

A True Son in the Faith

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, June 22nd, 2022. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here.! And I'll point it out periodically.

There are chunks of the book that we will jump over. So that doesn't mean they're not important.

That doesn't mean I don't, as your pastor, want you to go there and read them.

But there are really important, I've been thinking and praying about it a lot, there are really important things I want to cover. And as the book goes on further and further, it gets more packed, more dense.

And so I'm going to have to pick highlights to some extent. Now, why didn't I fast forward earlier in the series? Good question. But all of it was important to this point.

So it still is important, so hear me say that. But yeah, I'm going to need to fast forward and pick some highlights. And so I'll note to you when we have done that. So this morning we are focusing on Acts 16, verses 1 to 5.

[1 : 23] So you can grab a Bible from the pew in front of you, open your Bible if you have it with you. But we'll hear that now. Read it for us. Acts 16, 1 to 5.

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer, but whose father was Greek.

The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

So let's start by getting a bit of background on this passage. I'm always a little bit leery of putting bullets on slides, because I know I remember being in lectures in university and saying, oh, there it is on the slide.

[2 : 28] I'm just going to read ahead. Done. And then I can nod off again. So this is to emphasize key points, but I encourage you to stay engaged as well. So a little bit of background on this passage.

So Paul's second missionary journey began when he and Silas left Antioch of Syria. And remember, we talked about it last week, Paul chose Silas to travel with them, specifically chose them.

And they went off on a separate trip from Barnabas and John Mark. Remember, that was the other pair that went a different direction, as we learned last week, right? We also learned last week that Paul and Silas were commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord as they headed out on this journey.

What does commended mean in the Bible? Well, you've heard me say it a million times before, and I'm sure I'll say it a million more in the future. We tend to water down the meanings of words, right? Awesome. How often do you hear people say, that was an awesome chicken sandwich, right? So we say our God is an awesome God, awesome chicken sandwich. Is there a discrepancy there?

[3 : 38] Have we watered that adjective down? Probably. So what does commended mean in the Bible? Well, there's actually a range of meaning there. The first definition of the word commend is to represent someone as worthy, qualified, or desirable.

So they're commending someone who has qualities that they would want. And the second definition of commend or commended is to express approval or praise, right?

So when we say someone's behavior is commendable, that's essentially what we're saying, maybe a little watered down. But we're saying that we're expressing our approval in them because their actions were commendable.

So Paul and Silas were being blessed and sent out with the approval of a community of Christians. That's why they were commended by believers.

So the last thing that we learned from our passage last week was that Paul and Silas passed through the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And they strengthened the churches they visited, right?

[4 : 44] We don't ever hear someone visiting a church community in the New Testament, the early days of the church. Well, they discouraged everyone, right? We don't ever hear that.

So, but we also don't want to discount the fact that they commended the churches. They strengthened the churches where they visited. That's important to note. So they likely spent time with them, encouraging them in their faith.

So it wasn't just like, hey, good job, keep going. But they taught them as well, right? So they taught them. They likely answered questions. They strengthened them. They encouraged them.

So there was a lot of things that they did. Then as we heard this morning, Paul and Silas visited the cities of Derbe and Lystra. So remember, these were places that Paul and Barnabas had previously visited in their trips.

So they were going back, Paul and Silas were, going back to these places again. So now we need to be introduced to Timothy. Well, first of all, Timothy is my oldest brother.

[5 : 48] So I can introduce you to that, Timothy. But we're going to be introduced to Timothy from the Bible. Now, another quick aside. Have you ever looked at a pastoral job posting?

Pastors look at them, right? But have you ever looked at a pastoral job posting? Who is the example that those job postings tend to say? We want someone who is like, come on, I gave it to you, Timothy, right?

So it's often that we say the qualities of Timothy is what a given church wants in a pastor. So you can determine later if I'm up to that task or not.

But that's interesting, right? So he is that kind of example. Now, I've spoiled that part, but that's okay. Okay, so Timothy is that standard. So he seems like a B-list character a little bit, but we'll get into more of his background.

So we're immediately introduced in our passage from this morning to this young believer named Timothy. And he had a Jewish mother who was a believer. Scripture tells us that, makes that clear.

[6 : 55] And his father was Greek. So we learned that the believers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. So they found him commendable, perhaps, right? And that's interesting.

So he had a reputation, even as a young guy. So this would suggest that Timothy was on people's radar for some reason. And we can assume that it was a good thing that he was on their radar.

His reputation, and possibly, likely, the work that he had been doing, had gotten people's attention. So whether he was young or not, he was still doing good work and doing God's work in a way that got people's attention.

So looking ahead, you may know, you probably do, that Timothy was a man who would help Paul in his ministry for decades and at a great personal risk and cost, Timothy.

In the introduction to a letter Paul wrote to Timothy later, bears his name. Scholars suggest Paul wrote actually two letters to Timothy. We're going to see why.

[8 : 00] Fittingly called 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, right? So in the opening to 1 Timothy, Paul addresses Timothy as a true son of the faith.

Our sermon this morning is titled just that, a true son in the faith. And we're going to spend some time considering this young man named Timothy. Now, what do we know about Timothy's backstory?

Well, the name Timothy means honored by God or honoring God. Two different ways it's translated. And we're going to come to see that this man would prove to become true, to be very true to his name.

So we know that Timothy was from the city of Lystra. And it's fair to assume he may have been born there, or at the very least lived there prior to when we met him here, right?

He's also referred to as a disciple. So we know that he was a committed follower of Jesus. You're not a disciple of Jesus unless you are a follower of his.

[9 : 08] So our passage tells us that Timothy's mother was Jewish and a believer, and that his father was a Greek, right? So we know those things very clearly. There's no mention of a synagogue in the city of Lystra that can be found, really, in the New Testament.

So it may be that Timothy's mother hadn't necessarily been devout in the Jewish faith, or necessarily that connected to her Jewish heritage. And that might also explain why she had married a Greek man.

That's possible, right? So we'll come to learn that Timothy hadn't been circumcised as a child. So how do you preach a sermon about circumcision and not have everybody go gasp and get puzzled, right?

Why are we talking about this? But we'll get there. So that would also suggest Timothy not being circumcised, his mother was Jewish, that there wasn't a strict adherence to Judaism and their family, right?

There's another hint that maybe this wasn't a key factor for them. Now, let's hear Paul speaking to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3, 14 and 15.

[10 : 19] You can turn there or you can listen for sure. Paul speaking to Timothy, But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

So if Timothy was taught the Old Testament Scriptures as a child, that's what we're told there very clearly, we can presume that that came from either his mother or some other trusted source, right? So he had a teacher as a child who taught him the Scriptures and expressed their importance to him. So there's an interesting mix there, right, of Judaic influence, also seemingly a lack of it in Timothy's early days.

There's an interesting blend there. So how did Timothy become a follower of Jesus? Well, in 2 Timothy 1, verse 5, it says, I am reminded of your sincere faith.

Now remember, this is Paul speaking to Timothy. I'm reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois, and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded now lives in you also.

[11 : 43] So we learn from Paul there that not only was Timothy's mother a believer, and her name was Eunice, right? If you've got an aunt Eunice, chances are good that's where it came from.

But his grandmother Lois, now presumably his mother's mother, now we can make a reasonable assumption that because of the teaching and Paul suggesting it came from these two godly women, so it probably makes sense that this was not his father's Greek mother, right?

So we see there that his mother and grandmother were also followers of Jesus. So Timothy would have had this faith in Jesus modeled for him from very early on by these two godly women in his life, these really important influences.

So while we don't know for sure, it's likely that Timothy was converted by Paul. So whether directed directly by Paul or through Paul's teaching and preaching, was converted by him on Paul's first missionary journey.

So we know from Acts 14 that Paul had preached the gospel in Lystra. You might remember that, and if you don't, trust me, it's there. Acts 14, Paul preached in Lystra, which is where we've said Timothy lived.

[12 : 59] So Paul took his calling and role very seriously, his role of preaching the gospel. He saw himself, he talks about it many times, as being a spiritual father of sorts to the people that he had taught and led to Christ, right?

He took that role seriously. He didn't just come in, preach, and leave, never to think about these folks again, right? He took this mentorship, this teaching role very seriously.

And Paul thought highly and affectionately of Timothy, as we learn over time, because he refers to him at one point as his son in the faith. So again, right, there's that father-son mentorship relationship.

And Paul reflects that lots of times, different ways, that closeness, that affection for Timothy in his letters to him. Some scholars suggest that Timothy may have been as young as 13 when he converted to Christianity and started to follow Jesus.

Well, how do we know that? Well, let's look at some hints. Paul's first missionary journey happened around 47, 48 AD. So a younger age would line up with what we know of both Paul and Timothy's later lives and circumstances, right?

[14:15] The timeline makes sense. In 1 Timothy 4, 12, Paul says, don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, Paul says to him.

But set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. So Paul is emphasizing to Timothy these are important qualities of a follower of Jesus.

But I believe he's also recognizing that Timothy, he sees those qualities in Timothy already. So it's possible Timothy was a young adult at the time when Paul wrote his letters to him.

So it was this very young disciple that Paul wanted to join him and Silas on their mission. So imagine the courage required by Timothy to accept this opportunity, right?

This is huge. But also knowing the tribulations that Paul had already faced. These stories would be known. So Timothy is talking about leaving his family, leaving his hometown to travel with this great man, Paul, a great teacher, but also putting his circumstances and situation at risk.

[15:29] So then also imagine the faith required by Timothy's mother and his grandmother to let him go with Paul, right? Now, if you think about the New Testament and some of the apostles saying, oh, you know, we want profile, right?

We want attention. So we want to be with the Messiah because we're going to be notable, right?

We're going to be remembered. But there isn't a tone of that here, though. They wanted Timothy to go because they trusted Paul.

They trusted the Lord that this was meant to be, that this was a calling on Timothy's life. So after Timothy was selected, what happened then?

Well, Acts 16, verse 3 says, Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who had lived in that area. For they all knew that his father was a Greek.

So there's the possibly confusing circumcision verse for you. So before they headed out on this journey, Paul circumcised Timothy because of the Jews, which is what we can understand there, right?

[16:39] So remember, a few weeks ago, we considered this significant, potentially significant rift between Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus. And why?

Over the observance of Jewish laws. Remember that? We looked at that a few weeks ago. So we know that the Jews in that region would have known that Timothy's father was a Greek, right?

It was not a big city. Lystra was big enough, right? But people would have known him. And obviously, if people know Timothy's reputation and he's known to people, they would likely know his background, his parentage.

So remember that Paul's evangelistic message, his method, sorry, was always to preach the gospel to the Jews first and then the Gentiles.

Do you remember that? That was his MO. So his custom was always to seek out the synagogues in the cities where he traveled and start from there, right? Whether it was preaching to the Jews about Jesus was the hardest part.

[17:41] You know, it's like having a meal. Do you want to, do you save your dessert for last? Do you eat it first? You know, are you that kind of a person? So we wonder if maybe because he knew the Jewish audiences in the synagogues would be the hardest place to start, maybe he started there.

That's why. So many people would have viewed Timothy as a Jew. Why? Because his mother was a Jew, right? By association. And so in being uncircumcised, his potential effectiveness in ministry could have been unnecessarily and negatively hindered or impacted by that factor.

So throughout his ministry, we can recognize that Paul had no serious issues with Jewish Christians keeping some observances and elements of Old Testament law. Remember, we talked about the letter that went back from the Jerusalem Council to Gentile churches, giving them some guidelines, but wanting them to be overall freed from harsh, strict observance to the law.

But as we know, when it came to the issue of salvation, Paul wholeheartedly rejected any idea or suggestion that circumcision was a requirement, right?

He rejected, heartily rejected any suggestion that circumcision in any way observance to that law was the gateway to salvation. So think about what this time must have been like for Timothy.

[19:13] For males who were circumcised as infants, raise your hands, no, men who are circumcised as infants, it's not generally something that you remember, right?

God willing. You don't remember that into adulthood. You may know that it happened for obvious reasons. But think about this time. For a young man bordering on young adulthood, right?

Especially in times with no modern surgical tools, no anesthetic, there's a few ouches, this would have been a serious and likely painful procedure, right?

It's not like Paul would not have known what he was doing. He would have known. But ouch, right? It would have taken time to recover. It wouldn't have soon been forgotten by Timothy for lots of reasons, right?

For Timothy, his first act of this submission for service to Paul involved literal bloodshed, right? Is that the point where he had second thoughts about the trip?

[20 : 24] No, he did not. So, Timothy is commissioned. Well, remember we talked about what it means to be commissioned. In 1 Timothy 4, verse 14, Paul wrote to Timothy these words, do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy, when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

So, this suggests that not only was Timothy commissioned by the church elders, right? Blessed, sent out, but he likely also received, we get a sense there, some spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit at the same time, right?

So, the Holy Spirit blessed him just as the church blessed him. In 2 Timothy 1, verse 6, Paul says this, 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.

So, not only was Timothy commissioned and blessed by church leaders, Paul also personally blessed and commissioned him. He didn't just say, yeah, I got an opening on my team, let's go, yeah, I checked your resume, you're good.

He blessed him and invited him to join him. Interesting, very interesting. So, what happened after Timothy left Lystra? Throughout his ministry work, Timothy fulfilled special and often dangerous missions for Paul.

[21 : 53] So, I'll give you some highlights. He stayed behind with Silas in a place called Berea during difficult times. He was sent to encourage the church in Thessalonica on his own.

He left Ephesus to go to Macedonia with a man named Erastus. He was sent to Corinth to remind the church there of Paul's teaching. He was sent to the persecuted church in Philippi to learn of their situation.

And he was given specific tasks to support the church in Ephesus. These are big deal things. These are things where Paul not only trusted him to do this, believed he had the skills and abilities to do it, but trusted him as a partner to be able to handle things while Paul focused on others.

So truly Timothy became Paul's fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, as Paul refers to him. Someone who was a literal partner in ministry with him.

So I believe the most effective forms of ministry aren't work that is done in isolation. cooperation, but the kind of things that are done in cooperation and intentional fellowship with God and with others.

[23 : 10] I believe that God's amazing grace and his awesome power generally plays out best when we see him multiply efforts and resources beyond our wildest expectations.

When the end result truly is far, far, far greater than the sum of individual parts. ultimately, Paul considered no one to be as like-minded in ministry as him.

That's pretty high praise, really. Some scholars suggest that Timothy also worked with Paul in writing as many as six of the letters or books that we have in the New Testament.

Timothy was the direct recipient of two of Paul's letters. Now, obviously, the audience is millions and millions upon millions, but originally, it was one to one.

Those letters, those books, bear Timothy's name as the recipient. So as you read through the end of 2 Timothy, we come to learn that Paul is dying and he is reflecting on the end of his ministry.

[24 : 18] So who does he ask for? Who does he call to come to him quickly? Timothy. Just as Paul himself was imprisoned for his faith and his work, Timothy was also jailed, but later released.

Paul and Timothy would have a lot in common in both their lives and their ministries, and their relationship would be one that was deep and long lasting. So what can we learn from Timothy?

To summarize a bit from this morning, he was blessed by a faithful upbringing of his mother and his grandmother. He was dedicated as a disciple to serve Jesus and Jesus Apostle Paul.

He faithfully carried out the tasks that were entrusted to him. Timothy was courageous in the face of persecution, risking imprisonment and death.

He was humble enough to accept what we could see as a second-string position. And he was the perfect preacher's helper. Like Daniel in the Old Testament, Timothy serves as a wonderful example for serving God in our youth.

[25 : 38] But for all Christians, Timothy demonstrates what it means to be a true son or daughter in the faith. As sons and daughters of God through faith and baptism into Christ, let's seek to follow the amazing example of Timothy.

No matter how, when, or why God has called us, may examples like Timothy help us to be more confident, more brave, more faithful and fruitful in our service to Christ, no matter the cost.
Amen. Amen.