

Someone said to me this past week, “You know, a lot of people are discouraged right now.” So I said, “I know, that’s why I’ve been preaching on persecution.” I was kidding but I was also serious. Understood correctly, persecution trains us to endure. Persecution equips us to not shrink back. And we need to be trained and equipped or else something like discouragement will take hold of us and not let go.

Do you ever have concerns about any of these things? Might one or more of these be a reason for discouragement?

FEAR
SHAME
SUFFERING
BETRAYAL
DEATH

Paul dealt with all of these topics in the first chapter of his second letter to dear friend, Timothy. Let’s read it and then dig deep so we can turn discouragement into encouragement.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,

²To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

⁸ Therefore **do not be ashamed** of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his **prisoner**, but share in **suffering for the gospel** by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹² **which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed**, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. ¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

¹⁵ You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶ May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, ¹⁷ but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—¹⁸ may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

By the time Paul wrote this letter, he and Timothy had been doing ministry together for at least sixteen years. Timothy was almost certainly a teenager when Paul first met him. Paul had rejected Mark because Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas, but there was something very special about this Timothy kid, enough that he invited Timothy to join he and Silas. And now sixteen years later Paul wrote to Timothy about his sincere faith. The word for sincere means anti-hypocritical. That's a high compliment if someone says to you, "You have an anti-hypocritical faith. What I see displayed in your life is the very opposite of hypocrisy." How does one get from fear, suffering, shame, betrayal and death to an anti-hypocritical faith?

The key comes in verse 12—*I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able*. It really is that simple—belief in who Jesus is and what he has done. And not just a belief about some facts or data. An overwhelmingly convincing faith in Jesus. "I know whom I have believed"—Jesus is the object of our faith. Our faith in him is tied up in his faithfulness.

It's a simple illustration I have used before but it's useful. Not one person walked into the sanctuary this morning tip toeing lightly because they were afraid the floor was going to cave in. Not one person. Some of you did see the floor being built. I know I did, in fact I ruined my wrist pounding nails through the floorboards and into the joists. But most of you didn't see the floor being built, so why were you so confident when you walked in? Even though on rare occasions floors do cave in and balconies do collapse killing dozens of people, you instinctively understood that floors have inherent integrity. You trusted in the faithfulness of the floor. If we were to use Paul's language, we would have said, "I know in what I believe and I am convinced that this floor is rock solid and will bear all of this weight." The important thing to note is that your faith is outside of yourself. It's not faith in your own faith or faith in your ability to believe. Your faith has an external object—the integrity and repeated faithfulness of the floor itself.

This is how it works with our faith. Our faith is in the integrity and faithfulness of Christ. If you don't know what Christ has done for us, you will never have total confidence in his faithfulness. Tell me this. Will the sun rise tomorrow? The mathematical probability of a sunrise tomorrow is

effectively 100%. Christians know that one day the heavens and earth will be destroyed and even unbelievers understand that one day the sun will die or the earth will lose its orbit. But I can guarantee you that the sun will rise tomorrow because it has always risen. As believers we need to develop our understanding of God that will give us just as much certainty until we can all say, *I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able.*

So just from this text let's see what Jesus has already done so that we can build our certainty. While we are always aiming at certainty, I want you to understand that we also leave room for healthy doubts along the way. Unhealthy doubt is doubt with no attempt at a resolution. The doubt just sits with you and can grow like a cancer in your heart. Healthy doubt is doubt and questions that you are at least attempting to find answers for. In our pursuit of certainty, we must also leave room for lament and sorrow. At least a third of the Psalms are Psalms of lament where the writer literally cries, and cries out to the Lord. A lament has God-oriented complaint built into it as well. A lament really is a healthy doubt. A lament is doubt and sorrow that are working toward a resolution in God himself. So certainty, yes, but it doesn't not have to be a perfect pursuit of certainty that does not allow for our frailty and weakness.

- *who saved us and called us to a holy calling*

This is a mere summary. Paul summarized all of Jesus' saving work into three words—who saved us. That phrase is pregnant with meaning and significance. Paul assumes that we can fill in the missing gaps. He assumes that we have a full grasp of Jesus' saving work and that we are in perpetual awe of it. But for now, he just summarized it. But even with this summary there's a lot more here.

- *not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace*

Not because of our works. This fact is essential to true saving faith. In fact as I have been implying, faith is not faith if it depends on us and our works. In order to walk across this floor. I don't "do" anything. I am powerless except to acknowledge the integrity of the floor. Either we get credit for some of our salvation or God does it all. If we want even 1% credit it ceases to be faith.

It's not because of our works but because of "his own purpose and grace." This is not just a negation of our works but a positive statement on God's sovereign purpose. In other words, Jesus didn't just do the work of salvation, he planned it all out according to his sovereign purpose. and of course this makes perfect sense. Salvation of mankind can't possibly be an afterthought.

That's why I have always been bothered by the story of the bridle master and his son. You've heard it, right? The young son is walking along the tracks when the father sees his son get his foot caught in the tracks. A train is fast approaching where his son is stuck but if the father switches the track, it will lead two trains into a head on collision. So either the father causes hundreds to die or else he sacrifices his son. It is usually told with a lot more emotion than that, but this story is nothing like the gospel. Yes, there is sacrifice in the story, but the father is caught off guard. He never saw it coming. Everything about the story is accidental.

Does this story sound like verse nine to you?

- *which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*

Salvation was God’s eternal plan, in its scope and specificity. In its scope, it was large—it impacted the entire world throughout time. In its specificity, it was personal. He chose individual people for the gift of salvation. Each was chosen from before the foundation of the world. No surprises. No afterthoughts. No wringing of hands in heaven and last minute rescue missions. He accomplished salvation “before the ages began.”

- *and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus,*

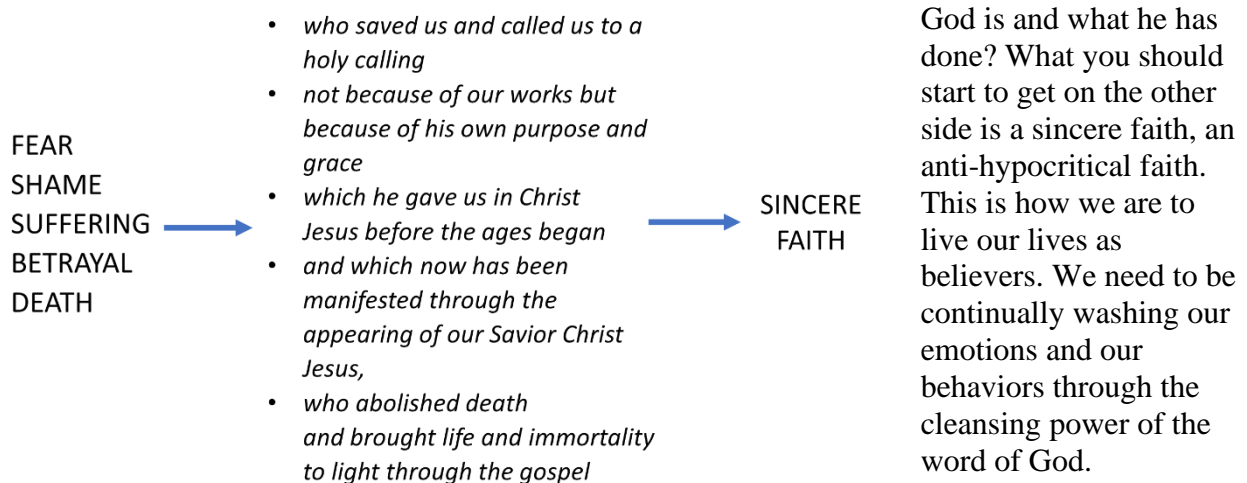
It was planned and then executed with precise precision timing, all according to God’s purpose. It’s hard to imagine God’s purposes and plans. When did he decide to create? He created man and woman without sin. They turned their backs on their Creator and were cast from the garden. He called Abraham out of a pagan land and led him to the Promised Land. Four hundred years in slavery. Moses and the law. Prophets come and go. Kings rise and fall. Then it’s quiet. Time marches forward but God’s word is silent. Then salvation was manifested through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ.

- *who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*

Jesus abolished death. In other words, he put death to death and in so doing, he brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

This is who Jesus is and what he has done. It’s what makes him perfect and infinite. It’s what makes him full of integrity and faithfulness. It’s why we can *know whom we have believed, and are convinced that he is able*. That’s faith. That’s belief in Christ. Now we need to see how belief in the object of our faith leads to a sincere faith—an anti-hypocritical faith. How do we live based on who Christ is and what he has done?

I want to walk you through the expressions of faith in Paul and his beloved child, Timothy. Here’s what we need to do. We need to take all of these heavy issues and run them through the truth of Scripture. For example, what happens when you wash FEAR through the truths of who



1. Thank God in every circumstance.

Paul thanked God while he was in prison. How likely would we be to be thankful while in prison? I don't thank God for flat tires or when I hit a deer thanking God doesn't come easy for me let alone if I was in prison. But Paul could genuinely thank God. But Paul was able to thank God while in prison because he practiced this: I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that he is able..." He knew that Jesus abolished death. He knew all of these gospel truths in the deepest parts of his heart and mind and reminded himself of them continually.

Also, this is what Paul was doing when he wrote this letter to Timothy. "He lived there [under house arrest guarded by a Roman soldier] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

Paul had the same mindset as Richard Wurmbrand during his fourteen years in a Romanian, prison. "It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their [the communists'] terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy."¹

2. Practice disciplined prayer.

Paul prayed constantly, night and day. He would mention Timothy by name. It was a discipline that he probably developed as a Pharisee but carried over into his work as an apostle and preacher.

3. Share a deep partnership with fellow believers.

This letter was written 15-16 years after Timothy first joined Paul. As I said, Timothy was almost certainly a teenager when Paul first met him. In verse four we learn that Timothy must have cried the last time the two had parted and Paul longs to see his partner in the gospel. Do you have any partnerships like this? I don't mean a friend or a relative but a gospel partner? Someone with whom you have walked shoulder to shoulder with in hard ministry. You've been in the ministry trenches with them and keep going back in for more. Do you have a ministry partner like that?

4. Do not be afraid.

for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

The person who said told me that many are discouraged most likely had fear and fears in mind when he said this. Fear and uncertainty lead to discouragement. We have a built in process in this chapter for handling our fears. Work your fears through these truths.

- *who saved us and called us to a holy calling*
- *not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace*
- *which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*
- *and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus,*
- *who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*

We are afraid when we don't have control over situations but does this sound like a God who is not in control? We have fear when we don't know if people have our back or not, but does this sound like a God who is not intimately involved in our lives? We have fear when the future is unknown, but does this sound like a God who is merely making a good guess about the future?

5. Do not be ashamed of Christ.

Shame is a key theme in this chapter.

- ⁸ *Therefore **do not be ashamed** of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his **prisoner**,*
- ¹² *But **I am not ashamed**, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.*
- ¹⁶ *May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains*

In this context, shame is almost identical to fear. Those who are ashamed feel this way because they want to avoid persecution. When persecution eventually comes our way—and I mean serious persecution—how will we respond? Will we shrink back? By the way, being ashamed of suffering believers is the same as being ashamed of Jesus.

Paul was so encouraged by those who were not ashamed of his chains because most were. *You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me.* I can't imagine this giant of the faith being largely abandoned at the end of his life. The betrayal was layered on top of the persecution which was layered on top of the suffering. Onesiphorus helped him when he was able. Luke was currently with Paul when he wrote this letter. Timothy and Mark were to come soon but beyond that, he was abandoned by his brothers.

Do you know the people who don't abandon their brothers? Soldiers in the heat of battle do not abandon one another. Battle hardens the bonds of fellowship like nothing else. The most cowardly soldier turns brave when he marches shoulder to shoulder with his brothers. Could it be that we shrink back from persecuted believers because we are not aware that we are actually in a battle? At the end of Ephesians, Paul wrote: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

I have a good friend who has been a police officer in Chicago for over twenty years and serves downtown as a bike cop. I was texting him yesterday and among other things he texted, "This is spiritual warfare." So here's a cop who has been in the midst of riots this past summer who carries the authority of the entire Chicago Police Department with him. His sidearm is a 40 caliber Smith & Wesson with multiple magazines and at a moment's notice he can have a team of officers backing him up. Despite that military grade help, he understands that the main battle is a spiritual battle. He really gets it.

Ours is not the domain of handguns, AR-15s and Abrams tanks. This is the domain of prayer and the Word. This is why Paul prayed night and day. This is why Paul encouraged Timothy to "follow the pattern of the sound words" and to "guard the good deposit entrusted to you." That's the Word and prayer. These are the weapons for a spiritual battle. This battle is always raging, 24/7, 365 days of the year. There is a visible reality and an invisible reality that is every bit as

real. Just because we can't see the enemy does not mean it is any less real. Not only is the unseen just as real, it is the real source of the battle. When we do battle against flesh and blood, the unseen enemy is commanding the war.

Last Sunday I challenged you to pray for your enemies every day for seven days. Several told me they were doing this and it was helpful—and hard. But why should we pray for our enemies if the true enemy is not a flesh and blood enemy? The unseen enemy always has a flesh and blood face to him or her. This is why Jesus commands us to pray for real people in the invisible war. This can change our hearts, as some of you experienced this week. If we can see and understand this battle, I think we might be more likely to stand together.

6. Share in suffering.

Paul's answer to not being ashamed is absolutely perfect. *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.* It's not enough to not shrink back but we are called to share in the suffering of our fellow saints. Again, this is what a band of brothers and sisters do for one another in the heat of battle. I love the fact that sharing in suffering is just one Greek word. Some of your translations read, *Join with me in suffering.* That's all just one word. It's cool that such a word even exists—that there is a need for a single word which calls us to join our Christian brothers in suffering for the gospel.

Don't shrink back. Don't be ashamed but instead, share in suffering with me for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of Jesus, for the sake of your brothers and sisters in Christ. But such things are impossible! It's one thing to pray for an enemy who lives a thousand miles away but it's much harder to physically suffer in the here and now. Of course it's impossible. Loving an enemy is impossible. Suffering at the hands of an enemy is impossible. That impossibility is meant to drive us to Jesus, to wave the white flag and trust in his faithfulness and not our own.

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¹ Richard Wurmbrand, Tortured for Christ.