

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – July 1, 2018

2 Timothy 1:8-14

8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who 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. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. 13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

If you were to find out that your life would be ending very soon, say within the next couple of days, what would you do with the time you had left? You might go for that last experience—one last time at your favorite restaurant, one last round of golf, one last day at the lake, one last chance to cross something off your bucket list. But I think more often we would try to use the days we had left to spend time with our family members and friends. We would want to share some last words with them and give them encouragement and say goodbye. We might go and make some visits, so that we can see them one last time. If the distance is too far we might make some phone calls to hear their voice one last time. Or we might try to write some letters. Now, letter writing has become a bit of a lost art, but whether it's an actual handwritten letter, or a typed document or even an email, there is something special about putting our thoughts down in this way because the recipients can continue to read it even after we are gone. This is what we have in our text for this morning/evening. The apostle Paul knew he would soon be dying and so wrote this second letter to Timothy. Among the many things included in the letter that he wanted to encourage, we see here a **Faith in the Face of the Death**. As we look at these verses we will see first, why this is possible and second, how this affects our lives today.

The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome, awaiting his trial before Caesar. While we do not know the specifics, it would seem from his letters that Paul was released from his imprisonment after two years and able to continue his missionary travels, revisiting former congregations and possibly even traveling to Spain. But as Nero came into power, the empire began to crack down on Christianity with persecution. Paul found himself again in prison and it was not going well. In chapter 4 he would mention that at his first defense no one came to his support (v. 16). This first hearing was often an opportunity for character witnesses to come forward. With no help in that area he knew it was only a matter of time before his trial ended in execution and his departure from this world (v. 6). And so he wanted to write this letter to Timothy. This second letter to Timothy and is also the last of the letters recorded in Scripture that Paul wrote. With these last words he wanted to encourage the young pastor whom he had trained and mentored. These words also serve as our encouragement as well.

So how was Paul dealing with the fact that he would soon die? Why could he have confidence as he faced death? Our text lists many reasons. Verse 9 describes the cause: “[God] 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. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” Paul was not saved by anything he had done, he knew he was sinner and even a persecutor of Christians himself. But he had been saved because of God’s grace. He had been chosen by God before time began. Verse 10 describes the results of Jesus’ work: “but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Death was supposed to be something fearful, an entrance in eternal punishment. But Jesus had destroyed death by his own perfect life and innocent death. In its place was immortality, the perfect and unending eternal life in heaven. With God’s grace and Christ’s work in mind, Paul could have the full confidence he described in the second half of verse 12: “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” Paul knew that his life was in God’s hands. He knew that God would be more than able to guard and protect him until the time came for his rescue from this life. He had no need to fear his death because God had taken care of all the details and his death would result in his entrance into God’s heavenly kingdom.

When we face our own death, there will be moments of doubt. Whether it’s the devil, the world or our sinful flesh, there will be voices that try to rob us of the confidence we have. Did God really forget that terrible thing from my past? Did I really do enough good things with my life for God to let me into heaven? Did I truly believe enough in what Jesus did? When these lies come at us, we can answer with the same confidence that Paul did. God’s grace is for all of our sins, no matter how terrible they might seem. We are not saved by what we do or the strength of our faith, but by what Jesus did. He has revealed that the path to life and immortality is only through him. We can entrust our lives to our God because he will guard and protect us from our enemies until that day comes. We have nothing to fear because we know the end result is our own entrance into God’s heavenly kingdom.

For Paul, this confidence in facing death affected the outlook of his life. Verse 11: “And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.” He knew the importance of his work—he was bringing the gospel message of Jesus to others like him who needed to hear it. And he also knew there might be consequences. Verse 12: “That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed.” He knew that his preaching might bring persecution and even death. But he was okay with that because he knew the importance of what he was doing and the worst that could happen, humanly speaking, was his death which he did not fear. He encouraged the same for Timothy in verse 8: “So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.” Timothy too could face persecution that could lead to his death, but the cost was worth it. Finally verses 13 & 14: “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” With the importance of having faith in the face of death, it was also important to guard the teaching that made such faith possible. This would be Timothy’s responsibility, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

So how does our faith in the face of death affect the outlook of our own lives? Paul’s situation was a bit different – he faced the threat of death from persecution for preaching and teaching the gospel. We do not face the same threat of death in our own lives right now, and while we do face persecution, we will save that topic for next week and a later section of 2 Timothy that will be our sermon text. While our situation may be different, there are also some similarities and so we can take Paul’s words to Timothy and apply them to ourselves. We too are to guard the good deposit of sound teaching that has been entrusted to us (v. 14). Do we let

our guard down as we spend less time with God's Word because our lives are too busy with everything else that is going on? Do we let our guard down and start to question what God's Word says because we would rather ignore the parts we don't want to hear? When we let our guard down we risk eroding the firm foundation of our faith and risk losing the confidence we have in the face of death. Of course always being on guard is an impossible task for us as sinful human beings and so we are blessed to have the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (v. 14). He will help us to grow in our faith as we work to guard what has been entrusted to us.

If we knew that we were going to die this week, we would probably all have different ideas of how exactly we would spend our time. But the one thing that we would have in common is the confidence that we would have in the face of death because we know that Christ has destroyed death and rescued us for immortality and that God would guard and keep us until that time arrives. And so if we were to write a letter to those we were leaving behind, this would be the most important thing to include so that they too could share in our confidence. Of course we don't have to wait until we know that we are dying to share such thoughts in a letter. Whether we are dying soon or not for years to come, this faith and confidence will affect everything we do. As Paul started in verse 8, "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord." We will continue to proclaim and live our faith so that others too can find this same faith in the face of death. Amen.