

- Another call to faithful service, with particular emphasis here on the reliability of Scripture and on Paul's example.

Introduction

- I think I've told this story before, but it illustrates the point quite well:
 - I was telling a story by way of introduction to one of the first sermons I preached as a trainee minister, doing pulpit supply in Port Seton outside Edinburgh...
 - the story was about a missionary... a Godly man... Dr Thomson... just before WW2 he & wife to North Africa. Worked amongst the Muslims... In the early part of the war conditions deteriorated... they lost one child to malnutrition... spent themselves for the sake of the gospel... came home
 - after a number of years came to be a minister in Glasgow.
 - there was a young man in the congregation; became a Christian in his teens; grew greatly as a Christian as a result of Dr Thomson's teaching and influence.
 - after a few years he himself felt the call to the ministry; was helped and guided by Dr Thomson
 - on taking up his first charge, distance separated them; but Dr Thomson's influence on the life and ministry of that young man remained undiminished
 - in Dr Thomson's later years, that younger man gave a lot of practical help; still looked to Dr Thomson as a spiritual example and encouragement.
- Not make believe - my dad is that young man!
 - and Dr and Mrs Thomson came to hear me preach that morning when I was due to use the story by way of introduction!!
- Timothy and Paul had a similar relationship; longstanding influence and friendship;
 - Paul now knows that he will shortly be executed; wants to pass on his last words of encouragement to his associate;
- We'll do well to listen to what Paul, who did so much to shape the early church, reckoned was of vital importance to pass on to Timothy, essentially his successor in parts of his ministry.
- As we go through, looking at what Paul said, keep this in mind: this is Paul's final advice to Timothy; the essential things to help Timothy fulfil his ministry and follow his Lord.
- Paul has three things to say here: about suffering in a Godly life, about Scripture's place in a Godly life, and about Spending ourselves in God's service:

Suffering in a Godly Life

- I wonder, if one of us were writing a letter of encouragement to someone, passing on advice and help so that they can keep going faithfully, would we include the difficulties, opposition, even suffering that is in store, as Paul does? Not instinctively!!
 - but that's exactly what he does here
- Paul humbly realises that Timothy looks to him as an example:
 - and so Paul points to the reality of that example;
 - of the way Paul has ordered his life ("my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ...);
 - but he also points to the consequences that such a life brought for Paul ("persecutions, sufferings - what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.")
- What's more, for Timothy its not a mere recounting of Paul's early life:
 - Timothy was almost certainly converted in one of the cities that Paul mentioned, and would have seen first hand what Paul endured.
- Its rather like one of those family gatherings where a lot of the conversation goes something like "Do you remember when ..."
 - Paul is using those early, vivid memories to make sure Timothy realises that suffering is part and parcel of a normal Christian life.
 - 3:12 says "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted". Not just Paul... not just Timothy... us too.

- **Why** does Paul talk so much about suffering? What relevance for us?
- **First**, he is simply letting Timothy - **and us** - know what to expect:
 - we are all better at coping with things we expect than with a complete unknown
 - Jesus himself did exactly the same thing - just before he was arrested, he warned his disciples that "**they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name**" (Luke 21:12).
- *Paul goes a little bit further than merely issuing a warning*
- **Second**, he makes it clear what it is that provokes the persecution, that leads to the suffering... "everyone who wants to live a **godly life** in Christ Jesus".
 - we all like to conform! Peer pressure - musical tastes - fashion - acceptable behaviour...
 - anyone who is different sticks out; they are made to feel uncomfortable, different, odd, at worst intimidated, persecuted.
- When we start to live **godly lives** we are different, we will stick out... and we'll encounter exactly the kind of persecution that Paul describes.
 - maybe in 21st Century Scotland we are **unlikely to be locked up** for our faith
 - but **ridiculed? limited job/promotion prospects** because of real honesty? for many older teenagers and folk in their early 20's, if you won't do the things the crowd do - then **losing friends** is a real prospect.
 - and spiritual opposition...
- Do we then shy away from living godly lives, from maintaining Christian standards, from responding to God's call to service? **NO!** Paul makes it clear that its not ultimately **our** behaviour, but our association with **Christ** that makes the difference.
- Its as we try to live a "godly life **in Christ Jesus**" that we'll face persecution.
 - and, as we face the persecution for the sake of Jesus, so **he** gives us the strength to face it.
 - Paul's words to Timothy were "As for you, **continue** in what you have learned ..."
 - keep going... its not easy, hasn't ever been, never will be... but follow the way God has set out, not your own! remember Paul's patience, faith, firm purpose, endurance...
- So - sufferings and opposition will come, yes - but **because of Christ, for his sake, and in his strength.**

Scripture in a Godly Life

- The second big thing that Paul wants to get over to Timothy is how important God's word is. One of the modern paraphrases puts Paul's words, "**there's nothing like the written Word of God...!**"
 - **there's nothing like it!**
 - in all the things that God's still got in store for him, Paul wants to make sure Timothy has a firm hold of the place the Bible should play.
- Paul says **four main things** about the role and function of Scripture:

1. Makes wise unto salvation.

- **First**, Paul says that the Scriptures are "**able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**" (3:15).
 - in other words, Scripture points us to Jesus... to make it clear what he has done for us... to make clear our need of him... and make clear how we should respond to his offer of salvation.
 - there are many stories of folk who have come to faith simply through reading from the Bible - maybe some folk here first came to know Christ in exactly that way!
- Not that there's something magical about this (**hold up**) book!
 - rather, Scripture points to **Jesus**, "**the author and perfecter of our faith.**" (Heb 12:2)

- true faith in Jesus can be nothing else than a biblical faith.

2. All is God breathed and is useful...

- Second thing Paul makes sure Timothy understands is where Scripture comes from:
 - "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for..."
 - it comes from **God** - his guiding and shaping lies behind **all** of the Bible
 - the letters of advice of Paul; the fast paced narrative of Mark; the "orderly account" of Luke...
 - all have their own individual character, style, focus, but all are **God breathed**
 - and **therefore** Scripture is good and authoritative.
 - it all has its place - like a **jigsaw puzzle** - maybe the bit you are reading feels like a bit of "blue sky" - hard to fit in and at first glance not contributing to the picture - but as a jigsaw wouldn't be complete with a single piece missing, so **all** of the Bible has its place, and all contributes to the portrait of Jesus that is the Scripture's focus.
- Point of this is that Timothy (and us) pay attention to what the Bible teaches!
 - God has given us this complete picture of himself and his Son for a purpose - to **thoroughly equip us for every good work**
- We don't need anything else! It teaches us, rebukes us, corrects us, trains us - its helps set the shape and purpose of our lives.

3. To be preached.

- As we move into chapter 4, Paul almost seems to catch himself - he's writing to **Timothy**, and so he comes back to apply what he has just been saying to Timothy's particular circumstances:
 - **senior pastor; preacher; encourager; "rebuker" - patiently - care...**
- In other words, Timothy's understanding of Scripture is not merely to be an intellectual assent. It has to shape the way he does his job as pastor/leader
 - for Timothy that meant he had to stand up and preach - now we are not all called to be preachers, but we too must place Scriptural principles at the heart of all that we do.
- (4:1) "**In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:**"
 - I wonder what comes next for us...? for Timothy, he was to preach, and to preach in a way that conformed to Scripture; **for each of us...?**

4. Enables us to stand fast in the face of heresy.

- Test what we hear, what we see, against what the Bible says
 - spiritual gifts, baptism, atonement, how we are to reach out to those around us, who should join the church....
 - test against Scripture...

Spending ourselves in God's service: Paul's Life

- I wonder what you'd do if you got a letter from someone offering you all sorts of "useful" advice. For many of us, our gut reaction would be something like:
 - "What do they know? I can sort out my own problems!"
 - *(we see personal independence as an unquestionable virtue.)*
- Maybe if we'd been in Timothy's shoes, we'd have thought "Who does Paul think he is?"
 - but Timothy knew that Paul's advice is certainly **not empty words** - it's been tested in the furnace of Paul's own life, in the trials and tribulations that he faced.
 - this advice is **exactly the way Paul had carried on his own life and work** - through the Holy Spirit working in him...
 - *a work that had founded churches across a sizeable chunk of the known world, and was used to contribute about a 1/3... 1/2 of the NT books.*
- And look at what Paul is able to say at the end of his long and traumatic career:
 - **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**
 - *Note: not won, just completed.*

Faithfulness:

- Not only has Paul been faithful to God, and to his calling, but **supremely God has been faithful to Paul** in all his trials. He has never let him down, never deserted him, always given him the strength to carry on!
- And what's more, **Paul is absolutely certain** that there is a place in heaven for him:
 - God's promise of life everlasting is about to be realised.
 - **Paul is going home and he knows it!**
- His final word to Timothy is not "do it this way", "do it that way", but:
 - **"see God's faithfulness - go and live in the same way; God is no man's debtor"**
- And that challenge comes to use - are we prepared to live like Paul, with the same **"way of life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings"** for the sake of our Lord? Are we prepared to put in the hard work of allowing Scripture's teaching to rule our lives? Are we able to say:

I am fighting the good fight,
I am running the race,
I am keeping the faith....