

A GREAT TESTIMONY

II Timothy 1:8-14

Timothy was urged not to be ashamed either of his testimony for Christ or of Paul who had been imprisoned for his loyalty to Christ, but rather to endure bravely the hardships which may be involved in preaching the gospel. "Don't start being ashamed." After all, what is there about being a Christian of which to be ashamed, unless it be that one is such a poor Christian? In reality, it is a matchless honor to be a real Christian.

In one of the Italian wars of many years ago, the recruiting band was marching through one of the villages gathering young volunteers as it went, who brought their weapons and fell in at the end of the procession. At one place an old woman, stirred by the martial music, went hurriedly back into her house and returned with a broomstick and joined the march. How her fellow-villagers laughed! What could the silly old woman do for the war? She hurled at them her spirited reply, "I don't care so long as you know whose side I'm on." Even if we have nothing but a broomstick to contribute to the Cause, let us bring that, and see that there is no question about our allegiance, that all may know that we are undoubtedly and unashamedly His.

Shall Timothy be ashamed of the Master he served? "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." There is our testimony of Him. In these days He is "despised and rejected of men," but in "that Day" He shall be crowned. How easy it will be to honor Him then; but how infinitely more worth while to honor Him now, in the days of His rejection! Have you not some testimony to give concerning Him? Is He not a Saviour so complete, a Master so amazing, a Friend so altogether wonderful? Tell others what you yourself have experienced of Him in your own heart.

Shall Timothy be ashamed of the Man he loved? "Nor of me His prisoner." There was a time when Timothy held Paul as his hero, as well as his father in the faith, when he was proud beyond words to be seen in his company, to be counted among his helpers. Has all of that to be altered now that his friend has been thrown into prison, and is under social disgrace? A thousand times, No. Timothy will never be ashamed of his great leader, in prison or out of it.

Shall Timothy be ashamed of the Message he bore? Need he blush to think that he had ever preached such things? His message was the gospel of Christ. But remember that this Good News begins with Bad News. The pronouncement of our guilty sinnership precedes the announcement of His gracious Saviourhood.

God does not give any of His children the spirit of cowardice which manifests itself by a timidity and shrinking in the daily difficulties which the Christian meets in the warfare for the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit never works cowardice in men.

The alternative of being ashamed was to suffer hardship for the gospel. If a Christian leader in those troubled times gave his testimony for Christ, personal suffering was almost certain to follow. Paul urged Timothy to join him in suffering these evils.

What Christ did for sinners in need of grace is summarized in verse ten. In connection with His first coming He utterly defeated or rendered ineffective that which we call death. He brought life and immortality to light by exhibiting life in His own glorious resurrection, and by means of His promise through the Gospel.

As a herald Paul must announce and loudly proclaim that gospel. As an apostle he must say and do nothing except that which he has been commanded to say and do. As a teacher he must impart instruction carefully about salvation, and admonish unto faith and obedience.

Because of the fulfilment of his assignment as an apostle of Christ, Paul suffered in that terrible Roman prison, a dismal underground dungeon with a hole in the ceiling for light and air. "For which cause," that is, because of my loyalty to the gospel of Christ, "I suffer all these things," -- this dungeon, this darkness, this desertion, this loneliness, this hatred; "Yet I am not ashamed." He was convinced that Christ was able to guard the deposit entrusted to Him.

Paul affirmed that he did not have any doubt as to the credentials of his faith. He claimed to have arrived at a glorious certainty. The man who has a sure word to speak on any subject demands attention. The man who knows in any realm is worthy of consideration. But here is a man who claimed that he possessed that knowledge which is supreme.

Paul was glad to say, "I know." There were some things which he confessed he did not know. There were other things which he knew only "in part." But every now and then he said, "I know." His conviction, his assurance and his certainty gave power to his testimony and abiding influence to his personality. His great affirmatives, such as this one, are like the rays of a lighthouse which pierce the fogs of doubt and uncertainty. Assurance is the secret of the highest eloquence and influence. When George Whitefield was getting the people of Edinburgh to arise at five o'clock in the morning in order to hear him preach, a man met the Scottish agnostic and skeptic, David Hume, on his way to the place where Whitefield was preaching. In astonishment he said to him, "Are you going to hear Whitefield? I thought you didn't believe in Christianity." "No, I don't," said Hume, "But he does!" Even the skeptic delighted to hear a man who could say, "I believe; I know."

Paul is exhorting Timothy to be a true and faithful proclaimer of the Gospel of Christ. He reminds him Who Christ is, what He has done, and how God saves us, not according to our works, nor our good deeds, nor our character; but according to His own purpose and grace, given us in Christ Jesus before the world was made. That eternal purpose of God to redeem us and to save us was made manifest to the world in Christ, Who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel. As a preacher of that Gospel, Paul says he suffered many things; yet he says that he does not regret what he suffered, is not ashamed of Christ, and is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

Paul knew that he was a sinner. Although his life had always been a conscientious one, he knew that he could not count on any good things that he had done to procure his salvation. In writing to the Romans he had said, "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Paul added, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." No one ever makes any progress toward the Christian life until he starts where Paul started, "I am a sinner and in me dwelleth no good thing."

Paul knew Christ. He knew Him as the One Who had appeared unto him, convicted him of his sin, saved him, called him into His service, and been faithful to him. He could look back over the events of his stormy life, sickness, hunger, thirst, suffering, imprisonment, shipwreck and peril; and yet he could truthfully say, "Always He stood by me." He knew Christ as the one through whose death on the cross he was reconciled unto God. "He loved me and gave Himself for me."

This language is unhesitating in tone. It is not that of a doubter, but of a man who knows. Such assurance as he had is so valuable that one may be sure that it is costly. The best things in life are not purchasable. They have to be received as a free gift, or be won. There is only one way of getting experience. The man who can say, "I know" is the man of experience. That is why, when we want to know something we usually go to the person who has had experience.

Paul's certainty of Christ's redeeming power was born out of his own experience. Paul had known all about the guilt and slavery and shame of sin. To use his own language, sin had dwelt in him, reigned over him, and used his members as instruments of unrighteousness. So keenly did he feel the pain and shame of the tyranny of sin that in his misery he cried, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" Out of this wretchedness and misery Paul had been delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's certainty of the Saviourhood of Christ was based on the fact that he had saved him. Oh the blessedness of a personal knowledge of Christ! Paul knew Him by faith, by love, by obedience and by suffering. He entrusted himself completely to Christ who was fully competent to take care of him. Our text is a splendid declaration of Paul's unflinching confidence in the Redeemer. As we seek to analyze this verse, let us note four things.

I. The Deposit.

"That which I have committed unto Him" means "My deposit." The beauty of this passage is in the word "commit" which means to put the matter out of my hands into His. Paul trusted a Person and deposited his soul, his life, his desires, his fame, his fortune, his hopes, and his all into Christ's keeping. The deposit is the sum total of all that constitutes life. It includes time, talents, character, knowledge, possessions, privileges, influence, destiny and everything that enters into the sum of life. The great surrender occurred when he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" That surrender was absolute and unreserved. Thereafter, his deposit was in the keeping of Christ.

II. The Depositor.

He is Saul of Tarsus. It is Saul born again. It is Saul a new creation and a new creature. Saul of Tarsus took charge of himself, but Saul the Christian committed himself to Another. He did not worry about his deposit, but rested completely.

III. The Depository.

The depository is Christ, the Divine and devoted keeper of souls. Paul placed his soul in the hands of Christ with the blessed assurance of its perfect safety. His soul, with all its fears, interests and hopes, he had put into the hands of Christ, as the grandest and most precious deposit which he could ever make. The making of this deposit was the first act that ever brought real comfort to his spirit.

When Paul committed himself to Christ, he renounced all dependence upon his own efforts to save himself, he had implicit confidence that Christ would save him, and he made a full and free surrender of himself to Christ, to be His property and His servant forever.

IV. The Testimony Of The Depositor.

1. A Personal knowledge. "I know."

There was no doubt on Paul's part. It is one thing to know, and another thing to know what you know. The difference between the two is the difference between

general information and intelligent conviction. One may have considerable information, and lack power. He may be encyclopedic, but without force. There were certain things of which Paul was absolutely sure, of which he was as certain as he was of his own existence. And it was these certainties of the soul that made him the preacher that he was. Paul never would have traveled as he did, nor toiled as he did, nor submitted to persecution as he did, if all he had given to men had been doubts, criticisms and negations.

2. A Personal Saviour. "Whom."

He knew Him--what He was, Who He was, what He had done, what He could do, and what He had promised to do. Renouncing all dependence upon his own efforts to save himself, and believing in Christ's willingness and ability to save him, Paul made a full surrender to Christ. He found Him to be willing, able and ready to save him. He found Him to be the Saviour of both soul and body, the sum of all happiness, and the source of all strength.

3. A Personal faith. "I have believed."

The object of Paul's faith was not a thing, but a Person. It was not a belief in a religion, but in a Redeemer; a faith, not in Christianity, but in Christ; a trust, not in a plan of salvation, but in a Saviour; not in a creed, but in Christ Jesus.

4. A Personal confidence. "Am persuaded that He is able to keep."

Paul did not trust in himself, or build on his own foundation. He knew, on the basis of experience, that Christ was a good, wise, watchful, powerful and faithful keeper. Christ is an able guardian and the only preserver. He Himself said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." Paul said, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He knew that Christ would keep him from the very moment he committed his soul to Him. The same power by which Paul was kept is offered to every person, for Christ is no more a respecter of persons in His saving work than He is in His keeping work. He both saves and sustains all who put their trust in Him.

It is said that there used to be an old battered safe standing on Broadway in New York City on which was this sign, "It stood the test. The contents were all saved." It had passed through one of the hottest fires New York City had ever seen, but the old safe had kept its treasures in spite of the flames, and had delivered every scrap of paper to its rightful owner unharmed.

And so, beloved, Jesus Christ is such a safe to all the souls that put their trust in Him. No matter what the flames are, whether of temptation, persecution or peril, if you fully trust Christ all will be well. Commit every interest to Jesus Christ. If you can trust Him for your salvation, you ought to trust Him, for your sustenance. His power is sufficient for every time and place of danger.

Have you, my friend, committed your soul entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you entrusted the destiny of your immortal soul to Him Who died for you on the cross? If you have done that, then you have the right and the privilege to say with Paul, "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." Christ is the Saviour who never deceives nor fails. Christ will not fail you if you will commit your soul to Him. Won't you trust Him now as we sing?