

2 Timothy 1:1-12, 2:8-13
ReKindle Evangelism

NOTE: This was the first sermon preached as the new pastor of FBC Gonzales. It began a sermon series from 2 Timothy entitled “ReKindle.” The series’ thematic verses was 2 Timothy 1:6-7.

My Alma Mater, East Texas Baptist University (ETBU), has a lamppost outside its administrative building. Installed in 1932, It is said to be the light that never dies. It is a symbol of the university, as I recall, showing the world that the school will carry the light of Christ throughout the world.

This is the goal of the Christian life is it not? We say it in different ways. We are on fire for God. Or this little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.

It does not seem that Timothy is letting his light shine. It seems that Paul is inferring that Timothy has been acting like a coward or at least is being tempted to be a coward.

2 Tim. 1:6-7: “For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (NRSV).

Paul reminds Timothy that this is not how his grandmother and mother raised him. This is not how Paul taught him. This is not who he is supposed to be. Don’t have a spirit of cowardice but have a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.

I don’t know about you, but the biggest hurt to me would be someone telling me like Paul tells Timothy. Invoking the names of my family and saying “you know better.” Having someone disappointed in me is much worse than someone being angry with me. There is some psychology to back my feelings. Disappointment is when something does not live up to our expectations. Some psychologists will say that disappointment happens when we become so stressed about something not living up to our expectations that we lack the energy to be angry. When we feel disappointment, it’s almost as if we are too upset to even be angry. So to turn that on its head, when someone says they are disappointed in you, they are so upset at you that they can’t even muster the energy to lash out in anger.

-With Paul not speaking in anger, as he is known to do, it seems that Paul is disappointed in Timothy. Paul tells Timothy that he is not living up to the faith which Eunice, Lois, and Paul instilled in him. Do not be a coward but be strong and loving and in control.

What did Timothy do that led to Paul’s provocative statement in verse 7?

-Did he have some type of moral failure?

1 Timothy indicates that Timothy was ministering in Ephesus at the time. Ephesus was a worldly city with trade and commerce coming in from all around the world. We know of literature and inscriptions concerning worship of Aphrodite in Ephesus. Had Timothy fallen into moral failure?

Nothing seems to indicate this.

-Had he just gotten distracted?

Ephesus was known for its gymnasiums and baths. It was a place with lots of activities, lots of athletic events to participate in, lots of opportunity to just get busy.

-Had he gone AWOL? Was he holding back from preaching the gospel?

Again, knowing what we can know about Ephesus, temples to other gods and goddesses were found throughout the city. Had Timothy begun to worship idols? Had he become a coward and gone along to get along. With Paul in prison, was he having second thoughts about this Christianity thing?

Possibly, a spirit of cowardice would fit with the shame Paul is telling Timothy not to have.

-Keep sharing the gospel even though circumstances look bad now. I might be in prison, chained like a criminal, but this is how they treated our Lord as well, and the gospel can never be chained.

-It doesn't seem to me that any of these are the reason Paul is asserting that Timothy's fire is on low heat, simmering and in danger of growing cold. The answer I believe lies in verses 8-9.

Not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.

Do not be ashamed. There's only one reason you say that to someone. They're acting ashamed. If Paul stopped here, we'd have to believe that Timothy was running from the work. But Paul doesn't.

2 Tim. 1:8-9: "Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, and this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began..." (NRSV).

Rely on the power of God. Not according to our efforts but the fire that resides inside us.

Paul is emphasizing that in order to suffer for the gospel, it cannot be done by the will of Timothy but must come from the power of God. Timothy is not suffering for the gospel. Timothy is not causing enough good trouble as the late John Lewis might say. Timothy is not suffering because he is not relying on God to do God-sized things in Ephesus. He is doing work which comes from his desires, which are good desires, but they are just not God desires. Timothy is thinking too small and these small projects are not on the Empire's radar. Timothy is playing it safe.

What is Timothy's problem? This wasn't a situation where Timothy fell into a compromising moral situation. This wasn't a situation where Timothy was distracted. This wasn't even a situation where Timothy was being lazy. This was a situation where I think Timothy was trying to do everything himself. And this disappointed Paul. The results were too small because he was doing human size work, not God-size work. This over-reliance on himself led Paul to say that Timothy wasn't given a spirit of cowardice. No. The Holy Spirit which resides in Timothy is powerful, loving, and disciplined. The Spirit isn't a coward. Timothy should not be relying on his own blood, sweat, and tears to do the work. Timothy needed to remember who is doing the work. Timothy needed to remember his first love. Timothy needed to remember that it was the Spirit inside of him which would do work far greater than he could do. He needed to remember the faith that Eunice and Lois had instilled in him.

Do not lose your first love. (Rev. 2:3-4)

-I am more confident that this is what Paul is writing to Timothy because of what Jesus tells the church in Ephesus through John in Revelation 2:3-4

Rev. 2:3-4: “I also know that you are enduring and bearing up for the sake of my name and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (NRSV).

ReKindle your passion for Jesus...

Maybe the fire has cooled over the years. Maybe ferocious flames of faith have turned to cooling coals of malaise. ReKindle the passion you once had.

This is not a call from a new pastor to do more church work. It might be a call to some of you to do less church work. Don't be like Timothy and the church in Ephesus, who was doing the work but didn't have passion anymore. Come back to the strength of the relationship you once had with Christ.

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Do you know what Jesus told the disciples to do when he ascended to heaven? Yes, he gave them the Great Commission. Yes, he told them to be witnesses to peoples near and far. But he also told them to wait. Don't leave Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon you. Don't do anything without the Holy Spirit. But when the Holy Spirit comes and descends on those gathered like a rush of a violent wind and tongues of fire rest upon them? That's when you go. That's when you do as the prophet Joel prophesies about the last days and Peter correctly realizes is happening in this very moment on that day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:17-21 (quoting Joel 2:28-32):

“In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (NRSV).

In the last days...men and women will prophesy, proclaim, preach the good news of Jesus Christ. The young and the old will receive messages from God to share with the community. Rich and poor, even slaves as its put in v 18, will prophesy, proclaim, preach because of the Spirit which has been poured into them. All peoples, who call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved and receive the power of the Holy Spirit. So church, if you are not on fire, if your flame has been turned low, it's time to let God turn it back up. It's time to let your fire get smothered in lighter fluid. It's time to be so burning hot for Jesus that other people are looking at you and thinking,

what's wrong with her? It's time to rekindle the passion you once had. Rekindle the faith that the generations before instilled in you. Rekindle the spirit of power, love, and discipline.

What does it look like when we have let our passion be rekindled for Jesus?

It looks drunk. Being on fire for God looks insane to the world. It makes no sense. You must not be in your right mind. You aren't making normal decisions. Something is up. So you must be inebriated. Something is different about you. You should be different from non-Christians. You should think differently and live differently. And do you know what I find should be the biggest difference? Peace. One on fire for God is not worried about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving lets their requests be known to God. And peace will guard your hearts and minds which are connected with Jesus.

But wait, you may be saying. What does this have to do with evangelism? Everything...Evangelism is not an elevator speech but it is a way of life. Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary. These words are falsely attributed to St. Francis of Assisi but these words are key to the success of Christianity. Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary. Now, I do think using words is necessary but words are meaningless if they are not accompanied by actions. "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams...Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."