

“Transitions: Guard Your Faith” 2 Timothy 1:13-14

John Howland was on a ship that was sailing from England. He was seeking freedom of religion and freedom from past debts. The year is 1620 and the boat is the Mayflower. The destination was what we now call the United States. Then it was just the New World.

John Howland almost did not get to see the New World, for about 30 days into the journey a torrential storm overtook the boat. As the wind and waves beat upon the small vessel, water started to seep into the lower levels of the boat. As the crew worked desperately to save the ship, John Howland was swept off the deck by a wave and thrown into the sea. He would have been lost in that storm if it had not been for one thing...

John was able to catch hold of a rope that was trailing behind the ship and hold on for dear life. As he was dragged under the waves, buffeted by the breakers and slammed against the boat, he refused to let go. He hung on to that rope until the crew were able to drag him back on board, safe and alive!

John Howland settled in the New World, married and had ten children. From his family came notable persons such as the Baldwin brothers, of Baldwin piano fame, and former US Presidents George Bush and George W Bush.

John’s story could have come to an abrupt end in 1620 when he fell off that boat, but because he held fast to the rope, he was saved, and his story continues to this day through his family.

In our passage today the Apostle Paul says to his young protégé, Timothy, “Hold fast.” This morning we will look at what Timothy was to hold onto and why.

The second letter addressed to Timothy may be the one of the last letters the Apostle wrote. Things have changed since Paul wrote his first letter. He is once more in prison, and almost everyone has abandoned him. Paul senses that death is just around the corner for him, so he wants to give Timothy as much advice and council as he can. The madman, Nero, now sits on the throne of Rome and Paul sits in one of his prison cells. The year is about AD 58 or 59.

There is no doubt about the deep affection Paul has for Timothy. In verse 2 he calls Timothy his son. This does not mean he is the biological father of Timothy, but that he loves him like a son. Paul longs to see him, according to verse 4, and when he does he will be filled with joy.

And speaking of joy, Paul rejoices that the faith that was in Timothy’s grandmother and mother now resides in Timothy. The faith of godly parents and grandparents cannot save their children. Each child must choose for themselves if they will say “Yes” to the offer of life found only in Jesus, or if they will say “No.” There is no other choice.

Recently Lise and I had the privilege of listening to our daughter give her testimony in a church service in preparation for church membership. For the first time we got to hear when the faith of her parents became her own faith; when she moved beyond being a good, religious daughter

to being fully surrendered to following Christ. As Lise and I listened to her testimony we were filled with joy.

Timothy was a pastor, though much younger than the Apostle Paul. His ministry was to the church in Ephesus, a large and important Gentile church, filled with challenges, and even problems. In the book of Acts, chapter 19, we read of the miracles God did through Paul there, but also about the opposition to the Gospel that came through Jewish antagonists and Greek speaking artisans whose trade was to make idols to false gods. Paul left young Timothy to be in charge of that church.

Paul tells Timothy to stir up the gift that is within him. He is a preacher, a teacher, a pastor and a leader. God put that within him, but Timothy needed to step out and be a strong leader in the midst of the trials.

Someone has said that many people are waiting for a dramatic new anointing from God, while God is waiting for them to stir up what he has already given them. The picture here is of a fire about to go out. However, if it is stirred and fed new fuel it will roar back to life.

Paul exhorts Timothy not to be ashamed of the Gospel or of Paul, a prisoner for the sake of the Gospel (v. 8). In fact, Paul invites Timothy in joining him in suffering for the Gospel's sake. For as the Holy Spirit works within the believer, we are not given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-discipline (KJV – sound mind). What a wonderful change takes place in our hearts and minds when we let the Holy Spirit take control of our lives.

Paul reminds Timothy of some important truths of the Gospel.

First, it is God who saved us (v. 9). There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We can be as religious as we like, and as generous with our time and money as possible, and even know the right things to say, but we will never find salvation until we come to Jesus, and through repentance and faith accept the gift of forgiveness and life Jesus offers us. Until we truly see ourselves as sinners who can do nothing to save ourselves, and believe that what Jesus did on that cross was all that was necessary to provide for our salvation, we will remain lost.

Another term Paul uses in this chapter is life. In Jesus we find life, according to verse 1 & 10. Spiritually we are all dead because of the sins we commit (all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God- Romans 3:23) and by the nature we are born with (in Adam all die – 1 Corinthians 15:22). There is nothing a dead man (or woman) can do to bring themselves back to life. But praise God, Jesus came and offers life to all who put their faith in him for salvation.

Even here Paul reminds us, “He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.” (v. 9) When did God choose to show us grace? When we became good? When we repented? After Jesus died? Actually, Paul says, God was showing grace to us – planning our salvation – before the beginning of time! Yet we did not realize God's grace until Jesus came and made it clear to us.

Jesus brought life and immortality to us through the message of the Gospel (v. 10).

And that, Paul says, is worth suffering for. In verse 12 we find those wonderful words from Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.”

Paul has given everything over to Jesus: his reputation, his finances, his health, even his life. It is all in Jesus’ hands, and that is the safest place it can be. Jesus will guard it and keep it safe until the day God calls Paul home.

And please notice that Paul says he knows “Who” he believes in, not “What” he believes in. Christianity is not about getting a bunch of propositions memorized, having the right doctrines about God. Christianity is about having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We believe in a person, Jesus Christ, not just a doctrine. This is a relationship of love.

All this is what led us to the point where Paul says to Timothy: “Hold fast the pattern of sound words”, or as the NIV says, “keep” it.

There is an interesting picture here. Paul says that he has given Timothy a “pattern of sound doctrine” (NIV) or a “form of sound words” (KJV). The Greek word translated “Form” or “Pattern” signifies a sketch or plan of a building, or a structure. Here it is the blueprint of the Gospel message – given by God to Paul and passed on to Timothy. Just as Moses brought the plans for the tabernacle down from the mountain after God gave them to him, so God gave the blueprint for the Gospel.

The Gospel is not something man has invented. It is not a fabrication of the church or even the councils of the church. Timothy heard the Gospel from Paul who heard it from God. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Then please notice what Paul says here: hold onto that sound doctrine with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Neither true faith nor true love can exist without Christ. The life of the Christian is to be lived “in Christ Jesus.” If we are not walking in Christ, we are not truly Christian.

We walk in faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Faith speaks of all God does for us in Christ. Faith is our response to the message of salvation found only in Jesus. Even this faith is a gift from God. Faith holds fast to Jesus knowing there is no other place to turn for salvation. Faith prompts us to let go, stop trying to control everything, and simply follow where Jesus is leading. Faith is the response of a heart that truly sees the love of God revealed in Christ.

Love starts with God, who “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) “God

demonstrated his love for us in this, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) “God is love!” (1 John 4:8).

And when we are made new through faith in Christ, his love fills us and starts to flow from us. Why does Paul go to jail for the sake of the Gospel? Because he loves God and the people he was sent to share the message of Jesus with. Why does Paul write to encourage his young pastor? Love. Why does Timothy need to stir the calling within him – the calling to be a pastor? It is out of love for God and the people around him.

Paul closes with the call to guard the good deposit that was entrusted to Timothy – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit. There would be so many things that would try to pry Timothy away from Christ and the call on his life to be a pastor, from temptations to false doctrines, from persecution to success (yes, success can be an enemy too, for it can lead to pride and complacency).

Paul knows Timothy cannot stay strong without the Holy Spirit. But with the Spirit, Timothy is set for as long as God will give him.

As I read this first chapter in Paul’s letter to Timothy, I asked myself some questions:

1. Who is my Timothy? Who am I encouraging and teaching so that they not only stay true but are effective in ministry for Christ? I believe we all should be encouragers as God’s children, but there may be a certain someone that God draws us to who needs our support. Who is my Timothy?

2. Is it important that we hold on today? My sense is that it is more important now than ever. The world is quickly moving towards the conclusion of the story, when Jesus will return and judgement will come on all who rejected the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus. This week a kind brother in Christ told me about a meteor that is scheduled to hit the earth in 2025, and destroy life as we know it on our planet. Revelation 8:8, 10 tell of a fiery mountain and a blazing torch falling from the sky and destroying 1/3 of everything. There are so many signs pointing to the return of Jesus, it is critical that believers are holding on, ready to meet Jesus.

On top of that, the world is growing more and more hostile to Christianity. As the church grows, and it is growing every day, Satan is getting more and more upset. He is making war against the bride of Christ. We know we do not fight against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and spiritual forces of evil in high places. (Ephesians 6:12).

Hold fast to the faith and love you have received. Guard the good deposit entrusted to you. Paul says this to Timothy in case he does not get to send him any more messages.

I send this message to you in in case I do not get to send you many more messages. When Jesus returns, and he gathers his children around him I want to be able to see every single person who called the Nanaimo Church of the Nazarene their church there. I do not want one person missing. So hold on and guard the good deposit God has put in you. Never give up.