

+ 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 + Love Speaks Urgently + 19th Sunday after Pentecost + 29 September 2013 +

"I want to tell someone about Jesus!" George was a dying man. He had lived a pretty hard adult life. After serving as a tank driver in Europe in World War II and witnessing some things that he would rarely ever talk about again—including the liberation of a Nazi concentration camp, George became an alcoholic. The fact that he and his father ran a tavern didn't help things any. It would be 40 years before he would stop drinking. His alcoholism and his hard life nearly ruined his marriage and his family. It certainly ruined his health and nearly killed him a few times, but the Lord in his grace had other plans for George.

You see, early on the Lord had brought into his life a young woman named Betty who loved her Lord dearly and wanted their children to have that same love for their Lord and his Word. So George started going to church with them. He had to take Bible Information Class so their sons could attend the local Lutheran Elementary School. He was hearing the Word of God, but kept on self-medicating with the bottle. Their two sons eventually became pastors. George was proud of that fact, but disappointed that neither followed him as a third-generation tavernkeeper.

In the meantime, George's health took occasional turns for the worse. Doctors questioned if he was going to live, yet the Lord in his grace kept him alive. Finally, in late 1986, George's life nearly ended again, but this time the Lord in his grace through Betty and their sons and their pastor finally got through to him. George stopped drinking, and for the first time in his life, through the faith the Lord had kept alive, George realized what God had done for him. He realized that Jesus had forgiven every one of those sins from his past. He realized what precious gifts God had given to him in his wife, his sons, their families, and in making him a forgiven child of God.

George's life and focus changed. In spite of declining health and mobility, he made sure he and Betty were in worship every Sunday to hear God's Word and receive the Sacrament. He read his Bible and *Meditations* every day. He supported the work of the Gospel with his treasures and his prayers, and he encouraged his grandchildren as they studied for the ministry. In late 2004, his health took a final turn for the worse. His 78-year-old heart was wearing out. When he went in for heart surgery, he told his family, "I want to tell someone about Jesus before I die."

"I want to tell someone about Jesus." You could say that that was the motto of the Apostle Paul's life...or at least the 30 years after Christ had made him a Christian. It was amazing that he even was a Christian—a true testimony of God's grace. Paul had once been a young Jewish scholar named Saul, who was zealous for the Lord and the Law of Moses and had become obsessed with wiping the name of Jesus off the face of the earth. Saul had viciously pursued and persecuted Christians, forcing them to blaspheme the name of Christ publicly and approving of their death. Yet that all changed on a dusty road to Damascus. There Jesus himself confronted Saul and redirected his obsession to spreading the name of Jesus to every soul.

Paul was going to suffer for serving Jesus, because just as he had been opposed to Christ, so also many others would be opposed to him as Christ's apostle. If you read through the book of Acts or Paul's letters to Christian congregations, it becomes pretty clear how difficult it was for Paul. It was a fight, a hard struggle, a contest that required Paul to use every mental and physical fiber in his body. He was beaten. He was flogged. He endured imprisonments and shipwrecks and kangaroo courts and rejection. He was even stoned nearly to death and thrown out of a city, but he never gave up sharing Jesus. He just couldn't stop telling people about the Savior who rescued him. Paul always had this sense of urgency about his proclamation of Jesus, because Christ was coming soon and time was running out. Yet the Lord in his grace allowed him to serve for about 30 years. It had been a hard, yet blessed struggle for the faith, but Paul's life was nearing its end.

Things had not been going well for Paul. He found himself imprisoned in Rome for the second time. The first time he had been freed after house arrest, but this time, execution loomed. So he penned one last letter to his dear "son" in the faith, Timothy. ***"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me in the future the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing."***

In spite of his faithful testimony and the grace that God himself promised, Paul's trial had not gone well. Everyone who could have spoken for him ***"deserted"*** him. ***"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the proclamation might be fully made through me and all the Gentiles might hear. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth."*** Even though Paul had no one to defend and support him among his friends and fellow believers, he still had the Lord by his side, strengthening him.

The Lord had one more task left for him to do—tell people about Jesus. Paul knew that time was running out. Yet that urgency to proclaim Jesus that had motivated him for the past 30 years never wavered. He had opportunity to proclaim the good news of Jesus once more to the Gentiles. He knew his last day was coming soon, and that the Last Day was coming soon for souls who needed to hear about Jesus. Yet having told others about his gracious

Savior, Paul was confident of this: ***“The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom.”*** It was only a matter of time before the Apostle Paul was put to death, yet he was rescued and received that gift of grace—***“the crown of righteousness”***, but not before Paul had told others about Jesus.

“I want to tell someone about Jesus.” Is that your first thought when you wake up in the morning? Is that thought on your mind as you get ready in the morning or when you go to school or work? Is that thought on your mind during the day or when you go home for the evening or when you go to bed?

Probably not, because it’s so easy to put that task off. “I can do it tomorrow or when it’s a good time for me to talk about Jesus. Besides, it’s not like they’re coming to me to tell them about Jesus. I’ll have time some other time.” ...But will you? Will you have another opportunity to tell that loved one, that friend, that neighbor, that co-worker, that classmate about their Savior? What if Christ comes again and neither you nor anyone else shared Jesus with that loved one or neighbor or friend? What if your life ends tonight? What if theirs ends? We often don’t see that, so we put off the task.

We lack Paul’s urgency. Why is it that you and I don’t have the Apostle’s urgency? Well, it has been 2,000 years since Jesus promised to come again. It’s been 2,000 years since the Apostle Paul penned these words for our learning. With all that time behind us, it’s easy to think, “I’ve got time to tell my loved one about Jesus—I’ll have more opportunities”, but God doesn’t promise tomorrow or even another opportunity. He just gives us now. If we don’t have that kind of urgency to tell someone about Jesus, can we honestly say that we’re faithfully fighting the good fight? Will we just let souls die?

That’s what makes the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ so very amazing. Paul spoke about Jesus urgently because he fully realized what God in his grace had done for him. He realized that Jesus had lived a perfect life in his place, perfectly obeying the Father’s holy will, which he never could. He realized the price that Jesus himself had paid for all those sins that made Paul consider himself ***“the worst of sinners”*** (1 Timothy 1:15). Even in spite of that, Jesus had made Paul his child through faith. Paul realized that Christ’s resurrection from the dead not only guaranteed his own resurrection someday, but also guaranteed eternal life. Paul had experienced God’s grace and it motivated him to keep on telling others about Jesus.

The same can be said for you and me. Praise our gracious God that Jesus didn’t hesitate to take on our human flesh, that he didn’t put it off for “a better time”. Praise our gracious God that Jesus took all that guilt that weighs heavily on your heart for all those missed opportunities and lost time and lack of urgency, and paid for all that guilt with his own holy, precious blood. Praise our gracious God that ***“the crown of righteousness”*** awaits each of us, who long for Christ’s appearing, in the glories of heaven with him. Praise our gracious God that by his grace and mercy, not only are we forgiven, but we are also empowered and motivated to tell others about our Savior.

That grace shown to Paul is the same grace that restores the urgency among us, as it was in the early church and expressed by apostles like Paul and Peter. That grace changes how you and I view our loved ones, our neighbors, our co-workers, our classmates. Not just regular people like us, but blood-bought souls that are dying spiritually and eternally every day and who desperately need someone like you or me to tell them about Jesus.

Like Paul, we only have a lifetime’s worth of opportunities to tell someone about their Savior. So let’s take them! You all have loved ones or neighbors or friends or co-workers or classmates who are dying spiritually. I do, too, and Jesus has given us the task to contend for the faith and proclaim him to those people. Are you scared? Do you feel like you’ll be alone or you’re not sure what to say? That soul before you is headed towards hell, and you have the only message that will save them for an eternity in heaven. You also have a Lord who will stand by you and strengthen you the entire way. You have a Lord who will empower you through his Word just as he works through the Word you share to rescue dying souls. If you’re looking for motivation, look to the cross and the empty tomb. See Jesus there, and then look heavenward to the crown and eternity that await you because of his grace shown to you, and know that Jesus is coming again soon!

So when you wake up or get ready for the day or go through your day, I pray that the Lord will grant you Paul’s urgency, “I want to tell someone about Jesus today.” The Lord gave George that kind of urgency. Before he was put under for heart surgery, he asked everyone to stop so he could pray for them. After his surgery, nurses and doctors and his wife and his son and his grandson and his pastor heard about Jesus one more time, and then the Lord called him home.

My friends, who are you going to tell about Jesus today? Amen.