

2 Timothy

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2020-10-18

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2 Timothy 1:1-4:22

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I. Background - the enormous stress Paul and Timothy were facing during the times of the Great Tribulation, the catacombs of Rome, and the Great Apostasy

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt hemmed in, with no options, and with everyone against you? David faced that in Ziklag when the Amalekites invaded his hometown while he and his men were away fighting. And the Amalekites stole everything, burned down the houses, kidnapped his wife and all of his men's wives and children. And the men were so angry that they were ready to stone David. But he didn't despair. He strengthened himself in the Lord and came up with a plan. Well, Paul was experiencing a Ziklag moment. He was in prison, everyone had abandoned him out of fear of being imprisoned themselves, he didn't even have warm clothing, and winter was approaching. He was in a miserable situation.

As a bit of background, I believe that 2 Timothy was written within a year of 1 Timothy and less than a year after Titus was written. Some disagree and say that 2 Timothy was written 2-3 years after 1 Timothy. I think it was within a year. But either way, a lot had happened in that time. Half of the city of Rome had burned to the ground in July of AD 64. Numerous witnesses claimed that Nero's men burned it down and anger against Nero began to mount. To deflect criticism away from himself, he blamed the burning of the city on the Christians, and the whole population turned against them. The church had to go underground - very literally underground into the catacombs.

As a result of this persecution, Paul was arrested in AD 65. I believe he was turned in by one of the Christians that he had excommunicated in Ephesus - Alexander the copper smith. And with Christians being public enemy number one, it didn't look like Paul would survive the year. Paul hoped for some supplies, clothing, or any assistance he could get from the Asian Christians, but chapter 1:15 says that they had completely abandoned Paul. They were scared, and Paul implies that they were ashamed to be identified with him. He asked for help in his legal defense, and chapter 4:16 says that no one stood with him in his first defense - not one. He had to defend himself all alone.

So, abandoned by almost everyone (and he mentions names), Paul found himself in circumstances way worse than in his first imprisonment that was recorded in Acts 28. His first imprisonment was simply house arrest. People could come and go and visit him. But this time he was in a cold prison cell that left Paul shivering and needing his warm cloak - which he asks Timothy to bring to him. Luke was with Paul according to 2 Timothy 4:11. We aren't told what his circumstances were.

Now, what about Timothy? Any biography of Timothy will tell you that Timothy had been combating a lot of his own sicknesses and ailments (1 Tim. 5:23), and that he was timid and insecure (2 Tim. 1:7). Yet amazingly, Timothy reached out to Paul as a result of this letter. Two references in this book (1:18; 4:19) show that Timothy was still in Ephesus. Tychicus carried this letter from Rome on Paul's behalf (4:12), so Tychicus was another hero who took huge risks on Paul's behalf. It would have been extremely dangerous to help a Christian in prison, yet this book speaks of the kind of boldness and courage that could do just that.

The book of Hebrews, which was written one year after 2 Timothy, tells us that Timothy ended up in prison as a result of responding to Paul's call in this letter, but then was subsequently released. And that release was an unexpected release. Here's how Luke words it in Hebrews 13:23 - "Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly." Paul had already been executed by that time, leaving only Luke and Timothy in Rome. So it appears that both Timothy and Luke ministered to Paul before he was executed. Timothy ended up in prison, but then got released. And Luke then wrote the book of Hebrews. And Timothy then returned to Ephesus.

So even with this little bit of background, I think you can see that 2 Timothy is dealing with some pretty scary times. As I mentioned last week, the church was facing enemies without and enemies within. The enemies without produced what is known as the Great Tribulation. The enemies within produced what we described last week as the Great Apostasy.

II. Overview of the book, taking both sides of the chiasm together

And what was Paul's greatest concern in the face of all of this trouble? Not his own safety. Not the persecution from outside. If you look at the chiasm on the back side of your outlines you will see that the heart of this book is chapter 3:1-9 - the Great Apostasy within the church. Over the past year (or

if you date 1 Timothy earlier than I do, over the past two years) Paul and Timothy had been doing everything in their power to stem the negative influence of heretics upon the church. So 2 Timothy is really part two of the same subject that 1 Timothy brings up. Everyone agrees that the two books belong together to fill out Paul's instructions on pastoral ministry. That's why 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are called the "Pastoral Epistles." But based on the heart of the chiastic structure of both 1 and 2 Timothy, it also appears to be part 2 of dealing with this enemy within. So, just like I did last week, I will take both sides of the chiasm at the same time and work my way to the middle of the book.

Chiastic Structure of 2 Timothy

By Phil Kayser

- A Greetings, grace (1:1-2)
- B Faithful saints - Paul, Timothy, Lois, Eunice (1:3-7)
- C Paul faithful in the midst of suffering (1:8-12)
 - D Paul forsaken; Examples of faithful and unfaithful ministry (1:13-18)
 - E Characteristics of faithful ministry in the face of apostasy (2:1-26)
 - F Apostasy in the last days (3:1-9)
 - E' Characteristics of faithful ministry in the face of apostasy (3:10-4:5)
 - D' Paul forsaken; Examples of faithful and unfaithful ministry (4:6-16)
- C' Paul faithful in the midst of suffering (4:17-18)
- B' Faithful saints - Prisca, Aquila, Onesiphorus, Erastus, Trophimus, etc. (4:19-21)
- A' Greetings, grace (4:22)

A. The A sections - Greetings and grace (1:1-2 & 4:22)

We'll start with the two A sections - the greetings and grace. I love that Paul never starts by railing against darkness. Instead, he lights a candle in the darkness. He pronounces grace, mercy, and peace in the midst of the darkness.

Secondly, Paul doesn't abandon his calling or his office simply because times got tough. And he doesn't want Timothy to abandon his office. That would be the easy way out. Instead, Paul boldly in print calls himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." And what a way to start while facing an imminent execution - still focusing on the life that Jesus has given. So the two A sections are such an appropriate introduction and conclusion.

B. The B sections - Faithful saints listed (1:3-7 & 4:19-21)

The two B sections call Timothy to emulate the faithful saints that have gone before him and that continue to be with him. Paul points to what an amazing example Timothy's mother and grandmother were as wives who didn't have the spiritual support of their husbands - and yet, they remained faithful. Paul wants Timothy to emulate them. What a heart-catching example to put before Timothy. "Timothy, you can't bail. Your mother didn't bail. Your grandmother didn't bail. They remained faithful." Timothy's dad and granddad were both unbelievers and appear to have remained unbelievers. So that makes Lois and Eunice wonderful models to ministers who might have felt spiritually abandoned themselves. Are there tears in this section of memory? Yes. And Paul, though suffering himself, seeks to wipe away Timothy's tears to the best of his ability and to encourage him to not give up. He tells Timothy (verse 6),

6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

When facing the darkness of our own day, we too need the Holy Spirit's power, and the Spirit's love, and a Spirit-produced sound mind.

In the second B section Paul winds down his letter by reminding Timothy of the wonderful friends that he has in Priscilla and Aquilla. They too are great role models just like his mother and grandmother were. Prisca is just a shortened version of Priscilla, just like Phil is a shortened version of Phillip. Paul no doubt wished Priscilla and Aquilla were in Rome, but he's glad that Timothy has their help.

When you are facing tough times and abandonment by friends, remember how the faithful of the past and the faithful of the present have handled those exact same feelings, and let them stir you up to faithfulness. My mom and my dad were a tremendous example to me in Ethiopia of self-sacrificing faithfulness. My dad's tears and burden for the lost still captures my heart. Every time I think of my dad, I want to be faithful. Don't focus on what you don't have. Thank God for the family and the friends that you do have. And nurture those friendships.

C. The C sections - Paul modeling faithfulness to Timothy in the midst of suffering (1:8-12 & 4:17-18)

In the two C sections Paul moves to encouraging Timothy to imitate him. He wasn't embarrassed to set himself up as an example to follow. This is what

mentors do. Next week we will see how we need to have both male and female mentors within the church, and every Christian should seek to find an upward mentor whom he or she wants to be like in at least some slice of life, and a downward mentoree that you can mentor in some slice of life, and sideways equals that you can be as iron sharpening iron with. All of us need each other to grow. But let's dig into this section.

Timothy was obviously very anxious about the Great Tribulation and he had already received backlash from those who were being disciplined. So there were two sources to his anxiety. In some regions, it looked like the church would be exterminated. The times were looking very grim. So Paul starts in verse 8 by saying,

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God...

Apparently everyone else in Asia had been ashamed to be identified with Paul. They didn't want to be demonized with him, and they abandoned him. But Paul points out in this book that Jesus was also treated as a criminal; He was also abandoned, and the Good News of the Gospel calls all of us to be willing to suffer with Him and to not be ashamed of Him. In verse 12 Paul says, "I am not ashamed..." Maybe Satan had tempted him to be ashamed, but verses 9-11 give an incredibly wonderful summary of the Gospel privileges that we have been called into that make it all worthwhile. Verse 12 is worth memorizing. It says,

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

When you are Gospel saturated, it enables you to face death with total confidence in God's keeping power. When I was going past the Maoist guerilla checkpoints in Orissa State in India where it looked like we might be kidnapped (I didn't realize we were there illegally), and when we were street preaching where Christians had previously been stoned, I had an absolute peace that the Spirit gave me. In fact, there have been many times on my trips where I realized what a privilege it would be to die as a martyr. But God is able to keep us - spiritually and physically.

The second C section (chapter 4:17-18) gives a similar confidence, and it gives an interesting historical note that some commentators have puzzled over. Chapter 4:17-18.

2Tim. 4:17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory

forever and ever. Amen!

Commentators differ on whether the lion was Satan, Nero, or a literal lion at the Colosseum. I'm not dogmatic, but I lean in the direction of believing that in the past he been thrown to the lions (possibly in the Colosseum) and that God had stopped the mouth of the lion just like he did with Daniel. It was a close call. But I will grant that it could simply be a reference to his previous deliverance from a Roman prison or from Satan. Commentators are not sure.

In any case, the application is clear. It's the same as in the first C section. Paul knows that God can deliver him from his persecutors - even if that deliverance means going to heaven. That is the ultimate deliverance, isn't it? And because of His confidence in the Gospel, Paul is able to help Timothy to have similar boldness. Each of these sections logically moves Timothy to his duties to face the Great Apostasy head on. And last week we saw that Timothy did indeed faithfully and successfully do so. He was overseeing a presbytery that was rare in regaining purity in the time period of AD 64-66. But it was these two epistles written to Timothy that enabled him to stand strong.

D. The D sections - Paul forsaken - examples of faithful and unfaithful ministry (1:13-18 & 4:6-16)

The two D sections now get into the dirt that Timothy had been wrestling with and basically say, "Hey, Timothy. I understand what you are going through. I too have been forsaken. I too am facing people who are abandoning the faith and have to be disciplined. I too have gotten backlash from disciplined people. Yet I have remained faithful." And Paul goes on to call Timothy to be faithful and to stand firm on the Scriptures. Let me read chapter 1:13-18 without a great deal of comment because they are fairly straightforward.

2Tim. 1:13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

So we are not facing the enemy in our own strength. The Holy Spirit provides the resources that we need to face apostasy. Paul shares what he has faced. Verse 15:

2Tim. 1:15 This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

But now comes an example that has puzzled many people. Roman Catholics give this as a proof text for their heresy of praying for the dead. Verses 16-18:

16 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; 17 but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. 18 The Lord grant to him that he

may find mercy from the Lord in that Day—and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.

Was he praying for someone who had already died? Several commentaries give reasons why that could not possibly be the case. You see, Roman Catholics like to say that Onesiphorus was a good guy in purgatory, and Paul is praying him out of purgatory and into heaven. Seems like a lot to read into those verses.

Here's a much simpler and straightforward interpretation. Onesiphorus had taken pity on Paul, had come to the prison at great risk to his own safety in order to bring Paul food and to minister to him and had been a tremendous blessing to Paul. He had often refreshed Paul. But as a result of his ministry to Paul, Onesiphorus himself was accused and put into prison. Paul knows that Onesiphorus faces certain death, so he prays for mercy to be extended to his family who won't have him as a provider, and he prays for mercy to be extended to Onesiphorus so that he will be faithful and persevere and not fall away. Onesiphorus is about to die just as Paul is.

So why does Paul even bring up that case? Wouldn't bringing up the case of Onesiphorus scare Timothy even more? Wouldn't it scare Timothy out of coming? Well, Paul wants Timothy to come, but he wants Timothy to come freely and with the full knowledgeable of the risks that will be involved. If Timothy follows Paul's request, he will face the real possibility of a similar fate to Onesiphours. But Timothy will have the same honor that Onesiphorus had of being faithful even until death. Onesiphorus was living out the Gospel just like Paul, and Paul wants Timothy to be similarly living out the Gospel. Elders do hard things. Timothy is going to go to Rome, knowing that it could go down badly just like it did with Onesiphorus.

In the second D section (chapter 4:6-16) Paul amplifies on the themes he introduced in the first D section. Let me just read that whole section without much comment because both D sections illustrate the nature of faithful and unfaithful ministry. Chapter 4, beginning to read at verse 6:

2Tim. 4:6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

These are the kinds of testimonies that make us want to be more faithful. Whenever I read missionary biographies and biographies of martyrs, it stirs up my heart to want to run the race well, to fight the good fight well. I want to lay down my life for Christ. I want to be like them. They inspire me. There is something very attractive about such faithful saints. We want to be

transformed like they have been. Continuing in verse 9 - we see Paul making his request:

2Tim. 4:9 Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. 12 And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.

2Tim. 4:14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. 15 You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.

2Tim. 4:16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

So there were some who were unfaithful through weakness, and Paul sympathizes with them and prays that God would not hold it against them. But Paul prays judgments upon Alexander the coppersmith. Who was this man? I believe Gordon Fee and other commentators are absolutely correct when they say that this was the same man who was excommunicated in 1 Timothy 1:20. Rather than repenting, Alexander had become vindictive, making it his goal in life to destroy Paul. He was bitter against Paul. He followed Paul around from city to city harassing him, undermining him, speaking against him, and once the fire in Rome happened, he took advantage of the hateful propaganda against Christians by turning Paul in to the authorities (probably in Troas) and testifying against him. The word translated as “did” means to testify against someone. So the first sentence in verse 14 could be translated, “Alexander the copper smith testified much evil against me.” And then he says in verse 15, “You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.” Watch out! He’s going to come after you too, Timothy. What on earth would motivate this man to leave his business in Ephesus, and follow Paul from city to city, to turn him in at Troas, to testify against him, to follow him to Rome and testify against him there? What on earth would motivate him to do that? Probably bitterness, though I’m sure there was demonic hatred, and vindictiveness, and other negative emotions as well.

This was such an appropriate warning to Timothy because church discipline (which is what Timothy had been engaging in) does not end the problem for elders. Shepherding the sheep is a difficult task all by itself because it involves us in the pains and sins of the sheep. But it’s usually very gratifying work when the members take advantage of our shepherding. Engaging in discipline (even when it results in repentance) is an even more difficult task. It not only involves an enormous amount of work, but it sometimes results in an enormous amount of backlash. But wow, once excommunication has

happened, some people are so vindictive that the elders' lives can even be in jeopardy. I have seen such people stalking elders, harassing them, undermining them in the congregation, slandering them, threatening them with lawsuits. It's no fun to be an elder. I'm just saying - it's not fun to be an elder. But God calls elders, and if He has called you, He can enable you to be faithful 1) for the sake of His kingdom 2) and out of love for the sheep. So what Paul is calling Timothy to do is tough. What God calls all elders to is tough. But when we sense God's calling, it impels us to ministry just as it impelled Timothy to do hard things.

E. The E sections - Characteristics of faithful Scripture-saturated ministry in the face of compromising apostasy (2:1-26 & 3:10-4:5)

And it's such a good transition to the next section because he mentions the influence of other excommunicated people continuing to spread like cancer in the congregations. It's sad when members of the congregation listen to the poison being spewed by excommunicated people. That creates fires that the elders are always having to put out. It shouldn't be that way.

Anyway, in the two E sections he goes through all the things that make up a faithful ministry. I've labeled those two sections, "Characteristics of faithful Scripture-saturated ministry in the face of compromising apostasy." Let's read chapter 2 first.

2Tim. 2:1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Without grace we cannot do effective ministry. Elder candidates must learn how to experience God's grace in everything that they do. That is what will sustain you. If you have not learned to drink deeply from the throne of grace, you will flame out in the ministry. Verse 2:

2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

We cannot do ministry alone. We must expand and continually raise up new leaders. You all know the pressures that Gary and I have with Rodney gone. But even with him here, we need new elders. Now, I'm not doing a very good job of advertising for the position, am I? It is difficult work, but we are looking for people who believe they are called to do that difficult work. What God orders, He pays for, provides for, and equips for. But Paul does not want would-be elders to be ignorant of the difficulties they will face. Verse 3:

3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. I've told men many times that if they can't take being kicked in the stomach and betrayed by friends and slandered by enemies, don't even think of

becoming an elder. Being an elder is an office of hardship and spiritual battle. It's not just a job. My jobs in the lumber industry, janitorial industry, being an orderly, and being a maintenance man were far easier. But having said all that, being a pastor is an incredibly gratifying service as well. Some people wouldn't want to be runners like Eric Liddell. It's tough work to become an Olympic qualified runner. But Eric said that God made him to run and when he ran he felt God's pleasure. The same is true of the race we are all called to be in as elders. The same is true of each of your callings. If you embrace your calling fully, you can experience God's pleasure in it.

Think of the images that Paul uses in this section. In verse 4 he likens a good elder to a good soldier. Is being a soldier tough and dangerous? Of course it is. But it is also gratifying. Men want to defend their wives and families and their homeland. God made us to be willing to make those kinds of sacrifices. So that's a balance to counting the cost - we are impelled by our calling as men to do so.

In verse 5 he likens a minister of the Gospel to a dedicated athlete who lays aside anything that will hinder him from winning. And people wonder, "Why would they make those sacrifices?" Well, they feel called. Their is something satisfying to the athlete. The same is true of eldership.

In verse 6 he likens it to a hard-working farmer. And yes, a farmer needs to be able to enjoy some of the benefits of farming, but there is hard work involved.

But really, everyone has to make sacrifices for their own calling (as he pointed out earlier with Lois and Eunice). If we aren't interested in making those kinds of sacrifices, Paul says that we need to consider Christ. Do you want to be like Christ? If we are going to imitate Christ, what did Christ do? He sacrificed Himself that He might please God. Every one of you men is a pastor of your home and you are called by God to make sacrifices on behalf of your home. Paul points to himself being in chains, and then hastens to say - ah, but the Gospel is not chained. I love that. Nothing can stop the power of the Gospel. But Paul is willing to endure anything for Christ in order to win Christ's elect (verse 10). And what do we have to lose anyway? He writes a poem in verses 11-13, saying,

2Tim. 2:11 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. 12 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

Then he continues to use additional images of faithful ministry such as a hard worker, a hard exegete, a master builder, a servant, etc. But I want to

just keep reading with very little comment most of these two E sections on what faithful ministry looks like. Beginning at chapter 2:14:

2Tim. 2:14 Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God,

We've got to have a God-centered focus or we will never survive the ministry. We'll be like those names listed in this epistle who took the easy way out - who were ashamed of Paul. But Paul says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God..."

...a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. It takes work to preach God's Word faithfully. It takes work to expose heresy. It takes work to protect the sheep from the wolves. It takes work to be a faithful elder. Verse 16:

16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. 17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, 18 who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Oh! may that be true of each of us! May we hate iniquity.

But Paul has to encourage Timothy to engage in church discipline so that the heresy wouldn't spread like cancer. And as I mentioned last week, Timothy and the whole presbytery took these letters to heart and within one year of this letter being written, the entire presbytery was cleansed of heresy and heretics. Church restoration is possible. Revelation 2:1-7 tells us that success story. Verse 20:

2Tim. 2:20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. 22 Flee also youthful lusts;...

You know, there are some sins that you don't stick around to fight. You just flee. Joseph knew not to fight his flesh while in the presence of Potiphar's wife. He fled the temptation. Verse 22 goes on to say,

...but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

All believers are called to pursue righteousness; to not be lackadaisical about it. To be righteous you have to be committed to the metaphors of this chapter - to be student of the Word, a soldier, a dedicated athlete, a worker. Even your own sanctification does not come easy. It involves work. Verse 23:

23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. A lot of times Facebook degenerates into exactly this - endless, foolish

disputes that go nowhere. I've learned not to get sucked into the debates stirred up by the trolls who hijack every conversation. Don't be Facebook warriors who embrace every debate. And if you know that a person is a troll intent on debating everyone, defriend them. What does Paul say? "Avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife." Verse 24:

24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

That's the goal of discipline - restoration. That's even true of excommunication. Your hope is that they will be restored to Christ. An elder must be able to do this kind of counseling, warning, teaching, and rescue work.

Let's read the verses in the second E section, beginning at chapter 3:10.

2Tim. 3:10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.

There is so much there that we can't get into, but let me quickly point out two things. First, there are some things you can't study in a book but need to learn by doing, and by imitating, and by being with mentors. The word for "carefully followed" deals with learning in close quarters with a person. This was the way that Jesus taught His disciples. They watched Him, imitated Him, were guided by Him, and they hung around Him. It's discipleship. It's one of the reasons why in this church (unlike so many churches) we try to meet one-on-one with the men of the congregation. When the congregation was smaller, we tried to do this one-on-one once a month. Logistically that is almost impossible now. But the point is that there are some things that are better done one-on-one than from the pulpit. How do you learn from a book how to be long-suffering, have perseverance, face persecution? It really takes being persecuted to learn that, doesn't it? You can't learn how to ride a bike by reading a book. You learn by trying, and falling, and trying again. But there is so much you could learn from each other if you would be willing to be involved in mentorship from fellow-members.

Second, God delivered Paul out of all previous persecutions. It didn't mean he didn't suffer. The long litany of things that he suffered are listed out in 2 Corinthians 11. But Paul's point is that you can't die any sooner than it is God's will for you to die. You can face persecution with that confidence. But that God ordained His first century saints to face persecution can be seen in verses 12 and following:

12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Those Scriptures that Timothy was brought up on were the Old Testament Scriptures. Both of these E sections deal with Scripture-saturated and grace filled ministries. But notice what all the Old Testament Scriptures are sufficient for - beginning to read at verse 16:

2Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God's Word is sufficient for all pastoral ministry. Period. And it is sufficient to equip us for all of life. And so Paul gives the charge to stay faithful to the Scriptures in chapter 4:1-5.

2Tim. 4:1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Every word in that section should be meditated deeply upon by aspiring elders and those who are already elders. It is a huge calling, but an absolutely essential calling. Those who are called should have this inward compulsion - woe is me if I do not preach everything God has called me to preach. These sections are a rebuke to the seeker sensitive movement. They are a rebuke to the name it and claim it prosperity Gospel. They are a rebuke to the postmodern wishy washy church that doesn't want to offend anybody. Paul would say that if you haven't offended and called out by name the heretics of your own age, then you've got a different Gospel and you certainly are not imitating Paul who offended and called out the heretics of his own age by name.

F. The center of the book - both realism and hope regarding the Great Apostasy (3:1-9)

But that brings us to the heart of the book (chapter 3:1-9). And the heart of the book gives the messy realism of errors that elders must deal with as well as the hope that their ministry will not be in vain. They will receive a harvest from their ministry. And granted, Paul is describing the worst apostasy in world history that happened in the years leading up to AD 68, and that were

cut short in AD 68 with the death of Nero. But they do show the tendency of the flesh, the world, and the devil to draw the church away of the law and the Gospel.

On my own timeline of my life, in which I have mapped out what God has done in my life from my birth to the present, and which also includes my mission statement, I have it all graphed as an arrow with the point of the arrow plunging into the darkness of the last column that God has called me to change. The last column of the sheet (that the arrow of my life is penetrating) has a listing of the things that make me groan and weep. They are the things that rob God of glory and make me long to see more of His Gospel and Law changing. That's the way I see the heart of this book for Paul. These were the things that made Paul and Timothy pound the table in their prayers pleading with God in intercession. These were the things that made them groan in spirit and not be satisfied until those things could be defeated.

Let's end by reading chapter 3:1-9, which (by the way) is the darkness that each life here in this church should be an arrow shot into; an arrow designed to make a difference; an arrow calling upon God's kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Though these were a description of the last days that Paul and Timothy were experiencing, they still describe the human heart in any age. If any of this darkness describes you, repent of it, turn from it, and bow your necks before the conquering scepter of King Jesus. Beginning at verse 1:

2Tim. 3:1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith;

But praise God for the hope given in the last verse that the Great Apostasy would be reversed. Hallelujah! Paul says,

9 but [I love that "but" - "but"] they will progress no further, [Praise God! "but they will progress no further,] for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

This speaks of the self-defeating nature of apostasy and sin. But this also speaks of the Gospel being more powerful than evil. It speaks of the growth of the kingdom over history. As Romans 5:20 words it, "where sin

abounded, grace abounded much more.” Do we live in a time when sin abounds? Yes. But that also means we must be living in a time when grace abounds much more. Don’t ever think that your own sins are stronger than the Gospel. Wherever we apply grace, it can conquer and overcome evil. We need to believe that. Wherever we shine the light of His kingdom, His kingdom will gain the ascendancy.

The sad part is that Christians and even Christian ministers are ashamed of shining the light of the Word of God into city hall, or Nebraska’s unicameral, or Washington DC. I praise the Lord for men like Virgil Walker and Darrel Harrison who have boldly been taking down the strongholds of our nation - despite criticism and persecution. Pray for such men. Most Christians don’t do so because they have been fooled by pietistic teaching that doing so won’t succeed so why bother? They have been fooled by the heresy of pluralism and are convinced that we will be wiped out if we don’t embrace pluralism. That’s going backwards. That’s making peace with evil. Never! Never! Pluralism doesn’t make peace with Christ and Christ will never make peace with pluralism. Pluralism was the camel’s head stuck into the tent of our nation that eventually has pushed Christians out of the public arena. Grace more abounding must be brought back into every area of life.

Whatever happens in our own day, let’s make chapter 1:12 our theme:

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Let’s pray.