

2 Timothy 1

Are you feeling a little dull? Has church lost its edge?

Well, today's reading from 2 Timothy is for you!

This second letter to Timothy is a call to raise ourselves up from whatever spiritual slumbers we are in and rededicate ourselves to God's mission.

What are we looking at? This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to his young prodigy, Timothy. From what we can glean from this letter and the first one, Timothy is a young man who has been thrust into leadership within the church. His is a faith that has been passed down from his grandmother, Lois, to his mother, Eunice and now to him. But it does seem from this letter that, for whatever reason, Timothy has gone off the boil. But Paul is determined that Timothy stirs himself into action.

So he gives Timothy, and therefore us, some pointers about how to do this.

- 1) v6 Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you
- 2) v8 Join with me in suffering for the Gospel
- 3) Keep the pattern of sound teaching

So, let's go through Paul's advice...

- 1) Fan into flame the gift given to you...

I'd love to know fully what spiritual gift Timothy had but we aren't told. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he tells us that there were prophecies made about Timothy and that he received a spiritual gift when the elders laid hands in him prayer. Beyond that, it's all speculation. What we do know is that Timothy was a leader in the church whilst still a young man. Timothy is told in the first letter, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young."

It doesn't actually matter to us what the gift was but that the gift was going cold and being under used is important. The gifts of God are given for the benefit of the whole church so that we can serve on another, serve the world and bring glory to God. So, when a gift starts to be under used, everything else starts to suffer.

It's a bit like a fire, when one part starts to go out and grow colder, the rest of the fire will suffer and there's a creep that goes on until the whole fire goes out. The best way to recover the fire is to fan it into flames, get the bellows going and get the fire hot again.

And that is what Timothy needs to do. He needs to refocus himself and, as Paul says, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." The gifts that are given to each of us don't require superhuman strength from ourselves to exercise, rather they require us to listen to the Holy Spirit at work within us all. Maybe it requires a little bit of will power from ourselves to resolve to turn things around but we're continually told to lean on God and not ourselves.

- 2) Join with me in suffering for the Gospel.

They're not really words we want to hear are they! No one in their right mind revels in the thought of suffering. But Paul knows that it is important.

At this point in history the church was under attack. As an offshoot of Judaism, it was viewed as a dangerous heresy to be stamped out. For the Roman Empire it was a cult that required prime obedience to a God it was not familiar with rather than the Emperor and, therefore, was incompatible with the objectives of the empire. Being a Christian was dangerous!

But the work of the church in spreading the good news of Jesus was too important to be put off by this threat. People needed to know of the true God. They needed to know where true salvation lay. People needed to know the pattern of life that God wants people to live by. So, come what may, the early Christians took on the task of sharing the Gospel and they paid the price of doing so with their lives. As Paul writes this letter, he is in prison and is expecting death "I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure." He says towards the end of his letter.

You start to get an inkling of why Timothy is wavering in his calling. His Mentor may be about to pay the ultimate price and Timothy would have known the potential for him to follow in that same path.

But Paul's faith is strong, he knows that no matter what is done to him, he is safe in God's hands. Death has been destroyed and life eternal awaits him like a crown. To walk away from his calling would be to walk away from the promises of God.

3) Keep the pattern of sound teaching

Timothy had received his faith through his family and he'd been the recipient of teaching from the Apostle Paul. Sound teaching, teaching that builds people up spiritually and prepares them for service. But it seems that there were some who were determined to put a different spin on Christianity. It was the case then and it's been the case all through the history of the church, people have tried to manipulate the Gospel to meet their own ends.

Paul had encountered these people and had had to do battle with them, steadfastly proclaiming the truth. And these people were still around and now it was up to Timothy to take them on. Constantly battling with people can be hard work and draining. Again, I think we see a reason for Timothy becoming luke warm. It would be easy for him to give in to them and adopt their teaching, anything for a quiet life! But to go down that path would lead him away from salvation and, consequently, others.

But we have been given this great gift of the Gospel. Words straight from the heart of God. Words that can make a true difference in the world. They are teachings that it is worth battling to keep and hold onto tight

Conclusion

So, for us, where does this leave us? I think when we look at the state of the church as a whole in this nation, we can see that this is a blueprint for the way to turn things around.

Churches up and down the nation are teeming with people with gifts from God but they aren't always being used. When one person doesn't use their gift, the burden falls on others and so a weightiness appears and suddenly church becomes a burden rather than a joy. Fan into flame the gift that God has given you and if you're not sure what it is, then seek that from God in prayer.

And be prepared to suffer. The good news, you're not going to be thrown in jail! But we are God's hands and feet in this world. We are the ones he has called to proclaim the gospel and, boy o boy, is there a world out there that needs to know that needs the hope of the gospel and needs to know that God loves them. And if the church isn't going to go the extra mile, then who will?

But be careful of the teaching that you hold. More than ever, we live in a world of disinformation. But in this world of fake news there is truth and, in the words of Jesus, this truth will set you free. But there are those who, for their own reasons, would seek to tie people down with falsehood.

(hold bible) this is God's gift to you. Hold tight to what it says. Wrestle with what it teaches. And resist anything that goes against what it proclaims.

So may you be blessed as you live a life of service in the name of Jesus. May you hold tight to the teaching given you, may you be undaunted by the challenges that face you and may the gifts that God has given you burnt bright in this world.