

Fan It Into Flame

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Date: 16 January 2024

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[0 : 00] Greetings and salutations, Gentiles and Jew.

Welcome to the Providence Community Podcast, the very first podcast of 2024. My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church.

This here is one of their preparation for community group kind of podcasts. Pretty soon you'll be gathering to discuss the text that you heard last week in the sermon.

And I try to drop these podcasts at least before you gather to meet for community groups so that you have maybe another way of listening and thinking through the content that was explored during the Sunday morning sermon.

Well, we're looking at a particular passage in a particular book. We're looking at 2 Timothy. I don't think I mentioned that the name of the series is going to be called True North. And it is sort of just based on this idea that Paul is, he is really ready to leave this world, ready to be executed, in fact, already being poured out like a drink offering, he says.

[1 : 15] As Paul is waiting for execution, he reaches out to one of those men that he loves the most, his true child, he says in this book, his beloved child, his beloved son in the faith, Timothy.

Now, Timothy, if you'll remember from our time in 1 Timothy, has been left in Ephesus, which is an extremely strategic and important city in the Roman Empire.

And I've got a frog in my throat. I keep sounding like Al Mohler. Anyway, thank you for listening to today's turning point, whatever his thing is. He's left Timothy in Ephesus because Ephesus is a church that is starting to veer away from true doctrine.

It seems to me in this particular instance that in Timothy's case, he may have received a supernatural gifting of teaching to do the job that Paul's called him to do.

That's really why he's there. He is there to teach. He is there to keep folks on the right path of theological truthfulness, of gospel truthfulness.

[2 : 31] And so what we're finding in our passage is that Paul is really about to be executed. He's suffered a great deal for being a faithful teacher.

And he's writing to Timothy to encourage him to remain faithful in his particular teaching gift. This is described, I think, in the verse that sort of sets the table for the entire book.

And that is that he wants him to fan into flame. This is 2 Timothy 1.6. Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control. Now, we're always catching up.

Sorry, coffee break. We're always catching up to an overcorrection from previous problems and issues and so on and so forth. This is just the Christian life. This is what it means to be in a local church, to be in a particular moment in Christianity, in the history of Christianity.

[3 : 39] We're always sort of either moving away from some error or readjusting after we've moved away perhaps more than we ought to. One of those has been one of the things that has developed in Christianity in the past 30 years or so is this idea of gospel-centeredness, in particular an emphasis on the finished work of Jesus and the satisfaction and relief that comes from the finished work of Jesus.

And this is all beautiful and glorious truth. We're just not very good as people. And particularly as communicators, we have created a style of preaching that greatly favors oversimplification.

And as a result of that, we tend to often deliver unbalanced truth. And I think there's a little we can do about that. I don't know that we can fix that.

I think there's just by the very nature of who we are as people and so on and so forth. It's a difficult thing to do. Anyway, so we've established this sort of environment where we pretty routinely

celebrate the finished work of Jesus.

But in so doing, we tend to neglect talking about the progressive elements of Christianity. And Christianity is a progressive sort of thing, even as it is a finished sort of thing.

[5 : 08] No one piece of this is going to describe the glorious riches that we have in Christ. And to some extent, in a very real sense, we are what we are.

We are set apart in Him. We are, Hebrew says, we are sanctified in Him even now. But in another sense, we are caught in this, caught, we are put into this sort of progressive experience. And every aspect of Christianity has a progressive element to it and a completed element to it. It's the already, not yet, and it's in everything.

This is how we would talk about the kingdom. This is how we would talk about our salvation. It is already and not yet. This is how we would talk about our sanctification and so on and so forth. And so we want to make sure that even as we celebrate the finished work of Jesus Christ and, for instance, eternal security, or just the concreteness of our salvation as it was set before the foundation of the world.

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Even as we celebrate the finished aspects, we've got to be careful that we're not neglecting the progressive elements that are everywhere within the nature of Christianity.

[6 : 28] Whether you're talking about this idea with Jesus communicates with the parable of the stewards, in which individuals are given a dispensation, given a gift, and they are given not so much a gift, some talents, some finances, and they are really evaluated by how much they multiply what they were given.

This is simply the very idea of the kingdom of God being like leaven, advancing slowly and progressively. This is simply the way that we are transformed from one degree of glory to another. I could just go on and on and describe all the various ways in which this progressive issue is important. Well, how do we progress? We progress through effort.

One of the passages that I've been meaning to read to you, if I just knew the Lord wanted me to bring this to the church at some point, is 2 Timothy 1.

Let's just start in verse 2. May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

[7 : 48] So already at the beginning, may grace and peace be multiplied to you. We're talking about growth and progression here. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Verse 5 of 2 Timothy 1. In the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fail, you will never fall.

For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that I have, that you have.

I think it right as long as I'm in this body to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made very clear to me.

[9 : 50] I'm in verse 15, about done. And I will make every effort so that after my departure, you may be able at any time to recall these things.

All right, so patterns are beautiful things. My broken little brain loves patterns. Here's the pattern I'm seeing. I've got three goodbye texts in mind.

Paul writing Timothy is a call to what in his final moments? What's he saying to Timothy? Multiply. Fan into flames. Get this thing, take this gift you've been given, and steward it so that it becomes more progression.

We have this passage I just read to you. How does this passage end? Peter says, I'm about to check out, guys.

Lord Jesus has revealed it to me that I'm not going to be here much longer. I'm going to pass away. What does Peter say? His intention is to use his final moments, his final days.

[11 : 02] What's his intention? His intention is to encourage this sort of progressive growth. If these qualities are yours and ever increasing. So there's two, the two kind of, the two big dogs of the faith, Peter and Paul, both as they are passing from this life to the next, use their final days to communicate a bit of what I would call spiritual ambition, spiritual discontentment to some degree, just the idea of expecting and leaning into and wanting to give and serve and grow more and more and more.

There's no resting on laurels. We're not using our last days. Peter and Paul are not using their last days to sort of, you know, sit and or even simply to celebrate what has already been finished. But in many respects, they look at what has already been finished and say to the people they love, take that, take that gift you've been given and do a great thing with it.

In the passage in 2 Peter, he actually says that if you don't do this thing, if you're not growing in these qualities, it shows that you don't have a clear understanding of what the finished work of Jesus entails.

Verse 9, For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.

[12 : 54] For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. I said there were three. We've got Peter and Paul, but I'm also thinking of Jesus, who says what at the end of his earthly ministry?

Go, therefore, into the nations. Multiply. Make disciples. Expand. Take over. Rule and subdue. So the concern is simply that God loves you just the way you are.

The work is finished. These sorts of statements, while true, don't actually explain the entirety of the Christian life. They explain the foundation of the Christian life.

But in some respects, neglect what we are to do to build on that foundation. And that's why Paul is saying to Timothy, fan this gift you have into flame.

It's all the same idea, whether we're talking about a spiritual gift, whether we're talking about a calling, whether we're talking about the marriage that you have, or your church membership, or your vocation.

[14 : 12] You've got all these things that God's given you. Let's lean in and do the very best with them that we can. Now, as I said in the sermon, there are times when fanning something into a flame, making it burn brighter, there are times when trying more is obviously going to get you into more trouble.

And, you know, for Timothy, as a teacher, you know, that's certainly the case. It's really easy, as I mentioned on Sunday, to sort of do just enough to satisfy your own conscience, understanding that if you were to do more, it would cause trouble for you in some respect.

And I think we all understand how that works in teaching. But, you know, I'm not sure that's not true of all gifts.

You know, I don't know where we're—well, I have a very complicated—we need to talk about spiritual gifts sometime, because I think that we, again, have oversimplified that even a little bit. But let's assume for this conversation, the traditional view, that people are given a particular gift or two or whatever.

May not be—that may not be what's going on there, but we could talk about that someday. Let's assume that's the case. Well, have you ever practiced mercy and realized, you know, I can give this much mercy?

[15 : 52] I can give this much care. But if I go much further, we're going to start getting into some pretty sacrificial stuff. I don't know.

To me, as I've walked through the Christian life, I've seen this in my life in not just teaching, in every area, where, you know, I can do enough to say I've done it.

I can do enough to say that I've checked off the box. But if I did a little bit more, I'd be causing some problems for myself. This is a slippery slope kind of thing because someone who's listening to this with a weak conscience is going to just, like, not even know how to not do this in every area all the time.

I remember feeling this way when I was learning to read my Bible, and I'm like, what's the amount that pleases God? You know, amount, like daily amount.

How much am I reading that's the right amount? So this is something that is an art rather than a science.

[17:07] Some of us would love to have just a clear law of do this much or that much. But what I've learned over time is that the law is love.

I'm supposed to love the Lord. I'm supposed to love the people in my life. I'm supposed to love my neighbors. And love definitely goes beyond the mere kind of checking the box and saying that you've done it.

So what I would encourage for you community group goes this week to discuss is, I just think this, first of all, let's make sure we understand that the whole Christian life is about taking something given to us and doing our very best with it.

And maybe you could start thinking about what things there are like that in your life. And then maybe there are areas where, you know, I think there are things that, that there are gifts that if you were to fan them into the flame and do everything that God's called you to do with them, it would be, you could get into some trouble.

So one of the things I've learned about that is that my plan to avoid difficulty is the path that actually leads to the worst kinds of difficulty.

[18:26] My commitment to safety is where is the most dangerous thing in my life. My plan to cut corners, my plan to be safe, my plan to be careful, my plan to avoid pain.

These are always the things that lead me to pain. And I have never, ever, ever regretted just obeying, just going all the way in some area.

I feel like this podcast is very disjointed. I'm sorry about that. But I'll leave you with this. In the next chapter of, in 2 Timothy chapter 2, Paul talks about three vocations, and he talks about the soldier, the farmer, and the athlete.

We'll get into that when we get there on Sunday morning. But each one of those positions, the farmer, the athlete, and the soldier, are essentially experts at leveraging discomfort for the sake of accomplishment.

That's what those positions are. That's what a farmer is. That's what a soldier is. That's what an athlete is. That's what a farmer is investing significant amounts of time of discomfort to get the prize.

[19:52] They're sort of like master pain investors in a way. That's kind of what soldiers, athletes, and farmers are. And those are appropriate ways of thinking of the Christian life.

I want to leave you with this, and then we'll be done. And I'll get better. I'll get back to a better version of this. But I just want to make sure we never skip just basic things.

And one of the basic things would be, you know there's a plan for your life that brings optimal glory to God. And then there's a plan for your life that brings you ultimate joy and ultimate goodness and so forth.

And those are the same plan. You will never have to compromise what's best for you by pursuing what is best for God.

You will never have to. It will sometimes look like you will have to. You will never have to. If you commit to doing what's best for the Lord, what's best for his name, what's best for his glory, it will always wind up being what's best for you.

[21:08] If you try to live your life the other way and you use comfort as your compass, you won't. This is how Lewis talks about it. You know, aim for earth, get nothing.

Aim for heaven, get earth thrown in. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these other things will be added to you. So there's, our minds are probably capable of thinking about this as like two different ways to live life.

One for the ultimate glory of God and one for my happiness and joy. The truth is, is that if you will live for the Lord and really live for the Lord, you will find that that path was the best path for you.

And you will say, as Paul said, as Peter said, as David Livingstone said, I have no regrets. I am so grateful that I lived all in for the Lord Jesus.

All right, friends, thank you for listening to 20 minutes of me figuring out how to do a podcast again. I'm so grateful for you. I'm so grateful for our church. I'm so grateful that we get to encourage one another to faith and good deeds.

[22:17] So may you do so today or tomorrow as you gather for your community groups. God bless.