

***2 Timothy 1:1-7 ...fan into flame the gift of God, which is in ... For God did not give us a timid spirit, but a spirit of power and love and sound judgment. (v.6,7)***

Paul was in prison...again, but this time he was not expecting to be released. Over thirty years had passed since tongues of fire had come to rest on the disciples' heads, and from the day of Pentecost on, by God's grace, they had been faithful to their Lord. They proclaimed the good news about Jesus. They carried the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and Paul had taken it from there to the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire.

But things were different now. The Christians weren't just being harassed. They were being persecuted and even executed. Many of Paul's congregations were struggling. Many of Paul's companions had abandoned him. And he knew that his end was near.

Yet Paul wasn't pessimistic. When he wrote to Timothy, he didn't say: "You know, Timothy, we had a good run, but all good things come to an end, eh?" He didn't entertain the thought that when he died the light of the gospel would die out with him.

Not at all! In spite of his situation, in spite of his circumstances, Paul was optimistic. Even more than that, he was grateful. He gave thanks to God, especially for his co-worker and close friend Timothy. And in his last will and testament (as II Timothy is sometimes called) Paul passed on the torch to his son in the faith.

Nearly two thousand years have passed since Paul wrote, but the apostle's words are just as relevant and just as important today. As we give thanks for God's grace in the life of Timothy, we give thanks that the flaming torch of faith has been passed on again and again, and it is in now in our hands. And as we consider what we hold in our hands and hearts, please...

Instead of complaining about the deplorable conditions in his dungeon cell, instead of cursing his so-called friends who had deserted him, instead of wondering how God could be treating him like this after he had dedicated his entire life to God's service, the first words of Paul's last letter were words of thanksgiving. He wrote to Timothy: "***I thank God, whom I serve with a clean conscience as my ancestors did...***" (3).

Paul had been accused of spreading a new (and therefore illegal) religion throughout the Roman Empire. But what he was preaching wasn't really anything new at all. For hundreds of years, God's prophets had been speaking about a Savior who was to come. Paul simply carried their message to its logical conclusion by proclaiming that all of those Old Testament prophecies, all of God's ancient, gracious promises, had been fulfilled in Jesus.

It was that grace that created such a special bond between Timothy and Paul. You may recall that Paul had never married, and therefore he had no children. He dedicated his whole life to mission work, and it was on his first missionary journey that he met young Timothy.

Paul must have seen something special in this young man because he recruited Timothy to join him on his second missionary journey. And from that time on the two of them were almost inseparable. They traveled together. They worked together. They prayed together. Paul called Timothy "***my child, whom I love***" (1). He even went so far as to say: "***I have no one else like him***" (Philippians 2:20).

All of this helps us appreciate what Paul says next: "***I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day. When I remember your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.***" Paul considered himself to be Timothy's spiritual father. After all, Paul had seen him grow and mature in the faith. No doubt, along the way, Paul had been instrumental in helping Timothy through tearful times and now longs to look on him with the joy

a father feels when his child passes into adulthood.

But Paul couldn't take all the credit for Timothy's spiritual formation. He was quick to point out that Timothy's spiritual foundation had been laid long before Paul came on the scene: ***I remember your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am convinced that it also lives in you.***

Timothy had been given the greatest gift a child can get. He was born into a God-fearing family. He learned Bible stories as he sat on his *yia-yia's* lap (as the Greek's called their grandmas). His mom said prayers with him before he went to bed at night. And the living faith of these two women was alive and well in him, too. The flaming torch of faith had been passed on.

Dear parents, I know it doesn't make the headlines when a mom works on memory work with her child. It isn't breaking news when a father leads his family in prayer. Christian training isn't the most glamorous work. But there is no more important work.

As we sit here today, we all have Loises and Eunices in our lives, people who have shared with us the simple truths of God's Word, family members who taught us that ***God so loved the world*** and that we are *Jesus' little lambs*. Today, along with Timothy, remember them. Give thanks to God for these dear people who passed their faith on to us. And then take to heart Paul's reminder to ***you to fan into flame [this] gift of God***" (6).

Because quite frankly, that's the best way we can show these Loises and Eunices our appreciation. That's the best way we can give them the honor they deserve. That's the best way we can give glory to God for the precious gift that we have been given. Keep the flame of faith burning brightly. Live that faith in word and action. Pass that flaming torch of faith on to others.

But let's face it. It isn't going to be easy. It isn't going to be easy to be "religious" about

your religion. It isn't going to be easy to demonstrate for your kids that regularity in worship is more important than recreational leagues. It isn't going to be easy to warn your best friend that her life choices are self-destructive and putting her eternity at risk. It isn't going to be easy to stop the gossip among your classmates when they're running down another student. It isn't going to be easy to show compassion towards those we would be tempted to deem as undeserving and unappreciative and unforgiving. It isn't going to be easy to share what you hold to and confess about Jesus to someone you've just met, let alone someone you have been related to for years. Though *it only takes a spark to get a fire going* (as the song goes), it isn't going to be easy to be the Spirit's instrument to ***fan into flame the gift of faith.***

Apparently, Timothy may have struggled with similar thoughts and feelings – perhaps more of a leaner than a leader. Paul sirs the heart, ***For God did not give us a timid spirit, but a spirit of power and love and sound judgment.***

Paul knew Timothy. He knew his strengths and weaknesses, and he knew exactly what Timothy needed to hear. Paul's declaring: "Timothy, don't tell me that you aren't up to the task. Don't tell me that you don't have the gifts or the guts to lead. I know better. I know that you have the power of God, that is the gospel. I know that you have a love for God and a love for lost souls." No, God doesn't give *any* of his people a spirit of timidity. God has given each of us ***a spirit of power*** – the *gospel*, which is ***"the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"*** (Romans 1:16). And you have it...in your grasp...***the power of God***...the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified: his perfect life lived for you; His innocent life sacrificed for you; His glorious body raised for you in victory over death. This is freedom and forgiveness. This is sure and certain hope. This is a gift and a message of ***power***. This is the ***flame*** of faith...given to you by God in his immeasurable love. Don't hesitate. Pass it on!