

Spirit of Power, Love and Self-Discipline

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Preacher: Paul Barker

- [0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 31st of December 2000.
- The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled A Spirit of Power, Love and Self-Discipline and is from 2 Timothy 1.1-7.
- Death Row, by all accounts, is not a place to go for a holiday. It's full, in America at least, it seems, of angry and demoralised men existing there rather than living and awaiting execution.
- Some of them spend many long and cruel years before they die. For most of them, life is pointless and hopeless and they are full of despair.
- Just occasionally, there are glimpses of hope such as in the book and film Dead Man Walking. But by and large, for most of them, it is rather a despairing, hopeless, bitter place to be.
- [1 : 15] St Paul, in the letter we're looking at, writes from Rome's equivalent of Death Row. He's been in prison for some years on trumped-up charges that we read about in the Acts of the Apostles.
- He appealed to Caesar because he was a Roman citizen and so to Rome he was sent. And for some years, it seems, he's been under house arrest.
- Now, it seems, in prison, in chains and in fetters. It would no doubt be very easy for him to be angry, to be bitter, to be frustrated, to be hopeless.
- It would be easy for him to regard the work of the Gospel as being thwarted and frustrated by his imprisonment in Rome. And in addition to all of that, Nero is now the emperor and he is beginning purges of persecution, testing the adolescent church and Christians.
- Paul's second letter to Timothy is his last recorded letter. His life is all but over. He's awaiting death in chains, as I've said, and in fetters.
- [2 : 30] And he writes now not to a church as most of his letters are addressed, but to an individual, to Timothy, to perhaps his dearest friend, his protege, as a minister and missionary, perhaps to one of his own converts.
- But throughout this letter, there's no despair and no bitterness. There's no hopelessness, but rather encouragement, boldness and hope. Of all Paul's letters, this is one of the most moving and emotional of his letters.
- The caricature that some people have of St. Paul as being a rather harsh person certainly doesn't stand up to the evidence of this letter. Here he oozes warmth and encouragement, compassion, emotion, and confidence in Christ.
- A deeply personal letter. Despite Paul's unique status as an apostle to the Gentiles, nonetheless, there are words for us in this letter.
- Though it was written to one individual nearly 2,000 years ago, nonetheless, this letter speaks to us as a church and as individuals today.
- [3 : 49] For example, for those in their twilight years of life, let's say, there is a great example and encouragement in this letter, like Paul himself, to finish the Christian race well.

Paul's life is almost over. There's encouragement for those in their latter years to finish their Christian life well. But for those who are younger, younger in faith, younger in natural life, there is a call here to persevere in faith, to keep on in Christian life and in Christian ministry, to take up the baton, in a sense, from the previous generation.

But for us as a church as well, there is a call here to stand firm in biblical faith, to hold fast to the gospel that has been passed on, to stand against opposition and persecution, to stand against heresy and immorality.

Timothy, for the next few weeks in the morning services, Paul's second letter to Timothy is what I'll be preaching from. Let me encourage you to read it through in one go.

It's only four chapters. It's not very long. It'll take you about the time it takes to make a cup of tea. Let me encourage you to meditate upon it and reflect upon it, to learn from it and to heed its lessons.

[5 : 15] And you may like to turn now, if you haven't already done so, to page 966 to 2 Timothy chapter 1. And today, looking at the opening paragraph verses 1 to 7.

Over the next few weeks, we will be comforted by these words, but also rebuked. We'll be challenged by them, but we'll also be encouraged by them as well.

For a man on death row, to receive a promise of life might seem too good to be true.

The irony is that Paul is on death row precisely because of a promise of life. You would think that if you received a promise of life, death row would be the last place you'd ever find yourself.

But here he is. But the promise of life that's been given to St. Paul is not a promise of reprieve. It's not a promise of justice because Paul is there unjustly as though somehow real justice will be done and Paul will be given life and set free.

[6 : 21] Nor is it a promise of escape from prison either. For Paul, the promise of life is the promise of life in Christ. And even though he's about to face death at the execution of the Roman emperor, Jesus' promise of life stands firm for him.

That's how he introduces himself in verse 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, that is, one sent with the words of the gospel, one who's witnessed and testified to the resurrected Christ by the will of God.

And then he says, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. That's why he's there. He's in prison facing death because of a promise of life in Christ.

Now those words, I think, are deliberately ironic but they're also a very neat summary of what the Christian faith and gospel is about. The gospel is about a promise of life.

A promise of life that stands firm even when Paul is facing physical death. Indeed, from beginning to end of the Bible, the promise of life is one way of describing what God is on about.

[7 : 37] In the very opening words, page 1 of the Bible, God creates life. And then he sets up the first people in a garden and in the middle of the garden is a tree of life and through the garden flows a river of life.

God is on about life. But when those people fail God, when they sin and disobey him and don't believe his statements, then he keeps them out of the garden, away from this source of life.

And they face for the first time death and the sting of death because of their sin. But throughout the rest of the Old Testament, God is on about restoring that promise of life to sinful people.

And there are little snippets, cameos, if you like, little pointers and indications to God on about life. He keeps promising life, long life in the land of blessing, for example.

The psalmist talks about walking through the valley of the shadow of death but not fearing anything because he looks forward to living forever in the house of the Lord despite the death that is all around him at the time.

[8 : 46] Periodically, there are such snippets and bits and pieces pointing to that promise of life. But that promise of course reaches full bloom when we get to the New Testament. For there comes Jesus Christ, the one who described himself as the way, the truth and the life, the resurrection and the life, the one who came to give life and in all its abundance to those who believe in him.

Those well-known words from John's Gospel chapter 3 that Jesus came to die so that we wouldn't perish but rather believing in him would have life.

And so Jesus dies but rises as the down payment, the guarantee, the first fruits if you like of resurrected and eternal life.

And then when you get to the last page of the Bible we see again the theme of life rather dominant. A picture of the New Jerusalem, a picture of heaven and there again at the centre is the tree of life and there again flows through it the river of life and now believers in Christ can come freely and live in God's presence.

Yes, it's a fair way of summarising what God is on about, what the Bible is on about, what the Gospel is about. It is the promise of life and that is why Paul faces death but not hopeless death, a death with a sure and certain hope because as Jesus died and rose so too Paul has confidence that the promise of life will stand firm against physical death itself.

[10 : 29] That promise of life is good news indeed to sinners facing the sting of death. Paul knows that Nero's best plans or worst plans we might say cannot thwart or quash or annul that promise of life and so Paul describes himself in that way.

Ironically, yes but truthfully, nonetheless that facing death the promise of life stands firm for him as a believer in Christ.

He then greets Timothy his beloved child he calls him with three gospel expressions. This is a standard way of introducing a letter in the ancient Greek world but the greetings here have given way to Christian expressions or gospel expressions of greeting.

Rather than saying to Timothy greetings he says to Timothy my beloved child grace mercy and peace again wonderful ways of summarising what the gospel is about.

Grace that is a generous gift which we don't deserve or earn or merit salvation or life is a gift of grace which we don't deserve mercy because we're sinners and we need forgiveness so Paul is acknowledging that the promise of life is extended in effect with mercy to sinners who are forgiven and therefore receive this gift of life and peace the fruit of it all not a peace that's a detente a standoff not just a peaceful calm life without any rush or pressure but rather peace with God a restored and harmonious relationship with the living God all three of those things come from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord verse 2 ends notice how Paul here as he does time and again as the New Testament does time and again sees Jesus on a par with God the Father there's no

[12 : 40] God the Father up here and Jesus down the ladder somewhere but Jesus is regarded here as fully the source of grace peace and mercy equal with God the Father there's no place ever for saying that Jesus is somehow a second run deity or just a good person he's fully God as this expression indicates as well as many others well Timothy is the person to whom Paul is writing he came from a place called Lystra in Turkey possibly he was converted there through Paul's own ministry when Paul travelled there on his first missionary journey in the middle chapters of the Acts of the Apostles that may be why Paul calls Timothy my beloved child son in verse 2 that is that Paul is responsible for Timothy coming to Christian faith he's a spiritual father so to speak but it may just be a term of endearment anyway Timothy was picked up by

Paul on his second missionary journey Paul had gone back to Turkey to encourage the churches that he'd visited with Barnabas the first time when he got to Lystra he brought Timothy on board his team so to speak and took him with him as he continued to travel through Turkey and then across to Macedonia down through Thessalonica ultimately to Athens when he was in Athens he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to minister to the church there so Timothy is already regarded as a sort of junior minister so to speak Paul went on to Corinth and then Timothy having ministered in Thessalonica joined Paul later on in Corinth later on again Timothy accompanies Paul back to Jerusalem and quite possibly when Paul is arrested and then after a couple of years imprisonment in Israel or Palestine and sent off to Rome Timothy could well have been with him we know that Timothy was with Paul probably in Rome when he wrote the letters to the Philippians and the

Colossians from prison and probably as I say in Rome from Rome Paul later sent Timothy to Ephesus a church that Paul had founded back in Turkey on the Aegean Sea and there it seems Timothy is at this point in 2 Timothy ministering or pastoring the church that Paul had founded some years before in Ephesus in other places Paul calls him a fellow worker and a servant of the gospel so here is somebody who is dear to Paul somebody who's travelled with him has seen the trials the unreadable unrest the troubles has been with him and seen people converted has followed and seen the model of Paul's example of ministry has followed him to Jerusalem and then to Rome and is now pastoring a church it seems back in Ephesus Paul remembers him fondly he says that in verse 3 I'm grateful to God he says when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day daily he's praying for him giving thanks to

God for him for his life and for his faith no doubt he goes on to say in verse 4 that he recalls his tears perhaps the tears when he sent Timothy from Rome to Ephesus maybe thinking it would be the last time they'd ever see each other Paul in prison knowing that he faced death possibly saying goodbye for the last time recalling your tears he says I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy Timothy may well have been in Ephesus at this stage for a year or two maybe a couple of years since Paul had seen him and later on in this letter he'll say to Timothy come back and visit me in Rome come quickly come before winter maybe Paul fearing the end for him was near in particular the thing about Timothy that he thanks God for and remembers is his sincere faith verse 5 I'm reminded of your sincere faith not that sincerity means faith but here faith that is personally held faith that is genuine that's not counterfeit it's not just an intellectual exercise or something like that it is real faith that

Timothy himself has but the sense of sincere also has the sense of being faithful or persevering that is it's not a faith that's just sprung up for a time and in the first difficulty withered away later on Paul will mention a man called Demas who was a Christian started out for a while but then has given up the faith and gone off as an ex Christian in effect not so for Timothy his faith is sincere that it is lasting this is a faith that keeps on keeping on persevering and enduring regardless of the trials and opposition that is faced by Timothy as it was by Paul as well Timothy is an unusual character in the New Testament because he's a third generation Christian most of the people we come across in the New Testament it seems are first generation Christians that is they're in the first sort of spread of the gospel after the resurrection of

[18 : 08] Jesus they've converted from Judaism or paganism but their parents and their grandparents and so on were obviously not Christians they couldn't have been because they lived before Jesus time but when we get to Timothy and we're now in the 60s AD about 30 years after the resurrection Timothy's mother and his grandmother were both believers were both Christians Paul mentions them in verse 5 I'm reminded of your sincere faith a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now I'm sure lives in you we know a little bit about his mother because in the Acts of the apostles we're told that Timothy's mother Eunice was a Jew but married to a Gentile man a Greek man Timothy hadn't been circumcised as a child therefore and when Paul took him on board in the team he had Timothy circumcised because that would give him a better entree into ministry to the

Jewish people as they travelled and visited synagogues though a Jew clearly his mother Eunice is also a Christian converted to the Christian faith maybe even through Paul's ministry we don't know that and notice the expression that he uses at the end of verse five about Timothy not just that and now I'm sure you have now I'm sure that same faith lives in you you see Christian faith is a living thing it's not an intellectual package it's not a formula it's not some inheritance that's passed down from generation and stored away in a glory box for times to come Christian faith is living faith and it lives in Timothy as it lived in his mother Eunice and as it lived in his grandmother Lois now of course that's an appropriate way of describing Christian faith because in essence it's the promise of life and the promise of life is already living it's not totally something that is a promise for the future but it's already a living faith because

Jesus already lives so faith in a living Jesus is a living faith within the person so a Christian you see is not somebody who's just had some external right of baptism or has been brought up in a Christian household somebody who's received a little formula or believes some intellectual statements about Jesus a Christian is somebody who has within them a living faith in a living Lord now of course it's also an appropriate way of describing Christian faith here because of the threats all around of death with Nero persecution had begun fiercely for the first time against the Christian church and Paul was facing death later on we know that Timothy himself was in prison whether or not he died for his faith we do not know Timothy you see is not a Christian because his mother was one and she brought him up and baptized him as an infant and took him to Sunday school and left him when he got confirmed at the age of 12 he's himself if you look across the page to the bottom right hand corner chapter 3 verse 14

Paul says to Timothy for as for you continue in what you have learned and firmly believed knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus Timothy was taught the Christian faith and now it lives in he left to one side but he was taught it he caught it as well but notice how he's been taught by the scriptures that salvation is found in Jesus Christ and now that lives in him here's a lovely little cameo of a grandmother and a mother and now the son who are Christians Timothy taught perhaps by mum by grandma by St.

Paul by others has come for himself to trust in the same living Lord Jesus as they have done many of you I know from sad experience have children who are really not Christians despite your best efforts at teaching at modeling at encouraging and praying for them they at this stage at least many are not Christians there's no guarantee I guess for Christian parents that despite their best efforts and prayers their children will grow up to be Christians many of you younger parents are in the task now of praying for modeling teaching the Christian faith to your children faith is faith may live in them don't give up but don't just think it will be caught either

[23 : 38] Timothy example is that Christian faith is taught as well as court and more than Sunday school teachers and more than the church and ministers parents have the prime responsibility for bringing up their children as Christians and seeing them come to have a living faith for themselves grandparents of course have a good role as well but parents are the prime role let me encourage you to make sure that you know the faith well that you can teach it to your children I remember when I was about 18 having dinner with a friend and his wife and their four children who were at primary and early secondary school at that time and for the first time in my life I was part of a family devotional time I had never ever seen a family that after the meal read a Bible passage made some comments and they prayed for each other together and

I thought I wish I had this as a child having grown up in a non Christian family well I'm thankful that God despite that has by his grace brought me to Christian faith every family's patterns are different but it seems to me that pattern to be taught the Christian faith well Timothy at this stage is a young perhaps in his 30s I still think that's young just pastor of a church in Ephesus he's facing persecution and he's facing opposition heresy and immorality it seems Paul's giving thanks here is not just a sort of reminiscence of an old man looking back to happy times saying oh yes I remember your grandma and your mother Paul's point in mentioning that is to exhort

Timothy to persevere now there's every reason for Timothy to be timid to be afraid to be a coward facing all this opposition and pressure being only in his 30s after all so Paul says to him in verse 6 for this reason I remind you Paul had laid hands on Timothy as an act of setting him apart or commissioning him for ministry it's still part of the practice of Anglican ordination in the cathedral so that when somebody is ordained deacon or priest hands are laid on them by bishops and maybe other priests as a way of in a sense symbolically transferring or continuing Christian ministry and also seeking the prayers of God to give the gifts of his spirit to his ministers we do the same thing when we commission missionaries and sometimes when we send people out from us to go to other places and sometimes when we pray for leaders of groups and so on

Paul is not saying that he himself could pass on a gift of God's spirit but the means by which God's spirit had come to Timothy especially for his ministry was through the laying on of hands in a sense an ordination type service I guess and commissioning for Timothy notice what the exhortation is it is to rekindle or to keep in full flame God's gift of his spirit two things are being balanced here one is that it is God's gift and God's spirit that is given but on the other hand Timothy has to expend his effort to keep in full flame that gift that is God just doesn't give his spirit and therefore he expects his ministers to sort of sit back and let the spirit do his job there's a sense in which God gives the spirit that's required but Timothy's responsibility is to keep it in full flame to expend effort so there's two things there's human effort being expended as well as

God's enabling and equipping spirit being given and both things are needed and both things are mentioned in verse six in this exhortation three implications of God's spirit are brought out in verse seven there are many other things that God's spirit does many other ways in which he equips but for Timothy three in particular are appropriate they are in effect the effect of God giving his Holy Spirit for Timothy's ministry and mission work in particular in Ephesus the first thing he says and he makes it emphatic is that God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but a spirit of power that is the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit given does not make you a coward or timid but rather gives you power now for Timothy with the difficulties of persecuting Roman Empire difficulties of ministry and Ephesus and some of those will come out in the words and verses and chapters that follow there was every temptation to shrink back from proclaiming fully the gospel to shrink back in the face of opposition and temptation and disappointments and so on but a feature an essential feature of

[29 : 06] God's spirit being given is that it is given with power not power to perform miracles or power to become an overbearing dominant leader but rather power to proclaim the gospel in season and out of season regardless of the opposition the persecution and the difficulties that are faced power to persevere despite the opposition that's what the very next verse goes on to say don't be ashamed then of testimony about our Lord that's God's spirit's power at work not being ashamed being able to persevere despite the opposition that is faced there is no reason for any Christian ever to shrink from the gospel and to shrink from proclaiming it because God has given us not just Timothy not just Paul but us Christians all God's spirit of power even to death as Paul now faces it and Timothy perhaps later did there is no cause for being afraid or a coward or timid it may have been that

Timothy's own personal nature was to be timid some commentaries talk about him being timid Timothy sounds nice there may be some truth in it but certainly just in his ministry situation regardless of his nature there'd be every temptation to be timid in the face of opposition the second mark is love love is the first of the lists of the fruit of the spirit that Paul writes about in another place preeminent amongst all things as he talks about in 1 Corinthians 13 when God's spirit is poured into our hearts love is the result as he describes in the letter to the Romans maybe Timothy was finding it difficult to love these difficult Ephesians we're not sure but for Timothy as the pastor of a church in Ephesus love was to be indispensable for him and the third thing that's mentioned is self discipline the word conveys a number of ideas it's not just self discipline in the sense of living a fairly rigorous life though that's part of it it's exercising wise judgment and discernment a sound mind not letting your head run away being a level headed sort of person a prudent person that's the idea behind this expression here

God's spirit will manifest itself with such character and how I know that that's necessary in ministry Paul's not exhorting Timothy here to dig into his personal reserves he's not saying Timothy come on you're a bold person don't be timid he's not saying to Timothy come on you've got love dig deep into your heart and find it he's rather directing Timothy to God's equipping because it's God's power it's God's love and it's God's discipline that Timothy is to use and be equipped by well these characteristics of power love and self discipline are not purely for ordained or pastoral ministry the Holy Spirit is given to each and every Christian it's the same spirit that was given to Timothy as well so even for those who are Sunday school teachers those who lead Bible studies Seb's and girls club and so on there's a sense in which this stands for you as well the same ministry is being exercised in different ways by each of you in different areas the same spirit is given to equip

God doesn't leave his people resourceless when he calls them to exercise ministry but he equips them by his spirit with power love and self discipline let me say too that these verses have a special place for me I guess I was mentored for a while by a person called Paul as it happened who'd sometimes jokingly call me young Timothy he was the person who first challenged me to consider ordination when I was 19 years old and when I left his ministry and came back to Melbourne from interstate these are the verses he gave to me when I left verse 7 God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self discipline by nature I think in many ways I am a fairly timid person by nature I think in many ways I don't find it easy to love and by nature in many ways I badly lack self discipline but these verses have been a constant encouragement to me to rely on and use God's enabling spirit and not my own strength and ability ministry these verses encourage me to remember that God has called me to ministry but he promises to equip me for it as well these verses encourage me to be bold for the sake of the gospel and these verses encourage me to persevere for the sake of the gospel

I think the same application also applies for the church which is why these personal words to Timothy stand in holy scripture today we as a church have the same spirit given to us which means that we have no cause not to be powerful and bold in proclaiming the gospel sharing our faith in a world that is often apathetic indifferent and sometimes directly in opposition we as a church have the same spirit of love that means we must at all times and with all people be loving as God is and that means in particular to people that are unlovable and people that are strangers and newcomers to us and thirdly God has given us as a church that same spirit that manifests itself in self-discipline in wise judgment in discernment in prudence in being level-headed we are to thank God for his spirit individually and as a church and we are I think to do what

[35 : 36] Paul exhorts Timothy to do as well to keep in full flame that same spirit that we may be marked by power love and self discipline all for the promise of life in Christ Jesus Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen God