

Entrusted with the Gospel

2 Timothy 1:1-7

29 July 2018 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: Why did Paul write this letter?

Big Idea: Thank God for faithful brothers and sisters.

Introduction

A few weeks before he died, poet and playwright Oscar Wilde was pretty much broke.

Most of his friends had abandoned him.

As he lay on his bed in a cheap hotel in Paris, he famously quipped,

“This wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. Either it goes or I do.”

Famous last words.

Have you ever thought about what you'd like your last words to be?

They probably won't be famous.

Perhaps you dream of being like Oscar Wilde, having something pithy and witty to say in the face of death.

Sadly, others want one last opportunity to shake their fists at God and the world.

Most of us, I suspect, hope to have the opportunity to say goodbye to our loved ones, telling them how much we love them.

The apostle Paul's last words are even more famous Wilde's.

Actually, there are a number of similarities between how Paul and Oscar Wilde spent their last days.

Neither of them had a penny to his name.

They'd both been abandoned by their friends.

Rather than being in a dingy French hotel though, Paul's accommodation was a Roman gaol.

The book in the Bible that we know as 2 Timothy contains Paul's last words.

Well, as far as we know, this was the last thing he wrote.

It's a letter - you can see that it begins in verses 1 and 2 with the kind of standard introduction that was used in letters in the ancient world.

Paul's words mightn't be as funny as Wilde's, but they're far more profound.

Paul was a big cheese in the early church.

In fact, other than Jesus, he's probably the greatest theologian that's ever lived.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote about half of the books in the New Testament.

He was an apostle, "by the will of God", we're told in verse 1.

That means he was given a mission to testify about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

It wasn't his choice. Being an apostle wasn't part of his life plan.

He didn't wake up one day and decide to become an apostle.

The risen Jesus miraculously appeared to him on the road to Damascus, personally selecting him and personally giving him a mission.

The mission he was given was to preach the greatest message that the world has ever heard.

He was sent to tell people the good news that our sins can be forgiven and we can have a new life.

Not just a physical existence now, but the promise of a fresh start by being united with Christ.

Because of sin, God cut human beings off from the tree of life.

Yet we are willing to accept Jesus' death on our behalf to pay for our sin, then we can have hope that we will live with God forever in the new heavens and new earth.

We call this message the gospel.

The gospel is such great news because it's a powerful message, an inspirational message.

A truth that had the power to change people's lives when they first heard it.

And the same message continues to change people's lives today, moving sinners from the realm of death into the realm of life.

Jesus sent Paul to proclaim this glorious message throughout the whole world.

And not just to Jewish people who were scattered everywhere, but to the gentiles, that is non-Israelites, as well.

Listen to the words at his commissioning service in Acts 9:

Acts 9:15 (NIV11) ¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

It was hard, difficult work.

Paul was warned from the outset that this mission would be costly.

In the next verse, we read:

Acts 9:16 (NIV11) ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Right from the very beginning, he had people after his life.

We read in Acts 9 that the Jews in Damascus were pretty cranky at what he was preaching.

They put out a contract on his life and the only way he was able to escape was being lowered down the city walls in a basket in the middle of the night.

He was shouted at and abused, often by the people who were meant to be his friends.¹

There were times he was hungry, cold and naked.

He was flogged, including being receiving 39 lashes from the Jews on at least five occasions.

He was shipwrecked not once, or twice, but three times.

Because of his efforts the gospel message spread far and wide.

He took the gospel a long way, to all sorts of places.

It started out in little old Israel and he was able to take the good news about Jesus all around Greece and Turkey.

He was sent out by the church in Antioch on three missionary journeys.

People were converted and churches were planted in towns and cities around the known world.

He got to take the gospel all the way to the city of Rome – first by letter and then in person.

He'd even had the opportunity – as we're told in Philippians 1 – to share the gospel with all the guards in Caesar's palace.

Under God, Paul had managed to achieve so much.

He was a man with ministry runs on the board.

But as he writes these famous last words, that'd all come to an end.

Paul was in gaol. It's not like he hasn't been in gaol before.

He'd been arrested and put in prison more times than we know.

The Acts of the Apostles ends with him under house arrest.

Somehow though, he was released to continue ministering.

He was like the proverbial cat with nine lives.

But this time it's different.

This time he knows that he's not going to be getting out.

He's on death row.

The Bible doesn't tell us how Paul died, however fairly reliable tradition says that he was beheaded (as befitted a Roman citizen) on the Ostian Way, about 3 miles from Rome.

Sitting on death row would cause even the most convinced and convicted person to reflect on their life and ministry.

What would Paul's legacy be?

Another man would've been worried about where the church – his life's work – was headed.

There were plenty more battles still left to be won.

There was trouble from outside the church – Alexander the metalworker did his best to cause trouble (4:14).

There was sabotage from inside the church – like Hymenaeus and Philetus who were leading people astray by teaching that the resurrection of believers had already taken place (3:17-18).

Was it worth all the cost and sacrifice?

He'd devoted his life to building the church.

Would it survive or would it be annihilated after he was gone?

Was it going to be game over?

Obviously, the answer to that is "no".

Otherwise our church wouldn't be here proclaiming the same gospel that Paul did, some two thousand years later.

But he didn't know that.

At the time, he must've wondered if the cost was worth it.

One of my favourite books is an autobiography of an Australian named Bert Facey.

He had a really tough life.

He was booted out of home at 6 years old and sent off to work for a cruel boss who literally whipped him within an inch of his life.

Abandoned by his family, he was left to make his own way in the world.

He signed up for the army and experienced the tragedy of Gallipoli first hand.

Most of his life was a battle against the odds, and yet he titled his book, *A Fortunate Life*.

That's what it was like for Paul.

He didn't have any regrets.

He knows that he served the Lord faithfully, verse 3.

Being in gaol for the sake of the gospel discredited him in the eyes of many.

But he writes that he has a clear conscience, presumably words he wrote with a clear conscience, because he knew he'd been faithful to his Lord and his mission.

He knows that even though he's in gaol and about to lose his life, he's going to gain something much better – eternity with Christ.

His life is safe in Jesus.

He also knows that the success of the church doesn't just depend on him.

Actually, it never had.

God has this. Jesus will build his church.

Paul had run his race, but now the gospel had to be entrusted to others.

It was time for the gospel baton to be passed to the next generation.

One of the key people who will carry on his gospel work is Timothy, who he describes as his "dear son" in verse 2.

That doesn't mean that he's Timothy's biological father.

We know from Acts 16 that his father was a Greek, not a Jew.

Paul was his spiritual father.

We don't know for sure whether Tim was saved when Paul first brought the gospel to his hometown of Lystra.

By the time he came back though, he was already known as a man of faith and so Paul took him on as his left-hand man.

Timothy was his padawan, he was basically apprenticed to Paul – learning how to do ministry with on-the-job training.

He'd travelled with him on both his second and third missionary journeys.

Timmo helped Paul to write the letters to the churches in Philippi, Colossae and Thessalonica, as well as to Philemon.

He'd undertaken a number of special assignments.

He was sent to Corinth to help the church there.

Paul had left him behind in the church in Ephesus to try and clean up the mess in the church – which is why he wrote the first letter to Timothy.

These last words are a final farewell letter written from Paul to his protégé.

As the gospel baton passes to Timothy, Paul writes to encourage him.

Paul knows first-hand the kind of challenges he's going to face.

He encourages him to stand firm in the gospel, even in the face of strong opposition.

He's been entrusted with the gospel.

That means believing it, defending it and most importantly, living it.

Unlike most of the letters in the New Testament written to churches, this is a personal letter.

So, it might seem odd to be reading someone else's mail and spending time studying it.

But it was always meant to be an open letter too.

It finishes with a greeting to more than one person:

2 Timothy 4:22 (NIV11) ²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you[se] all.

This is a letter that has relevance to all of us who have been entrusted with the gospel.

Outline

Let's get into our passage this morning.

2 Timothy is an interesting book and just about everyone divides it up differently.

We're going to be ignoring the paragraphs that might be in your Bible translation and just looking at the first seven verses this morning.

The big idea is that we thank God for faithful brothers and sisters.

The success of the gospel doesn't depend on any individual, but God uses faithful individuals to share the gospel.

- Remember who you are (1:3-5)
- Rely on God's Spirit (1:6-7)

Remember who you are (1:3-5)

Paul begins by reflecting on Timothy's character.

He knows this man and his character.

Tim's a man of faith and he wants Timothy to remember who he is.

Just as importantly, Paul thanks God for his faith.

Verses 3-5 are one long sentence in the original Greek and they focus on remembering.

Remembering comes up three times.

Locked up in gaol, we presume that Paul probably had a lot of time to remember.

But more than just remembering, this remembering leads to thanks.

Firstly, Paul remembers Timothy in prayer.

Paul might be on death row, he might be locked up in prison, restrained in shackles, but that doesn't mean his ministry is over.

His days of planting new churches in cities and opening up new frontiers for the sake of the gospel are done.

But that doesn't stop him from being able to pray.

As he remembers Timothy and who he is, he's driven to minister by praying for him.

I thank God for prayer warriors in the church.

People who pour out their hearts to God Almighty, interceding on behalf of others.

Often, but not always, they're the older people in the church who aren't distracted so much by being busy and so dedicate their time to praying.

I'm especially thankful for older people in other churches who I know pray for me regularly.

Because I need it.

Some people get older and they think, "Leave the religion to the young ones. We've had our time."

I thank God for those who are such blessing by using their time and energy to pray.

I suspect that most of us feel at least a little bit guilty when we read that Paul prayed constantly day and night.

Do you? I certainly do.

I'm not convinced that it means that Paul spent every waking (and sleeping) moment praying.

However, it does mean that he was committed, dedicated, to the task.

In my experience, I find it hardest to pray when my prayers are too small.

When I'm focused on my own little world, I struggle to pray to God.

Paul's prayers weren't focused on himself – his first concern wasn't his own comfort – that he'd be released from gaol or even that he'd avoid a painful death.

Aren't those the kind of prayers that we often turn to though?

They were prayers for Timothy fuelled by the gospel.

When the gospel is at the heart of our prayers, we have the greatest motivation in the world.

When my prayers are driven by the gospel, that's when I find it enjoyable, desirable to pray.

The second thing that Paul remembers are Timothy's tears.

Some people have cheekily suggested that that his tears might've been because his mother's name was Eunice.

Of course, that would be uncharitable and offensive to anyone named Eunice, so I certainly wouldn't make such a comment.

Others have suggested that his tears might've been because of the difficulties of ministry.

What in ministry could possibly bring him to tears, you might wonder?

Hmmm. Let me think about that for a moment.

Perhaps it's seeing people walk away from the faith.

It could be the false accusations that are levelled against him.

Maybe his own feelings of inadequacy, being painfully aware of the sin in his life.

It's enough to drive anyone to tears, but I don't think that's why Timothy cried.

I think that it's that he's losing his mentor.

This man who he loves dearly is going.

Timothy has a big heart, he cares especially for his mentor.

Paul's pain and struggle weight Timmo down.

So, at the end of the letter, he asks Timothy to make arrangements to come and visit him.

Paul longs to see Timothy again so that they will both be filled with joy and be encouraged.

The third thing he remembers is Tim's faith.

Timothy was a man who truly trusted in God.

He wasn't a fake and a phony. A fair-weather friend of Jesus.

Timothy had been through many challenging times, but unlike many others, when his faith was tested, Timothy continued to trust in the Lord.

It doesn't just matter *that* you trust.

What you trust in is just as important.

Christians trust in Jesus because his power has been proven by God raising him from the dead.

If God is powerful enough to raise Jesus from the dead, he can raise us from the dead too.

Muslims, on the other hand, hope that Allah will be merciful to them, but they don't have any certainty.

On this point, these two world religions are worlds apart.

In the early days of the church, there was deep scepticism amongst the Jews and the Romans about what people like Paul and Timothy were teaching.

Many saw Christianity as a new religion, kind of like Judaism, but different.

When Paul comes before Governor Felix in Acts 24, the Jews accuse him of being part of a sect.

Paul gives his defence:

Acts 24:14–16 (NIV11) ¹⁴ However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, ¹⁵ and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶ So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

Paul understood that he served the same God the Jewish people had always had.

He makes clear in verse 3 that he serves the same God as his ancestors did.

Just as Timothy served the same God his ancestors had.

Paul recognises that Timothy has the same faith as his mother and grandmother.

We know for sure that his mother was converted to Christ because she's called a believer in Acts 16.

We don't know about his grandmother, though she could've been a believer too.

But the point is the same regardless.

Regardless of whether his grandmother even had the opportunity to trust in Jesus, Timothy trusted the same God she did.

Timothy isn't off the tracks, on-board with some new-fangled religion.

He believes in Jesus the one who fulfilled all of God's great promises.

In 3:15, we find out that he'd been taught the Old Testament Scriptures from an early age.

What a great heritage to have.

I bet when Timothy first heard the gospel, all the pieces of the Old Testament fell into place.

He would've seen how the whole writings, the Psalms and the prophets all pointed to Christ.

As Paul reflects on his young charge, he doesn't just pray.

He gives thanks to God.

Because he knows who Timothy is – a faithful man of God.

So he knows that the gospel has been entrusted to a safe pair of hands – and more importantly, a faithful mouth to proclaim truth.

We have a pretty unique church.

We share our lives with brothers and sisters who love the Lord, friends who trust the gospel.

Here we have a body of believers who are firmly grounded in the gospel, not chasing after the latest, spiritual fashion.

More than that, our church is full of people who remind each other of the gospel and point one another to Jesus when we're struggling.

We're surrounded by Christians who believe the Bible and who gently and faithfully point out to us when we're in error and call us back to Christ.

That's an amazing blessing.

Sadly, that doesn't happen everywhere.

When I think of you all and your faithfulness, I thank God for you.

I trust that you are thankful to God for one another too.

Rely on God's Spirit (1:6-7)

Having given thanks to God for who Timothy is, he goes on to remind Timothy of what he needs to do.

Paul encourages him to rely on God's Spirit.

Because he has a sincere faith, he needs to fan the flame to the gift he's been given.

Verse 6:

2 Timothy 1:6 (NIV11) ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

No one quite knows for sure what the gift is that Paul's talking about in this verse.

It's not the gift of apostleship, which wasn't passed on from Paul to Timothy.

We're given a hint about what the gift is from the fact that it has something to do with Paul laying hands on Timothy.

In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul told Timmo not to neglect the gift that was given when the elders laid hands on him.

In the verse immediately before, he talks about preaching and teaching.

So, I take it that Paul is talking about the gifts of preaching and teaching the gospel that were confirmed in Timothy when he was ordained by the elders.

It's not enough just to have these gifts though, they also need to be fanned into flame.

Paul's using the metaphor of a fire here.

A fire needs three things to stay alight: heat, fuel and air.

He's particularly picking up on the need for oxygen here.

To get a campfire going, you can use your hat to wave oxygen to the flames.

A blacksmith uses bellows to feed the fire in his forge so that it gets hot enough to heat the metal he's working.

One of the first ever viral videos on the internet showed a bloke who was cranky that his charcoal barbeque took 45 minutes for the charcoal to get hot.

So, he did a number of experiments to see how much he could get the time down.

It speaks to the pyrotechnic in me.

He ended up getting his charcoal barbeque ready in three seconds. By using liquid oxygen.

Some might say that's overkill. I'd say it's fun.

Paul isn't saying that Timothy's gift is waning, but he is saying that it needs to be given oxygen.

The gift needs to be fed.

In other words, Paul is using this metaphor to say that his gifts need to be used.

When it comes to spiritual gifts, they need to be exercised.

Not much, "Use it or lose it," but they don't do much good when they're left sitting on the shelf.

Not all of us are called and gifted to be preachers and teachers.

That's okay.

The Holy Spirit gives all kinds of gifts, all from the same Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:4 (NIV11) ⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that he distributes them as he sees fit.²

The whole reason that the Spirit gives people spiritual gifts is so that the whole church will benefit from them.³

Paul tells us that when someone doesn't use their gifts, the whole body suffers.

They're to be used.

We don't tend to talk a lot about spiritual gifts in our Church.

We certainly don't focus on them like some other parts of the Christian church do.

So, I want to take this opportunity to ask, "How has God uniquely gifted you?"

What skills, preferences and desires has he given you?

How do you use those for the good of the church?

Our gifts need to be exercised for them to be of benefit to the church.

There are lots of reasons that we might not use our gifts.

Some people might not think their gift is needed or there's not room for them.

I trust that if the Spirit has given it, then it is needed.

Others are just plain lazy – they don't use their gifts because even though it's a gift, it can still be hard work.

Or we feel like we're too busy.

Using our gifts costs time and energy.

In Timothy's case, he was probably tempted to be afraid.

There are a number of reasons that he likely felt weak and powerless.

Age worked against him and people didn't take him seriously because of it.⁴

He was a timid bloke who seems to have had a poor constitution.⁵

I get the sense that he was very aware of his own inadequacies.

Are you ever afraid? You might not think of it like that.

How often do you feel like you don't have the right words to say?

Do you get paralysed by thinking that you're not smart enough?

Do you feel like you're not good enough and so God can't use you?

Or you're afraid of the response that you might get.

Perhaps you're worried that the gospel sounds silly to other people.

Paul reminds Timothy that he doesn't need to be afraid though, because he's not working alone.

And we don't either.

Verse 7:

2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV11) ⁷ For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

After he rose from the dead, but just before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem.

He was going, leaving them, but that also meant that the Spirit was coming.

Acts 1:8 (NIV11) ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

We never minister under our own steam... and when we do, it turns out disastrously.

God work in us through his Holy Spirit though.

And so you don't have to be afraid.

You don't have to be timid.

When the Spirit is on your side, you don't have to hold back.

The Holy Spirit gives you the power you need.

Paul reminds the Ephesians of the power that the Spirit gives.

Ephesians 3:16 (NIV11) ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Using the Holy Spirit and God shows his power through our weakness.

But it's not just power he gives.

He also gives us the ability to love when we find that tough, with the kind of self-sacrificial love that Jesus showed at the cross.

He gives us the power to love the unlovely and sometimes, just to care.

And he helps us have the self-control we need to do it.

God doesn't just give his Spirit to the spiritual heavyweights.

This Spirit wasn't just given to Paul or Timothy, but to every believer.

What was true of Paul and Timothy is true of you too.

_____, God hasn't given you a Spirit of fear.

_____, God has given you a Spirit of power.

_____, God has given you a Spirit of love.

_____, God has given you a Spirit of self-control.

I'm not picking on any of those people particularly, I just wanted to make it personal.

We, like Timothy, can trust that as we minister, we can rely on the Spirit of God.

He's the gift given to us, so that we can serve others.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, I give thanks for you, my faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

We, the church, have been entrusted with the greatest gift, the best news that the world has ever heard.

It has the power to change people's lives.

God has not entrusted us with the gospel and then left us alone though.

He's given us his Spirit who works in us so that we can proclaim Christ and live the gospel with confidence. Amen.

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:23ff

² Hebrews 2:4

³ 1 Corinthians 12:7

⁴ 1 Timothy 4:12

⁵ 1 Timothy 5:23

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Big Question: Why did Paul write this letter?

Big Idea: Thank God for faithful brothers and sisters.

Discussion Questions

1. Who was this letter written from and to? What do we know about these people and the relationship between them?
2. How do you think Paul felt about having to entrust the gospel to Timothy?
3. Why did Paul thank God for Timothy?
4. Why did Timothy cry?
5. What are some reasons that your prayers might feel 'flat'? How does the gospel fuel your prayers?
6. What are some of the things about your brothers and sisters in Christ that you're thankful to God for?
7. What was the gift given to Timothy?
8. What did Paul mean when he told Timothy to "fan into flame the gift of God"?
9. What are some reasons why you don't exercise the gifts the Spirit has given you to help build up Christ's body? List some reasons to use them.
10. How does the Holy Spirit help us in our ministry?
11. Why do we need power, love and self-discipline for ministry?