

2 Timothy 1:1–14 — A Day of Ruin

*Things in Christ Jesus, the Promise of Life, and Courage for the Assembly's
Dark Hour*

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 1:1–14

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed

unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.”

The Character of the Epistle

This is, as far as can be known, the last epistle that the apostle Paul wrote — his final words preserved in Scripture. What moved the reading of it to mind was 4:11, where Paul writes: “Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.” We had traced Mark’s departure from the work, his restoration as recorded in Colossians 4, and here is the final mention: profitable to Paul in the ministry. In a day of ruin, the man who has failed in service and been restored has an opportunity to contribute something all the more noticeable because so few remain faithful.

But the epistle is much larger than Mark. Its subject is the assembly of God in a day of ruin. It is written to give good courage, and to set before the believer the remedies God has provided for his people in such an hour. When the apostle Paul wrote it, Christian profession was characterized by the rejection of Paul himself, by words that were cancerous and overthrew the faith, by departure and foolishness and apostasy. Yet you would never know it from the first two verses. Those two verses give no hint of how dark the rest of the book will be.

Things That Do Not Change: In Christ Jesus

The expression “in Christ Jesus” appears seven times in this short epistle. The things that are in Christ Jesus do not depend on circumstances. They do not shift with the situation. A brother once pointed out that the things God has put in Christ Jesus are there safely — as though in a vault. Neither Satan, nor demons, nor men, nor even one’s own will can tamper with what is deposited there.

There was a teaching in circulation some years ago called situational ethics — the idea that what is right and what is wrong can change depending on circumstances. The very name conveys the problem. What verse 1 sets before us

are things absolutely independent of situation: the will of God, the promise of life, Jesus Christ himself. These are not situational. In a day when human institutions, human traditions, and human arrangements have failed and are seen to have fatal flaws, the things which are in Christ Jesus remain untouched.

The specific thing mentioned in verse 1 is “the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.” This is not merely a profession of life or a claim to it. Life is a present possession of the believer. It is not what a saved person does — not prayer, not Bible reading, not interest in the things of Christ, though all of those follow from it. It is what makes the difference between a living person and a dead body. And because it is from God, not from the will of the man who has it, it does not depend upon his circumstances or even his own will. Eternal life is granted according to the will of God.

Paul and Timothy: Put in Their Right Places

The two opening verses set Paul and Timothy each in their right place. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. In a day of ruin, he is still an apostle. The will of God is still in effect. The promise of life is still there, and Christ does not change. His apostleship is connected with the will of God, with the promise of life, and with the person of Christ — none of those things have changed. The book could have begun with just his name and Timothy’s. Everything else in those two verses is there to lay a foundation that does not move.

Timothy is addressed as “my dearly beloved son” — in J.N. Darby’s translation, “my beloved child.” Sonship is a word of dignity; child speaks of the father’s love and the fact of begetting. The distinction matters: a son stands in a relationship of honor; a child is a little one in whom the father delights and from whom a family resemblance is expected. If the apostle Paul was Timothy’s father in the faith, then something of Paul should be visible in Timothy. It was through Paul’s preaching that Timothy had been saved; he was Paul’s true child in faith

(1 Timothy 1:2).

In a day of ruin, this placing of each person in his right position carries a moral force. To pretend to be what one is not in such a day is particularly harmful. For Timothy to chafe at being called Paul's child — to insist that he had grown beyond needing such a designation — would have been to be out of the place assigned him by the epistle itself. The lesson is simple and weighty: in a day of ruin, do not pretend. Be exactly what you are. The apostle Paul is not pretending to be anything other than he is. Timothy should not either.

Grace, Mercy, and Peace

The greeting of verse 2 differs from Paul's other epistles in adding mercy to grace and peace. In the pastoral epistles — 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus — all three appear together. In the day of ruin that 2 Timothy especially addresses, grace, mercy, and peace are precisely what is needed. Without them, the case would be hopeless. Grace is God for us, and all that he is, in spite of all that we are. Mercy has more reference to us and our unworthiness. And peace — from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord — is the settled rest that rests on both.

Life and Immortality Brought to Light

Verses 9 and 10 reach back before the world and forward to the gospel. God saved us and called us with a holy calling not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. This is before time itself. And what was given before the world began is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Before the gospel, believers had the faith of resurrection — Job had it, Mary had it. But the understanding was general and sometimes imprecise. What the gospel has done is bring life and immortality to light — to shed full clarity upon what

was previously in shadow. The resurrection of Christ from among the dead (not a general resurrection, but a resurrection from among the dead, the out-resurrection) is the great clarifying event. He is the firstfruits of those that slept; afterwards they that are his at his coming.

Hold Fast the Form of Sound Words

The exhortation of verses 13 and 14 is the practical answer to everything that has been set out in the preceding verses. In a day when sound words are being overthrown, when cancerous teaching is spreading, the remedy given is to hold fast the form of sound words heard from the apostle Paul — in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. The form matters. The content matters. And the spirit in which it is held — faith and love — matters equally.

The good thing committed is to be kept by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. This is not a human resource. In a day of ruin, the human resources — traditions, institutions, arrangements — have failed or are failing. What does not fail is the indwelling Holy Spirit. The deposit is safe, not because of the vessel, but because of the divine power that guards what has been committed.

Onesiphorus stands as the bright individual example in this chapter. All they in Asia had turned away from Paul. Phygellus and Hermogenes are named among those who had turned. But Onesiphorus sought Paul out very diligently when he was in Rome, was not ashamed of his chain, and refreshed him. The coming day will be his day of vindication: “The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.” In a dark hour, one faithful man who is not ashamed of the prisoner’s chain is worth noting. His name is in Scripture.

He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.