

Theme: Living faithfully in the last days (7/9/25)

Text: Luke 14:25-33; Timothy 3:10-17

Forty years ago, I started my vocational ministry journey at my first year as tutor of Sia'atoutai Methodist Theological College in Tonga. It was also the year after I married my lovely wife Meleane. God blessed us with three lovely children: Netane, Taulama and Louisa. I am glad that they wanted to be here today, especially for Taulama who is currently serving as a CMS missionary in Vietnam. It was a big surprise for Meleane and I, but Taulama said, 'we started ministry together at Kingsgrove and we should be finishing together.' Yes, my family was and still is my greatest support and prayer warriors for my service in God's ministry. Nearly thirty years ago, one of the children prayed 'Dear God, help daddy in his work and meetings. Help daddy in his preachings and funerals, and help him to retire soon.' It took thirty years to answer that prayer. After moving houses four times within five years and then leaving Tonga to serve in England for eight years, one of them said to me, "Dad, where is our real home?"

However, I was ordained by the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. We served at the College and the Church Evangelism Department. Then we were sent to England as mission partners with the Methodist World Church in Britain Partnership. We returned to Australia after fifteen years overseas. We settled in Melbourne and I served at Monash UC. I was in Melbourne for several years for my ministry training, so it didn't take long for me to realize the changes among the people within the Uniting Church. The kind of language and the mood and tension in meetings in all councils from the local Church, Presbytery and Synod level. I couldn't believe returning to the Church where I was training to serve, it was not the same anymore. However, I got a fulltime placement at St David's UC in Albury. After six years there we moved back to Sydney. In the past 14 years we served in this Parish and now coming to its closure for us. Again, the changes and the dynamic of ministry was different from the time we left for Tonga in 1991.

I should say that our move from Victoria-Tasmania Synod, to NSW-ACT Synod; from St David's UC Albury, to Kingsgrove-West Bexley UC, was the most challenging transition and toughest term of ministry in my recollection. The ministry in the past fourteen years was like a roller-coaster. We started with two small congregations in February 2011. Shortly after the 100th anniversary of West Bexley chapel, we decided to join the two together in November 2015.

We rebuilt the congregation with more visitors and members from Beverley Hills UC. In February 2019 we started a new congregation in Tongan language services. We had 70-80 attendants at our monthly Combined Communion Service. But after Covid we were not able to continue that congregation due to many families moving towards Western Sydney and elsewhere. Parish ministry is probably the toughest kind of ministry I have encountered, and the local Church can be one of the most (if not the most) complex organisation in the world, basically because of the diverse kind of people that make up the congregation.

Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy from prison in Rome, not long before he was executed. At the beginning of 2 Timothy 3, he warned Timothy, “mark this.” Paul is saying, ‘Timothy, you need to understand this.’ In the last days (days before Jesus’ return) there will be terrible times. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Paul wrote to warn Timothy of the permanent characteristics of the last age – that will be terrible. It will not be caused by natural disasters but by people, and have nothing to do with them. Watch out for they are dangerous. How would Timothy deal with these warnings? How would he continue to live for Christ, and serve Christ in this day and age? Paul encouraged Timothy with two actions:

1. Follow my teaching and way of life (10-13)

Before we explore Paul’s charges here, I want us to see how his use of the father-son term to highlight his role as Timothy’s spiritual father and mentor. “To Timothy, my dear son” (1:2), wrote Paul. The point I want us to think about right now, who is your hero or role model in the faith? The one you imitate and learn from in your Christian journey and service of Christ. Paul instructed Timothy his son in the faith ¹⁰*You know all about my **teaching**, my **way of life**.* Only in his first two points, we can distinguish the false teacher from the faithful one, the fake follower from the true disciple of Jesus, because these two always go together about the faithful servants of Christ.

Friends, it is easy to make a wrong choice and to trust wrong people particularly when we’re desperate and in a panic situation. Paul’s instruction is also for our direction. He goes on to say, Timothy, you know *my purpose* – ‘to preach; Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel’ (1 Cor 9:16), you know my *faith, patience, love, endurance*, which were all demonstrated in the hardship that he as an Apostle of Christ had been through – in prison frequently, flogged

more severely, exposed to death again and again (1 Cor 11:23) ; and you know ¹¹*persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me.*

Paul was not ashamed of sharing this part of the package of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Notice in this verse (11) he gets specific, saying to Timothy you know the afflictions and persecutions I have gone through in Antioch, for being kicked out of the city for preaching Jesus. In Iconium, we're ill-treated and stoned, and in Lystra, Timothy's own hometown. Paul was stoned there for preaching the gospel and was dragged out of the city. The disciples gathered around his body and thought he was dead. They were praying for him – there he got up and went back to the city to preach (Acts 13 & 14). Eventually, Paul affirmed, that yes, though I endured, but it was 'the Lord who rescued me from all of them.' Friends, you might believe me, if I tell you now that my ministry in the past 40 years was a 'singing in the rain' experience all the way – enjoying every moment. But the truth is – Christian ministry is a mission impossible without God's guiding hand, God's wisdom and His saving grace.

Paul quotes the words of Jesus here: ¹²*everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* He makes it clear that his experience is not unique. Anyone who wants to live a godly life and follow Christ will be persecuted and bound to suffer persecution. Jesus said, 'if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first' (John 15:18). Persecution comes in any way, in any shape, and any form at any time. It could be through words, a look or attitude to manipulate and twist our gospel message. Persecution is an inevitable consequence of faithful following and serving Christ. If you haven't faced some sort of conflict or suffering for your faith in Jesus, you're probably not doing it right or living a Godly life.

2. Cling to the Scriptures (14-17)

Paul speaks to Timothy on the same tone, ¹⁴*but as for you, to distinguish him from the false and fake followers; continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.* Paul is saying that what Timothy had learned is secured by whom he learned it from – from the Apostle himself and from his faithful mother and grandmother. Note the line: 'continue in what you have learned and have convinced of' (believed). Like Timothy, many of us were brought up in Christian homes, taught how to pray at the meal table, heard Bible stories read to us at home and Sunday School, joined youth meetings and so on. We started well, but often failed to

continue and keep up with God's direction. Good teaching is often guaranteed by reliable and faithful teacher (s). Here Paul refers to himself and Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois.

Paul urges Timothy that as he continues in the good things he had learned, also cling and stand firm in the Scriptures. Why? Because, ¹⁵ *the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* is God's Word to follow.

Paul did not expect Timothy to depend on his teaching and examples alone, even in another place he said, 'follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ' (1 Cor 11:1). Timothy needs backing from the Holy Scriptures, the basis of his upbringing and the source of wisdom. Why did Paul draw much attention to the Scripture? Because it is, ¹⁵ *the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*. The purpose of the Holy Scripture is not ultimately to make you smart or clever, or to solve all your problems or make you comfortable. The purpose is to make you wise enough to put your faith in Jesus Christ and be saved. This is why we have tried to develop a habit of reading God's Word daily and encourage one another in prayer and fellowship.

Finally, Paul gives us two fundamental truths about the holy Scriptures: **First**, is the ***origin of the Scriptures***. ¹⁶*All Scripture is God-breathed*. It is God's words about himself. All Scripture is inspired by God. It is effective and life-giving. As prophet Isaiah wrote: When God's Word goes out of his mouth, it will not return empty, but it will accomplish what He desires (Isa 55:11).

Second, is the ***purpose of the Scriptures***. What it is intended to do? ¹⁵*The holy Scripture is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*. The Bible is essentially a handbook of salvation. It draws attention to Christ and in Him through faith we may have salvation. Again, the Scripture is ¹⁶*useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*, ¹⁷*so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*.

Friends, Paul makes it so very clear to us that the Holy Scriptures contains both what we believe and how we should conduct ourselves as faithful followers and servants of Christ. The false teachers divorce the two, faithful teachers marry them. Do not forget, the same person (Jesus) who said, "I am the Truth," also said, "I am the Life."

Two simple messages to take home from this passage: First, don't be discouraged by hardship – understand that difficulties are part of God's plan for you to live and serve him faithfully. Second, Prioritise God's Word – make God's unchanging Word the firm foundation for your life and service of the gospel.

Let us pray...