

Come Follow Me
Elo Viz Production
Week 44
1 & 2 Timothy

Three of the four books we are studying this week are known as the Pastoral letters. What that means is that Paul wrote letters to both Timothy and Titus. Timothy and Titus did not write these books, but they were letters to them as pastors of the church in their cities. All four of these books are letters written by Paul. And they are not in chronological order. Paul actually wrote the second letter to Timothy last. This was his final letter before he was put to death by the Emperor Nero. And the final words we have from Paul. This is important because his writings suggest that Paul knew that he was not going to make it out of there alive. These are his last words, so to speak.

So the question bears asking. If you knew you were going to die soon, what would you say? And who would you say it to?

One of Paul's closest friends and companions was Timothy. Called to the ministry as a youngman (around 15 years old). Timothy was his protege. A few times he even calls him his son. He obviously wasn't his biological son, but he looks at Timothy as if he was.

Though there are a lot of things that I would like to discuss in Paul's letter, there is one thing that really stands out to me that he repeats several times.

It is first mentioned in verse eight if Chapter one:

“8 Be not thou therefore **ashamed** of the **testimony** of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;” (2 Timothy 1:8)

He uses the word “ashamed” four times in this letter. And though Paul was not ashamed of the Lord or His work, Timothy had some reservations, some timidity, even maybe some fear about the work he was called to do. And he had a perfectly good reason to be. In that day persecution was very harsh for Christians. Especially under the rule of Nero. There is a well known expression referring to this emperor that he “Fiddled while Rome burned”. And though fiddles were not invented yet at that time, the expression has a back story that explains a lot. Nero had a vision for Rome. He wanted to modernize it, redo some of the old buildings and update the drapes. However, the council that controlled the city denied the emperor's request to fund the project. So legend has it that he hired arsonists to burn 10 of the 14 synagogues in Rome. Forcing the hand of those that opposed his vision to build a more beautiful city. Thus the saying that Nero fiddled or watched with joy as Rome burnt to the ground. The worst part of this whole situation is that Nero blamed it on the christians. Also a manipulation to fulfill his evil desires. It gave him reason to literally slaughter innocent believers. He did awful things to them. I'll give you one example: Nero had built this huge beautiful garden and he would take christians and dip them in tar, and light them on fire as lamps for his garden. Paul was also a casualty of this

devilish man. He cast him into the underground dungeon known as Mamertine prison. A cold dungeon where prisoners were lowered through a small hole in the ground into a pitch black, cold cave. Paul also mentions his chains which seems unnecessary to chain a prisoner that could clearly not escape. But would be added torture to Paul who knew he would never get out alive.

So for Paul to tell, not only Timothy but us as well: to not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it would have been a hard thing for them to hear back then. Because the the penalty for such a life lived devoted to the Savior was torture and death. Paul himself was beheaded just after writing this letter. Well, what is the worst thing that can happen to us in our day for our faith and outward expressions of our devotions to Jesus Christ and His church? The worst thing we could probably experience is someone would unfriend us or stop talking to us. If we ponder on this we might hear a small chuckle from those living in Paul's day. You mean to tell me that if we go out and preach the gospel to everyone we know and they don't agree with our views or beliefs they will just ignore us and stop talking to us. Yup, That sounds harsh. I'm not sure we could endure such a hard thing. I'm sure you can hear the sarcasm in my voice.

But no matter what they suffered in Paul's day, they were all loyal to the cause. And loyalty is a hard trait to find nowadays. Even not too long ago it meant a lot more than we realize.

In 1985 Jeffrey R Holland shared a fantastic message on loyalty and he told this story: “Karl G. Maeser, the first president of [BYU] university, once wrote:

[My young friends,] I have been asked what I mean by word of honor. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls—walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape; but stand me on the floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first! [West, Vital Quotations, p. 167]”

He also shared this story of Joseph F Smith:

“After four years of missionary service in the Hawaiian Islands (begun at age fifteen, by the way), young Joseph F. Smith returned to the mainland and began making his way back to the Salt Lake Valley. But these were difficult times. Feelings toward the Latter-day Saints were running very high. The terrible experience at Mountain Meadows was fresh in the minds of many people. Polygamy had become a national political issue, and at that very hour Albert Sidney Johnston’s army was on its way to the Utah territory under orders from the president of the United States. Less disciplined than the U.S. Army were many frontiersmen scattered abroad who vowed openly they would murder every Mormon anywhere they could be found.

It was back into that world that nineteen-year-old Joseph F. Smith drove his team and wagon. One evening the little company with which he traveled had barely made camp before a company of drunken men rode in on horseback, cursing and swearing and threatening to kill. Some of the older men, when they heard the riders coming, had gone down into the brush by the creek, waiting out of sight for the band to pass. But young Joseph F. had been out a distance from the camp gathering wood for the fire and so was not aware of the potential problem. With the openness of youth he walked back toward the camp, only to realize too late the difficult circumstance he now faced almost totally alone.

His first thought was to drop the wood and run toward the creek, seeking shelter in the trees in his flight. Then the thought came to him, “Why should I run from [my faith]?” With that compelling sense of loyalty firmly in his mind, he continued to carry his armful of wood to the edge of the fire. As he was about to deposit his load, one of the ruffians, pistol cocked and pointed squarely at the young man’s head, cursed as only a drunken rascal can and demanded in a loud, angry voice, “I’m a killer of Mormons, boy. Are you a Mormon?”

Without a moment of hesitation and looking the heathen directly in the eye, Joseph F., scarcely old enough to be entering the MTC, boldly answered, “Yes, siree; died in the wool; true blue, through and through.”

The answer was given so boldly and without any sign of fear that it completely disarmed this belligerent man. In his bewilderment he put down his pistol, grasped the young missionary by the hand, and said, “Well, you are the — — bravest man I ever met! Shake, young fellow, I’m glad to see a lad that stands up for his convictions.”

Years later, while serving as the president of the Church, Joseph F. Smith said that he truly expected to take at point-blank range the full charge from the barrel of that man’s pistol. But he also said that after his initial inclination to run, it never again entered his mind to do anything but stand up for his beliefs and face the death that appeared to be the inevitable result of such conviction. (Taken from Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938], pp. 188–89.)”

President Holland shares so many other great stories that we don't have time to read, But i will leave a link to his talk in the transcript you can find on the website:

<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/oh-lord-keep-rudder-true/>

The point to his whole message and also of mine today is that since the early days of the church we have come to use a term of endearment as to call our fellow christians "brothers or sisters". But is that all it is, or do we actually mean it when we call each other brothers or sisters, or is it just some cultural thing that say but don't mean? Because before we can experience heavenly loyalty to God and Jesus Christ we must first know how to be loyal and faithful to His children in this mortal sphere. And part of that loyalty comes with sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with those that are prepared to hear it.

And how do you know if they are prepared and ready to accept Jesus into their lives? Would it be a crazy idea to maybe ask them? Or to simply just talk about Jesus and then you'll know if they are open and ready.

I'll share one quick personal experience in closing. I recently changed jobs and had to go through a series of Interviews. In the last interview I was sitting in this big fancy office with two corporate executives and one of them asked me if I would tell them a little about myself. Gosh, there are so many things that I could have said that I consider part of my identity, like being a father and a husband, a director or a non-profit to name a few, but there is one thing that transcends all of these important things: With boldness and conviction I looked this man right in the eyes and said: The most important thing for you to know about me is that: I love Jesus.

I could tell he was a little taken back and had never heard someone say that before. And it did change the course of the interview and the things we talked about. And to all those out there wondering if I got the job: Yes I did. And it has been a wonderful place to work.

I think we are lucky that we don't have to worry about being killed or beheaded for our faith as our ancestors did. Perhaps we just need to be a little more bold and open in sharing our faith and testimony. It can still be scary, but promise you that you will feel a sense of power and an increase of faith when we step up and speak out in love and truth. I pray you will have those experiences in your life.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.