

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/3/92
II Timothy 1:1-4 "Contentment on Death-Row"

Intro: Germany was in the wicked clutches of a power-hungry dictator named Adolf Hitler. The world was at war. The Nazis sought through aggression to build a super-race, with the elimination of all defective peoples, namely the Jews. You know the history books. More than 6 million Jews were destroyed before the Holocaust ended.

What you may not know is that the Church at large in Germany during the 1930's and early 1940's was completely duped by Hitler's propoganda, and in fact supported him. We may find it hard to believe, but it was true. They so desperately wanted a leader to restore fallen Germany that they were willing to follow a leader like Hitler.

Only a few individuals could see the deadly course proposed by the Furher. But it was too little too late. One was a German pastor named Martin Niemoller. He was arrested and placed in strict isolation in a concentration camp as Hitler's "personal prisoner." He later wrote critically about his own attitude and that of the church in their negligence to stand up for what was right: "When they arrested the Communists, I kept silent. I was not a Communist. When they took away the trade unionists, I did not protest. I was not a trade unionist. When it was my turn, there was no one left to protest."

I recently finished reading the biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He too was a Geman pastor. He too was one of the few that could see the ultimate godless intent of the Nazi machine. And he too was ultimately arrested and imprisoned for his actions. In fact, on April 9, 1945, he was transported to Flossenburg Concentration Camp, and executed.

While in prison, Bonhoeffer wrote the following words: "One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world--watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith."(A Spoke in Wheel, 170).

Imagine with me. Suppose YOU were an innocent victem of a godless political system. And suppose YOU were condemned unjustly to be executed. Suppose it was because of your commitment to Jesus Christ that you were on death-row. What would you do? And suppose while in those circumstances you were allowed the opportunity to write a letter to a friend. What would you say?

New Series: II Timothy--A Letter from a Man on Death-Row

READ 1:1-2 "Paul an apostle...to Timothy"

Before us is a personal letter from the Apostle Paul to his close ministry associate and spiritual son Timothy. But it's more than a personal letter. It's an inspired letter--that is, God the Holy Spirit breathed out these words through His human instrument Paul. That means that this letter is practical and valuable for us.

See II Tim 3:16-17

Illust: I grew up on a farm that had a large woods. There were 2 ways to appreciate the beauty of that woods. One--By climbing to the top of the highest point, Bald Knob. And standing there underneath the Burr Oak tree. From that one vantage point I could scan hundreds of acres. I could soak up the big picture.

There was another way to appreciate the woods. What was that? I skidded down the hill and treked along the cattle path. From that perspective I could see and feel things impossible to see from above--the thorns on the berry bushes and multifloral rose bushes, the rough bark on the shagbark hickory trees, the anthills in the ground, the tadpoles in the creek.

What was the difference? From Baldknob I soaked up the Big Picture, the panorama view. From the cattle path, I got the Closeup view. And both views complemented each other.

Key: That's the way we should engage in Bible study. For example, when you study a book from the Bible in your devotions, you must see both. First, the big picture--what is the overall message of the book? And secondly, the Closeup Look--one paragraph at a time, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, word by word.

And that's what we want to do this morning with II Timothy.

Proposition: This morning as we begin a new expository series exploring the message of II Timothy, we want to look at 2 things.

I. The Big Picture of II Timothy

Chapter 1--The charge to guard the gospel (1:14).

Chapter 2--The charge to suffer for the gospel (2:3, 8, 9).

Chapter 3--The charge to continue in the gospel (3:13, 14).

Chapter 4--The charge to proclaim the gospel (4:1-2).

(taken from John Stott)

II. The Closeup View (1-4)

A. The Author (1)

B. The Recipient (2)

C. The Relationship (3-4)

I. The Big Picture of II Timothy

Why did God give us the book of II Timothy? What is its purpose? What main issue does this letter address for us today?

Observations: Have you noticed...?

1. There seems to be an increasing interest in religion in the 1990's.

2. The impact that the Church has on Society is dwindling.

3. The Modern Church seems to be suffering from an identity crisis.

We don't know why we're here. We're floundering. We've lost a strong sense of purpose and mission.

Q: What does the Church need today?

A: A generation of Timothy's who will hearken to the message of II Timothy!

Why? What is the message of II Timothy?

II Timothy was the last inspired letter penned by Paul. He wrote it around the year 67 A.D. Do you know where he was when he wrote it? Isolated in a dark, dank dungeon in Rome. His days were numbered. He will tell us in 4:6-7, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand..."

You may be thinking, "I thought when Paul was in prison in Rome, he was under house arrest, with freedom for friends to come and go." He WAS, in his FIRST Roman imprisonment. You can read about that at the end of Acts. Acts 28 ends with Paul under quarantine in Rome, awaiting trial.

What happened next? Apparently he was released, after 3+ years of incarceration. He traveled to Crete where he left Titus behind (Tit 15), and then to Ephesus where he left Timothy behind. He may well have gone to Colossae to see Philemon, as he had planned. He went to Macedonia next. While there, he wrote 2 letters. One to Titus, and the other to Timothy (I Timothy). He told Titus he planned on spending the winter in Nicopolis, on the coast of Greece. Then some time later he possibly fulfilled his dream to take the gospel to Spain.

Next Paul revisited Ephesus, where he saw Timothy. He eventually traveled to Troas, where he left his cloak and some books behind with Carpus (II Tim 4:13). Seemingly he ventured to Corinth, and then back to Rome.

Somewhere along the way, Paul was arrested again. Where? We don't know. Because of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, he was imprisoned a second time in Rome. And this time Paul did NOT have the freedom and comfort of his own hired house. One commentator suggests, "He was incarcerated in some dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air. He was in chains (1:16). He wore fetters like a criminal (2:9). He was so isolated that Onesiphorus succeeded in finding him only after a painstaking search (1:17).

Tradition says that Paul was condemned to death, taken to the Ostian Way about 3 miles outside of Rome, and beheaded.

Q: Does that move you? Does it grip your heart to see this great saint fettered unjustly in some hole in the ground?

How did Paul deal with his predicament? Was he bitter? Did he lash out with his pen against his cruel captors? No.

In fact, do you know what he did? He didn't think of himself, but of the future of the gospel. With his own execution staring him in the face, Paul wrote a letter. II Timothy.

Q: Do you know why Paul wrote II Timothy?

A: To encourage Timothy in the ministry at Ephesus!

Illust: Selflessness

Q: Why did Timothy need encouragement? For over 15 years Timothy had been Paul's assistant. A second man. When he needed guidance, Paul was there. But soon, Paul knew, he would not be there. And Timothy would be thrust in a new position of leadership.

Tim had 3 strikes against him:

1. He was relatively young (I Tm 4:12; II Tm 2:22)--mid 30's.
2. He was prone to illness (I Tm 5:23).
3. He was timid by temperament (naturally shy; an introvert)

In one commentator's words, Timothy was the kind of guy who would "rather lean than lead."

But God had a new ministry in store for Timothy. He would soon be thrust into a new position of leadership. Paul had led the church planting efforts among the Gentiles for 30 years. But Nero would soon have his head.

Would Nero succeed in stopping the spread of the gospel?

With Paul out of the way, would the church shrivel up and die? No!

That's why Paul wrote II Timothy! I like the outline of II Tim provided by John Stott. He suggests that Paul gave Tim (and us!) 4 charges in this letter:

Chapter 1--The charge to guard the gospel (1:14).

Chapter 2--The charge to suffer for the gospel (2:3, 8, 9).

Chapter 3--The charge to continue in the gospel (3:13, 14).

Chapter 4--The charge to proclaim the gospel (4:1-2).

That's the message of II Timothy!

Quote: Stott, 22

Application: Some of you here today are like Timothy. In this sense--God wants to use you in a special ministry, but you're shrinking back. "I'm too young! My health isn't the greatest! I'm a shy introvert! God can't use me!"

Oh really? Take a good look at Paul's words to Timothy.

Illust:

Tran: That's the big picture of II Timothy...

II. The Closeup View (1-4)

Notice the first 3 things Paul wrote in his letter:

A. The Author (1)

V 1 "Paul an apostle..."

Paul identifies himself as an apostle. That's interesting. He was not one of the original 12. How did Paul become an apostle? He tells us 3 things about his apostleship:

1. He was an apostle "of Jesus Christ."

Paul was no volunteer! He had seen Jesus Christ, on the road to Damascus. And He had been commissioned by Christ to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (see Acts 9:16)

2. He was an apostle "by the will of God."

Note: In I Tim 1:1 Paul says he became an apostle "by the commandment of God."
Key. God's will is revealed through God's command!

3. He was an apostle "acc to the promise of life..."

What a great phrase!

Q: What motivated Paul as an apostle? What should motivate us?

A: We have a promise, a guarantee from God. We have a promise of life!
Illust: People are looking for the "good life"!

Q: Where is the only place a person can find the good life?

A: V 1b "which is in Christ Jesus"

see: 2:10; 3:15

Illust:

B. The Recipient (2)

Who was Timothy? Paul calls him:

1. My Son

Paul's relationship with Tim went back 15 years. See Acts 16:1-3

Tim was from Lystra (1). Apparently Paul had led Tim to Christ on his first visit to Lystra (Acts 14). Tim blossomed quickly in the faith. He had a great reputation in his home church (2). So Paul recruited him for missionary service (3). For the next decade, Paul disciplined Timothy. He taught him the Scriptures. Then he commissioned him for ministry (II Tim 1:6).

But he was more than a spiritual son to Paul...

2. My BELOVED Son.

What was the first thing Paul said to Tim? He reminded him of the fundamentals of Christianity (2):

"grace"

"mercy"

"peace"

C. The Relationship (3-4)

Paul didn't fly solo in ministry. He was a "team-player." In fact, in this letter alone he mentions 22 names--Onesiphorus, Luke, Mark, Tychicus, Carpus, Prisca and Aquila, Erastus, Trophimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia, to name a few.

Do you know what that list of names says to me?

The most important things in life are not THINGS, but RELATIONSHIPS.

1. Relationship with God through Jesus Christ

2. Relationships with People

Solomon said so in Eccl 12:13, "Here's the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God"
Jesus said so in Mt 22:37-40, Two great commands...

Listen. I can have a 6 digit salary, a \$250,000 house, a corvette in the garage, and be miserable! If my relationships are out of whack! On the other hand, I can be chained in a dark dungeon, and be content. Why? Ask Paul--By knowing that I am right with God, and right with my fellow man.

Having said that, don't get the idea Paul was calloused to pain. Don't think for a minute that Paul didn't struggle with loneliness and rejection. Listen to vv 3-4.

Vv 3-4 "I thank my God...greatly desiring to see you..."

Think with me. What had Paul accomplished for the cause of Christ in his life?
--3 missionary trips, starting and strengthening churches from Antioch to Thess
--He wrote nearly half of the NT books
--He defended the church from apostate groups like the Judaisers and preGnostic
Paul had been an active man! How could he possibly exist locked up in some
prison? How could he keep his senses?
1. He could THANK God. v 3 "I thank God"
2. He could REMEMBER (and write). v 3 "I have remembrance"
3. He could PRAY! v 3 "w/o ceasing ... in my prayers"

Q: Did Paul ever get frustrated in ministry?
V 4 "Greatly desiring to see you..."

Think about something with me. By the time Paul wrote II Tim, he'd labored for Christ some 30 years. He'd led many to Christ. He'd started churches all over the Roman empire. But now the end was in sight. And guess what? He was all ALONE!
Tragic: Some people backstabbed Paul.
He reproves them by name in this letter--men like Phygelus and Hermogenes (1:15), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17), Demas and Alexander the coppersmith (ch 4).

Q: How did Paul keep going?
A: Paul made a commitment early on in his life. He would serve Christ. And he would leave the results up to Christ.
Right now, Tim needed him. The last time Paul had seen his spiritual son, Tim broke down and cried. Perhaps Tim was there when the Roman soldiers drug Paul off. This was no time for Paul to feel sorry for himself. He thought of Tim.
Illust:

Conclusion:

Q: Are you content with your life? Are you?
What should you do? Take some counsel from a man who experienced contentment in a dungeon.
1. Cultivate an appreciation for God.
2. Pour your life into ministering to others.