

Message #3

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1 Timothy

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MISSION IMPOSSIBLE,
OR DEALING WITH SITUATIONS OF INADEQUACY

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-20

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

In 1988 Christina Onassis (PROJECTOR ON--- CHRISTINA ONASSIS), the daughter of the famous shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis and stepdaughter of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, died from a heart attack. She was not quite 38 years old. Her death followed three failed marriages and years of drug abuse. She left behind a three year old daughter and a ton of money. Her daughter Athina (ATHINA ONASSIS- CHILD) inherited half of the Onassis empire, since she was the only remaining heir and descendant in the Onassis family. That part of the estate was estimated to be around a billion dollars. The other half went to a foundation.

Can you imagine the sense of inadequacy that a young girl like this would have in handling such a situation? Of course, there were trustees and stepparents who watched over her and the inheritance until she reached the age of 18. But there were legal fights about the inheritance along the way. (ATHINA ONASSIS) At age 18 Athina gained control of her inheritance. She dedicated her energies to raising horses and competing in equestrian events. She was married and later divorced, which led to more legal fights. She once told her stepmother **“if she could burn all the Onassis money, she would do it.”** (smh.com, 1/25/20030)

How many of us would feel adequate to deal with a billion dollar estate at age 18, or age 35? (PROJECTOR OFF) It might be fun to try, right? I suspect that there would be a whole lot of stress that would come along with it.

There are many situations in life that confront us with feelings of inadequacy. This whole coronavirus epidemic has presented all of us with new and unique challenges to figure out how to confront. In the last couple of years we have had an unusual number of deaths of men in our church which have created a lot of widows. Widowhood involves situations of inadequacy that may relate to management of finances or car maintenance or house upkeep or simply being alone.

Others of us may feel inadequate as a husband or wife or parent or teacher or student or boss. We may feel inadequate in regard to specific situations--- in regard to personal relationships or finances or health difficulties or career direction. The temptation sometimes is to run away from difficult circumstances. Occasionally that may be appropriate, but usually it is not.

In our study of the little New Testament Book of First Timothy so far we have learned that Timothy had struggles with feelings of inadequacy. He had excellent Christian training. He had been disciplined by the Apostle Paul. He was a faithful man. He had done Christian ministry on his own. But Timothy was still a young man, and he had a quieter personality than firebrands like Paul and Peter. By nature he probably was not the confrontational type, and he now faced challenges that required confrontation.

The Apostle Paul had appointed Timothy to be his representative at the church in Ephesus in Asia Minor. We saw last time that there were teachers in Ephesus who were seeking to lead Christians astray with wrong doctrine. This was creating divisions in the church. Apparently Timothy also had health problems. In the face of these difficult circumstances, I wonder if Timothy was hoping for a different assignment.

This was not to be. Paul was convinced that Timothy was the right person for the job. So in our passage this morning we are going to look at Paul's encouragement for a Christian who cannot escape his or her responsibilities. How should we handle situations where we have feelings of inadequacy?

I.

In vv. 12-17 of 1 Timothy #1 (which is found on p. 991 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs) the Apostle Paul says that IN SITUATIONS OF INADEQUACY WE CAN BE ENCOURAGED BY THE POWER OF A GODLY TESTIMONY. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. IN SITUATIONS OF INADEQUACY...) In the preceding three verses the apostle had just been speaking about various kinds of sinners and the power of the gospel. This led to the opportunity for him to describe his own spiritual transformation. In describing his testimony there is encouragement for Timothy. Six times in the New Testament Paul describes his conversion. The story that people have about how they become Christians can be an encouragement for Christians and unbelievers.

Paul writes in v. 12, **"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service..."** The first thing that Paul notes about his own spiritual experience is that Christ has given him strength. That is what Timothy needs in the face of his difficult

situation. According to v. 12, that strength has been given as Paul has been faithful in serving Him. Paul's testimony is not that God has removed all of his problems, not that God has eliminated stress from his life, but rather that Christ has given him strength to respond to the challenges in his life, as Paul has been faithful to do the right things.

That strength was seen in Paul's first visit to Lystra, Timothy's hometown. He was stoned by Jewish persecutors who did not like his message. Paul was given the physical strength to recover from that, and he was given the spiritual fortitude and boldness to go on with his ministry. When Paul first arrived at Corinth, he again encountered Jewish persecution. The Lord at night gave him a vision that many would believe in Him in that city. So he was strengthened to persevere in his ministry in that city by that supernatural experience.

Our response in the face of trials and challenges is so often to ask God to remove the problems. Often He does not do that. He wants us instead to persevere through them and to ask for the strength to deal with them and to accomplish His purposes in them.

Sometimes in the midst of difficult situations we give up. We get mad at God. We get mad at other Christians. We get mad at the church. Perhaps we drop out of sight. Maybe we just run away. We then don't experience the strength that comes from God because we give up too soon, or we fail to be faithful. Paul says that he has experienced God's strength as he has been faithful to follow God.

We also receive strength and grace from God purely as a result of His mercy. In vv. 13 & 14 Paul says that Christ has strengthened him "... **though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.**" Paul is not saying that he was called to be a Christian because he was a really good guy. He is saying that he was directed into greater service as he was faithful to Christ after becoming a Christian.

In vv. 13 & 14 he says that he was undeserving of the gift of salvation. He was a very religious guy. He was a devout Pharisee. He thought that he was serving God. But because he was opposing Jesus and His claims, He was a blasphemer.

Listen to his own testimony in Acts #26 (ACTS 26:9), beginning in v. 9: **"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. (ACTS 26:10) And I did so in**

Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. (ACTS 26:11) And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities."

Yet Paul says that His sin was one of ignorance. He thought that he was serving God, even as many of the Islamic fundamentalists are convinced that they are serving God. Before the Sanhedrin, the high council of Judaism, after his conversion, Paul told the Jewish leaders in Acts #23 that he had followed his conscience up to the present day. (PROJECTOR OFF) He was convinced that he was serving God right along. So Paul and his actions became the object of divine pity and mercy, rather than judgment.

It is not that Paul is claiming that he is deserving of his position or of the grace of God. For in v. 15 he calls himself the foremost of sinners: **"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."**

We may tend to think that the worst sinners are alcoholics and drug addicts and prostitutes and people who are behind bars. Paul did not fit into those categories. He was a religious man. He was an upstanding member of the religious community. He was a Roman citizen. Probably he was involved in the Jerusalem Rotary. He was a moral guy and had a deep commitment to the God of the Old Testament. As a Pharisee, he fasted twice a week. Yet he called himself the worst of sinners. Why? Because he opposed Christ and His work. He persecuted Christians.

Following Paul's line of thinking, the worst sinners today may not be adulterers and bank robbers and drunk drivers and rioters. The worst sinners may be religious people. In Matthew #23 v. 15 (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 23:15) Jesus declared, **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."**

So it is that Jesus may have the harshest judgment toward pastors who tell their parishioners that this born-again stuff is a bunch of bologna. Such may be his view of college professors who try to help their incoming students recognize that Christian beliefs are irrational. (PROJECTOR OFF) Likewise may be his judgment of Islamic teachers who tell their students that the United States is the 'Great Satan' and that they will go to heaven and be given 72 virgins to enjoy if they become suicide bombers. Such may be his view of denominational leaders who tell their people that unity is more important than Biblical

standards of sexuality. Such may be his view of religious leaders who argue that the abortion issue is primarily a matter of a woman's right to control her own body.

Apparently there was a saying going around churches in the first century that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. It is quoted in v. 15 of our passage. According to the gospels, Jesus Himself said (PROJECTOR ON--- MARK 2:17), **"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."** Fortunately, He is still in that business today.

In 1960 Madalyn Murray O'Hair had a fourteen year old son who was attending public schools in Baltimore. (MADELYN MURRAY O'HAIR) The school had Bible readings every day. She sued the school district, claiming that this practice violated the First Amendment clause about the establishment of religion. She was an atheist and did not want her son exposed to this kind of corrupting influence. Her case, along with a similar case, was appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled in 1963 that those daily Bible readings were unconstitutional. (Abington vs. Schempp)

The O'Hair home was hardly the kind of situation that one would expect to produce anything Christian. In his autobiography son William Murray (WILLIAM MURRAY) describes the dysfunctional family in which he was raised. As an adult he stumbled through life as an alcoholic. But in the desperation of a deteriorating life, God got his attention. At age 33 he became a follower of Jesus. His mother responded with this declaration: **"One could call this a postnatal abortion on the part of a mother, I guess; I repudiate him entirely and completely for now and all times. He is beyond human forgiveness."** (*Ungodly: The Passions, Torments, and Murder of Atheist Madely Murray O'Hair*, p. 138) Madelyn was eventually murdered by a former worker at the organization she founded, American Atheists. William Murray went on to become a Baptist minister. Today he is the head of the Religious Freedom Coalition in Washington, D.C. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Such is the kind of mercy which Jesus Christ displays. According to v. 16, **"But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."** This example points to the power which Jesus has to change lives. If Jesus can change the greatest of sinners into an apostle, there is no limit to his power. If the living God can reach down into an atheistic home and convert a man trained to deny the existence of God, there is hope that He can touch the people for whom we pray.

It means that He can strengthen a Timothy who feels inadequate to handle false teaching in his church. It means that he can sustain widows dealing with the loss of a husband. It means that he can help a man

who feels helpless in the face of a difficult marriage. It means that He can strengthen a student who feels overwhelmed by school. It means that He can help a family struggling with financial debt. It means that he can sustain older people staying isolated to avoid the coronavirus--- if we will remain faithful.

There is power in a godly testimony. The story of one's decision to trust Christ and the changed life that follows is often instrumental in bringing others to Christ. But it can also be an encouragement to other Christians. Here Paul was talking about his own experience for the benefit of his coworker Timothy. Paul was encouraging his friend by sharing his own experience. There is power in a godly testimony.

As Paul reflects upon his own conversion experience, he is prompted to worship God. In v. 17 he declares, **"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."** The realization of God's grace in our lives should lead to praise and worship.

Jonathan Edwards (PROJECTOR ON--- JONATHAN EDWARDS) grew up in Connecticut as a preacher's kid. At age 13 he went to Yale. One Sunday when he was 17 years old, he stayed home from church. He wandered into his father's library and scanned his books. He happened to pull one volume out because it had no title on its binding. It was a Bible. Jonathan Edwards randomly opened it to this page, and his eyes fell upon v. 17. The simple description of the majesty and vastness of God hit him. He felt guilty for having resisted the gospel for so long. Right there he put his faith in Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Edwards went on to obtain his ministerial degree at Yale. He taught there for a time, but then he became a pastor and a writer. He is best known as a leader in the New England revival called the Great Awakening. At the end of his life Edward was president of Princeton University. He is generally regarded as America's greatest theologian. His life, Paul's life, and our lives can be a demonstration of the power of a godly testimony.

II.

The first thing that Paul used to encourage Timothy, and which can also be an encouragement to us and those around us, is the power of a godly testimony. The second thing is THE REMINDER ABOUT GOD'S WILL. (II. IN SITUATIONS OF INADEQUACY...) That is the message of vv. 18-20.

Paul begins in v. 18, **“This charge I entrust to you, Timothy...”** Back in v. 3 Paul used the same word when he wrote, **“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine...”** The charge, or command, which Paul seems to be talking about in v. 18 has to do with staying at Ephesus and dealing with the false teachers.

The question which we might legitimately ask is: “How do we know that Paul’s command expresses the will of God for Timothy?” The answer has to do with the fact that Paul held a position that was unique to the beginning period of the church. As I mentioned last time, at first there was no New Testament available to provide the church with a doctrinal guide or standard. But God had gifted certain individuals who had seen Christ, and He appointed them to have a unique power and position in the early church. These were the apostles. He also raised up prophets.

In Ephesians #2 v. 20 (EPHESIANS 2:20) Paul writes that the church was **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone...”** Once a foundation is laid, another foundation is not needed. So I am skeptical about people who claim to be apostles or prophets today. God used these first century gifted people, including the Apostle Paul, to communicate God’s will to the church.

(PROJECTOR OFF) In v. 18 of our passage Paul adds, **“This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare...”** Specific prophecies were made about Timothy and apparently about his ministry. Perhaps they came through Paul, perhaps through someone else.

In #4 v. 14 Paul writes, **“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.”** Perhaps at the time when Timothy was ordained, or commissioned to ministry, prophecies were made about him. Paul has no doubt that Timothy was equipped with the kind of spiritual gifts which were necessary to do the job at Ephesus. Perhaps there were specific prophecies made about the role which Timothy was to have in that city. In any event, Paul was reminding Timothy of God’s will for him.

Often in churches we hear people speak about the “call to ministry.” By that they seem to be talking about a mystical working of the Holy Spirit in an individual calling that person to full-time vocational ministry. I don’t see a basis for that here. There was a specific prophecy made in regard to Timothy, and Timothy was given ministry responsibilities by an apostle of Christ. When the term “calling” appears in

the New Testament in a theological sense, the reference is usually to God's effective drawing of individuals to faith in Jesus.

Paul likewise went into vocational ministry not as the result of some inner urging of the Holy Spirit, but because of the appearance of Christ to him on the road to Damascus where he was headed to arrest Christians. The resurrected Christ spoke to him audibly and Paul was blinded for a time. The normal basis for someone becoming involved in vocational Christian ministry seems to be laid out in #3 of this book. We shall see that it involves a recognition by a church and its leaders of the special abilities and effectiveness and faithfulness of a particular individual. Paul there speaks about a person's desire for service, but he makes no reference to a mystical calling.

The prophecies made concerning Timothy will be helpful, Paul says, because they will help him fight the good fight. Paul was a realist. He knew from experience that Christian ministry involves struggles. Ultimately these struggles involve a spiritual war against Satan and his forces. Too often, unfortunately, struggles in churches take place over things not worth fighting about. At Ephesus the issues involved basic doctrines of the faith. That was deserving of a fight, and Paul was encouraging Timothy to get in there and fight against false teachers and the wrong doctrine that they were promoting.

The kind of fighting which Timothy is encouraged to wage always involves a spiritual element. Paul refers to that in vv. 19 & 20. He speaks of **"holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."** Timothy is encouraged to keep the faith and a good conscience. In spiritual warfare Christians need both right doctrine and correct behavior.

The text indicates that some have rejected a good conscience. The result is that their faith has been messed up also. In other words, failure in the area of morality has a bad effect upon what they choose to believe. Doctrinal error often stems from moral failure. When Christians become involved in sin in a particular area, there is a natural temptation to change what they choose to believe so that they can ease feelings of guilt which naturally follow. Christians become involved, for example, in sexual wrongdoing, and sometimes they reinterpret the plain meaning of Biblical texts to justify their behavior. They decide that the Bible doesn't say that sex before marriage is wrong or homosexuality is wrong.

Paul indicates that such a thing happened to two men at Ephesus--- Hymenaeus and Alexander. Hymenaeus is mentioned again in 2 Timothy #2 vv. 17 & 18. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 TIMOTHY 2:17-19) There the Apostle Paul speaks of **"Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying**

that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.” Jesus had indicated that the resurrection of the dead would be accompanied by His return to earth. That has not happened. So Hymenaeus had swerved from the truth. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Alexander, who is also mentioned in v. 20 of our text, had a more common name. There are several Alexanders mentioned in the New Testament. In 2 Timothy #4 v. 14 Paul speaks of an Alexander who did Paul much harm. Perhaps it is the same man as the one in our text.

The apostle says in v. 20 that he has handed over the two false teachers **“to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”** Probably this meant that he had ordered them to be cut off from the fellowship of the church--- not to punish them but to motivate them to repent. Excommunication was an effective discipline in the early church. To be cut off from a local church was to be turned out into a world that was controlled by Satan.

The local church was the only group in town that provided spiritual protection and fellowship and comfort and nourishment to a Christian. Someone excluded from that fellowship did not have the option of going up the street to Second Baptist Church or around the corner to First Community Church. There were not any other churches around. There was not any Christian radio or TV. There was not any parachurch group that offered support. Unfortunately today when churches seek to discipline Christians who are messing up, offenders too often just go to another church which may not check out a person's spiritual history.

Paul's main focus in these three verses is upon reminding Timothy about God's will for his life. That will was to stay at Ephesus and to fight against the false teaching that was being promoted there. When we are facing situations where we feel inadequate, it helps to know that we are doing what God wants us to be doing.

Timothy had specific revelation from God concerning at least some aspects of his situation. We don't normally have that same kind of specific divine revelation given to us today. But we do have something available to us that they did not have in the first century. We have the entire Bible. That Bible contains specifics and general principles that describe God's will for us in most of the situations of inadequacy that we face.

Raising your kids seem like mission impossible at times? Feel inadequate as a parent or grandparent? This book contains many reminders of God's will for us. Thousands of books have been written that describe what the Bible says about raising children. The same thing could be said about the Bible's instructions about marriage, about work, about church responsibilities, about our obligation to share the gospel with the world around us, and about struggles with our emotions.

In whatever situation of inadequacy we face, we can receive encouragement from the power of a godly testimony and from a reminder about God's will for our lives. We can be confident that God's power is adequate. That does not mean that He will give us an easy solution to every problem. That does not mean that we will not have struggles within our lives. That does not mean that we will not experience sadness and sorrow and depression. But it does mean that God will give us the power to endure if we do the right thing. It does mean that we will ultimately succeed in the purpose in life which God has for us.

Our country has the highest rate of incarceration of any nation in the world. The American criminal justice system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,833 state prisons, 110 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,134 local jails, 218 immigration detention facilities, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. Territories. (Prison Policy Initiative, 3/24/2020)

According to the US Department of Justice 83% of former prisoners end up back in prison. This is an obvious problem. People concerned about this are faced with a situation of inadequacy. But when Jesus becomes involved, there is a solution. Most of you are familiar with Hope for Prisoners here in the Las Vegas area. It is a Christian based system. Some of the people in our congregation have served as mentors and teachers for the program. One of our elders has been through the program. As many as 400 Metro officers have served as teachers and mentors in Hope for Prisoners. A study was done of ex-prisoners who have been through the long form of the program. The study found that only 6% of graduates have ended up back in jail. Clark County District Attorney Steve Wolfson says, **"It's a program that works. It's pretty simple."** ("State of Nevada," KNPR, 4/23/2019)

Feeling inadequate as a parent, as a mate, as a worker, as a church leader, as a student, as a prisoner facing release from incarceration? Take courage. God's power is sufficient. Focus on doing God's revealed will, and we have the promise that Christ will strengthen us.