

Scriptures: Joel 2:23-32; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 16-18

I Will Pour Out My Spirit

This morning we heard probably the most well-known chunk of Scripture from the Prophet Joel's book. God speaks through him saying, "I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days," (Joel 2:28-29). Friends, we are living in those days right now. God has poured out His Holy Spirit on us, and on all God's people.

In all of it, God is the One who does the heavy lifting. He does the hard work. And we reap the benefits of it because of His profound love for us. He gives us His own Son, who lays glory aside, comes down to live a life of absolute poverty, and then suffers death on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins we commit. We've been blessed beyond measure in the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ!

And, to ice the cake, so to speak, it gets even better! He leaves the tomb empty three days later, and after ascending back to Heaven, He sends us the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to come and dwell within us. The Holy Spirit comes and resides in our hearts and does the work of changing us from sinners into saints if we yield ourselves to Him. God still does miraculous and amazing things, and He continues to do amazing and miraculous things in and through all of you, here at New Hope!

Today we're going to wrap up our time in Paul's second letter to Timothy. We're going to be reading part of the end of that book. Some Bible scholars believe that this is the last letter Paul wrote before his execution at the hand of Emperor Nero in Rome. If you have your Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18. I'll be reading from the New International Version. **Read 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18.**

Poured Out

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure," Paul says. He sees the proverbial hand writing on the wall – Paul knows his death is near. He talks about his life being poured out like a drink offering. Jewish Christians, which Timothy was, would have understood that in a couple ways.

Firstly, they would have recognized it for what Paul says it is, a drink offering. As a ritual of Jewish worship in the Temple during the time when the Bible was being written, the priests took wine and poured it around the altar as an offering of thanks to God. See, what Jewish people did in those days was they would bring the first tenth – the tithe – of whatever they harvested, and usually this was the best of the best, and

they gave it as an act of worship to God. So it was the best wine that they made, it wasn't a cheap \$5 bottle from Aldi's, it was the high dollar stuff a faithful worshiper of God would have given in thanks for the bountiful harvest. And the priests poured it out around the base of the altar.

The second way they would have understood this was a little more sinister, but probably more accurate given what Paul tells them in the following verses. In the Jewish faith people offered sheep or bulls at the Temple as sacrifices for sin. The priests would kill the animals, take the blood, and pour it on the altar. Paul's life, which has been spent in preaching and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, is being given back to God. Paul recognizes that his own life is a sacrifice. His imprisonment, and coming martyrdom – being killed for his faith in Jesus – was a sacrifice.

Fought The Good Fight

Paul goes on in verse 7 to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." He's looking back at approximately thirty years of work as an apostle, and in doing so, he doesn't say that he won, he says he fought and finished. He had grit. He persevered in the face of adversity.

It is so easy for us to give up. We live in a culture and in a society that would rather quit something than disagree and enter prayerful dialogue. Regardless of how many times Paul was beaten and imprisoned, he never gave up. He never quit preaching the gospel and he never gave up on leading others to know Jesus Christ.

Why doesn't Paul say he won the fight or the race? Because there were many times when he lost. He allowed himself to be wronged, to be treated poorly, only to further the message – the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul kept the faith.

When times get hard – and for Christians, there will be hard times – we cannot afford to give up. We have to stand for Truth. The life of a Christian is not a sprint. It's more of a marathon that we spend a lifetime running toward the finish line. Jesus, and our eternal reward, is our finish line.

Keep Running

It sure is easier to keep running the race when we have crowds – our local church – cheering us on and good friends running along with us! Friends, we keep each other motivated when our conversation is about God's Word. We're at our best as a local church, when our common focus is on Jesus Christ. We revive, refresh, and encourage each other when our fellowship with one another is filled with prayer.

There's something very interesting which Paul tells Timothy, which also applies to us today. He says, "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but

also to all who have longed for His appearing,” (verse 8). Paul mentions that because of his faith, there is a crown waiting for him. He says it’s a crown of righteousness, from the Righteous Judge Himself. It’s an interesting visual which would have spoken to the ancient Greek Gentiles of the day.

Does anyone know what one of the biggest events were in ancient Greece and Rome? This event happened every four years near Mount Olympus. The Olympic Games! The Greeks, and Romans, loved them! The winners of those competitions were given wreaths made of tree leaves to wear as a victor’s crown. Paul, in mentioning a crown of righteousness, is also appealing to the Gentile audience in Ephesus.

Crown of Righteousness

So what is this crown of righteousness of which Paul speaks? No one can be certain, but artists through the ages have attempted to visualize it in paintings of Jesus Christ and the saints. What do the artists in the Middle Ages paint into the paintings above holy people? Halos. They portray Mary, and Joseph, and the apostles all wearing crowns of light.

It’s amazing that in the depths of Nero’s dungeon, awaiting execution, Paul knows he’s getting ready to be killed for his faith, but instead of focusing on the loss of his life, he finds contentment in knowing what his future – eternity – has in store. How does Paul know what his future holds? He knows Who it is who ultimately holds his life in His hands – Jesus Christ. Our society today doesn’t like to think about death. We go out of our way to avoid it.

What Paul says next in the lectionary text today sounds a lot like something Jesus would say. “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them,” (verse 16). When Jesus Christ went to trial late at night on Maundy Thursday night, and up to the crucifixion on Good Friday, He surely felt that way. In fact, Luke’s gospel records that Jesus prays from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up His clothes by casting lots,” (Luke 23:34).

I’ve told you before, and here’s why I believe it, as our Savior died for your sins and mine, He was humiliated. I truly believe He hung on the cross completely naked – fully exposed – bruised, beaten, bleeding, dying. Friends, those soldiers casting lots for clothes wouldn’t have wasted time or placed bets on shredded rags like we so often see as we attempt to sanitize the scene at Golgotha on Good Friday. The depths of the love of God are so profoundly deep, if they were an ocean, we would never be able to reach the bottom even in the sturdiest of submarines.

Jesus Is Rubbing Off On Paul

Jesus is apparently rubbing off on Paul. Paul's faith in Jesus Christ makes Paul sound a lot like Jesus Christ sounded the day He died. "But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth," (2 Tim. 4:17). People deserted him, but the Lord was at his side and gave him strength. He doesn't want grudges to be held against the people. He knows – and we know – people will let us down. When they see the rain, the walls caving in, the waves crashing around us, they ditch us.

Paul remembers the real enemy isn't the people who are against him. The people are not Paul's main adversary. People are not our main adversary, either. It's Satan. Satan puts stumbling blocks in our way, most often in the form of people and problems, to discourage us from doing God's work.

When Paul was being imprisoned and persecuted for spreading the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it wasn't people standing up with him. It was God. God held him up, and gave him strength to keep on preaching. Going backwards to verse 7, Paul was able to fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith only because of God. God is always the One Who does the heavy lifting – we simply strive to live in obedience to Him and reap the benefits!

There is a shift at the end of our text today. Paul says, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen," (verse 18). In the last two verses leading up to this one, Paul spoke in the past tense. It was stuff that had already happened to him. But in verse 18, he speaks of things to come, specifically, about his pending execution. Paul knows when they come to kill him, he will be on his way to eternal life with Jesus – a better life than what he's ever lived.

Leaving A Legacy

Friends, Paul is one of the most well-known people found in the Bible. He wrote many of the epistles found in the New Testament. What a legacy! What will be your legacy? I mentioned earlier that death in our society is a touchy subject. In talking about death with kids – teens – it becomes apparent that there are all sorts of ideas about what happens when these physical bodies are no longer capable of supporting our life here below. Some think about the legacy, and others think about the here and now.

One recent conversation went something like this. "Being martyred would be the best way to die." "Why?" "Well, I want to be a martyr. I want to die for my faith." I appreciate where she's coming from, and her willingness to die for her faith. But friends, we shouldn't set out with the idea that we want to be martyred. In places where Christians are being martyred for their faith, it tends to be a last-resort sort of thing – they've tried

to escape from the oppression in their country and have been captured and found out. Usually they are given the option to renounce their faith – that’s something we should never do as followers of Jesus – and because they refuse to say they’re wrong about Him they are killed.

Kendra was telling me about a boy at the school who told her he didn’t think he wanted to go to Heaven. She said he told her he was content to stay on earth forever, eating plenty of food, playing video games, spending time with his girlfriend, and playing sports. That’s not an option. She started doing some digging, and the kid thought that being in Heaven meant that he would be on his knees forever, with his hands in the air, singing and worshipping God all the time. He confessed that he didn’t like singing.

See friends, as the Church, we have a mission to get the Word about Jesus Christ out to the world. He is God, and because He is Perfection wrapped in human flesh, being present with Him in Heaven is going to be a perfect place. I think we get so fixated on various minor details, that our earthly minds cannot fully describe or even imagine what it’s going to be like. It’s going to be amazing, better than our wildest dreams.

There’s no doubt that both of the young people in these conversations will leave legacies of their own. As we age, our priorities change. The more life experience we have, the more our perspectives change. The two teens are still babes in Christ. They’re learning and growing in their relationship with Jesus every day.

What Is Our Legacy?

But their faith is deep! In many ways, they lead the adults surrounding them in their lives. My point is that we have to continue to guide all of the people on their journey so they don’t lose their faith, even when things get tough. As God’s people, we want all of God’s people to persevere and never give up. So we have to be willing servants, who understand God’s Word – not just reading it, but really understanding it and applying it to our own lives and how we continue to contribute to growing God’s kingdom. The eternal rewards are indescribable

So New Hope, what legacy do you want to leave your kids and grandkids? We must teach them about living for Jesus while they are in this physical body – fighting the good fight, finishing the race, keeping the faith. Times are hard – they’ll get harder – but we must persevere because the end result, our eternity with Jesus, is the prize our eyes are on. We can have all kinds of legacies – powerful titles and positions of authority, a substantial inheritance, awards and recognition – the only thing that really matters is our relationship with Jesus Christ. The impact and influence you leave in the life of others – especially young people to carry on the work – will be your greatest legacy. We see the legacy left to us by Paul, and his efforts to guide Timothy, and we

need to be doing that, too. Let our legacy be the eternal inheritance left to every life we have lovingly led to Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Almighty God, You have sent Jesus to show us how to live. Grant us the power of Your Holy Spirit so that we may follow Him in faithfulness all the days of our lives. Amen.