

Timothy, the Bearer of the Baton

Text: 2 Tim 4:1-5

Bible tells us that Timothy was much less qualified than Saint Paul. While Paul was a spiritual giant, Timothy was a pigmy. He was young and immature (1 Tim 4:12; 2 Tim 2:22). He was timid (2 Tim 1:7). He was a sickly person for we know that Paul advised him to drink some wine as a medicine (1 Tim 5:23). He was also perhaps an introvert and a loner that is why Paul had to write the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor 16:10) not to do things that might scare him. He was not an able person from worldly standard. In fact, he would be disqualified for a leadership role.

Nevertheless, Paul picked him as his disciple. And the Bible tells us that Paul made a right choice. Today, the Church historians consider Timothy as the most significant successor of Paul, who continued the legacy of Paul and his teachings after Paul went to be with the Lord.

Why did Paul pick Timothy? Bible tells us that Timothy had some virtues that Paul was deeply impressed by.

First, Timothy had a good public reputation. Those who knew him, they spoke well about him. In Acts 16:2, Dr. Luke writes, *“The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.”* When Paul received a good recommendation about Timothy from those who had observed Timothy for a long time, he appointed him as his successor. Later, Paul testifies that his public reputation was consistent. He wrote to the Christians at Phillipi, *“But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.”* (Phil 2:22) Notice the remark, “you know,” and “Timothy has proved himself.” Timothy’s credibility was a hard earned credibility and the people were aware of it. It is so important that those of us who are in the ministry should have a good public reputation. Do the people consider us worthy of the ministerial task? Have I proven myself? What do they think about me? What kind of opinion my friend has about me? My wife and my children have been the best help in that regard. It is good to get their unbiased remarks.

Second, Timothy was a faithful disciple. A good disciple is the one who learns everything with great diligence from his teacher and put them into practice. He desires to imitate his teacher in all possible ways—his ideology, his philosophy, and his life style. The relationship between the teacher and a true disciple is like a relationship between a father and a son. You remember the proverbial phrase, “Like father like son”. Church historians consider Timothy as the extension of Paul’s very life. In other words, he was a living ghost of Paul. Notice, what Paul had to say about Timothy in 1 Cor 4:17, *“For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”* Notice the sentences again; “who is faithful in the Lord,” “He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus,” and “which agree with what I teach everywhere.” Wow! It is like saying if you have Timothy, you have me. Timothy is my true representation.

Third, Timothy was a sincere minister. The etymological origin of the English word minister is the Latin word *ministerio*, which simply means to serve or the one who is sent out to serve others. The concept of serving other embodies an attitude of other mindedness. A minister is expected to serve somebody other than himself. So ministry cannot be a place for self-service and self-benefit. It is not a platform for self-promotion or finding one's fortune. A genuine minister is always concerned for others. Paul himself was a true example of this. In 2Cor 11:23-28, Paul clarifies how he is no less a minister of Christ in comparison to others. He writes,

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Following the footsteps of Paul was not an easy task. Timothy, as a disciple, had a big shoe to fill in. And so he did. In his letter to Christians at Phillipi, Paul wrote, “*I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare*” (Phil 2:19-21). Timothy proved himself as genuine minister by being other minded, showing true concerns for others, and pouring himself as a drink offering for others as Paul himself did.

To this Timothy, who is now a worthy disciple to carry on the baton of the gospel, Paul at the end of his life journey gives him an important charge in 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

In this charge, Timothy is expected to do six things explicitly. Timothy is asked to (1) preach the word, (2) be ready always, (3) be a good Christian teacher who corrects, rebukes, and encourages others with patience and careful instructions, (4) keep his head cool in all situations, (5) do the work of an evangelist, and

(6) discharge all the duties of his ministry. In one sense, the list appears to be a comprehensive one, but in another sense it is not. To preach the word, one must read the word, meditate upon it, wait upon the Lord, write one's reflections, and then practice to deliver them effectively.

Furthermore, the discharging of all the duties of ministry may include anything and everything. Sometime to get the work of God accomplished, Christian ministers may be required to do a job which may be menial like the cleaning of a toilet, brushing somebody's shoe, and doing laundry etc. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, "*To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*" (1 Cor 9:22)

In other words, it is not about following a definite charter of duty and doing things legalistically and dutifully. In fact, Paul's charge intends to emphasize the indispensability of the preaching of the Word of God, the urgency and the readiness of a minister, the uttermost necessity of maintaining a cool temperament, a lifestyle of an evangelists rather than acting like the managing director or the CEO, and be willing to do anything in order to accomplish God's work.

The next important things to be noticed in this passage are the reasons for this charge. Paul gives four important reasons for implementing this charge diligently.

First, notice the clause in verse 1, "*In the presence of God*". For Paul, God is present. He is a real being. He is omnipresent. God is not a historic personality of the past. He is not an ideological figure or philosophical icon. But God is a present being.

As a young Buddhist temple boy, one of my vices was stealing money from the Buddhist temple. I only waited for an opportunity when no human could see me. I was more afraid of human beings than God. But after having received Jesus Christ in my life, it is the fear of the Lord that has protected me from many sins than the fear of human beings. In Psalm 139: 1-7, David expressed it well.

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in-- behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

There are two unseen eyes who watch over us all the time. These eyes scrutinize not only our external activities, but also our inner and mental engagements. We have been careful to teach our children not to be aware of their parents only, but be aware of these two eyes primarily. My children think that it is very freaky idea.

Paul was conscious and aware of God's holy presence in his life. Such awareness can change mindset, our decisions, and our ethical behavior. A child of God conducts himself/herself primarily under such awareness. He/She feels primarily accountable to God for he is omnipresent and he is always watching.

Second, there is judgment a day in front of us. The ever present God is going to judge both the living and dead. One day, there will be a pay day. We will stand before him and give an account of what we did with what God gave us. In fact, Paul warns about this to Christians at Corinth. He wrote in 1 Cor 3:12-15,

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Paul might have got his idea from Jesus' parable of the talents. Jesus was explaining about the end times and the coming of the Kingdom of heaven. This is what he said about the person who did not use his talents appropriately. He said in Matt 25:28-30,

Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus did not use euphemistic language for his disciple. He did not intend to be soft because after He was gone the perishing world would desperately need the faithfulness of his disciples. That is true even today. Our faithfulness to God would determine how our family members and neighbors will fare on the Day of Judgment. So, Paul says not only because we are aware of God watching us presently, but also the fact that he will be judging us tomorrow, we should take the charge seriously.

The third reason for the charge is mentioned in verses 3-4. Chronologically it is not the third but I would like to mention it first before I emphasize on the last. In these two verses, Paul prophesies a negative picture of the world. According to him, the people are not going to improve spiritually rather they are going to become bad. The world is going downward with influence of the evil. There will be absence of truth. People will prefer story telling. They will look for fictions that entertain. They will look for the preachers, who agree with their ideology, who can satisfy their human needs, who do not make them uncomfortable by preaching the truth. They will prefer preachers who can entertain them. Paul says that there will be many preachers who would fit into that category.

The fourth reason to carry out the charge is the promise of the glorious hope given to every Christian. God is not only going to judge, but also He is going to come and establish His kingdom. We will see Jesus face to face. When Jesus comes He will reward us and escort us to the tree of life, passing through the gates of the city. John records Jesus' words in Revelation 22:12-14,

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

In that city, we will meet our beloveds who have gone before us. In that city, there will be no sorrows, no tears, no sickness, no cancer, no sinful nature, and no presence of the evil. We will be worshipping God day and night. We will serve God and will reign with him to eternity. And we will sing a new song with the angels. John describes this Rev 5:9-10:

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Timothy understood clearly why the baton was placed in his hand and why the charge was given to him. It was a historical challenge to Timothy to grow up and become Paul because Paul had come to the end of his life. Timothy could afford no more to remain the same all his life, he must become Paul for all the reasons Paul explained.

Likewise, the baton is in our hand now. We know why it has been placed in our hand. And why we should heed Paul's charge with an absolute dedication. May the good Lord enable us.

Let us reflect for a moment and pray. How are we doing as Timothy today? What do we need to reconsider in our lives and dedicate them to God? Pray that God will enable us to be the faithful Timothy of our generation.

Amen