

2 Timothy: 1:1-9 Ever wish you had the power to face your fears?

In a world of panic and fear, what are Christians to do, even if it means their life?

1:1, the circumstances surrounding Paul are this: he's basically on death row and there's no call coming from the Governor that will save him. He will be executed by the Roman government, no doubt about it. Why does Paul find himself in this predicament? Because the current Emperor, Nero, has set his sights on all Christians, especially leaders like Paul who's in prison awaiting execution for preaching the name of Christ throughout the Roman Empire. In light of this, how does Paul begin his second letter to Timothy? By highlighting who he is and who commissioned him, "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." Instead of backing down from what got him in trouble with Nero, Paul doubles down. He is not going to be afraid nor ashamed of his faith in Christ. Then he adds this curious phrase at the end, "according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." Why does he add this? What does it have to do with this letter? It may have something to do with the tenor of the letter and what's currently hanging over every Christian in the Roman Empire: death. Death is looming over Paul and what does Paul say in the face of death? He's in essence saying, "You can kill this body, but my life is in Jesus' hands."

1:2, the letter is addressed to Timothy whom Paul considers his "beloved son." We get a glimpse of just how Paul felt about young Timothy in Philippians 2:19-23. Paul never married; he had no kids of his own, but he always saw the believers he ministered to as his children (e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:14-15). He especially felt this way about Timothy; he saw him as a beloved son who worked alongside him (Philippians 2:22). As he addresses Timothy, he wished God the Father's and the Son's grace, mercy and peace. He wants Timothy to be surrounded by these as he faces the difficult job before him in Ephesus.

1:3-5, Paul makes an incredible statement about himself here, one might think he's bragging. But this is the furthest thing from Paul's mind. In fact, every time Paul evaluated himself, he pointed out just how much he couldn't brag (e.g., 1 Timothy 1:15). He says he serves God with a pure conscience and he puts himself in the company of men like Moses and David. Is Paul saying that he's been perfect, that he never failed? Not in the least. He's talking about his primary objective, what the Lord Jesus Christ called him to do: preach the name of Christ always and everywhere unapologetically. He never renounced Christ. Though his life was in danger many times, he never backed down from preaching Christ, the Son of God. As his forefathers before him, Paul was faithful to God in the ministry God gave him. And he lets Timothy know that as a loving father, he is always praying for him.

We don't know anything about Timothy's actual father, except that he was a Gentile, likely an unbeliever (Acts 16:1). So Timothy probably saw Paul as a father figure, in fact, from Timothy's tears at their last goodbye, it's likely that he saw Paul as a father. Paul tells him that he longs to see him again before he dies; he'd like to experience the joy of a father for a son one last time before the Lord calls him home. Then Paul points to Timothy's faith: he tells him that he has a genuine faith and that he's 100% convinced that the faith he got from his mother and grandmother is still there deep within him. Why all this talk of Timothy's faith (this echoes Paul's reminders in 1 Timothy, e.g., 1:18-19; 4:14)? Is Timothy in danger of faltering concerning his faith? It looks like he might be.

1:6-7, so Paul reminds Timothy of the gift that God gave him, which Paul himself confirmed when he (and the elders of Timothy's church, 1 Timothy 4:14) laid hands on him, ordaining him for this God-given ministry (it likely happened when Paul added Timothy to his team during Paul's Second Missionary Journey, Acts 16:1-3).

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In his statement Paul says, “I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you.” The words “stir up” mean to rekindle, to start up again. It implies that the gift God gave him is in danger of dying out. He must not let this happen, instead, he must fan it into a tremendous flame for the Lord. Why was it going out? Was Timothy’s fears and timidity getting the best of him in the face of the great challenge in Ephesus? It looks like that might’ve been the case since Paul says next that God didn’t give him a spirit of “fear” (of cowardice or timidity). The spirit God gave us, His Spirit, is not afraid of anything. It never thinks or behaves cowardly. This is why Christians shouldn’t be afraid of anything. They should be the best cops, firefighters, first responders, soldiers, anyone who puts their life on the line. They should be able to march into any situation without fear of dying. And right now, death is in the air in the Roman Empire, especially for Christian leaders like Timothy and Paul. Nero is after them and Paul is now on death row. Is this what Timothy fears? Is he afraid that if he continues to proclaim the name of Christ boldly in Ephesus—a key city in the Roman Empire—that he might be next?

Why shouldn’t Christians fear death? This gets back to that little phrase Paul used at the beginning of the letter, “according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.” Christians aren’t supposed to be afraid of losing their life because Jesus has conquered death: He has overcome the one who had the power of death, Satan, and He now owns the keys of death (Hebrews 2:14-15; Revelation 1:18). Therefore, death cannot harm us beyond the grave because Jesus owns death and our life is hidden in Him (Colossians 3:3).

If God’s Spirit is not a coward, if cowardice is not what God gave us, what did He give us? He gave us the opposite and much more: He gave us a Spirit of power, love and sound mind. God possesses all three and through His Spirit we possess all three. And notice, we don’t just have power alone. Power without love and prudence is a dictator. Love without power and prudence leads to weakness that is run over. We must access all three; we must stand strong in the Lord’s power, love, and self-controlled wisdom. If Timothy does this, he will shed his timidity and replace it with wise, loving strength.

1:8-9, here’s another indication that perhaps Timothy was wavering in his faith. Paul essentially tells him not to be ashamed of the Gospel nor of him, the Lord’s prisoner. Instead, he must share with Paul in the sufferings that come with preaching the Gospel of Christ “according to the power of God,” again reminding him where he must get the power to overcome his fears: God. Why does Paul ask Timothy not to be ashamed of the Gospel or him? If you had a friend on death row and he said, “Do what I did. It might land you on death row, but don’t worry. God will protect us.” Would you do it? If you knew that preaching Christ could get you killed, would you? Where can we get the courage to not fear for our lives, no matter the mission God calls us to? Is it possible to be this courageous, are we kidding ourselves? Of course, it’s possible; that’s exactly what Paul is doing and he’s urging Timothy to follow his footsteps. Our courage depends on who we think controls our life, us, the State, the dangerous situation, or the Lord?

Next Paul mentions another reason why we shouldn’t fear but instead trust the Lord with our lives: before God created the concept of time, God had a plan to save us and to invite us into His divine plan and purpose. And our works had nothing to do with it; we did not earn or deserve it. It was strictly according to His grace, which was always and forever centered on His Son Jesus Christ who died to save us. God knew the difficulties we would face in this life and His grace and salvation was always there, waiting to carry us through it all, as it is now doing for Paul in a cold Roman dungeon.

Ever wish you had the courage to face all your fears? God is saying, “It’s here, grab it and I’ll protect your life, even if they take it.”