

Preparing to Go

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

We have a call on our lives. The Bible calls it a high and holy and heavenly calling. Yet, some fearful Christians see it more as a warrant for their arrest. We are afraid of the commitment and ashamed of the reproach. Instead of Christ's yoke that is easy and His burden that is light, we prefer to carry our own load. We resist stepping out of the boat.

All of us have been there. And most of us, if we are honest, have gone back there from time to time, if only for moments. We choose happiness instead of joy, spiritual separation instead of the sweetest fellowship. Though we may have many accomplishments, there is no lasting fruit in our own agendas.

But, in the deep places of each heart, the Holy Spirit continues to call us: "With all of your getting, get wisdom!" He instructs us to have a life that is prepared to go. We are surprised to find that the first lesson, the first page, the first

words are, “It is finished!”

The Father waits, never ceasing to watch over us. The Son has made the way for us. It is very narrow, so we can constantly sense His presence, and it takes us to places we would not have gone otherwise: glorious places—where the true treasures are. This booklet is about all of these things.

Chapter One

FIRST THE NATURAL, THEN THE SPIRITUAL

“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

“He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

“And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

“Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first” (Matthew 21:28-31a).

How many times do we find that first son? “I will not be a Christian. I’ll not serve God. I’ll not follow God. I will not!” Afterwards, he repented and he did what he said he would not do. The second son said, “I will go. I’ll go!” Then, later, he did not do it.

A very wise friend made a note of this para-

ble that I had never heard before: The Bible does not say, “A certain man had three sons....” It does not say he had three sons and one of them said, “Yes, father, I will do it,” and he did it. That son is not in this parable, nor is he reading this booklet. There is no one—except One—who said yes *and* did it.

According to Joshua 24:19, we *cannot* serve the Lord. All of us say “yes” and we don’t do it, or we say “no” and, later, we do it—by grace.

The only foundation for service is grace. Not our strength, not our ability, not our obedience, not our talent, not our fervency, not our sincerity, but grace. That is the only foundation for any service.

Malachi 3:13-16 is an important portion. I never saw it like this before.

“Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD.” A modern meaning for “stout” is “arrogant”: “Your words have been *arrogant* against me.... Yet you say, What have we spoken so much against you?”

They didn’t know that they were arrogant. They did not know. In the book of Malachi, there are seven times when the people say against God, “What? Where do You get that? What do you mean, Lord! What?!”

God said, “You have offered to Me polluted sacrifices.”

“What?”

“You have robbed Me. You have robbed Me, people. You have robbed Me.”

Indignant, they said, “What? *What?* What did You say? What are You talking about? Wherein have we robbed You? How have we robbed You?”

And He said, “In tithes and offerings” (see Malachi 3:8).

Blind Deception

That is a picture of deception. Deception is when I believe I am correct, but I am wrong. I am wrong, and God tries to correct me. Then I answer back to God, “What are You talking about? I don’t know what You’re saying! I don’t get it.”

God put His finger on them, and they rebelled and resisted. Blind and ignorant, and would not be reproved. That is a dangerous condition to be in.

“And your words have been [arrogant] against Me.” “Arrogant” is a powerful word. The Lord was saying, “You people are speaking against Me. In your pulpits and in your syna-

gogues, in your fellowship and in your attitude, you are against Me. And you say, 'Wherein have we spoken against You?'

"You have said, It is vain to serve God. That is what I'm talking about. You have said it is vain to serve Me." (See verse 14).

Afraid of Being a Loser?

Do you hear the voice of one of the sons in those verses? I hear the voice of the son who said, "No. I will not serve You. I will not do it." I hear him say, "I will not serve You. I cannot do it. I will not do it. I have a life to live. It is vain to serve You. I don't get much in return. Thank You very much, but You don't offer me a very good deal.

"Thank You, but I've got things to do. I've got a life to live. I'll go to church once a week, because it's good for me, and it's good for my family. But to me, it is vain to serve God, because I'll end up poor. I will end up lacking something."

"It is vain to serve God. You will end up a loser, or you will lose something. It is vain to serve God." That is what they said.

In Malachi 3:14b: "What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have

walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?"

What good is it? How many sheep did Solomon offer up? Do you remember? Solomon offered up perhaps one hundred thousand sheep—an enormous number. They offered up the sheep and burned them. "It is vain."

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained

"Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency (Psalm 73:13). In other words, "I have washed my hands, but it was in vain to do it. It has not profited me at all. I have gained nothing in return, only destruction where I have lost." That is the complaint heard in the world, around the world, and also, unfortunately, in the Church.

"It is fine to go to church once a week. It is fine to read my Bible periodically. But when it comes down to really losing my life and giving everything, I do not think it is very profitable or useful, and I don't believe it really works. I really think that once you get out there walking on the water, you'll sink, and you will get all wet—and I would rather be wet in the boat than wet out there!"

"Really? Not me!" said Peter. And some of us will agree. "I would rather be out there on the

water than wet in the boat, afraid to obey when the Lord calls me.”

Remember when Peter walked on the water (Matthew 14:29)? A pastor told me that before Peter went out there, Judas probably said, “Uh, Peter, do you want to leave your wallet in here? I’ll take care of it, just in case you don’t come back.”

No Regrets

When we are following God, the devil will always say, “That is dangerous. It is vain. It is a waste of time.”

I always think about the box of ointment that was given and poured out on Jesus (Mark 14:3). That box was precious—more precious than the oil. The oil was precious, though once it was poured out, it was gone. But the box: What happened to the box?

It wasn’t a plastic container that was to be thrown away. It was a box, a vessel, *precious*. Probably it could have been put back together and reused. Yet, I imagine that Mary put it in the closet.

Five years later, when Mary looked at the pieces of the broken box in her closet, did she resent what she did?

Ten years later when she looked at those pieces and had nothing in the cupboard, did she regret what she had done? That box with the ointment was worth one year's wages, one denarii a day. Do you think she said, "I wasted the oil; it cost a lot of money, three hundred denarii"? I think not.

When you don't have anything to eat, and you look at the empty box in your cupboard, do you resent or regret what you did? You might.

"It is vain to serve God," people say. "And what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?" (Malachi 3:14). If they don't say it, they think it. Their feet are a testimony that it is vain to serve God, because their feet don't show up.

"It is vain to go to prayer meeting. After all, in a prayer meeting, you are just kneeling down, and there is nothing there. In a prayer meeting, there are no explosions in the sky, no tingly warm, fuzzy feelings, and there may be nothing of great value said. Nothing to provoke me intellectually. It is vain to kneel down in an empty building or in the corner of a closet: It is vain."

That was the boy who said "no," and later he did it. But he did it by grace and by the Spirit

of God. He walked in the Spirit of God, and he did great things. Yet before we do those great things, I guarantee you that in the hearts of men, we say, "It is vain. It is not worth it. I need a job. I need money. I need a life. I need a wife. I need a house. I need a future. I need an education. I need a diploma. I need another diploma. I need securities. I need bonds. I need health. I need convalescing. I need therapy. I need encouragement. I need. And I will do the rest when it's convenient."

The other son was saying, "Yes, yes, yes! Yes!" but he did not do it.

No one is in between. There is not a third son in the parable. "The way is narrow, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14).

Chapter Two

HOLLOW HAPPINESS TO JOYFUL HOLINESS

“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

“For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.

“They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.

“Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.

“Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish” (Psalm 73:3-7).

“Yea, they that work wickedness are set up: yea, they that tempt God are even delivered” (Malachi 3:15*b*).

This is all bad news. I'll paraphrase that for you: The proud are happy. So? The Christian life is not a matter of happiness. It is an issue of holiness. Christianity is not a purpose of convenience. It's a life of purpose.

I don't mind if I suffer as long as I have divine purpose. Really, I *do* mind, and I don't like it, but if I live in a divine purpose, I will suffer well. I don't care about happiness. I'd rather have holiness. If I have holiness, then I have joy. Then, even silence is not a bad thing.

Happiness versus silence? I'll take the silence if in the silence there is holiness, because in the holiness, there is joy. But this way is unfamiliar to people, because no one is the third son. Nobody says, "Yes," and then he does it automatically. No. This is what he needs:

According to Malachi 3:16, "They that feared the LORD spake often one to another." How often? In this verse, "often" means every day. How often did they get together? Every day.

Bible School: The Key to Missions

Consider Paul's Bible school in Tyrannus (Acts 19). The Greek philosophers lectured in that building during the day until it closed at eleven in the morning when the day started to get hot. If you know anything about the weather in Turkey, we are talking hot and dry—105 to 128 degrees Fahrenheit in the summertime. And from eleven in the morning until four in the afternoon are the hot hours. Normally during that

time, the people sleep. Do you know what Paul was doing? He was teaching in the school. Why? Because those were the only hours that he had.

He worked in the morning, from six until eleven, making tents in Ephesus. After he finished his job, he went to the school, and he taught them everything he knew. How often? He did it every single day. He started in the synagogue. Later, he was kicked out of there, so he went to a Greek school.

They that fear God meet together often. Do you know why? They are the sons that say, "No. No, I cannot do it. I cannot!" And then, afterwards, this doctrine enters into their lives, and they realize that it is grace, that it is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said to His disciples, "You abide in Me, and I will bear fruit through you so you will glorify My Father" (see John 15:7-8). "I tell you, it is not you, but it is My grace through you, and you shall bear fruit. And I will give you My memory" (see John 14:26). It is an inner memory, where He will bring back to remembrance all things that He has said to us.

Then, we will have His joy (John 15:11), His fellowship (John 15:16-17). "You have not chosen me, I have chosen you. I call you not my ser-

vants, but I call you my friends.”

It is a *New Testament*, a *New Covenant*, a new life, with new orientation: a powerful orientation of grace.

They that feared the Lord met often one with another.

A pastor who has pioneered many churches in the Near and Middle Eastern nations told me last summer, “I realize what is the key to our work around the world. It is Bible school.”

That is exactly it.

What is Bible school? Bible school is meeting often, one to another, and saying, “It is not in vain to serve the Lord. It is our reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Bible school is that if He gave His only begotten Son, then how much more ought I give my life? If He laid down His life, then how much ought I also lay down my life for the brethren (1 John 3:16)?

Bible school is where I get lined-up with the revelation of divine truth. In my heart, I say “no.” Then I change by the spirit of grace. And now I do what I would not have done, and I do it by faith, and then I meet together with you. And I look at you, and I say, “Do you know what I know?”

And you say, “Yes! This is real. I can’t believe it, but it is true.”

Walking on Water

What is it? I am actually doing the will of God. I cannot believe it. I, the guy that would have no interest. I, the guy who had no ability. I, the man who is a sinner.

And you are over there, and the other man says, “I, too. I, too.”

We have communion, and we just can’t believe it. We are simply walking, and we cannot believe it. It is an awesome thing.

They met often, because it was motivating to meet and talk about the same grace, the same purpose, and the same Christ with the same message—spiritual communion, one with the other.

You say, “Do you believe it?”

And the other person says, “I cannot believe it. I am serving God, and I have found joy. I don’t care so much about myself, still I cannot believe it. God bears fruit in our lives, and I don’t know why. I actually enjoy sitting in the snack bar, drinking coffee, and talking about the things of God.”

I would rather come down to the all-night

prayer meeting, or meet for prayer in the morning with a friend and not announce it but just do it. I have an inner motivation. I am the son who said “No!” and now I do it with such joy, and such fervency. I go out of the boat, and I walk on the water. I begin to think like Peter the disciple: “Are you jealous, guys? Look at that. I’ve got a spongy feeling under my feet, and I am not sinking. I am only a few inches in the water, and I can’t believe that!”

Is it vain to serve the Lord?

There are people who say it is vain to serve God. They say it is vain to go to Bible school. It’s vain to stay up at night reading the Book. It’s vain to have a prayer meeting, vain to have a fellowship. It is vain to go to conferences and spend so much to get there. Still, some missionaries scrape their pennies together to travel across Siberia, to get to Budapest for a conference. Some people will travel nine days by bus from Central Asia and spend much money to get there—and they come. Siberia. Africa. And yet, some people will not even walk across the street to go to church.

It’s Definitely Worth the Trip

In Matthew 12:42, Jesus told how the Queen

of Sheba traveled eight hundred miles with a camel caravan to Jerusalem—nine months to get there and to get back home—to meet King Solomon, the wisest man in the world. Not a bad investment at the time. “But,” He said, “A greater than Solomon is here.” A greater than Solomon—the Body of Christ—is here, yet some will not walk across the street to come to church!

A greater than Solomon is here, yet some won’t even turn on their radio to hear a message that is transforming lives around the world. A great Bible school is here, doing so much work for so many years, and yet, people would stay on their farm in Montana, and go daydreaming in South Dakota, and be gambling in Las Vegas, and enjoy the pleasures of the flesh in Florida, and get into business in New York, and sell tires in Maine. They will not go to a school where they can get training that will change their lives, where they will meet often one with another.

Peter did not regret his decision to step out of the boat. Paul did not regret going to Bible school in the desert in Arabia. We do not regret taking long and perhaps difficult journeys to have a part in fellowship that is written in a book in heaven. It is holy—our joy and our rejoicing. It is how we know the Lord.

Chapter Three

THE SECRET OF FELLOWSHIP

“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Malachi 3:16).

Every time we speak those words that are opposite the stout words, the arrogant words of our flesh, every time we speak the opposite with words of faith, God hears it, and there is a great “Amen!” in the fellowship. God hears it.

We talk, God hears it. The conversation is refreshing. It is with the tears that Paul speaks about when he thinks of Timothy. It is the fellowship. It is the secret. The majority of people are doing their own programs, but here is the minority. This is where you find the tough-mindedness that comes from a fellowship in the Spirit, a tough-mindedness where Paul was in an absolute minority.

He is counting his faithful people on one hand. He is in trouble (2 Timothy), about to die, and thinking of the people; and he has a lot of people to think about. But in the Bible, see what he is saying, “When I first answered, no man stood with me” (2 Timothy 4). Demas? He left. He loved the world more. He spoke stout words in his heart against God, and he did not have fellowship. Demas did not draw near in the places where he could draw near in his heart.

It is the heart that is so important—the fellowship in my heart. If we say, “Oh yeah, okay. All right. I can do that. Oh sure, oh yeah. No big deal. Oh, I can do that,” then we will never do it God’s way.

But if it is first “no” and then brokenness, we will listen and God will lead us. We will meet often one with another, God giving us words to build up one another in the faith: “Yes, you are able. Keep walking! You are able.”

Where Questions Are Answered

The Lord says, “Come! Peter!”

Peter says, “Lord, call me.”

“Come! Come on over here, Peter. Get over here! Come on.”

(Judas is saying, “The wallet, please?”)

And Peter goes out there.

I have a box of ointment. I pour it out on Jesus by faith. Years later, I have the broken box kicking around in the closet. I pull it out and look at it. Do I regret it? No. Not if I meet often with other believers. And when I am built up, my questions are answered by the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 3:13 says we are to exhort, or encourage, one another daily, “while it is called To day: lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” God’s people saw His miracles as He led them out of captivity and through the wilderness, yet they grieved the Holy Spirit because they did not know His ways (see Psalm 95:8-11). In Malachi 3:14-15, they said “It is vain to serve God.” Their complaint? “We follow His rules, we walk before Him, yet the wicked are prospering, and we are not.” They had questions about God’s authority, and they heard no answers. They were not following the Holy Spirit.

What Were You Thinking?

If we are led by the Holy Spirit, we are the sons of God (Romans 8:14-15). The Holy Spirit leads us in our thought life (2 Corinthians 10:5). Check your thought life. Don’t speak stout

words in your heart against God. Check your thought life, casting down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Every word of encouragement and edification that we speak, He writes in a book of remembrance. Malachi 3:16: "A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name."

They thought upon His name; they thought about His grace. God. God's grace. When we think about His name, it is written in a Book. What a thought! What a message this is! We thought about His name; we were just talking about God. And the Word of God promises that if we just think about His name, the Holy Spirit ministers to us the name of God.

The Right Kind of Tears

"To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

"I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers

night and day;

“Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy” (2 Timothy 1:2-4).

If we were to read that entire chapter a few thousand times, it would be transforming. Read it. Read it again. Then read it again, and get the message from there. In fact, some preachers read a chapter forty times before they preach on it.

This is a great chapter about a man who is alone in a crisis. He is a great man, so tough-minded in his convictions. It is one thing to be stubborn: that is not correct. But to be correct and humble, with strong convictions—that is spiritual. Paul is in the minority. Really, he is in trouble. And when he thinks of Timothy, he remembers Timothy’s tears.

It is a great thought. Picture in your mind a person you love, and you see the person weeping the right kind of tears. When Paul remembered Timothy face to face, he pictured Timothy with tears. The right kind of tears. There were tears in Acts 20:36-38 when they heard that they would not see Paul any more. The people kissed his neck and wept when he told them they would not see him again—that kind of tears.

There is nothing more powerful than to have

fellowship with another person who has the same values, the same calling, the same purpose, and the same death to self. It is in this: “*I will not!*” Then I do it.

And then you meet that one who has the same purpose.

Paul looks at him and says, “Timothy!” And Timothy says, “Paul! I can’t believe it. We are doing it! It is such a joy, this service to the gospel. What a joy. I can’t believe it! It is awesome.”

There are tremendous tears. Perhaps he cannot even speak because of the awesomeness of the moment.

And Paul says, “Amen. I can’t believe it either. God has called me by His grace. Timothy, be strong in grace” (2 Timothy 2:1).

The True Treasures

“When I think of your tears, Timothy, I want to see you. I am greatly desiring to see you. I just want to see you.”

We might not have some machine but we have a Person. Might not have a new car, but we have a Person. Might not have much of a house, but we have a Person. We may not have a lot in the material way, but we have a lot in God’s

way, and there is nothing wrong with that. And if you have it all, awesome! Have it all!

But if you would have me choose, I would take the true treasures (Matthew 6:20). Spiritual treasures. The hearts of people, the love of people, and the fellowship. We have love in common suffering. Love in common communion. Love in common service. Let's take the evangelist's sketch board and go out there. Let's get on the elephant in Northern Thailand and go up there. Let's go live in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam and serve there. There is such a camaraderie in serving God together.

Let's go into Patterson Park in Baltimore. Let's have an awesome vision in neighboring towns and cities. Wherever it is that we are working and serving, it is all the same. It has nothing to do with external things. It has everything to do with this fact: I cannot. And yet, now, I do. This is the joy and rejoicing of my heart.

We get in the car, drive for hours, and someone is imparting something spiritual. Somebody is fellowshiping, imparting something from heaven, and it is so edifying. That is what Paul was talking about when he said he was "greatly desiring to see thee.... that I might be filled with joy."

I can't wait to see you, Timothy. When I see you, we're going to have a grand old time. We're going to have a great old time. If our foundation is right, we will have an awesome time when we meet together.

That is the evidence, the proof, that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there" (see Matthew 18:20). What name? The name of grace. The name of the Holy Spirit. The name of faith. The name of doctrine that says to me that I am wrong, but God is gracious. I am unable, but God is able. I cannot do it, but God does it.

Chapter Four

MAKING DISCIPLES: THE SWEETEST FELLOWSHIP

“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, [that is without hypocrisy,] which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Timothy 1:5).

Timothy is a second or third generation believer. He grew up in a Christian family. He learned the Scriptures from his youth. But he was timid.

Sometimes it seems as if Christians who grow up in Christian families are timid. Timothy had that tendency. But Paul was building him up, because he would rather trust in the man’s tough-mindedness in the truth of the gospel. The fact was that at times, Timothy was very sheepish—very timid, a bit shy, not so forth right, not so bold, not so courageous. But that was fine, because the basis of this whole thing is

“I cannot!” and then, “Yet I have received grace, so now I am able.” That is the basis for our fellowship.

Paul was saying, “Timothy, you are able.”

“There is a spirit in you, Timothy. Amen. Talk to me. You are able. Let us meet together often. Let us encourage one another often. Let us speak with content often. Let us build up each other often. And, as in Romans 14:19 and 15:2, let’s edify one another often.

“Timothy, when I think of your faith, I marvel! When I think of your tears, I love you. I love you so much, I want to see you.” We will break bread together. We will talk often. We will speak doctrine, and I’ll tell you why we believe. We will go through the Scriptures. We will quote Isaiah. We will go back into Deuteronomy. We will look at what Moses said in Exodus. We will look at the tabernacle. We will talk about the priesthood.

“We’ll talk about Jesus in heaven, what He said at the Last Supper, His resurrection, who saw Him, who touched Him. We’ll talk about His Ascension and Pentecost. Remember what happened at Pentecost?

“We’ll talk about the Church in Antioch. We will remember the walk that we had in Turkey

when we went through, and the time when I was stoned in Lystra.”

Timothy will say, “Tell me again. Tell me again!” And Paul will do it. And Timothy will say, “Yeah. Yeah! That’s what I want. This is the sweetest fellowship.” And it is written in heaven, in a book of remembrance.

They don’t speak stout words against God, and their feet are not an expression of mournful, reluctant servitude, doing something because we are supposed to do it. No, it is, “Let’s go. Let’s go! We believe! We have the truth. We have this treasure. Let’s go. Let’s go!”

No Need To Be Ashamed

That is why, when he was facing death, Paul wrote this letter to his son in the faith. He told it straight to Timothy: “Don’t be ashamed of the gospel. Don’t be ashamed that I am in jail. Don’t forsake me, as all of Asia has forsaken me. But be like that little man Onesiphorus (see 2 Timothy 1:16-18). Be like him. He sought me out very diligently, and he found me. He was in Rome looking for me, and he didn’t know where I was.

“I can picture him now: ‘Have you seen a little Hebrew guy causing a lot of trouble? He’s chained up with the Roman soldiers some-

where. Do you know where he is?' Everyone told him, 'No.' But he went again, and again, and he sought me out diligently, until he found me."

Why did Onesiphorus want to find Paul?

Because in him was the treasure and not stout words or familiar words, such as, "Oh yeah, I can do that. I can do it." Paul was a man who knew the gospel and the doctrine, and would establish us on another foundation. That is, "I cannot! But now, I do," and, "I do what I do by the grace of God," and, "All things are possible," and, "God is present here in our little meeting with two or three people." Paul is speaking to us, and he is so encouraging.

Onesiphorus went looking for Paul, and he found him. He went looking for Paul, and he was not ashamed of his chains, because chains are nothing.

The house I live in is nothing. What I look like is nothing. All those things that the world looks for are nothing compared to this great and awesome grace, the anointing, the fellowship, the messages, the purpose, and the Person, Jesus Christ.

Consider that for a moment. In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul is saying. "I suffer: but I am not

ashamed. I know whom I have believed. It is not a problem with me. You know, I look pretty ragged, but I am not ashamed. I'm torn up a little bit, and I am not ashamed. I am a nobody, and I'm not ashamed. I know Whom I believe."

"I know whom I have believed. He is my shield, my glory, and the lifter of my head (Psalm 3:3). I know, and I am not ashamed.

Where did that comfort come from? It comes from this type of fellowship in the Holy Spirit. I know that what we have believed is not in vain. Our work is not in vain. Our mission is not in vain. Our giving is not in vain. I know it is not in vain, and we are not ashamed.

The Transforming Power of Fellowship

It is the power of God to change people. It is the power of God to build them up. It is the power of God to change their lives.

We heard a testimony from Budapest. This man, an alcoholic from a city in the south, was visiting. He owed some people money and he needed a job. Pastor Brian took him, and trusted him, and gave him an opportunity. The man made some money, and he went back down to his city. He paid his debt, then he came back up.

In one month, his life has been transformed.

He is a different person. In one month, redemption—after one month of fellowship. It is the fellowship that Paul was talking about, the fellowship that we preach about, the fellowship that makes such a difference in the world that we live in.

It is so important that I've started and I have said, "It is not in vain." I'm going to walk on water. It is not in vain. I'm going to see Jesus in Bethlehem. It is not in vain. I will see Him in His resurrection. It is not in vain. I'm going to be there at Pentecost. It is not in vain. It will be written in a book. It is not in vain. Every time we meet together and we talk, it is written in a book. It is not in vain. It is not in vain.

The Harness of Grace

Paul said, "I'm not ashamed, Timothy. I remember your tears, and your faith, and your grandmother. I remember your mother. I remember when we met together. This is precious to me. The essence, the content of my life is in these precious memories in my mind. It is in those things that I have not followed cunningly devised fables, but I have embraced the gospel. I believed it and taught it every day—every day for hours. I have kept myself in the harness of

grace.”

Grace says “Go!” and Paul did. And “Study!” and he did. And “Pray!” and he did. Grace says, “Stir up yourselves,” and he did. “Go home at night with praise in your heart,” and he did. Grace says, “Meet together, often,” and they did.

And then, in chains, Paul said, “I’ve got it all in my mind. Yet, Asia has forsaken me. Demas has left me. But, wait—there is a knock at the door. Onesiphorus came and found me! He is here! Come on in.”

Onesiphorus comes in. They weep together, they fall down together. They have a prayer together. They open the Scripture.

And Onesiphorus says, “Thank you, Paul.”

And Paul says, “Really?”

“Yes, thank you, Paul.”

“Really? Why? Tell me.”

“Because of your life, churches have been planted in Colossae, and Ephesus, and Smyrna, and Laodicea, and Philadelphia, and Antioch, and up in Thessalonica, and Berea, and Athens—and they are still talking about you in Corinth.”

“What are they saying?”

“They are saying that when Paul came, he

built us up, and the Spirit in us said 'Amen.' Grace was revealed, and we walked by faith. The Church was edified with a spiritual gift (Romans 1:11). You are the man, Paul! Thank you so very much. Your life is not in vain. But it took a cross, and it took faith. It required the grace of God and deliberate training."

Paul could not do it, but he did it. And now, he could see it.

CONCLUSION

“I’m going to die soon,” Paul wrote. “Nero pronounced me a convicted criminal. I am going to die soon but that’s okay. I know I have a treasure, a crown reserved for me in heaven (2 Timothy 4:8). And every time that we met together, it was written in a book. I know that. And I remember your tears, Timothy. Those tears are a reality, an expression of joy and gratitude. I know that. And so, thank You, God.”

That is how Paul lived, that is how he faced his crisis, and that is how he died. It was in the reality of the Spirit that comes to us through Christ in our life and in our work. It is beautiful!

“Father, thank You for these thoughts. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”