



Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No. 1262-5
2 Timothy 2:1-2
Mark Mitchell
October 19, 2003

Invest in the Faithful

SERIES: *A Life That Counts: Studies in 2 Timothy*

A recent article in the *NY Times* discussed the massive decline of Christianity in Europe. Somehow the very place where the Christian faith was once so well established has become a spiritual wasteland. One pastor from Northern France said in an interview, "What's interesting isn't that there are fewer people in church, but that there are any at all."

I think that's how the Apostle Paul must have felt when he wrote his last will and testament to Timothy. He wrote to Timothy in the face of wide-scale defection from the truth. He said in chapter one, "All who are in Asia turned away from me." Early converts in Asia Minor who had responded to the call to come to Christ were turning away because of persecution by the Roman government. Paul was experiencing personally the force of this rejection. He writes to Timothy who is pastoring a church in Asia Minor in the city of Ephesus. And, of course, since Timothy was in Asia, he was observing this defection from the faith to which Paul alludes. Timothy was being pressed to the limit. He was weak in spirit, frail in body, timid in disposition and wanting in experience.

In view then of all of this Paul writes in chapter 2 to Timothy about what he should do to stop the slide. We will just look at the first two verses this morning, where Paul gives Timothy the first two of several directives which are fundamental to not just preserving but expanding the work of God's kingdom amidst widespread defection. These two things are just as applicable today as they were then.

I. Be a receptor of God's strengthening grace

The first directive is found in v. 1. "**You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**"

Paul starts out and says, "You, Timothy, in contrast to those in Asia who are turning away from the faith, be strong. No matter what others may think of you, no matter what you may think of yourself, no matter how weak, how inept, how inadequate, how ill-equipped you consider yourself to be, you, Timothy, be strong." This isn't a call to be strong in himself; it's a call to be *strengthened*. The verb is what Greek scholars call the divine passive. The idea is that Timothy is to allow himself

to be strengthened by God. It would be absurd to ask Timothy to be strong in himself, to clench his fist, to set his jaw, to marshal his own resources and be the man Paul wanted him to be in Ephesus. He simply didn't have it within himself to be strong. You might as well ask a snail to fly, or ask me to come up here and sing a solo. I don't have the means. I can't do it. To ask Timothy to be strong in himself would have been that ridiculous.

Where would he find that strength? Certainly, from God. But notice he's more specific. He says, "Find your strength in the grace that's in Christ Jesus. Be strengthened by the grace that you find in him." Grace is God's unmerited, unearned gift of assistance and help. We like to sing about grace: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me..." And grace IS that which saved us. If we're in Christ, we stand in grace. We stand in grace because of his work on the cross. We're forgiven. We're clothed with the righteousness of Christ. The apostle John put it this way, "**And from his fulness we have all received, grace upon grace**" (Jn. 1:16). If we're in Christ, grace has been heaped upon grace in our lives. We're swimming in it. We have to learn to stand in that truth.

But we also see here that grace doesn't end with salvation. Grace is not just something we stand in, it's something that we draw upon, as from a well, day by day. Grace is what we need every day to serve him. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, "**But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I but the grace of God that was with me**" (1 Cor. 15:10). We don't start out by grace and then run the race in our own strength. We need to draw upon his grace from start to finish. There is an old song written by Annie Johnson Flint that expresses this so well:

He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials he multiplies peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

That's what Paul was encouraging Timothy to understand and do - to draw from that unlimited storehouse of grace that was available to him in Christ. To be strong, not in himself, but in that grace.

But in order to do that we have to come to that place that the song speaks of - we have to exhaust our store of endurance, we have to reach the end of our hoarded resources. You see, natural strength is the greatest enemy to the grace of God. Yet everything in our culture tells us to be strong in ourselves; to take life by the throat and make things happen. That's why God puts us through trials and disappointments. That's why God allows us to get in over our heads. To humble us; to empty us so we will begin to look to him. Scripture says, "**God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble**" (Jms. 4:6). So to experience this strengthening grace we start by humbling ourselves.

But it's not just a one time decision to humble yourself. It's an ongoing thing. That's why Jesus himself said, "**Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me**" (Jn 15:4). Every day we have to choose to trust him, to keep his word, and when we do that we'll experience grace heaped upon grace.

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, wrote about this: "It makes no matter where he places me or how; that is rather for him to consider than me. For the easiest positions he must give me grace, and in the most difficult, his grace is sufficient. So, if God places me in great perplexity, must he not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? As to work, mine was never so plentiful, so responsible or so difficult, but the weight and the strain are all gone. His resources are mine, for He is mine."

So that's the first thing we're to do when things start falling apart - to be strong in the grace that's in Christ Jesus. That's a fundamental principle of helping anybody. You can only pass on to others what you yourself have received. If you want to make a difference in the face of widespread defection, Paul's advice is start with yourself: "You be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." That's the way to guard the truth.

With that in mind, Paul goes on to indicate the kind of ministry for which Timothy would need to strengthen himself by God's grace in Christ. .

II. Be a dispenser of God's ageless truth

The second directive is found in v. 2. "**The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.**"

In v. 1 Timothy was told to be a receptor of God's strengthening grace. Here in v. 2 he is told to be a dispenser of God's ageless truth. Remember up in v. 14 Paul told Timothy to "**guard the good deposit**" which he had entrusted to him. That's basically about playing defense. But he's to do more than play defense. He's also to play offense. That's what v. 2 is all about. Paul says he is to take that good deposit and pass it on. Remember, Paul knew that any day he would be executed, so he had to make arrangements for transmission of the gospel to the generations to come. But how would that happen?

That's an important question. It's a question we should be asking ourselves. It requires some foresight on our part. We have to realize that decisions we make now will have an impact on the future of the faith, even the future of this church. Paul says, "Don't just think about your current survival. Think about generations to come."

In the transmission of truth from hand to hand, Paul envisions four generations. First, the good deposit was entrusted to Paul by Christ himself. It was his by deposit, not by invention. Paul said in Galatians, "**I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ**" (Gal. 1:11-12).

Second, Paul entrusted that same deposit to Timothy. In 1 Timothy 6:20 Paul wrote, "**O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you.**" Notice here in v. 2 he calls this deposit "**the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses...**" When did Timothy hear these things from Paul? I don't think Paul sat Timothy down one day and lectured him on the truth. This was a process. And it was not a process

that took place in secret. He did this in the presence of many witnesses. There were others who saw and heard the same thing Timothy had. It wasn't done in secret. It involved living the truth as well as teaching the truth. We know from the book of Acts that Timothy was Paul's constant companion. He selected him to accompany him on his second missionary journey through Asia Minor. Timothy had an opportunity to associate with Paul and to observe his life and teaching. Right here in v. 1 he calls him "**my son.**" It was about relationship as well as knowledge. There was affection and warmth in this transmission.

Third, Timothy is to entrust what he has received from Paul to faithful men. I guess there were a few of those men left among the many deserters in Asia. How do you identify a faithful man? Faithful men are not necessarily talented men, or accomplished men, or successful men, or attractive men. A faithful man will be *teachable*. He'll have a searching mind, a mind that is ready to learn, a mind that has given evidence that it wants to know something. He's not content to pass through life just being entertained all the time. He wants to learn, to search out truth, to study and meditate on the Scripture and explore its application.

A faithful man will also be *humble*. He's willing to serve. He's willing to do the little things behind the scenes. He's learning to set aside his own ego and his own agenda.

A faithful man will be *reliable*. He follows through on his word. He sticks with things, even when it's not going well. I'm reminded of what Jesus told us in the parable of the talents. He said he'll speak to those who invested their talents in the kingdom: **"Well done good and faithful servant, you were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your Master"** (Mt. 25:21).

But notice these faithful men are also to teach others. These "others" are the fourth generation. This is why Paul told Timothy in his first letter to him that when he appoints elders they should be men who are "**able to teach.**" I don't think this means they must have teaching gifts, but that they understand the Scriptures and are able to communicate what they have to say in a clear and accurate way.

So these are the four stages of handing on the truth. It's been said that Christianity is always one generation away from extinction. That's why we need this foresight. Timothy's main priority was to invest in elders. But all of us have to think about how we'll invest in the next generation. Have you ever thought about the fact that someone did this with you? If you're in any way established as a growing believer, I'm sure that you can think

of a few people along the way that took time to invest in you. Maybe it was in a once a week meeting over breakfast; maybe it was a ministry team you served on together; maybe it was just hanging out together. But they cared enough to spend time with you and that had an impact on you. It doesn't happen by accident, does it?

Have you ever taught a child to drive a car? It's interesting how that whole process works. First, they take a driver education class. They get their heads all filled with knowledge about driving. But you don't give a kid a drivers license just because they took a class on drivers education. The next step is that they get a permit, and for about a year they drive with you in the car. That's a scary experience! I've been through it twice, and talk about testing your faith! At that the end of that process they still aren't ready. They have to take formal drivers training - one on one with a trained instructor. After that they have to take a drivers test, both written and in the car, and only when they pass that are they allowed to drive. Even then they have to wait six months before they can drive their friends around.

I wonder why we don't take the same approach in developing followers of Jesus? Maybe it's just too time consuming. Maybe we think we can cover more ground if we take hundred at a time. But can you imagine doing drivers training a hundred at a time? Can you imagine sending a person in to do heart surgery with no training? Look at the method Jesus used. At the outset of his ministry he chose twelve men. It was to this small band that Jesus committed the future of the church. As the Lord's ministry drew to a close he spent more and more of his time with this inner circle, often neglecting the multitudes. The transfer of truth to the next generation was dependent on his face to face training of these men. That's what Paul did with Timothy. It wasn't about how many people he could preach to. He spent much of his time in individual, personalized ministry to a few.

I wonder if one of the reasons why the church is having so little impact on our culture, not just in Europe but here in America, is that we've lost sight of this method. We're happy just to get people to pray a little prayer and call themselves Christians. We're happy just to get them through Drivers Education. No one has ever sat by them and shown them HOW to spiritually drive. As a result, their faith remains a mile wide and inch deep. And when life serves them up something they were never prepared for, their faith is found wanting.

Here is the point: Each of us have been handed something. Having been strengthened by his grace, we're to pass that on to faithful people.

CONCLUSION

For generations the Notre Dame name has been synonymous with college football success. The Fighting Irish have stockpiled more national championships, more Heisman Trophies, and more all-Americans than any other school in America. It's the Fort Knox of college sports. The school's legendary past is a story Hollywood loves to tell. Only at Notre Dame could Knute Rockne become famous by coaxing his team to "win one for the Gipper." And through the years they've won. But with all that success came high expectations too.

To reinforce those expectations, each spring the Notre Dame coaches gather the team together for *The Ceremony of the Jersey*. It's an annual event where each new recruit is presented with the football jersey he'll be wearing in the upcoming season. At any other school this may have little meaning but at Notre Dame it's like a visit to a museum. As each player is brought forward, he's presented with his new jersey as a scroll is read naming each of the legends who've worn that number before - their names, achievements, and degrees. The final name on the scroll belongs to the new recruit who'll be wearing it. The implication is obvious; wear the jersey with distinction, carry on the proud tradition, be worthy of the honor.

In many ways, you and I have been handed a jersey as well. It may not have a number, but it has some blood stains. People like Paul and Timothy, maybe a mom or a dad, maybe a youth pastor or a maybe college friend have worn that jersey. As those who have received God's grace and are being strengthened by it, our calling today is to pass that jersey on to the next generation.

© 2003 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA