

POWER, LOVE AND SELF-DISCIPLINE

2 Timothy 1:1-14

“If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would spend eternity?” How many of you here today have ever been asked this question? How many of you have ever asked someone this question? It is the classic question evangelists have used for years when seeking to bring people into the Kingdom of God.

Tony Campolo has a story. A minister tells the story of a man who stood up in a midweek prayer service at his church and gave a testimony. “I was in King’s Cross in Sydney, Australia,” the man said, “waiting for the traffic light to change. As I stood there, someone tugged on my jacket, and when I turned, this shabby-looking man looked at me and asked, “Sir! If you were to die tonight, where would you spend eternity?” That question haunted me for more than three weeks. I could get no rest as it came back to me time and time again. I had to find an answer to it, and I found that answer in Jesus.”

A couple of years later, another man stood in that same church and gave an almost identical testimony. He, too, had been at King’s Cross in Sydney, where a derelict man pulled on his jacket and asked him the simple question, “If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would spend eternity?” The man giving the testimony went on to say that the question haunted him for several days and eventually drove him to his knees and motivated him to give his life over to Jesus.

Then, 2 years later, the minister, himself, was in Sydney. Out of curiosity, he went to King’s Cross on the outside chance that he might find the derelict man. He stood on the corner scanning the faces of the people around him, when he felt someone tug on his jacket. When he turned, there was a man who obviously was poor and ragged. Before the man could say a word, the pastor raised his hand to silence him and said, “I know what you are going to say. You are going to ask, if I was to die tonight, where would I spend eternity?”

The old man was amazed and asked how the pastor knew that. The pastor told him about the two men who had given testimonies at his church and how they had become Christians because of the haunting question he has raised when they visited his city. The man was reduced to tears and said, “Mister, some eight years ago I was an old drunk. But then I gave my life to Jesus. I am uneducated. I don’t know how to say much or do much. The only thing I could think of was to go around and ask people this same question over and over again. I have been doing this for eight years, mister, and today was the first day I had any idea I was doing any good at all.”

Tony concludes, “Jesus does not expect us to be polished, or to possess the best techniques. What He does expect is that we faithfully do what we can to tell people of their need for Christ and His salvation.”

This morning we heard from the apostle Paul writing to his protégé Timothy. Paul opens with the acknowledgement that Timothy has been well versed in the faith by his mother and grandmother: “*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.*” Yes indeed, where would the Christian church

be today were it not for the faithful grandmothers and grandfathers who have seen to it that their grandchildren were taken to church! Just out of curiosity, how many of you were taken to church by your grandparent's or even a great Aunt or great Uncle?

Paul continues, *“For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”* I want to jump to the final two verses of our text this morning and we will spend the remainder of our time with these four verses. *“Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.”*

God has given each one of us a spirit of power, and of love and of self-discipline...to do what? You and I are to hold to the standard of sound teaching from Paul in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. And with this you and I are to *“guard this good treasure”* entrusted to us by none other than Jesus Christ himself! When you think of guarding something, what comes to mind? Watchdogs? Triple locks on all the doors of your home and the church? A professionally installed ADT security system? In our area, we should probably also think about the family shotgun! Do you think this is what Paul meant in these verses? Well, many folks do think Paul is referring to direct action on the part of Christians to defend their faith.

Let us look further into today's text. The word “guard” appears twice, once in verse 12 and once in verse 14. In the latter, as we've already mentioned, Paul tells Timothy to *“guard the good treasure entrusted to him.”* Verse 12, however, is less clear, for translators disagree on what exactly Paul said. It may be, as the NRSV has it, *“But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.”* (Homiletics Online, 2016)

Some translators believe verse 12 should read the following way: *“he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me”* making it sound as if Paul is responsible for guarding the faith. It is Christ who guards the faith, not us. One of the things that has happened with this dual understanding of this verse is that too many Christians have become so consumed with guarding the faith that they have lost sight of the true nature of faith in Christ, **which is to trust Jesus and follow him**. When a denomination spends 20+ years fighting amongst itself as to whom should be included in the church and who should be barred, I believe we have lost focus. I decided while I was still a fairly young Christian that it is not my job to change people – that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

As I studied this past week, one of my resources offered four practical suggestions of what it means to guard the faith. The first involves those who teach about the faith – Sunday school teachers, Bible Study teachers, Vacation Bible School and Sermons are just some of the ways this is done. Any of us who do this are teaching about Christianity or explaining it, which is actually a significant way of defending the faith. *Teachers guard the faith by seeing that knowledge of it is passed along, and that this knowledge is an accurate and faithful interpretation of the faith.* This is absolutely why I struggle week after week to write a sermon that is faithful to God's word that can also have practical application to our lives.

Second, we are defending the faith *when we respectfully explain how it affects us personally*. In 1 Peter, the writer advises Christians, “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” (3:15-16) Truly this is the most effective way to lead persons to Christ.

But it doesn't mean grabbing the other person by the throat and saying, “How dare you not believe!” Rather, it means “give an answer.” In fact, that’s how the NIV words it: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

And here’s the paraphrase of that line from The Message: “Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy.” Even here, not every Christian has the gift for doing that. Some genuinely say, “I believe in Jesus” but can’t articulate why. This is why it is so, so important that our daily actions, the way we speak, and the way we treat people tells the world that we are Jesus’ disciples.

Over 40 years ago, I went through summer training with the Coalition of Christian Outreach – a campus-based ministry to bring Jesus to college campuses by living with students in their residence halls, coaching them, and teaching in classrooms. A big part of our summer training was in evangelism. I was never so scared in my life. All I could think of was the people who stood on sidewalks with placards saying, “The End is near! Repent and be saved!” I worried needlessly. We studied a textbook titled “Evangelism Explosion,” which taught “lifestyle evangelism.” When I realized that I could keep on being Tizzy, loving people with the love of Jesus – that it wasn’t fancy words, or quoting scripture, but how I treated all God’s Children that would lead them to Christ, it all started making sense. Of course, there is a downside to this... in that I truly never know how many people I actually do lead to Christ. I am the sower who plants seeds, the Holy Spirit grows them and usually someone else does the harvesting.

But, let me tell you about Shortie Harris. It was during my first appointment when I met Shortie at the 4th of July celebration. Shortie was in her late 70’s, a retired physical therapist, who had not been in the church since she was a teenager. She was raised United Methodist but had fallen away from the faith because of how she had seen the church treat people who did not fit the “Christian” mold. For a solid year I was sure she was a Baptist until we started talking one day and I learned she was not and would never become a Baptist! I gave her one of my favorite books to read telling her we would talk about it. Shortly after that she and her 80+ year old sister drove some 14,000 miles in three weeks touring the U.S. of A. The very first Sunday back in Sedley, Shortie showed up in church.

Shortie was a strong Deist – she believed in God, but just could not wrap her mind around Jesus. She could see God in the beauty of Creation, but the idea of Jesus being the son of God was too abstract. A true scientist, she needed proof! And until she had concrete proof she would keep searching. I once asked her, “Shortie, have you ever been in love?” “Oh yes” she responded. “How do you know? Can you prove it to me?” Well beyond acknowledging heart pounding, or becoming weak kneed when around her beloved, she really could not prove it to me. “Knowing and Loving Jesus is like that, I told her.”

I told Shortie to ask God to show her that Jesus is real. I also cautioned her that she might not like how God answers her prayer. Well, one day, she got her answer. She was in a church for a Christmas concert and arrived early. With time to kill, she took a self-guided tour. On her tour, she encountered a life-sized cross with nails. In that moment, it hit her that Jesus died for her on the cross, and she knew. She knew.

I was with Shortie for an afternoon just before she died. Aside from the fact that she was leaving behind all those she loved, she was at complete peace. Shortie was a gift to me.

I told you there are four ways to guard the faith – the third way is to make disciples. I just gave you one example of doing this.

Finally, the advice to Timothy to “guard the good treasure entrusted to you, *with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us*” is instructive. It suggests that when it comes to defending the faith, *we ought to listen for the Spirit of God within us*, rather than responding in knee-jerk fashion to every new wrinkle in the so-called culture wars “against” Christianity.

Friends, *we can trust God and Christ*. If, indeed, God is Lord of the universe, God's intentions are not going to be stymied by even the strongest attacks on the faith mere humans can muster. The purposes of God may come under attack, but God is God, Jesus is Lord, and we don't need to fear for them or the faith they call us to.

Our main task is not to guard the faith, but to live it, share it, testify about it, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the love of Jesus, guided by Christian Disciplines.