

Text: 2 Timothy 1: 1-18

Theme: Series-Fan the Flame and Fight the Fight: What is the Gospel

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 02/10/2016 at 10.30am

Introduction

There is usually a lot of curiosity about the final words spoken by those who are dying or about to die. We want to hear from them as though they are already at the gates of heaven and their words would be words of wisdom that will focus on what really matters.

Today we commence studies in the book of 2nd Timothy, which focuses on Paul's final recorded words. And, as we do, we are presented with what really matters. At the end of the day, when we are about to take our last breath, our possessions, our positions, our power or prestige will mean nothing. What really will matter is the purpose God has called us up to fulfil, and the praise our lives have given Jesus. We will not be preoccupied with things but the people in our lives and how we have responded to them. So, consider your life and what you are living for, as you consider the final words of the Apostle Paul.

The letter tells Timothy his faith and calling aren't ancillary to his identity; they are part of who he is. Consider a muslim...first a muslim before anything else. So, as we explore the theme, what is the Gospel, we shall look at it under 3 main headings: 1. The Gospel is about confidence in God at all times. 2. The Gospel is God's power that enables us find grace in the prison of life. 3. The implications of this Gospel.

1. The Gospel is about confidence in God at all times. (verses 1-7)

Paul writes while a prisoner and awaiting a sentence of execution. He's calmly facing the last great crisis of his life, and as he does so he affirms that he's an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he leaves a last message for his beloved son in the Lord, Timothy. In order to make his calling count, Paul must pass on the baton of Gospel proclamation and living to Timothy with an intention that Timothy will continue with the chain and pass it on to faithful people. You and I and everyone who knows the Lord Jesus Christ are part of the chain. If you are not passing on the Gospel to others faithfully, you are betraying Christ's trust in you. But it is also very clear that Paul means this letter not just for Timothy, but also for the congregation that Timothy is serving. He wants that congregation to hear him say these things to Timothy. He wants that congregation to hear him say to Timothy, 'Timothy, be bold and strong as you minister the word,' because Timothy faced great obstacles, not the least of which from his own congregation!

Now, there are several things to learn from verses 1-7. In fact, it's so rich that we could do a series of sermons just on the first seven verses, but I will focus on the following

Verse 1. There you'll see Paul's ascription, how he identifies himself; and there's something we learn even from that ascription. The Apostle Paul is in Rome, awaiting the arraignment of sentencing. It is a sentencing in which he will hear the death penalty pronounced upon him. He has been a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ all his life. He has taken the gospel as far as he could go. He longs to go further into Europe, to Spain; he longs to continue building up churches, establishing them in the truth of God's word—and yet, here he is in a dungeon.

And the Apostle Paul could have done many things, like complaining to God. 'Here I have served the Lord all my life, and where do I find myself now? Awaiting death, unjustly, at the hands of pagans.' But that's not what we hear from Paul. We hear confidence in the very ascription of verse 1—**not confidence in himself, but confidence in God.**

We hear a humble dependence upon God's divine supply of grace in the very greetings that he speaks to Timothy **in verse 2.** He says, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God

the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord be to you. Timothy must find his sufficiency in the abundant grace and mercy and peace which flows from God and Jesus Christ His Son. We hear a heart of thankfulness in **verses 3-5**, a heart of thankfulness that serves as an example to every one of us going through trials. **Christians draw strength in trial from the knowledge of God's providence and promise.**

In verse 6, we see an exhortation to activity in the Christian life, from someone who is chained up and can hardly be active. And finally, we hear a word of reminder about what God has endowed us with to live and minister in this Christian life. And I'd like to look at those things with you. Paul shows us here that Christians can serve God with thanksgiving, whatever our circumstances.

Let us look at these verses again in some detail.

Verse 3

Now, here's Paul writing to Timothy: 'Dear Timothy, I'm in prison. I'm chained up. I'm awaiting execution. And you know, I was just thinking: I'm so thankful to God for you, and I'm so thankful to God for the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that He implanted in the heart of your grandmother, who passed it on to your mother, who passed it on to you.' Here is Paul waiting to die, and he's thankful! And the direction of his concerns was centered on others. He has not turned in on himself. That is unlike our culture, which has turned all of us in on ourselves so that the first thing we think about in life is 'what I need', and we even think about that in relationship to God and the church: **'Is God meeting my needs? Is the church meeting my needs?'** And here's Paul, and it's the last thing on his mind.

We think that God and the church exist to meet our needs, but Paul has heard the words of Jesus: "that those of you who give up houses and fields and families for My sake, in this life and the life to come will receive a hundred-fold. In other words, Jesus says when we go the way of self-denial, when we give up our life, when we forfeit our life in pursuit of His kingdom, His righteousness, His service, He will not forget us.

V.5

Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman who came to faith in Jesus Christ, and a pagan Greek father. Did you know that? Luke tells us that in Acts 16:1. And Paul says, 'I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Do you see the power of God's covenant plan of grace wherein He brings His children into His kingdom through households—even when they're messed up? And, my friends, when you look at your own family and you say 'there are so many things messed up', you just remember the power of God's promises in the lives of Eunice and Lois and Timothy. God sends His word forth, and it will not return without accomplishing what He has appointed it to accomplish.

Mothers, don't ever underestimate what you are implanting in the lives of the children that God has given to you. Many a woman has been God's instrument to win her children to Christ...and her husband to Christ, and many praying Christians have won many of their relations to Christ. May God grant that you follow in the line of Lois and Eunice.

Verse 6 - Christians must not neglect cultivation of God's empowering gifts by which we minister.

Paul doesn't simply express a gratitude which we ought to emulate, he also exhorts Timothy to activity. You see it in verse 6: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands..." Paul is not scolding Timothy. No,

this is a gentle, tender, pastoral, fatherly reminder—but it's urgent. He urgently calls Timothy to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in him.

Someone who has been given the gift of music, and they play the piano or violin—they may have a natural gifting at it, but [they've] got to practice! You've got to cultivate the gift. And Paul is saying, 'The Spirit has given you some gifts, Timothy; I see those gifts, but you have got to exert yourself. You have got to cultivate those gifts.' The Christian life isn't sitting back, letting go, and letting God! The Christian life is active service and cultivating the gifts and graces of the kingdom.

But there's one more thing.

Look at verse 7. Here Paul speaks of the endowment that God has given, not simply to Timothy, not simply to Timothy's congregation, but to all who trust in Jesus Christ.

We've often spoken of Timothy's timidity. He was apparently ready to give way to the pressures of others; ready to be fearful of the conflict which he encountered in ministry and in the world. And Paul just reminds him here again: 'Timothy, we haven't been given a spirit of timidity.'

Timothy, we know, had ailments. He had stomach problems. He got sick frequently, and no doubt that might have led people to say things behind his back: '—and that would have made him timid, you might imagine. And he was young. He was younger than a lot of the people that he was ministering to and with, and he had determined opponents in the church. And he was ministering to a church that was being persecuted by the world. Why, it's enough to make you paranoid! Paul says, 'Timothy, let me just remind you that the Spirit of God has not given you a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power.' Timothy must avail himself of that Spirit's power, love and self-discipline in order to minister, and so do you.

Verses 8-11: The Gospel is God's power that enables us find Grace in the prison of life

We're not sure what the charges against the apostle were; more than likely he was caught up in the frenzy of accusations against Christians, given the ransacking and the burning of Rome. It wasn't a good time to be a Christian, and many of Paul's followers, many of the professing church, had in fact, to all intents and purposes, forsaken the apostle.

Well, Paul is saying something of great importance here. "Don't be ashamed of the gospel...or of me, His prisoner." It is one thing to think highly of the Apostle Paul when he's writing one of the ten best-sellers and he's a celebrity of some sort. It's one thing to be on the side of Paul in such circumstances: it's another thing to be on the side of one who tomorrow is going to be taken out and beheaded. 'Don't be ashamed of the gospel, and don't be ashamed of me, His prisoner,' Paul is saying to Timothy.

Verses 9-10

Now, he says two things about the gospel in this passage: one is negative and the other is positive. He tells us what the gospel is not—like a good physician, like a good medical doctor going through the process of diagnosis, saying what this is not. I cannot emphasize too much this morning the importance of that negative: that the gospel is not anything to do with our works; that we are not saved because of our works; we're not brought into union with Christ because of our works. Our sins are not forgiven because of something that we do. It reminds us, doesn't it, of something that Paul has said on a different occasion to the church at Ephesus, in Ephesians, chapter two: that we are "saved by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Paul, is now asserting at the end of his life something that he had discovered at the very beginning of his Christian life: that we are Christians not because of anything within ourselves, not because of something that we do! Not because of human effort! Not

because of promises that we make! Not because of goals that we set! We are not saved because of who we are.

We sing that marvelous hymn of Augustus Toplady, *Rock of Ages*: “Not the labor of my hands, can fulfill Thy law's demands. Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone. “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling...”

My friend, let me ask you again this morning, a very, very simple question: what are you relying on for your salvation? Are you relying on membership of your church? Are you relying upon the fact that you are a good, upstanding gentleman or gentlewoman? And you're polite and you do good to your neighbour? And you never kick your dog, and you do all those wonderful things, and you chart them up. And you tick all the boxes, and you hear what the Apostle Paul is saying? Remember, these are his dying words! That we are saved not because of our works; that if we are to be saved, it must come from something entirely from outside of ourselves.

Now, what's the positive thing that he says? Well, he goes on to say that we are saved because of His own purpose and grace. It begins in eternity, this gospel, this purpose of God in rescuing our souls, in bringing us into union with Jesus Christ and forgiving us our sins, and granting to us the spirit of adoption. It begins in eternity!

And not only is it something that begins in eternity, but this is a gospel which he gives us in Christ Jesus, and now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus. It's connected with the incarnation of Jesus and the life of Jesus, and the death of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus, and the ascension of Jesus. It's all to do with Jesus Christ. Christ is at the center of this gospel, and what is it that Jesus has done?

'This gospel is something that prepares me for the world to come. I have no fear of death, and neither should you. I have no fear of what this world may have in store for me, and neither should you.' That's Paul's aim. And what he says is, **'This gospel of Jesus Christ that's connected with Christ's coming and death and resurrection and ascension,** He has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' He's abolished death.

Paul *isn't* saying to Timothy that if we become Christians we don't have to die. That's not what he's saying. He's saying that **if we become Christians, death has lost its sting.** “Paul, tell me some of the implications of this gospel.” ...and you might hear Paul saying elsewhere that this gospel forgives you all of your sins, and it brings you into union and communion with Jesus Christ, and it justifies you, and it adopts you into the household and family of God, and it assures you of covenant love. But these are not the things that Paul is concerned with here. He wants young, fragile Timothy to understand that within the gospel is all the assurance that he needs to live this life to the praise of God, no matter what may come. No matter what may come, because grace saves and continues to save to the very end and then some, and beyond! And beyond!

Do you see the point? This gospel prepares us, even if we face martyrdom, for future glory in the presence of Jesus Christ.

Verses 12-18: The implications of the Gospel

Let me outline this segment to you.

First, at verse 12, Paul is speaking to us about our confidence. He is saying, 'My only confidence is in Jesus Christ.'

If Paul's confidence in life and ministry had been based on his circumstances, his confidence would have been up and down like a roller coaster. One day — conversions; one day, many Christians being discipled and matured in the faith; the next day being heckled by pagans, rejected in his teaching; one day being received into the houses of Christians in a strange land; the next day, being beaten by the natives of a city for his proclamation of the gospel. If his confidence had been based upon his circumstance, it would have been a very dodgy thing indeed! And the Apostle Paul is saying, 'That's not where my confidence is. My confidence is in Jesus Christ, and so it never wavers.'

Paul is saying "I don't know what the future holds. I don't know what the response to my ministry is going to be. I don't know what struggles or trials or hardships I'm going to face' But he does say this: 'This I do know: I know Jesus, and I know that He is able to keep His promise to me. And Paul is saying to Timothy and he's saying to the Ephesians, and he's saying to you and me: 'You need to make sure that your confidence is in Jesus Christ.'

Secondly, at **verse 13**, Paul speaks of the importance of fidelity to truth. Here he is reminding us of the importance of Christians holding fast to the truth of God's word, to the faithful preaching of the apostles. That is so hard to do. We live in an age that doesn't believe in truth. **There are many of your friends who really esteem you, but who think you are nuts to believe that the Bible is the word of God. They really do love you, they just can't figure out how an intelligent person like you could possibly believe that this is the word of God.**

And so, Paul is saying, 'Timothy, hold on to the truth.' 'I don't want you to simply accept biblical truth as if they are theoretically true. I want you to live those truths out in your lives. I want those truths to work out in your faith and love.

Thirdly, at **verse 14**, he calls you and me to an active care or protection of that truth. He calls Timothy to guard the gospel message through the Holy Spirit. What Paul is saying to Timothy is this: 'You will have to be reliant upon the Holy Spirit if you are going to continue to be faithful to the truth, if you're going to continue to guard the truth.'

Fourthly, at **verse 15**, he actually prepares us to experience disappointment in the Christian life from the Christian church.

Paul is preparing us for possible disappointment in the church. It's a sad, sad sentence, isn't it? — "You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes." You see, Paul is saying, 'Timothy, **being faithful to the Lord doesn't guarantee human loyalty to us. Being faithful to the Lord doesn't mean that God's people won't disappoint you or let you down.**'

Paul had risked his life, he had shed his blood to bring the gospel to Jewish and Gentile Christians in Asia Minor; and in his hour of trial, when he was thrown in prison, he tells us just about all of them turned their back on him.

And you can understand why. For them to associate with Paul would have been to risk their own lives; to identify themselves as a Christian, a follower of an illegal religion, a superstition—it would have endangered their lives, their families, their livelihood. It would have invited persecution. And in his hour of need, this man who had evangelized Asia is abandoned by the very Christians whom he had been the human instrument of God the Holy Spirit to lead them to Christ.

Now, my friends, that could have made Paul bitter and cynical. It could have made him to question God and Christ, and the gospel and the church. And you know what's beautiful? It doesn't. And the very reason he records it here is to say, 'Timothy, don't think that serving God's people will mean that they will not let you down.'

My friends, that is such an important lesson for all of us to learn today. And you know what? You disappoint one another, too. I've known many a Christian who were church going people, and professing Christ, and they come to a crisis point in life and the church lets them down, and you know what? They leave the church, because they've been so bruised, so wounded, so let down, so disappointed by Christians.

Isn't it glorious that Paul says to Timothy, 'Timothy, don't be surprised by that: expect it!'

And then fifthly, if you'll look at **verses 16-18**, We see how the **Lord shows mercy on those who encourage His servants**.

Here Paul pronounces a divine blessing on this man, Onesiphorus, who has ministered to him. Out of all those Christians in Asia who had abandoned Paul, not Onesiphorus! No, when he comes to Rome—maybe he came to Rome on business—what does he do? Does he try and stay as far away as possible from the Apostle Paul so that he doesn't get in trouble for being a Christian? No! He searches all over the city until he finds Paul in prison, and he goes to him and he ministers to him. And Paul records his name: "He often refreshed me, and he was not ashamed of my chains... He eagerly searched for me, and he found me."

And you know what the Apostle says? "The Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day" —Isn't it precious that Jesus won't overlook the smallest kindness you extend to the people of God, and to the servants of God?

Paul here shares this example precisely because he wants to urge us to be biblical encouragers. And he says, 'Timothy, you be an encourager like this, and make sure your elders are encouragers like this, and make sure your congregation is filled with encouragement like this.' My friends, this is not something that happens because you're a nice person. **This is something that happens because of God's grace and because of your desire to follow the Bible.**

And you have to know one another before you can encourage one another. Oh, my friends, we ought to be a fellowship of encouragement—not because we're positive thinkers or committed to political correctness, but because we're committed to biblical principles. **Be an encouragement to other people. Paul needed it. We certainly do.**