

All right, we are going to have a word of prayer, and then we are going to have a sermon. "Loving Father in Heaven, we've heard such a beautiful music today. It's enriched us, it's blessed us. And we heard such a dynamic and exciting children's story. We've even participated in sharing of our resources with You. But now Lord, we've come to a moment when we are about to open Your Word; Your Word that is as Holy as You, and Lord we are not up to it. We pray that Your grace will prove to be sufficient again. We ask that You will be the One who teaches us. And You will be the One who impresses our hearts and our minds the way that they need to be. And we ask and pray this in Jesus' name, Amen."

Bridget Mitchef stood staring in the mirror. She felt miserable. She weighed 280 pounds. All her life she had struggled with an eating addiction. Even as a little girl, she recognized she was heavier than the other girls, and she was embarrassed about it. It stripped her of all self confidence. She loved to watch the ice skaters, especially the figure skating with a man and a woman, and the elegant movements back and forth and how it was all done in such a beautiful, flowing dance. It just appealed to her. And she loved dancing in general. In fact, she would watch it when it was on TV. And when no one was home, and no one was around, she would close the blinds, and put on some music, and she would dance – never in public though.

She was invited to a skating party. And she had her skates, and she was ready to go. And her mother drove her to the skating ring. And when she got there, she refused to get out of the car. She was just sick inside. She had no confidence at all. She married a fellow named Kevin when she was twenty years old. She promised herself that for him she would lose weight. That first year of marriage, she gained fifty pounds. And at age thirty, three children later, she was at 280 pounds. She talked to her husband about getting one of those operations, I don't know the technical term for it, but you make the stomach smaller. They didn't have health insurance to cover it. So they scrimped and saved, and did all they could until they found the money to pay for that surgery. And she had the surgery. One year later, she had lost 10 pounds. They said to not eat solid food, and she discovered ice cream and other foods like it. And because of her addiction to food, she writes that she could polish off a gallon of ice cream like nothing.

Her sons Alec and Zechariah approached her one day and said, "Mom, we want to take Tae Kwan Do." Now Tae Kwan Do is Korean martial arts. "Tae Kwan Do" means "hands and feet." So it's learning martial arts with your hands and with your feet. And Bridget agreed, got them enrolled in the Tae Kwan Do classes and attended as they were taking their training. She was amazed as she watched them go from one level of skill to another. And she watched their confidence build until her one son, Zachary, was called out in from of all the students. And instructor held out a board, one inch thick, and said: "Zachary, break that board." And Zachary kicked the board and busted it in two, and then just walked back to the side, just filled with confidence.

That night, Bridget had a hard time sleeping. On one hand she was thrilled with what this was doing for her boys. It was giving them a confidence she never had. And yet, at the same time it was highlighting the confidence she never had. And while she was laying in bed unable to sleep,

this thought ran through her mind. "Take Tae Kwan Do." She dismissed it immediately. She's never done anything that physical before. "Take Tae Kwan Do" came back. So sometime, during that night before she fell asleep, she made the decision. She would take Tae Kwan Do. And she writes the story of her standing at the full-length mirror, just before you enter the area where everybody is trained. And she is standing there in that white outfit. And she said, "It didn't look pretty, two hundred and eighty pounds squeezed into that thing." And she went out there. And she knew everybody was staring at her. Everybody saying, "What in the world is this?"

Well, the very first lesson, the instructor was encouraging. He said, "It's okay, we take everybody where they are at, and we work with them. And that's what we do. We train them, and they go at their own speed." So they began doing jumping jacks. You know what jumping jacks are? You know, I am not going to do one, it my split my pants, (laughter)... She couldn't. The best she could do, she could hold her arms out. She could move them in a little circular motion, and she could take a step forward, step forward, step back, step back. And over time, that was too much.

The next exercise they did was push-ups. And she laid down on the ground and tried to do a push-up. She pushed with everything she had. She just about got off the ground and collapsed on her face - looking up in time to see her son staring at her, feeling that they must think her a failure, but yet surprised to see them applauding her. "Go Mom!" Well, that first lesson ended. And basically all she got from it was a lot of soreness. But she went back. She went back for more training. She went back, and back, and back, and back. It took about a year and she was invited out in front of all the students. The instructor held that board, and said, "Kick it." She kicked it in two and walked back with confidence. Two years later, she would earn a black belt in Tae Kwan Do. She had lost over fifty pounds, but she had gained confidence. She stayed with the training. She found victory, and in that victory, she found confidence. That's what I'd like to study with you today.

Please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 28 verses 30 and 31. This would be the last sermon we'll have in the Book of Acts. Next week, we begin a new journey through the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Acts chapter 28 verses 30 and 31: "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." Paul will be in prison there in Rome for two years. It says, he is in his own rented house, and that was true. But he was under guard in that house. Nero let him go. Nero let him go in the year 63. Paul left Rome in the year 63, and there are lots of legends about where he went. Some legends have him going as far as England. Some have him going up into Germany. Others have him going into Spain. Most scholars believe he went to Corinth and around the region of Ephesus. And we know he wasn't at Troas, and I'll show you that in a few moments.

Paul will be rearrested in the year 66. Nero, as you know started a fire that burned much of Rome. And the people turned their hatred towards Nero, and he said "It was the Christians that did it." And so now, it became very unpopular to be a Christian in the Roman Empire. And Paul was rearrested in the year 66. He was brought back to Rome. This time he wasn't allowed in a rented house, he is in the mamertine prison. And I've never been there, but I've read

descriptions of it. You walked down very narrow steps, cut into the rock into a room maybe 8 x 10. The only light is the grate of a sewer, like a sewer cap above you. And there you are. It is cold, it is damp, it is dark, it is miserable. And Paul is an old man in his early to mid seventies at this time. And that was old back then. It's not old now. Seventy four is the new, well, help me here, is it sixty four? I think is fifty four, you know. As I am aging I am realizing, I am not really aging, I don't know about you?

But Paul did. He was in his seventies, and he was an old man. And he is in this dark, dank, lonely cell. In the year 67, he'll be brought back before Nero twice. First time, we'll read about it. Nero will let him go. The second time he'll have him beheaded. And in that year 67, both Paul and Peter lost their lives. Now while Paul was in prison here in Acts 28 verses 30 and 31, he wrote four letters, known as epistles. He wrote to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Those are called, the prison epistles. After he was let go, he would write the Pastoral Epistles, Titus and Timothy. It would be in the year 66 that he would write his last letter. And it is Second Timothy, just before he dies. And that's what we are going to look at today.

Let's turn in our Bibles to Second Timothy chapter 1. What would Paul write, this great servant of God, this great man? What would he write to his young mentor, Timothy? Second Timothy chapter 1 we begin with verse 8. Paul is in that mamertine prison when he writes this. He says, "Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord." The word "Testimony" there is "Martorius" it's where we come up with the word, martyr. And it means a witness for our Lord, or witnessing, or the witness of our Lord, either one. He says, "Don't be ashamed of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner; but share with me in the sufferings for the Gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with the holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began..."

Paul says, "Don't be ashamed. I am not ashamed of the Gospel. Before time began, God set a plan in motion, and that plan was a gift on eternal life for us. It's not our works, it's what Jesus did. I am not ashamed of that, I've embraced that. And I am willing to die for that." And he goes on to say to Timothy in verse 10, "...but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel..." We see in the life of Jesus, we see in the death of Jesus and in the resurrection of Jesus power over sin. Paul says, "I am not ashamed of that. It's eternal life. Don't be ashamed of it either Timothy, and don't be ashamed of me, a prisoner of that Gospel."

Verse 11, he says: "...to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason, I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." Do you sense the confidence in this man? He is facing death. He is not afraid, he is not ashamed. He has been through the training and that training has brought him this confidence, confidence in his God, confidence in salvation.

Well, he says more. Same chapter verse 15, he adds some information about his experience. He says, "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." He is saying in essence, "It's hard to be a Christian, and many

people are turning away. They've turned away from me," he said. "I don't have the support I used to have. It's lonely in this cold jail cell." "The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very diligently and found me. The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day – and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus." And so, that's one of the reasons the scholars believe that during that three year time period when he was out of jail the first time, he went to Ephesus.

Well, Paul's situation in prison is described for us in chapter 4 verses 9 and following. Second Timothy 4 verse 9, he is saying to Timothy: "Be diligent and come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica – Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me." I'll tell you, what a blessing to have a friend like Luke. Luke is his personal physician and his friend. We have journeyed with Luke and Paul for a long time in our studies through the series in the Book of Acts. And Luke is with Paul to the end.

Paul goes on to say in verse 11, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry." Paul is considering how important it is for these men to get together. He is looking forward to that fellowship. He says, "And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus." Verse 13 is very telling. "Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come - and the books, especially the parchments." It is that verse that scholars use to identify that they believe Paul was arrested in Troas. Troas is just South of Ephesus, over in Asia Minor. His coat was there; his books and his parchments are there. And he is saying to Timothy, "Please gather them and bring them to me, they will be useful to me."

And then a sad thing: "Alexander..." verse 14, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works." It is believed because of that verse, it is believed by scholars that Alexander the coppersmith is the one who had Paul arrested. And so Paul is saying, "he did me much harm." "You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words." He goes on to say, "At my first defense, no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them." So he had been before, one time, before Nero. It didn't go too well. Nobody stood with him. He knows what's coming down. He knows what will take place.

He says in verse 17, "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear." In another words Paul is saying, "God stood next to me and I preached the Gospel to Emperor, Nero." Isn't that amazing? "...all the Gentiles may hear and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." "They didn't take me that day." It was as Daniel, in the stories back in his book. Verse 18: "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever, Amen!"

Well, Paul concludes his letter with a very tender expression in verse 21. He says, "Do your utmost to come before winter." "Come before winter! Timothy, I miss you, I want to see you, I long to be with you, and don't forget my coat. Get here before winter, please. It's going to be

cold in this place. And so that's a little picture of the experience of Paul in the mamertine prison.

There is a passage in this book or a letter that he writes to Timothy that is worthy of us looking at. It is Second Timothy 4 verses 6-8. A passage you are well familiar with. But perhaps, so familiar with, you don't really know what is being said. One of the things we must do when we read the Bible, is to seek to understand the Bible in the light of the people who first received it. There are meanings that they understood. And if we can understand those meanings, then we can apply the Scriptures to ourselves today.

Verse 6 it says: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand." It was a custom back in Rome, at the end of every meal, and this would be well known throughout the Roman Empire. At the end of every meal they would take a cup of wine and they would pour it out as an offering to their gods. Paul is saying, "That's what's happening to me. I am being poured out. I gave my life to Jesus thirty some years before. I've given my recourses, my time, my energy, everything about me I've given to Him. And now, I am already being poured out, my life is soon to end. Day has ended, my time is over, my life is poured out as a sacrifice to God."

He goes on to say in verse 7, "...and the time of my departure is at hand." Is he sad about this? Well, I am sure he would like to continue living. I am sure he would like to continue writing and sharing and strengthening people in their faith of the Lord. Yet, he is reflective when he uses this word, "departure." In the Greek, the word "departure" has four basic applications. Let me share with you what they are. One would be, "unyoking an animal from a cart or a plow. It's delivering one from labor." Paul is saying, "My departure, when I should pass away, will result in rest from labor." And we even consider that today, on tomb stones you can read, "Rest in peace."

Another application of the word "departure" is "to loosen bonds or fetters." He is in chains and those chains are going to drop off from him in death. He will be released from prison and from the cell, and from those chains. Another application is "to loosen the ropes of a tent. It's one striking camp and moving on." And Paul is saying, "Soon, I am going to strike camp and I am going to move on." That's what death will do for him. And then, the last application is "the loosening of the mooring ropes of the ship." And it's as if Paul is saying, "I am going to journey from this port to another port. And in that port, there will be no more pain. There will be no more sorrow; there will be no more death. That's the port that he was looking forward to going to. "My departure is at hand."

Verse 7, he says: "I have fought the good fight." The word "fought" in Greek is very interesting. It's "agona" and it's where we get the English word, "agony." "I have agonized in this endeavor. I have fought." It also means, "Struggle." He in essence is saying, "I have struggled a good struggle. I have fought a good fight." There are fights worthy of fighting. There are fights not worthy of fighting. There are good fights and there are bad fights. He says, "I've fought the good fight." He refers to "a good fight" with Timothy, not that he had one with him, but he is telling Timothy to "fight the good fight" in First Timothy chapter 6 verse 12. Paul says this: "Fight the good fight of faith." That's the fight you want, "the fight of faith." "...lay hold on

eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

Of all the fights we have in life, make sure you fight this one. And that is the fight of faith. Make sure that you fight to have faith. Fight, fight, fight! He is saying, “Agonize, struggle for it, don’t give up on it. Grab hold of God, stay with God, don’t ever let go of God.” That’s what he is saying. And what is fascinating, in the previous verse, verse 11 it says: “But you, O man of God, flee these things...” and he is talking about worldliness that the wicked are involved in. And he says, “...pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.”

Now brothers and sisters, within Christianity there are lots of fights. There are lots of fights within denominations and against denominations. One denomination against another! Those are not necessarily good fights. The fight that Paul is alluding to here is the one that finds righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. These are the fights that change the heart. These are the fights that give morality, purity, holiness that are demonstrated by character, by being honest, sincere, and authentic. That’s the fight we need to be involved in. And too many people have spent too much time fighting not the good fight, but just fighting. They fight over days to worship on, they fight over commandments to keep, they fight over whether people are in heaven or not when they die, they fight, they fight, and they fight.

Those things have their place brothers and sisters, but not one of those teachings can save you! Jesus saves you and having faith in Him. That is the fight! And when we get a hold of Jesus, He gets a hold of us. And we become the people of God. I am telling you, I’ve said this before. You probably agree or you wouldn’t even attend here, it’s simply this. When we get to heaven, God is going to correct us all. But the reason we’ll be in heaven is because we have Jesus as our Savior. And by His grace, we become something like Him. That’s the fight. Please brothers and sisters, fight the good fight. Fight the fight of faith.

Let’s go back to Second Timothy chapter 4. You know, what good is it brothers and sisters to know all of the fundamental teachings of our denomination and not be able to love your spouse? “I have kept the faith,” Paul says in verse 7, “...I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race...” Now, he is putting this in the context of a race. The Olympics were very popular back in Paul’s day. They were held in Greece, very much a part of his world. He’d been to Greece many, many times preaching the Gospel. “I’ve finished the race” it simply means, he did not turn back.

He kept the faith. Now, if we are talking about religion, he kept confidence. His confidence in God he kept. If we are talking about business, he kept the contract that he signed. He was faithful to it. But Paul contextually is talking about a race. He is talking about the Olympic Games. And here is where it gets interesting if we can understand what it meant to the people back then. Every time they had the Olympic Games in Greece, the day that they began, the day of the contest all of the competitors had to meet. All of the competitors in the presence of the people, and in the presence of the pantheon of gods that Greece worshiped, took a solemn oath. And the solemn oath was this. That they had done not less than ten months training prior to that day. So they are taking a solemn oath before all the people, and before all those gods that they had that they had trained at least ten months leading up to that event.

And, they took a solemn oath that they would not resort to any trickery to win. So they put in the training, and they would not do any trickery in order to win. And in that context Paul is saying of his life, "I've kept the rules, I've played fair, I lived in honor of what was expected." The question is how do we apply the training to our lives? The trickery we know quite well. The trickery is rather easy. The trickery is when we make up our own rules about God. The trickery is when we do our own thing regarding God. When we try to fool ourselves and we try to fool others. That's easy to do. We try to win this Christian race by our own methodologies. And that only gives us confidence in our self and not confidence in God. And anybody involved in that trickery will fail.

So what is the real training? Paul tells us in Second Timothy chapter 3 beginning with verse 13. Paul writing to Timothy, last letter he will write, he says: "Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you..." okay? "Timothy as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Timothy is being told that the Word of God is your training. You go to the Word of God, and you will learn doctrine. And in this context brothers and sisters it's not doctrine like we think. It's teachings. You will learn the true teachings about how to live your life. The training is hard. The training is difficult because most of us are living very hectic lives. The training is that we would spend time reading this book, the Word of God. And in so doing, God will give us faith and confidence in Him, less faith and confidence in ourselves. But in the training that we go through, we will gain confidence in God. So that ultimately we can say, "I know in whom I have believed. I know Him! And He will get me through. My departure is soon at hand, so what? I am going to a distant port, a good land!"

And we'll not be afraid on our death beds. The training that God is calling us to is difficult because it requires time on our hands. Somehow in our busy schedules we got to niche out some time to read the Word of God, and to pray about what we've read, and to let it have effect upon our lives. It will create a relationship with God. And in that fellowshiping with God we will become more moral. We will become more careful in our lives. We will become more honest in our lives. We will become more like God in our lives. It is a miracle that takes place, but the decision is always ours. We have to submit ourselves to the training. We've got to do it brothers and sisters.

You may think you can only flap your arms a little bit, and move your feet when it comes to this type of training. You might not be able to get off the ground with a push-up, let alone try to do a sit up. But I am telling you, stay with the training, start, start tomorrow. Edge out ten minutes and read something in the Word of God and pray about it to the Lord. The training will begin. And you stay with that training. There will be some days that are better than others. Some days you won't want to. Some days you won't feel like it. But this brothers and sisters is not an option. This is salvation for us! If we endure the training, Jesus Himself will give us victory.

“I have kept the faith. I’ve kept the rules, I plaid fair, I lived in honor of what was expected.” It goes on to say, “Finally...” Second Timothy 4 verse 8: “Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will give to me on that day. But not only to me, but also to those who have loved His appearing.” Back in those days, you didn’t get a gold medal, a bronze or silver. You got a laurel wreath of victory, the Stephanus, the crown. It was placed upon one person. But I am telling you, in God’s kingdom, everybody who runs the race successfully, gets the crown. Everybody is a winner. Everybody has first place in the Kingdom of God. And that’s alluded to by the author of Hebrews, our last verse.

Look at Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. The author has spent a whole chapter talking about faith, all kinds of illustrations from people’s lives. And we come to chapter 12 verse 1 and it says: “Therefore we also since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...” and that cloud of witnesses brothers and sisters nobody knows whether it’s all those people of chapter 11 or if it’s all the angels in heaven? And there is a bandstand that’s all gathered there and they are waiting for everybody to finish the race successfully. And they’ve got their palm palms, and they’ve got their whistles and they’ve got their air horns and they are all excited. And they are thrilled.

I remember when my son graduated from college. I don’t know, somebody said you are not supposed to have air horns. I don’t think it was anybody official, I am sure it wasn’t. And when it was over, one thing was clear, the Arnolds where in the crowd. We were excited he had finished the course. And we cheered him loudly. Oh man, it was exciting.

“Therefore, we also since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” How do you run a race like that “...Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith?” Jesus is the beginner of it. Jesus is the end of it. He is everything in between. How do you run the race? You look to Jesus. How do you look to Jesus? You read His Word. You keep your eyes on Jesus, you become like Jesus. It’s a miracle. He does it! It’s our decision. Do we want to go through the training? And if we do, we’ll have the victory and with the victory, we’ll have confidence in our Lord.

You know, faith properly placed always looks up to God. And that’s what will see us through. Now, today, I want to know if there is anyone here that would like to say this: “Lord, I want my faith to look up to You. And I want You to do for me what only You can do.” If you would like to say that, then I am going to ask you to stand. We have some musicians here, and they are going to lead us in singing a song, “My faith looks up to Thee.” ...