour.

It had nothing to do with us but has come about because of His good will and pleasure.

The word "mercy" only appears in the greetings of Paul in these two letters to Timothy.

"Mercy" relates to divine forgiveness.

It tells us that though we have done the most terrible wrong we've been shown the most loving compassion.

And "peace" is what we now have by faith in Jesus Christ.

Because this represents that well-being we now have with God in Christ.

As Colossians 1 declares about Christ, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.”

One commentator summed up the use of these three words well.

He said, “Even grace will not give peace to man, unless mercy accompany it; for man needs pardon for the past no less than strength for the future.”

Thus Timothy is reminded of how the past has to be before the future can truly be!
And so are the rest of us too!

Then notice who this is from.

Because earlier we saw that it was not just a letter of Paul but a letter from the Lord through His apostle Paul.

And the most comprehensive and directive name is given here for the Lord.

This is “Grace, mercy and peace **from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**”

Clearly a reference to the Trinity, you say.

But again it is different than most other salutations at this point.

For they might only have God the Father at this point.

Or they might have God the Father and reference to the Son as the Saviour or as the Lord.

But none, bar the second letter to Timothy, have it spelt out about “Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The effect is one of definitive authority.

To use Christ and Lord in the same phrase about God the Son is to heighten His supreme position.

That’s to say He is not only ruling over all things but He’s doing it in the most comprehensive way!

Again, it might seem obscure yet it adds to the overall picture.

The heart of the letter is in its start!

Anyone hearing or reading it then would have picked this up.

Congregation, let’s also realise the same.

Then, as we open up the rest of 1st Timothy, we’ll be guided by how the Lord desires His Church to worship and serve Him.

Then we’ll see exactly how clear He is!

This reminds me of a conversation a Reformed elder once had with his minister.

That elder was trying to make the point that the Bible wasn’t as definitive about public worship as his minister liked to say it was.

He said to his minister, “But you have to acknowledge there are grey areas.”

And there are many in the Reformed-Presbyterian world like that today.

Leading lecturers in theological colleges are saying there are no clear guidelines for public worship found in Scripture (see RTC Monthly 'Ministry Spot' for December 2009, No.37, as an example).

Well, I like what that minister said in reply to the elder.

He said, "You know, the only ones who see grey are men.

"In the Lord's eyes it's either black or white!

Congregation, don't let anyone pull the wool over your eyes!

Don't let them say that these matters are so obscure and difficult we need to leave them in the hands of the experts.

And don't let them dare suggest that you couldn't possibly know all there is to know about this!

Instead, make your stand firmly upon God's Word.

The Lord has made these matters absolutely clear for us.

And He certainly hasn't given us any other way!

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Marvellous Saviour & Mighty Ruler over all...

We humble ourselves before You again in our prayer.

And in our prayer we ask that we will be open to these words from You, words You gave to your servant the apostle Paul, and which he first wrote to Timothy.

Help us to receive them as from You to us.

And may Your Spirit stir us to live like this here in this congregation of Yours.

In Your loving Name we pray, dear Jesus, Amen.