

The Firm Foundation of God Stands

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Amen. Take your Bibles and let's go to 2 Timothy as we begin our study through 2 Timothy this morning. We, uh, if, let me just say this, I think if the Apostle Paul were writing a hymn to emphasize what he's saying to Timothy in 2 Timothy, that hymn would be a good one because it's centered on the church and her supernatural element, and the, the blessed power and the creation of God that she is, and how God will preserve her to the end. Well, that's part of what Paul is telling Timothy.

Go to 2 Timothy 2:19 because chapter 2, verse 19, actually the very first phrase is a fitting summary of what Paul is getting across to Timothy in this letter. I want you to listen carefully this morning. There's, there's such weightiness, such gravity about what Paul is saying to Timothy as he is continuing to instruct him in how to pastor and oversee the church at Ephesus. 2 Timothy 2:19, the first phrase, "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands." Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands.

Now I entitled the exposition of 1 Timothy "Beautifying the Bride: Her Form and Her Fashion," because that's exactly what God was doing through Paul as he guides Timothy in structuring this church, that's her form, and how the church should function, that's her fashion. And as the church is – listen – is structured God's way, functions God's way, is empowered with God's truth and God's power, then the church is the beautified bride, and even more so as she matures until the day of our glorification when we will finally bear forth our full beauty. And so that's what this is all about, God getting glory through the church being the church.

So we talked about that and actually the theme verse for that, if you want to look, I think it'll be on your screen but 1 Timothy 3 back when we were going through 1 Timothy, verses 14 and 15 was, um, something of a, uh, statement of summary for that book. He says in verses 14 and 15, 1 Timothy 3, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." So we had that and then we come over to 2 Timothy now and God continues through Paul writing this letter to Timothy, telling him how to carry on forward his beautifying the bride in her form and in her fashion.

Now actually, 2 Timothy is about five or maybe seven years later than the writing of 1 Timothy. While he continues the instructions, there's something more to bear here because now the Apostle Paul is in his second Roman imprisonment. He's in a very serious, very difficult setting. Paul knows for certain that his execution is imminent and so he writes to Timothy and, in effect, tells Timothy, "No matter what happens and no matter what I have been through and, Timothy, no matter what you may go through, please know this, nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands. In effect, Timothy, stay faithful to the end. Finish all the way out just like I am because we're about something that is of God and it will stand. Matter of fact, it will stand for all time and eternity. The work is worth it. We are laboring in the building of God's house and it counts for all time and eternity." So stay faithful to the finish because the firm foundation of God stands is where we're going to be as we look at 2 Timothy and go through it together, alright?

Now let's talk about the author of the book. Of course, we know that the author here, the human author, that is, is the esteemed Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was a late addition to the apostolic band. Matter of fact, Paul was not converted or a follower of Christ when Christ ministered on the earth. God came to him or Christ came to him after his ascension into heaven. Uh, Paul even referred to himself in 1 Corinthians as one untimely born. "The other apostles were born during Jesus' ministry but Jesus came and got me later on. I am one untimely born."

You remember the story from Acts 9, the Apostle Paul is, is about the task of persecuting Christians and then we have in Acts 9:4-6, "and he," that's Saul or the Apostle Paul, "fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?'" If you get knocked down so hard from a light from heaven, you just go ahead and say that's the Lord. "'Well, who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'Well, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.'" Now how's that for sovereign election? I mean, out of nowhere God intervened, knocks him to the ground, he's humbled and broken, he looks up and the Lord says, "I'm about to tell you what you're gonna do for Me." He didn't have a vote in it, it wasn't a committee meeting, the church didn't vote, nothing happened, God just got him. He says, "I'm one untimely born."

So the author, humanly speaking, is the esteemed Apostle Paul. Now the audience. The audience, of course, is Timothy but it's also all the pastors of all the ages. If we want to know how to beautify the bride which, by the way, if you don't want to know how to do that, you don't need to be in the ministry, were about God's glory through his church, were about God being pleased and being seen through his church, being structured and functioning as he wants it to be structured and functioning. So it's for all the pastors but it's also for the local church. Of course, Timothy read this and discussed it with the local church family.

Let's remind ourselves about Timothy now. Timothy was Paul's younger understudy and he was a very devoted disciple of the Apostle Paul. Timothy was a native of either Derbe or Lystra, we can't be for sure. Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois,

were devoted believers and of Jewish heritage. Timothy's father, however, was a Greek. Timothy was no doubt converted under the Apostle Paul's preaching in his hometown area, and then some time elapsed and Timothy grew greatly in the Lord. He was a spiritual young man of God and he gained quite a high esteem among the local churches in that region which led to Paul choosing Timothy to be his companion and his close associate. And we know of all the companions of Paul. Paul pointed out that Timothy was his top guy. Matter of fact, he said this in Philippians 2:19-22. Paul says, "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition." Notice this, "For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father." The Apostle Paul says, "Timothy is the best guy I've got."

They actually ministered together for about 17 years from AD 51 to AD 68. Now we do know that Timothy had some physical limitations, some perhaps you would say emotional weaknesses. He seemed to be stressed a lot. He seemed to struggle with anxiety and I'd like to back up and say I don't know a pastor who's trying to do it right who doesn't do some of that ourselves, so I sympathize with him. But Paul had to instruct him some on those things and talk to him about taking care of himself. It's probable that Timothy was more fitted for the associate role than for the primary role in ministry leadership.

So now let's come to the date. When did the Apostle Paul write this? Most likely about 67 AD, perhaps 68. We can't pin it down exactly but that's very very close.

Now we come to the last area that I'll spend the bulk of our time on, the setting and the purpose. The setting and the purpose again, Timothy saying, "Stay faithful to the finish because the firm foundation of God stands." So we remind ourselves this morning that the Apostle Paul spent a good deal of time in Roman prisons. He wrote 1 Timothy, most likely he did, Titus, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians from the prison house in Rome. I don't know if the Lord was speaking to me, but I've had so many people encourage me to put some things in writing and I never have time. I thought, well, is God gonna put me in jail to get me to do some writing? Now it wouldn't be the writing Paul did, he was inspired to write Holy Scripture, but it did come to my mind.

Now he's writing to Timothy what we call 2 Timothy and this is during Paul's second imprisonment and just before Paul's martyrdom by execution. 2 Timothy has a much different tone than the book of 1 Timothy. During the first imprisonment when he probably wrote 1 Timothy, Paul was under something of a house arrest. Uh, he, he was anticipating his soon release and he could go out and visit with all the brethren and visit the churches and preach the gospel more and travel. But now in this second imprisonment, he says nothing about being released, he says nothing about future ministry in the earth. In this second book to Timothy, he speaks about the completion of his earthly ministry and he writes about the reward that awaits him in heaven. We do know for a fact that the second imprisonment was far more difficult. As I said, the first

imprisonment was like a house arrest. He, he could, he could stay in the quarters he was renting, he had crowds that would come, he could preach to people and lots of visitors coming and going, but the second imprisonment was much more restrictive and much more severe. He was in much like a solitary confinement. On one occasion he said, "I'm treated like an evildoer." Paul's in a place now where literally it's difficult to find him, and also very dangerous to be seen associating with him. You might find persecution for yourself if you were known to be associated with him. Paul talks of how many abandoned him during this period. In 2 Timothy 4:16 as he went before the judge, he says, "At my first defense, no one supported me but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them."

He lived through the horrors of one planned execution that was stayed already and seemingly that was a last minute thing. In 2 Timothy 4:17 he said, "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth." That has to refer to, "I was close to martyrdom and somehow God gave me grace and it didn't happen at that time." But now he's certain again that his execution is on and it will be very soon. He writes 2 Timothy with no hope of being delivered. This time he writes from the perspective that, "My persecutors are going to have their way with me, an unjust and violent death is now inevitable."

Let's back up for a moment and think about the cultural historical context of all that's going on. Nero is the Roman Emperor at this time. Nero is a vile and a cruel man and he especially hated this new little religious movement called Christianity. For example, Nero had many Christians crucified. Nero had Christians covered in animal skins and had dogs hunt them to their death. Nero would dip Christians in oil and suspend them on poles and light them to lighten the streets at night. One historian writes of how Nero would dip Christians in oil, put them on poles, and set them aflame, and have them placed around his palace gardens as he threw masquerade parties in drunkenness and revelry. That's Nero.

So Paul is imprisoned under Nero's charge. Probably two specific charges were against Paul at this point. 1. He was guilty of leading a novel illegal religion. And number 2, they found him guilty of leading a conspiracy to burn down Rome. We do know, it's a historical fact that in this day a, a great fire was set in Rome and burnt a lot of the city down to the ground, and Nero conveniently blamed it on Christians. But history also records that Nero had been trying for some time to tear down much of the city and rebuild these colossal buildings in his own honor. Neropolis he was going to call it for his own fame and glory. And so the rumor is that Nero probably set the fire himself so he could rebuild what he wanted because the Senate would not let him do it. He conveniently, though, made Christians the scapegoat. Nero was a cruel man.

The Apostle Paul is in his prison for being a Christian pastor and teacher, a leader of this new and, according to Rome, illicit and illegal religion. The Apostle Paul would probably identify with the words of Martin Luther who in the 15th and 16th century led something of the Protestant revolution out of Roman Catholicism back to the Bible and Martin

Luther wrote, "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life I'll sow. The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still." His kingdom is forever. So that's something of the contextual surrounding that Paul and even Timothy finds himself in, and you know, Paul as he's writing this knowing his execution is just at hand, has to be wondering is Timothy going to be next? And so he writes to him and says, "Timothy, it's worth it. Stay faithful to the end, Timothy, because the firm foundation of God stands."

Now something of the theme or the purpose. We've talked about this quite a bit already because I couldn't help but say it but we'll say it again. "Timothy, I want you to be faithful." That's the purpose of the book. "Timothy, I want you to stay with it. Timothy, I want you to finish out well." And you've got to wrap this in all that the Apostle Paul is presently dealing with and all that he has dealt with when we consider the frailty and the weakness of our fallen state, when we consider our physical and emotional being, when we consider the trials of this present sinful world. The Apostle Paul suffered through storms and bad weather, and he suffered with disease, and all the myriads of discomforts and pain that accompany this life and this ministry. When we consider the blunders and the failures of even ministers who are giving it the very best they have, when we consider the unrelenting attacks of the enemy to discourage us and destroy us, and in the Apostle Paul's case he's considering the soon and certain execution he will experience though he is an innocent man, considering that in these final days on the earth, the Apostle Paul is imprisoned in squalor and most of his associates have forsaken him, and actually in a human perspective his numbers aren't good, his ministry could be considered a failure. But considering it all, Paul says, "Timothy, stay with it like I've stayed with it, Timothy, because the firm foundation of God stands." And by the way, it's the only thing that will stand.

Now this firm foundation of 2 Timothy 2:19 is the church, and for time and space history before we get to our glorified state, it's the local churches of God. Paul tells the church at Corinth, for example, in 1 Corinthians 3:10, "I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it." Well, what did Paul lay in Corinth, in the city of Corinth? He started a church. It was God's church. Then in the next verse, 1 Corinthians 3:11, he says, "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." So in one case clearly the church is emphasized, now Jesus Christ is emphasized as the foundation. So you ask the question, "Well, is Christ the foundation or is it the church?" Yes. The church is his body. The church's head is Christ. They go together. The church is his work and he embodies his work.

1 Peter 2:4-6 comes to mind, "And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God." Now think about that just for a moment, all of these Roman leaders in the culture in general looked upon these ragtag outcast bunch as just sort of a sect of Judaism, they called themselves Christians. They're just kinda nobodies but God looks at them and said, "No, but they're precious stones. I'm building something the natural eye can't see yet." At the judgment day, they'll see it, brothers and sisters, but they can't see what God's building yet. Verse 5 of 1 Timothy 2, "you also, as living stones," Christ is choice and precious but there's living stones, that's us, "are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.'" In the foundation work God's doing right now in the world, Jesus is the cornerstone and every squares to him, but the rest of us who know him are the living stones in the foundation, his local churches. Of course, we do know that Christ technically speaking is separate from his church but – listen – Christ cannot be separated from his church. Technically speaking, we know the church is separate from Christ but the true church cannot be separated from Jesus Christ. He is the foundation. His church is the foundation. It's the firm foundation that Paul tells Timothy, "Timothy, stay with it. Don't quit. No matter what happens to me, stay faithful because the firm foundation of God will stand."

It's the only thing that's going to stand. It's the only thing that's going to be left when he returns and establishes his glorious eternal kingdom. Have you ever thought about that? God's going to return. Jesus Christ is returning and the only thing that we know now that will be here when he returns is the church because it's of God. He's laid a foundation and he's laid this foundation in the earth and he calls it his new creation. The foundation of the new creation is already starting. This sinless, eternal glorious, new creation is being planted in this earth as local churches are planted in the earth, and they will stand for time and for eternity no matter what.

Now when we think about no matter what, let's think a little bit about the man writing this letter to Timothy and what no matter what meant from his perspective. I can't cover all of it but I'm gonna take the Apostle Paul's wording to give you something of an outline of what he went through and yet he pens, "Nevertheless, even though all that's true, in effect it's worth it because 'the firm foundation of God stands.'" Matter of fact, God prescribed Paul's sufferings. God told a man, Ananias, to go get Paul and Ananias said, "I don't wanna go get this Saul of Tarsus. He's having Christians carted off into prison. He's having Christians put to death." And God tells Ananias, "No, no, no, I've changed some things. I'm about to show him how many things he must suffer for My sake." I mean, right before Paul began his ministry, God said, "You're gonna suffer greatly for Me in the earth."

Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 said he was often perplexed. He said he often despaired. He said, "I'm often struck down and I'm always delivered to death for Jesus' sake." In 2 Timothy 3, he speaks of persecutions and afflictions in Antioch, Iconium and in Lystra. In 1 Corinthians 15, he says, "I'm in jeopardy ever, every hour and I have fought beasts." In 2 Corinthians 4, he says, "I'm hard-pressed from every side." In 2 Corinthians 6, he mentions tribulations, distresses, stripes, imprisonments plural, tumults, sleeplessness and sorrowful. In 2 Corinthians 12, he mentions infirmities. In 2 Corinthians 12:7 and 10, he talks about the thorn in his side which a, which was either a person or a physical malady. He talks about reproaches and he talks about needs. In Galatians 4, he mentions his physical infirmities. And he says in Galatians 6, "I bear in my body the marks of Christ." In Romans 9, he says, "I have great sorrow and continual grief." And he says, "I have stripes above measure." He said, "I was 40 times hit minus one. I was shipwrecked and spent a night and a day in the deep. Three times I was beaten with rods and I was stoned.

I was under the peril of robbers and the perils of the Jews and the Gentiles and the perils among false brethren. I've known weakness and toil." Every one of these words are Paul's words. "I was often in hunger and in thirst. I was often cold and naked and even experienced snakebite." And then on top of it all, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11, "I've always had the continual burden for all the churches."

And some of you have a hard time making it to Sunday school on time. Shame on you in Jesus' name. Some of you daddies need to write or draw a line in the sand that says, "This household will be faithful to God." Now I know you're not wicked, I know you're not evil and I love you deeply because I know you love the Lord, but gird up your loins. Recommit your hearts. It's worth it because the firm foundation of God stands.

Suffering all these and yet these difficulties, these trials, these obstacles, these attacks never threatened to undermine God's true church. Never shook the church's foundation. Never caused her to fall over. Didn't even cause her to lean or totter or to go wobbly. Far from it, the sufferings the Apostle Paul experienced and all who are godly and carry their cross in this antichrist world will experience are but new pillars being driven deep below the already immovable foundation to further anchor her to the bedrock of Jesus Christ.

Paul comes to the time for his execution but he didn't call it that. Do you know what he calls it? "The time of my departure." Old Roman guards must have ridiculed and said, "Hey, you about, you about to get it, son." He's probably saying, "Woo! My departure's right ahead." I love that Paul looks at it, the way Paul looks at it. Most have abandoned him, he's alone, his outward ministry numbers are not good, Caesar and the house of Rome are glad that they have disposed of him and destroyed his following, yet Paul said, "No, you don't understand. I'm just, I'm just finishing my course." You haven't altered what God was doing at all. And as I read through 2 Timothy several times, and as I read through, Paul's not sad. Paul's not disappointed. Paul is not depressed. Rome is convinced that he's through and his little Christianity movement will die on the earth with him, but Paul's not gonna die in the earth. He's going to depart from this earth and be united with his Lord and Savior in heaven.

Now there is something he's leaving behind in the earth, gospel seed. Gospel seed. Paul has faithfully planted precious gospel seed over the entirety of Caesar's empire, and after his departure, Paul knows in God's sovereign timing that God will spiritually water that seed, and God will spiritually put heat on that seed and that seed will germinate and produce true life unto the glory of God over the entire Roman Empire. History records 238 years later and 38 Caesars later, Christianity became the most prominent religion in the known world. Powerful. It's what I keep telling you, church, about our work with Anchored in Truth, it may look small and it may have, not have the biggest bang to human eyes but it's true, it's true and it can't be stopped or held back. The firm foundation of God stands.

So in this context, again, Paul's writing to Timothy just before his execution and says, "Timothy, I've stayed with it and it's all worth it. I'm finishing out well, Timothy, and so must you. Timothy, stay faithful to your part of the work in laying God's foundation in

the earth, preaching the gospel, planting New Testament churches." I told you in my first exposition of 1 Timothy that the theme would be "Beautifying the Bride: Her Form and Her Function," because Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:14 and 15, "I, I'm writing to you to know how we ought to conduct ourselves in the household of God." So I called it "Beautifying the Bride: Her Form and Function." Now Paul's telling Timothy, "I've done my part in beautifying the bride. I've guided you and Timothy in how to do it also, now finish out well. Timothy, remain faithful to this process of beautifying the local church, beautifying the bride of Christ. It's the only thing that matters. It's eternal and it's the only thing that lasts for time and eternity. It's the firm foundation of God." So Paul writes to Timothy, "Timothy, despite everything that's happened to me and everything that is happened and gonna to happen to you, nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands." And there we stand. We stand on a foundation that all the powers of Rome couldn't conquer. Matter of fact, every time they tried to put it down, they just pushed the seed into more fertile ground.