

FAITHFUL TIMOTHY

Acts 16:1-3

It appears that Timothy was born in Lystra, which was a town in Lycaonia on one of the great Roman thoroughfares between the east and the west. His father was a Greek, but of what religious persuasion we are not told. His life was honorable and his reputation was good. His mother was a pious and devout Jewess. Timothy was the son of one of those mixed marriages which were condemned by stricter Jewish opinion, but still they were not uncommon in the later periods of Jewish history. The offspring of such a union was put to a serious disadvantage, for they had numerous prejudices to encounter and overcome before they could secure recognition.

Within Timothy was the blood of two opposite heredities. They were counteracted by each other. Israel and Greece were essentially opposite currents. Their difference lay deeper than any religious doctrines; it was constituted by their view of life. The Jew aimed at the repression of nature; the object of the Greek was to give the nature full play. The Jew encouraged the sense of obligation; the Greek fostered the thought of spontaneity. The Jew looked upon the universe with awe; the Greek viewed it as a pleasure-ground. The Jew uncovered his head in the presence of divine mysteries; the Greek made them subjects of daring speculation.

Timothy, however, had a great heritage in his parents. Any person who has noble parents has a great heritage. It means much to be well-born. To inherit a good name means more than great wealth. Every man and every woman should remember that their unborn children have a right to a good name. While it is possible for a young person to rise above the sordid name of an unworthy parent; yet, it is difficult to do so. The ones who do it are comparatively few; many are cursed from the cradle. They go through life with the ghost of a bad name trailing them. The public will not forget the parent's unworthiness. If parents would be respected by their children, let them live respectable lives. If they would be honored, let them be honorable.

It is quite probable that Timothy's father died during his son's infancy or very early childhood. So, it was to his mother Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, that Timothy owed the molding of his character. In his Second Epistle to Timothy, Paul speaks with warm appreciation of their faith, as well as of their faithfulness in instructing Timothy in the sacred writings of the Old Testament.

A powerful factor in Timothy's education was the Bible, or Old Testament. From a child it had been his great lesson-book; its milk had nourished his spiritual infancy, and its meat had sustained his spiritual manhood. There is not a book which will do for character what the Bible does. That is why Charles Dickens said to his son, "I have put a New Testament among your books, because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature can possibly be guided."

Paul congratulated Timothy on his equipment for life saying, "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures." The knowledge of the Bible is a vital element in education, even though it is not always recognized. These women deserved commendation for seeing to it that Timothy was reared in the faith of their Jewish fathers. Faith, reverence for holiness, belief in prayer and a desire for obedient living pervaded the atmosphere of the home in which he was reared.

Their home was one in which God was honored and magnified, the Scriptures were given the first place in reading matter, and the interests of the inner life were exalted above those of the outer life. It was a home in which it was thought to be of more consequence to train a child in the knowledge and habit of godliness than to teach him how to get rich, or how to shine in social circles, or how to have pleasure, or how to mount to a position of power.

In the course of Paul's first missionary journey Timothy was led to Christ through the instrumentality of the Apostle. At that time Timothy was approximately fifteen years of age. During the interval of seven years between Paul's first and second missionary journeys, the boy grew to manhood. Meanwhile, Timothy had proved himself to be a faithful and useful Christian. The Scriptures tell us that he was already a disciple "well reported of by the brethren." Before reaching Lystra on his second missionary journey, Paul had passed through the crisis of his separation from Barnabas. Naturally he was looking for another comrade. It is not surprising therefore that he was impressed with Timothy. The young man had made such progress in knowledge and was so established in the faith of Christ that Paul was ready and anxious to have him go as an efficient helper in the aggressive missionary work. Timothy was ready to go with Paul.

Timothy left his home, his mother and his grandmother and went with Paul and Silas to preach the gospel. Naturally, the parting from her son was a sore trial to the widowed Eunice. He had been so much to her, and she had done so much for him. Besides, she knew that many hardships and perils lay before him. However, she recognized and acknowledged an even higher call than that of natural and earthly affection.

Timothy became the companion of Paul and a co-worker with him in the sacred business of proclaiming the gospel and establishing and building up churches. He was an evangelist; he was a messenger; he was a peace-maker; he had much to do with the collection and distribution of alms; in outbreaks of heresy and licentiousness it was his privilege and responsibility to minister wise counsels; he was the intimate and trusted associate and also the discreet and faithful helper of the Apostle in his efforts to advance the cause of Christ.

Timothy had a lovable disposition. Sufficiently lacking in physical vigor to excite sympathy in his behalf, naturally timid and averse to assuming responsibilities, of a sensitive temperament, so conscientious that he was disposed to press his convictions into a perilous asceticism, of the kind of make-up which leads one to shrink from meeting opposition and bearing hardships, but which in the faith inspired and the strength furnished by the Master goes straight on as the voice calls or the vision beckons, it could hardly have been otherwise than that he should be exceedingly attractive to a man of the dauntless energy and push of the Apostle Paul. Nobody could well help loving and trusting such a man.

When to this there was added the warm testimony of the brethren, who were so competent to judge, to the high standard of his character and attainments, there was no room for hesitancy in calling him into the service.

Timothy is one of the characters in the Bible about whom there is no word of depreciation. He lived on a high plane. He was always found with noble people. He was always busy doing good things. There was no place nor time in his life for Satan to get control of his program. Timothy never lived a compromising life. He never left anybody in doubt about what he believed, what he was ready to do, or where and when he was ready to go. He was wholly committed to his task. His upward climb was an unceasing joy to Paul who won him to Christ, discovered him as a potential companion and co-worker, and challenged him to let the Lord have His way with him by spending his life, energy and efforts in the glorious gospel ministry.

Paul prided himself to a degree on his insight into Timothy's character at the first. He saw the promise that was in this gifted young man. He coveted his talents, service and influence for the Lord. He challenged Timothy to keep ablaze the gift of God that was in him. Timothy never disappointed Paul. He proved himself true blue and gave his Lord and Paul the very best that was in him. He remained faithful when others flickered and failed. Paul knew that he could count on Timothy to the limit, that he could trust him anywhere and all the time. Because of his faithfulness and loyalty, Paul knew that Timothy would stand true when others had deserted.

After speaking of his unfeigned faith, his unwearied service and his strict fidelity, Paul declared that of all the chosen band of his fellow-laborers there was none like Timothy, none so full of sympathy or so much after his own heart. Because he was always trustworthy and dependable, his name is often associated with Paul's in the various epistles which he had addressed to the churches, and frequently he was sent by Paul on special missions to minister to the brethren and to settle numerous problems which had arisen in the churches. He even left him in charge of the great church in Ephesus. That was a tremendous responsibility, but he doubtless measured up to it.

In the relation of Paul to Timothy we have one of those beautiful friendships between an older and a younger man which is commonly very helpful to both. It is in such cases, rather than where the friends are equal in age, that each can be the real complement of the other. Each from his abundance can supply the other's want, whereas men of equal age would have common wants and common supplies. It is difficult to estimate which of the two friends, Paul or Timothy, gained most from the affection and devotion of the other. That intense craving for sympathy, which breathes so strongly throughout the writings of Paul, found its chief human satisfaction in Timothy. It gave him strength in his weaknesses, hope in his many disappointments, and solid help in his daily burden of "anxiety for all the churches." The friendship between these two men, so unequal in years and so different in powers, is one of the most suggestive things in early Christian history.

Finally, Paul was cast into the Mamertine Prison in Rome. This was his last imprisonment. Friends no longer visited him, because it was not safe to do so. Onesiphorus oft refreshed Paul by his courage till he was apparently slain for his daring. Timothy was still in Ephesus, but Paul longed for him to visit him before winter, and to bring with him his cloak for protection from the cold, and his books which he had missed so much. He wanted to see Timothy before the Lord called him home.

It is probable that Timothy came quickly to Paul and paid the penalty for his courage by getting thrown into prison himself. We may suppose that Paul had the comfort of Timothy's presence with him when the end came. Probably Luke, Timothy and Mark were those who had the wonderful privilege of accompanying Paul to the place of execution outside of Rome on the Appian Way. We do not know about the further work of Timothy, but we can be sure that he was true and faithful to the end. To say the least, he was a wonderful example to all Christians of all ages.