1 Timothy 1

Series: Tim Bits!

Sermon: “What’s Your Pedigree?”

There was an advertisement that appeared in a London newspaper many years ago that read like this: “Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.” Would you believe that as dangerous as this ad sounded thousands of men responded to this ad? Mostly, they replied because it was Sir Ernest Shackleton who placed the ad.

Sir Ernest Shackleton, if you will remember, was a British adventurer who led three expeditions to the Antarctic. In thinking about men and women like Shackleton, I began to wonder what kind of a response, Jesus would receive if he placed an ad in our local newspaper. Using our imaginations, we can picture the ad now. Actually if it were today it would probably be on Facebook, Kijiji or something like that.

“Men and women wanted for the task of helping to build my church. You will often be misunderstood, even by those working with you. You will face constant attack from an invisible enemy. You may not see the results of your labour, and your full reward will not come until all your work is completed. It may cost you your home, your family, your friends, even your life.”

Having heard that imaginary ad, does it make you want to jump up and run as fast as you can to sign up? Working to build Christ’s church may be the most challenging thing ever put before us. We know the importance of such a calling, but “Yikes!” No wonder so many of us would rather be casual observers of Christ’s work than full participants. Our little series that we begin today focuses on a young man named Timothy.

Timothy was Paul’s protégé. He was a young man attracted to Christ through the preaching of Paul, and at about the age of 16 he joins Paul in his missionary journeys. Timothy loved Jesus, and longed to serve, and Paul saw this desire in him and nurtured it. Timothy listened and absorbed everything he could about the faith. Whether because of his eagerness to serve, or his rapidly developing maturity in faith, or a combination of both, Paul decides to toss Timothy into the fray.

Timothy goes on to take on some of the toughest assignments in the early church. In particular, for our concern today, Timothy is sent to Ephesus to deal with a serious problem. We must remember that the early church was a very fragile thing; actually I think in many ways the church still is. Unlike today with a completed text of scripture, and thousands of years of teaching and working out of theology, everything in Ephesus was new.

And being new, meant that a great deal of the theology Paul preached was vulnerable to misinterpretation and misuse by false teachers. In Ephesus, a small group of self-described teachers had wormed their way into the fellowship.

It is clear from what Paul writes that for them to have the impact they did, they must have been pretty smoothed tongue. That is, they knew how to manipulate words and therefor people. Their false teaching confused the Ephesians and led them astray. It was not very long until the central goal of faith in Christ was lost in the minds and hearts of the Ephesian Christians.

As Paul states, “The purpose of my instruction is that all the Christians there would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and sincere faith.” Then Paul is quite blunt, “But some teachers have missed the whole point.” So Timothy had been sent to clean up the mess. To “right the ship”, so to speak. Paul’s letters to Timothy are meant as words of encouragement and instruction, and if you learn nothing else from these letters, please recognize how difficult the challenge was for Timothy.

The two letters drip with concern from Paul, that Timothy not get discouraged. Timothy was encouraged to see these false teachers for what they were, self-serving, immoral, liars. Timothy was to challenge them, and lead the church back to the truth. I bet that went smoothly! We will see as we go along, some of the ways the false teachers tried to discourage Timothy, and belittle him in the eyes of the church.

One of the ways these false teachers tried to belittle Timothy was to point out his mixed heritage. Timothy was half Jewish, and half Gentile. These false teachers would create long demonstrations of their genealogy or pedigree, to prove they were true descendants of Abraham, and therefore more qualified to speak to the law of Moses, and God, than the young hybrid Timothy.

These teachers would create confusion, and doubt, seeking to be divisive rather than unifying. Hypocrisy, is never a means to unification. A sincere, well-crafted argument does not mean the truth has been spoken. People who hide their true selves in the shadows, get very nervous and often lash out, when the light of truth is shone on them. Such was the story of two brothers who were very rich but also very wicked.

Both brothers lived a wild, sinful lifestyle using their vast wealth to cover their tracks. On the surface, few people suspected the truth as they were very gifted at hiding their sin. Part of the façade they had built was going to church every week, and giving large amounts of money to various church projects. The church called a new pastor, who like Timothy was a young man.

This young man preached the truth with zeal and courage. Before long the attendance at church had grown so much that a new worship center was needed. The brothers’ hypocrisy was picked up early on by the new Pastor, who was endeavoring to shine some light into their lifestyle with little result. Suddenly one of the brothers died. And the young preacher was asked to preach at the funeral.

The day before the funeral, the surviving brother came to the church office and said to the minister, “There is a check in here that is large enough to pay the entire amount you need for the new sanctuary.

All I ask is one favour: tell the people at the funeral that my brother was a saint.” The minister gave the brother his word: he would do precisely what he asked. That afternoon the check was deposited. The next day, the minister stood in the pulpit overlooking the casket and said with firm conviction, “This man was an ungodly sinner, wicked to the core. He was unfaithful to his wife, hot-tempered with his children, ruthless in his business, and a hypocrite at church…but compared to his brother, he was a saint.” (Leadership Magazine, Fall 1995)

Timothy’s experience is instructive for us in reminding us that Timothy may not have had the genealogy of some of his opponents, or even the vast scriptural knowledge of one like Paul, but he had the most important pedigree of all. It is the pedigree we all need to seek after and cultivate in our lives. The pedigree I speak of has nothing to do with your genetics, or your education, or your age.

The pedigree that counts is a matter of your heart and your treasure. Whatever is at the center of your attention is what has us. Jesus expressed it as “Wherever your treasure is there your heart will be also.” The pedigree that matters is whatever is at the center of your life. If, as was the case with the false teachers in Ephesus, if you have secular, temporal matters at the center of your life, then you will be committing your life to foolishness.

Timothy’s pedigree was what was at the center of his life; namely Jesus Christ. His ministry, his preaching, his teaching, his morality was all centered on Jesus. Paul encouraged him to cling, or anchor to Jesus. It was not an idle request of Paul’s. There were a lot of lesser things to draw a young man’s attention away from Christ. Much as there is plenty to draw us away from Jesus.

It would have likely been tempting for Timothy to lower himself to the level of the false teachers. To seek his own gain, at any cost. Traveling the narrow way is hard slugging at times. There are easier paths but that doesn’t mean they are truthful paths or paths that lead to life. I stumbled across a little illustration by Tim Hansel who wrote a book called *Holy Sweat.* This is what he wrote.

*At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there, sort of like a president. But later on when I met Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal. I don’t know just when it was that he suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.*

*When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable…It was the shortest distance between two points. But when he took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and even through rocky places at breakneck speeds, it was all I could do to hang on! Even though it looked like madness, He said, “pedal!” I worried and was anxious and asked, “Where are you taking me?” He laughed and did not answer, and I started to trust.*

*I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure. And when I’d say, “I’m scared,” He’d lean back and touch my hand. He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy.*

*They gave me gifts to take on my journey, my Lord’s and mine. And we were off again. He said, “Give the gifts away; they’re extra baggage, too much weight,” So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light. I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He’d wreck it; but He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages.*

*And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I am beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ. And when I am sure I just can’t do any more, He just smiles and says, “pedal!”* I doubt Timothy had a bicycle, but I am sure that he felt like giving up sometimes. All people who seek to serve God faithfully have those moments.

So why continue on? Remember the prophet Jeremiah. What a rough bike ride God took him on. Threatened, imprisoned, mocked, forbidden to marry; why did he go on? In Jeremiah 20:7-9 we read Jeremiahs own answer to that question. *“O Lord, you persuaded me, and I allowed myself to be persuaded. You are stronger than I am, and you overpowered me.*

*Now I am mocked by everyone in the city. Whenever I speak, the words come out in violent outbursts. ‘Violence and destruction!’ I shout. So these messages from the Lord have made me a household joke. And I can’t stop! If I say I’ll never mention the Lord or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like fire. It’s like a fire in my bones! I am weary of holding it in!”*

All of God’s servants can retell similar stories. That when the burden of bearing the word of God becomes so great it is attractive to just walk away, and many do just that. The statistics on the number of clergy, in all denominations, who leave ministry after just a few years is frightening. But it’s not just clergy. It is an affliction that haunts us all. The reason many leave is that their hearts are focused on the wrong love.

This issue comes up several times in the gospels with Jesus. One example is Matthew 8:19-22. “Then one of the teachers of religious law said to him, ‘Teacher, I will follow you no matter where you go!’ But Jesus said, ‘Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have no home of my own, not even a place to lay my head.’ Another of his disciples said, ‘Lord, first let me return home and bury my father.’ But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me now! Let those who are spiritually dead care for their own dead.’”

“Where you heart is there your treasure will be also.” Reading about young Timothy, and the challenges before him, makes all of us ask the critical question, where is your heart? We can express it in other ways. What is your priority? What takes you focus?

What do you commit your time and resources to? Do I really have Jesus in the center of my life or is he on the fringe just looking in? To borrow from my earlier illustration; who is steering your bike? I once hear someone who was commenting on the phrase popular at one time that “Jesus was their co-pilot”. The comment was that if this was the case then you need to switch seats.

Are you familiar with Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken”? In the poem, Frost pictures a walk in the woods, in which he comes across a fork where there are two paths to choose. He tells himself that one day he shall return to travel the other path but he rightly discerns that he will never come this way again, and he has only one choice. It is clear that this poem is not about a walk in the woods but about life choices.

He writes:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh*

*Somewhere ages and ages hence;*

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-*

*I took the one less traveled by,*

*And this has made all the difference.*

Which road do you travel?