

Introduction

There is a lot of recognition these days for heroes. Heroes work here. Heroes live here. Thanks to all our heroes. Feed a hero. The focus is on those who are serving on the front lines in the battle with COVID-19. We are grateful to the many in our community and right here in our own congregation who are at the epicenter of the fight and who serve others selflessly in the current pandemic context.

Mothers Day is a fitting time to talk about our heroes; my mother is certainly a hero of mine. So, I want us to think together this morning about heroes from a biblical perspective. Heroes are uncommonly valiant persons who inspire others. They become a role model, a shining example. They are paragons, models or patterns of excellence. Your heroes are the people you admire and the people you want to be like. I would like to direct your attention this morning to 2 Timothy 1 where the Apostle Paul calls attention to his heroes and two that should be Timothy’s heroes, both of which are mothers.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

In this letter Paul expresses his sense that his death is near. The time of his departure from this world has come. The close connection he has with Timothy reverberates through his communication. As a written document the letter will survive his passing. Paul wants Timothy in the future to be able to look back at Paul and be inspired, encouraged, and resolved to live as he lived; preach as he preached; and persevere as he persevered, anchored in the word of God. So it is striking that from the very beginning of the letter Paul draws attention to the fact that his own life and service to God have been influenced by the example of others. The same is also true for Timothy. This morning in our time together I want you to consider with me the power and importance of a godly example.

Give your attention first to . . .

I. Exemplary Ancestors (3)

A. Paul remembers Timothy constantly in his prayers, day and night. And as he prays he is mindful of God’s work of grace in Timothy. His thoughts

can't escape the bonds of love they share. He can't shake the image of Timothy's tears that flowed from heartache when last they parted, and he yearns for the time they will again be in the company of each other. Yet there is a priority in his life which supercedes everything else.

As Paul prays constantly for Timothy, he thanks God. And Paul can't refer to God without referencing his relationship to him. One of Paul's favorite ways of referring to himself is to call himself a servant of God. Here he says to Timothy that he serves God with a clear conscience. Paul's first and overarching purpose in life is to serve God. That is why he is able to say he serves with a clear conscience. He is not pretending to serve on the outside with a heart of hypocrisy on the inside. His service is true and genuine. His life is not about himself but about the purpose and glory of God. That is how he serves.

B. When the children of Israel were captives in Egypt, they were slaves of Pharaoh. They served him; they were under his command. But the Lord demanded of Pharaoh to let them go so that they might SERVE him. AS a people they were to worship and obey him. In the wilderness of temptation, Satan told Jesus he would give him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory if he would fall down and worship him. But Jesus responded, "You shall worship the Lord your God and HIM ONLY shall you SERVE." Jesus taught his disciples the fact that no one can SERVE two masters. The proof that the Thessalonian believers had converted to Christ was that "they TURNED to God from idols to SERVE the living and true God." Each of these examples underscore that serving God is to be owned by him, to worship him, and to do what he says, to willingly and gladly and intentionally live for the purpose of the Lord.

Human beings do not like the thought of serving. We DO like the thought of being served, being helped, being aided in our quest, in our cause, in our own interest. But to be servants of God means we devote ourselves to his quest, his cause, his commands, and his interest. Much of what goes as Christianity in today's world is not human beings surrendered to and serving God but God surrendered to and serving human beings. It is not essentially different from pagan idolatry where worshipers try to harness the power of a deity for their own personal sake.

This is nothing new. Hosea the prophet was sent to draw attention to the problem of feigned obedience among the Israelites. They made a loud pretentious show of claiming to know God. But in the very midst of their pretense, they were using their own silver and gold to make idols to bow down to. They were completely inconsistent. Their inconsistency betrayed the truth. You cannot truly serve the one true God and any other god at the same time. Whatever their claim to know and serve God, it was annihilated by the duplicity of their hearts. And it was obvious to any one looking on.

Sadly the same duplicity is evident in our generation. Many who call themselves Christians and claim to serve God and seek his will reflect the same inconsistency. They say they love God; many of these pray to God and go to church. But they are entrenched in patterns of sin in their lives. It seems they have no intention of bringing their behavior under the Lordship of Christ.

They claim to serve the Lord, but their lives look no different than the rest of the culture. It is especially evident in matters related to sexuality as couples live together without being married and have no qualms about casual sex outside marriage. They condone homosexual desires, acts, and relationships. They are dishonest whenever dishonesty serves them. They gossip and slander. They are impatient when wronged. They regularly explode in anger. They are haughty and filled with pride. They are self-seeking, not thinking about the interests of others. They are worldly, attached to the world and the things of the world. To say you know God while practicing these things is like saying you serve God while using your silver and gold to make idols. That's not serving God. Now do not misunderstand me. Every human-being, saved and unsaved, struggles with temptation. But folks who say they serve God, but who do not determine to change their sinful practice do not serve God, and certainly not with a clear conscience.

So, do you live as a servant of God? Do you serve him? Consider carefully. As you do, contemplate Paul's own sense of what it means to serve God. He says to the Philippian believers, "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the

surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Can you say with Paul as your example that you SERVE God with a clear conscience? That was his PASSION. And it should be the passion of every follower of Christ Jesus.

C. Now take note that Paul draws attention in his serving to the fact that he is following an exemplary pattern that was set before him. He tells Timothy, “I serve God with a clear conscience ‘as did my ancestors.’” His serving God follows the pattern of his forbears. There were saints whose example guided and inspired Paul. He does not tell us exactly whom he was talking about. It probably was not members of his own family. Paul does not appear to have had a godly family heritage. He did have a religious family heritage, but he counted that as loss.

Likely Paul had his mind on people like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and others who had served the Lord selflessly and perseveringly. They were an inspiration to Paul. Their example was a well from which he drew comfort, encouragement, and motivation. They were like cheerleaders whose lives and examples imparted an energy to the determined way in which he served God. You know, I think of the Apostle Paul as one of the greatest followers of Christ ever. It makes an impression on me to think that he had his heroes, that there were other servants of God whose lives guided and inspired him.

From this point Paul directs Timothy to the fact that there are such people in his life as well. He has two of his own exemplary heroes. So we turn our attention from Paul’s exemplary ancestors to two . . .

II. Exemplary Mothers (5)

A. As Paul thinks of Timothy, he is reminded of his sincere faith. The word SINCERE means not hypocritical. It is real; it is authentic; it is genuine. Timothy’s faith is like Paul’s serving with a clear conscience. It is not pretend; it is not fake; it is not duplicitous. Timothy is marked by a faith like Paul’s. He too serves God. He trusts him, believes him, obeys him, and worships him.

A sincere faith possesses an intense concern for holiness. Psalm 119 redounds with expressions of sincere faith. I am going to give you a couple of them. First, the psalmist says in verse 17, “Deal bountifully with your

servant, that I may live and keep your word.” Did you catch that he calls himself a servant? And as a servant his desire is that the Lord’s generosity to him will enable him to live and keep God’s word. A servant with a clear conscience is a person with a sincere faith. And a sincere faith in God desires to live in order to do what the master commands. He lives to do his master’s will.

Second, the psalmist implores the Lord in verse 34, “Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.” He wants God to give him understanding so that he may obey God’s commands wholeheartedly or sincerely, with the affection of his inmost being. A sincere faith does not own Jesus as a means to get something else. A sincere faith owns Jesus because Jesus is what it wants! He is not a means to something bigger! He is the end! He is the prize! This is the sincere faith which Paul observes in Timothy. This is why Paul aches and longs to be near him. Timothy’s faith inspires even the man who disciples him.

B. But Paul cannot think of Timothy’s faith without also thinking of Lois and Eunice. Lois was Eunice’s mother, and Eunice was Timothy’s mother. Both of these ladies had exhibited sincere faith before Timothy did. Timothy came to this faith in the context of their faith. God does not always work like this, but he did in Timothy’s case. His grandmother was a woman of sincere faith. She appears to have been an exemplary influence of faith in her daughter’s life. And together the two mothers were an exemplary pattern for Timothy.

The parallel between what Paul says about himself and what he highlights about Timothy is striking. Paul says, I serve like my ancestors did, and your faith is like the faith of your immediate ancestors, these two exemplary mothers. Paul is indicating to Timothy that just as he had received encouragement, instruction, and inspiration from faithful forefathers, Timothy can gain the same benefit from these faithful mothers. Theirs is a rich, rich heritage that they have passed along to him.

A contributing factor to Timothy’s usefulness for the kingdom is the exemplary faith of both his mother and grand mother. He was greatly

blessed. If you have received such a heritage from the Lord as did Timothy, you are blessed as well. Many do not have such strong examples in such important relationships in their lives. If you do, you are greatly advantaged. You have a rich mine from which to draw encouragement, strength, and inspiration. Do not miss the great gift God has given you. Do not neglect this precious treasure.

There is a lot to learn from what Paul says to Timothy. Here are . . .

III. Specific Instructions

A. First, we learn that lives lived well by our fellow believers are a gift of God for our encouragement, inspiration, and perseverance. Certainly in the scriptures there are many examples of selflessness in serving God. Some of us have such examples in our immediate families, although some of us, like Paul, do not. Many are the examples of godly servants of the Lord whose exemplary faith is like spinach to our souls. Their stories have been preserved in biographies. We should treasure these and take advantage of them. I mentioned several weeks back how Melissa and I were reading a biography of George Mueller. It really made us think and it spurred us on in faith and prayer. Numerous other biographies are out there and we should honor God's gifts by gleaning inspiration from them.

But we do not have to just read biographies to be inspired and encouraged by other saints. We should look around us. We should note exemplary lives around us. We should move in close along side these saints and drink deeply from their example.

B. Second, we are not to look to these exemplary figures instead of Christ. Nobody can replace Jesus Christ, and we must not let anyone take his place. No, but godly men and women of sincere faith are witnesses to the glory of Christ, and our faith in Christ can be bolstered through their witness.

Nothing can take the place of Jesus who paid the debt owed by sinners. He is the Son of God. He is our hope. You can have eternal life alone through faith in him. He is the Lord. It is he that you and I must follow. If you are truly trusting in him, you will be his servant. You will want to serve him

with your whole heart. But at the same time we can be inspired, instructed, and encouraged by the sincere faith of others who trust in him.

C. Third, since exemplary followers of Christ can contribute to the strength and inspiration and stability of other believers, we should each strive to be such a one. Think how you have received encouragement when you spend time with folks who are on fire for God. In my seminary days, I looked forward to going to campus just to be around the high level of intensity and passion for God that seemed to hang there in the air. It was refreshing and invigorating and compelling. But we should not merely look for where we can find such energy, we should also seek to be ones whose life and example energizes, inspires, and encourages. It takes a person of sincere faith to encourage others in their faith. What are you accomplishing in the lives of other believers? Are you blessing your family with an exemplary faith? A determined service for God? Can they look at you and say I thank God every time I think of you? Can anyone say they are trusting Christ the way you or I do? Let's strive for it. Let's cry out to God for it. Let's give thanks to God for the exemplary heroes in our lives, but let's also strive to be exemplary heroes for others. This is what the writer of Hebrews calls spurring one another on towards love and good deeds.

Conclusion

Our families need it. Our neighbors need it. This world needs it. They need lives they can see, people whose hearts they can behold, who live to serve Christ with their whole hearts. Children need mothers and fathers who exemplify sincere faith. Churches need elders and pastors and deacons and teachers like this. Brothers need brothers, and sisters need sisters. I exhort you and encourage you to serve and love and trust this way first for Christ but also for each other, for the glory of God.

Hebrews 11 provides a list of exemplary saints whose lives demonstrate sincere faith. He mentions Abel, Enoch, Noah, and many others whom he says were commended through their faith. Hebrews 12 calls all these faithful servants of God a cloud of witnesses. They surround us testifying to us what sincere faith looks like. They are an example to be followed. The writer exhorts, "Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

looking to Jesus the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross and has set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”