

2 TIMOTHY 1:1

AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST JESUS

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus...”¹

Reading Paul’s letters, I’m always struck by his introductions. With the exception of his missives to the Philippian saints, the Letters to the Church in Thessalonica and his letter to Philemon, Paul always introduces himself as an Apostle. Why should it be necessary to emphasise that he is an Apostle? If I am corresponding with people who know me, I do not normally feel compelled to iterate that I am a pastor. It is passingly strange that Paul does this.

Perhaps an examination of this inclusion will be instructive to our understanding of the Apostle. Candidly, I am certain that our appreciation of Paul’s labours will be heightened through even a cursory study of his introduction penned to the various churches. Today, however, it should prove beneficial to think why Paul would need to stress to Timothy that he was an Apostle of Christ Jesus.

APOSTLES ARE APPOINTED, NOT HIRED — “Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” When we concluded 1 Timothy, Paul was on the road. He stated in his First Letter to Timothy, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” [1 TIMOTHY 3:14, 15].

Now, however, Paul was chained and in the Mamertine Prison in Rome. This was a dank, dark underground chamber with a single hole in the ceiling for light and air. He had already had a judicial hearing that he alludes to when he writes, “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” [2 TIMOTHY 4:16-18].

This is not Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome. You will remember that he had been accused by the religious leaders, and when Festus suggested that Paul appear in Jerusalem for trial the Apostle appealed to Caesar. In his first incarceration, he had lived in relative comfort in a rented house [see ACTS 28:30, 31]; now he was isolated in the dreaded Mamertine Prison. In his first imprisonment he was visited by many friends. This time, he was deserted by many. Demas had abandoned the Apostle because he was “in love with this present world” [2 TIMOTHY 4:10]; Crescens had gone to Galatia and Titus was dispatched to Dalmatia [2 TIMOTHY 4:10, 11]. In his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul had enjoyed many opportunities to witness for Christ. In this imprisonment he was securely locked away; and though he was permitted opportunity to read and to write, he was unable to interact with many people as before. In his first imprisonment the Apostle was expecting freedom [see PHILIPPIANS 1:19, 24-26; PHILEMON 22]; in this final imprisonment, he expected execution and afterward, heaven [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-12; 2:8, 9; 4:6-8, 18]. Paul was imprisoned the first time from about sixty to sixty-two A.D.; it is now five years later.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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Was Paul's confinement not sufficiently worrisome in itself, matters had deteriorated in Ephesus where Timothy was pastoring. Hymenaeus, whom Paul had excommunicated, still vexed the Apostle as he performed his wicked deeds [see **2 TIMOTHY 2:17**]. Thus, the Apostle wrote out of deep concern for the congregation and under personal duress arising from his personal situation. Paul knew that he would soon be killed because of his faith, but he does not fear death. He does fear dishonouring the Saviour who redeemed him. Therefore, he will ask Timothy to come, bringing some items of clothing for warmth, but especially to bring the parchments—copies of the Scriptures—that he had not been able to bring with him. We will never know in this life if Timothy and Mark were able to reach Rome before Paul was executed, but the request was made, nevertheless.

So, Paul writes this second letter to the Pastor of the Church in Ephesus. Again, note that he identifies himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” I find it odd that Paul would need to identify himself in this manner, especially since Timothy had travelled with Paul during so many of his missionary journeys. I can imagine several reasons why Paul would have felt the need to identify himself as an Apostle in this letter. It is possible that though he was writing a letter to Timothy, Paul knew that his ultimate audience was much broader. In other words, it is conceivable that Paul knew that he was guided by the Spirit of God to pen a missive that would ultimately be included in the collection of writings that we know as Scripture. This is a position adopted by many commentators both now and in days gone by. I am not convinced, however. There must be another reason that Paul felt it necessary to identify himself as an apostle.

In order to explain what seems apparent to me, it will be helpful to establish what it meant to be an Apostle. Though there are religious groups that designate some among their leadership as apostles, no individual can say he is personally certified by the Son of God today. Paul is careful to stipulate that his apostleship is “by the will of God.” In other words, Paul claims that his was an appointment from God to serve in this particular position on behalf of Christ Jesus.

We know that the Twelve were personally chosen by Jesus during his ministry during the days of His flesh. Throughout the Gospels, this band of men is identified as “the Twelve.” Some twenty-four or possibly twenty-five times, they are simply spoken of as “the Twelve.” This group, specifically chosen by Christ the Lord, included Judah Iscariot. Such a choice by the Saviour should not be disturbing to the follower of Christ—it magnifies the grace of God who permits even the wicked to come near that they might hear the message of life. If they reject the gift of life, even though they stand in the very presence of the Son of God, then how great must be their condemnation! That God did not immediately condemn Judas and slay him exalts His grace and mercy.

After Judas hanged himself, Peter led the remaining men to seek God's approval to appoint one other person in order to ensure a full complement as “the Twelve.” When there was dissension in the congregation about the distribution of benevolence, it was “the Twelve,” including Matthias who had been chosen to replace Judas, that called the congregation to order, insisting that they seek out men qualified to function as deacons, overseeing the distribution of benevolence [**ACTS 6:1 ff.**]. Paul recognised that this designation for that body of men was appropriate, for when he spoke about the Master's resurrection, he testified that Jesus appeared to “the Twelve” [**1 CORINTHIANS 15:5**]. Thus, “the Twelve” speaks of those men whom Jesus specifically appointed. Jesus “appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” [**MARK 3:14, 15**]; and it now included Matthias, chosen by lot to replace Judas [see **ACTS 1:21-26**].

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Remember that the Apostle whom we know as “Paul,” was given the name “Saul” at his birth. He was known as Saul until his first missionary venture [see **ACTS 13:9**]. Perhaps it was that when he learned he was being sent to the Gentiles, he chose to identify himself with a Gentile name rather than a Jewish name. Soon after his conversion, he was sought out by Barnabas who introduced the new convert to the saints in Antioch, vouching for his conversion. We read in the Scriptures of “Barnabas and Saul.”² However, as Stalker writes, “the subordinate [became] the leader; and as if to mark that he had become a new man and taken a new place, he was no longer called by the Jewish name of Saul, which up to this point he had borne, but by the name of Paul, which has ever since been his designation among Christians.”³

When Saul was struck down by the brilliance of the light that shone around him as he travelled to Damascus, he heard a voice identifying Himself as “Jesus of Nazareth” whom Saul was said to be persecuting. The Risen Master identified Himself so closely with His people that to persecute His people was to persecute Him. Saul, clearly alarmed at what was happening, asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” At this, the voice that spoke said to him, “Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do” [**ACTS 22:8-10**]. Note the language, because it will prove germane to our study today. The voice, identified as “the Lord,” instructs Paul to go into Damascus where he will learn “all that is appointed for you to do.” Here, God used a word that speaks of assignment to a particular role or function.⁴

Ananias, informed by God that Saul was “a chosen instrument” [**ACTS 9:15**], said to the blinded man, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard” [**ACTS 22:14, 15**]. Ananias testified that Saul was “appointed.” Here, God employed a different word. This word means “to choose in advance, to select beforehand or to designate in advance.”⁵ Thus, we are confident that Paul’s understanding was that he had been chosen to this particular position long before the actual appointment.

Later, testifying before Agrippa, Paul recalled that appointment in these words, “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” [**ACTS 26:16-18**]. What is apparent from this testimony before Agrippa is that Paul knew what his specific appointment entailed.

From these accounts, we learn that Paul’s appointment was divinely determined long before the appointment itself. Paul was appointed to hear directly from the mouth of the Risen Lord of Glory that he was to be a witness to all whom he would meet of what he had seen and heard. When Paul expanded on that message before Agrippa, he testified that he was told that his appointment would make him immortal until his service was concluded by God, that he would be sent (from the same root we obtain the word “apostle”) to the Gentiles in order to turn them from darkness to light and to deliver them from the power of Satan to God and so they could receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those sanctified by faith in the Living Christ. Paul’s appointment was specific and powerful; and it was appointment as an Apostle.

² **ACTS 11: 30; 12:25; 13:2, 7**

³ James Stalker, **The Life of St. Paul** (American Tract Society, New York 1888), 79.

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 482

⁵ Louw and Nida, op. cit., 360

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This brings us back to the question of why Paul was compelled to identify himself formally as an Apostle in this letter to a colleague and fellow servant of the Risen Lord. I believe the more likely reason Paul identified himself as an Apostle is revealed through comparing those writings in which he did not identify himself as an Apostle with those letters in which he did identify himself as an apostle. I do want to look at these various letters, but take note that Paul referred to himself as an Apostle no less than sixteen times in his letters. Yet, when writing to the Christians in Philippi, to the saints under pressure in Thessalonica and to Philemon, Paul makes no mention that he is an Apostle.

Paul did not identify himself as an Apostle when writing to the Thessalonians, to the Philippians or to Philemon. Writing in either Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes to encourage them to stand firm in the face of opposition. He seems not to be particularly concerned that they are about to deviate from the faith. I suppose one could make an argument concerning the fact that these are very early letters from the Apostle; that he had not “learned” to pull rank at this point in his service. However, the Letter to the Galatians churches was written about the same time, so I am hesitant to push this point.

Writing the Philippians, Paul invests considerable time in a reflective mood. He reviews his own call and service; however, there are no particular doctrinal errors that he is compelled to address. This is a delightful letter written to a church that must have given the Apostle great joy. Each time he thought of them, it is likely that a smile broke out on his face.

Philemon is an intensely personal letter. The purpose is focused on accepting a slave as a brother. Paul is quite pointed in asking that Philemon respond as a godly man rather than being compelled by command. Paul bluntly says, “I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord” [**PHILEMON 14**]. He presents his request as though he and Philemon were partners—as they truly had been. Because of the nature of this particular letter, the Apostle had no reason to present his apostolic appointment in order to compel compliance.

However, in every other letter included in the canon, Paul begins the missive by certifying his appointment as an apostle. “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” [**ROMANS 1:1-6**]. In this letter, the Apostle will grapple with several deviations from and threats to sound doctrine, establishing the necessity of a solid grasp of Christ’s salvation in order to advance the cause of Christ.

Paul begins both the first and the second Letter to the Church of God in Corinth, “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus” [**1 CORINTHIANS 1:1; 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1**]. The Letter to Galatian Churches begins with a strong statement of apostolic authority: “Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—” [**GALATIANS 1:1**]. The Letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians begins the same, with a simple declaration, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” [**EPHESIANS 1:1; COLOSSIANS 1:1**]. Each of these missives addresses a number of serious threats to the Faith. Paul is being challenged by outside influences in each of these instances. Therefore, he is compelled to establish his credentials in order to confront error boldly.

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Writing Titus, Paul opens the letter, “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior” [TITUS 1:1-3]. Recall that Titus was beginning to equivocate. His task was difficult and he seemingly questioned what he was doing and why he was doing it. Paul wants him to understand that Titus was appointed by one who held divine authority. Thus, Paul emphasises his own apostolic credentials, establishing that Titus stands in a train of men who serve at the pleasure of God the Saviour.

In his first letter to Timothy, the Apostle had opened with a statement of his apostolic position. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope” [1 TIMOTHY 1:1]. The Church in Ephesus was threatened by false teachers who had infiltrated the congregation and were promoting themselves to the detriment of the congregation. Paul wrote to stiffen Timothy’s spine, to insist that he stand firm in opposition to the errors that were being introduced.

Now, the aged saint drafts a final missive to the young theologian. Paul knows that he hasn’t much time before he will be executed. He is aware of the threats that continue against the Ephesian assembly, and he knows Timothy’s tendency toward timidity. Paul’s love for the young preacher is apparent; and his deep concern for the health of the congregation is equally on display in this missive. Intimacy does not preclude authority. Therefore, Paul will speak pointedly, emphasising his position as an Apostle. It is a means by which he stresses how vital this letter is. Timothy dare not read this letter as though it is a casual missive offering suggestions for a pleasant pastorate; Paul is writing an urgent appeal that must not be ignored or relegated to the realm of mere recommendation.

As an Apostle of Christ, Paul stood in the place of Christ and spoke the Word of Christ, and he did so by the will of God. Though they were friends and colleagues, Timothy needed to bear in mind that Paul’s position outranked his own. Paul’s appointment was by Christ Jesus Himself. You recall that he had stressed to the Galatian churches that he was appointed “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father” [GALATIANS 1:1].

Masked by our English tongue, there seems another matter of considerable significance in Paul’s opening words. He does emphasise his apostleship as an appointment that precludes accidents in life. What I mean is that Paul is in prison, facing death. He has been deserted by many and forced to send others away to conduct business in his place. Paul is saying that he held appointment by divine commissioning—it was “by the will of God.” Paul wants Timothy to know that his imprisonment and even the death that he is facing are not accidents. Rather incarceration and even death are part of his ambassadorship for Christ Jesus.

There may be incidents in the life of the child of God; but there are no accidents. The one who is sent by God to labour on His behalf is guided by an unseen hand. Her life is guarded by One who does all things perfectly, and God’s Spirit watches over her at all times. Assuredly is this true in the life of the Apostle; however, I contend it is no less true in the life of each child of God. God appoints us to salvation and equips us for a particular labour within the congregation where He chooses to place us. Our lives as Christians are not described as accidental, but rather as consequential. When we find ourselves in the hard place, we take comfort in the knowledge of the unseen God who has guided us to this point and who will continue to direct our steps until we arrive home. Underscore in your mind that there are no accidents in the life of the child of God; the Lord God directs our paths to the praise of His glory.

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Speaking authoritatively as he does in this missive, Paul speaks pointedly to the act of preaching in this day. The authoritative note is often absent among the churches today. Preachers often appear content to deliver soothing sermonettes to Christianettes, as though pious platitudes and noxious nostrums will suffice to allay the fears of saints facing the challenges of life. The man of God who is not content to give a religious lecture, choosing instead to expound the Word of God faithfully, is indeed in the apostolic lineage. That man wears the apostolic mantle and wields the same authority conferred by God who has given His Word. Though he is but a prisoner, Paul's words have divine sanction. Just so, the preacher who provides sound exposition of the Word speaks with divine sanction.

Permit me to advance this point farther still so it is applied in the life of each Christian. Not only must preachers realise the authoritative lineage in which they stand; each Christian who witnesses as we are charged to do must speak with authority. We have the message of life to deliver to men and women who are dead in trespasses and sins. We have no warrant to deliver a message that mews, "Repent, after a fashion, and believe such as it were, or be damned in a measure." We must learn to speak boldly, pleading with our loved ones; there is no time to equivocate. Every moment family members stand outside the grace of God they are in peril. Each Christian must stand boldly for the Faith in this evil day. Mankind is rushing toward judgement and there is no hope except the hope that is offered in Christ the Lord. We must live boldly as those who are twice-born that the lost of this dying world will see in us the evidence of new life in Christ Jesus. When you plead with them to believe, urging them to receive the grace of God in Christ the Lord, you are speaking with divine sanction.

This is not a time for Christians to mope and mosey about as though death is not coming! This is why we are warned:

‘Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" [**EPHESIANS 5:13b-17**].

We know that the Word also cautions us who believe, "You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand" [**ROMANS 13:11, 12a**].

APOSTOLIC PURPOSE — Why would God appoint someone to serve as an Apostle? What was God's purpose in sending Paul, especially sending him to the Gentiles who had no promise? Paul says that his apostleship was "according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus." The meaning of what the Apostle wrote can be confusing. Therefore, it is important to take time to ensure that we understand what he has said.

Many translations render the Greek term *katá* "according to." There could be one of two meanings to what Paul wrote, however. One translation implies cause—Paul became an Apostle when he received "the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus." The other understanding implies a goal or a purpose. Thus, "The promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus" became the message Paul had carried across the Roman Empire. It is this latter understanding that best fits what is written—his goal was delivering the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.

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The promise of the life begins at conversion and is fully realised at the return of Christ the Lord. This appears to be the Apostle's meaning. There is life in Christ Jesus. There was a day when the Son of God took up residence in my life. I can't say that there was a great emotional crisis, but He did take up residence. Though I had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, there was a point in time when the Spirit of God made me alive in Christ the Lord. The Son of God dispelled the darkness and gave me light. The chill of death was driven away by the warmth of His love. I have never regretted coming to life in Him.

Life begins at conversion. This is the reason we read in Scripture, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:17]. Though we are now alive in Him because our new life began at that moment we He made us alive with Him, we nevertheless anticipate what is yet to come. The Apostle has written, "We wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved" [ROMANS 8:23, 24a].

In stating his purpose as an Apostle, Paul reveals the heart of his theology. If you wish to understand Pauline theology, focus on the phrase "in Christ Jesus." Almost as often, he uses the phrase "in Christ." The concept is a summary statement of Paul's theology. This is a favourite phrase which the Apostle uses in every letter with the exception of 2 THESSALONIANS and TITUS. And even in these two books, Paul employs the same concept in a slightly different format.⁶ In Paul's view, the phrase "in Christ Jesus" speaks of the mystical union between Christ and the one who has placed trust in Him. Thus, the relationship between Christ and the one who trusts Him is unlike any other. In one letter, Paul describes this relationship as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" [COLOSSIANS 1:27]. Thus, as one commentary has stated, to be "in Christ Jesus" involves "trusting Him, identifying with Him, seeing ourselves under His protection and authority and recognising His presence in us."⁷

Writing the Christians in Colossae, the Apostle makes a significant statement in this context. He writes, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" [COLOSSIANS 3:1-4]. We Christians have died with Christ—that is, we recognise that His death was because of our sin. Therefore, our sin has been removed because we put faith in Him. Therefore, our life is now hidden with Christ in God. And yet, we live in anticipation of the day when Christ Jesus shall return—Christ, who is our life! And when He appears, we will appear with Him in glory. We shall share in His glory. We cannot even imagine what that means, though we accept the reality of this truth through faith. What is evident, however, is that Christ is our life!

John writes, "Now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" [1 JOHN 2:28-3:3].

⁶ See 2 THESSALONIANS 1:12; TITUS 3:4-6

⁷ Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman and Neil S. Wilson, **1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus: Life Application Bible Commentary** (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL 1993) 156

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We speak of eternal life as being revealed at the return of Christ Jesus our Lord. However, the eternal life that we have received is a present possession. We Christians are not peddling some sort of “pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by” religion; we offer through Christ the Lord a very present life. We do not have mere length of days—we have a new quality of life. Our life is now defined by our relationship to God. This is not merely some strange form of existence; it is the new quality of life that defines the life we now share with the Living Saviour. We do not possess probationary life, as though somehow we could lose the life He has given; we possess eternal life. The child of God now possesses eternal life; and while she will never be separated from the love of God, she knows that she is now and ever shall be “accepted in the Beloved” [EPHESIANS 1:6].⁸

Paul is in prison because of the call of God; he faces execution because of the will of God. From the mortal point of view, we could say that the Gospel has brought him to this state. I should imagine that most of us were we in the same situation, would be fixated on the impending death. However, the Apostle is focused on life—“the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus.” The Gospel that brought him to incarceration and facing the executioner’s sword is the same Gospel that promises him life. This life that he anticipates has been the goal of his service. He has lived anticipating the divine call homeward.

Perhaps you will recall something that the Apostle wrote during an earlier imprisonment. “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” [PHILIPPIANS 1:20, 21].

His confident statement, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” is the natural culmination of a life that has been lived in the presence of the Saviour. Years earlier, Paul had written the Galatian Christians, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” [GALATIANS 2:20].

If we were able truly to seize this truth, we would live without fear. We would not only be victors over death in theory; we would be victors in fact. Whether I am liked or disliked by colleagues, my life is in Christ the Lord. Whether my message is accepted or rejected, I serve Him in whom I live and breathe and have my being. Whether my wealth in this world is threatened or whether God blesses me with abundance, my times are in His hands.

Here is a truth with which the believer can encourage himself: God’s promise of and ability to give me “life” is not hampered by the particulars of my current ministry assignment. Some to whom I now speak face difficult situations. Life is tenuous, relationships may be shattered, strength may be fading, at times we will feel betrayed by those whom we love and whom we esteem—what is important for each of us to realise is that we are not deserted. Whatever situation we may encounter, the One who has given us life is still with us.

Despite the conditions he must endure, the Apostle nevertheless invited the young pastor, “Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-12].

⁸ **The New King James Version** (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN 1982)

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Whatever your situation, fulfil your ministry. Whatever circumstance you now face, fulfil your ministry. Whatever condition under which you labour, fulfil your ministry. That ministry was assigned by God who makes no mistakes. You do not stand alone; He who appointed you stands with you. When strength fails, He is prepared to carry you. When friends desert and you feel as though you stand alone, He is with you. When the final breath is drawn, He will send His holy angels to escort you home and into His presence.

I've often drawn comfort from the words Isaiah penned long years ago.

“Listen to me, O house of Jacob,
all the remnant of the house of Israel,
who have been borne by me from before your birth,
carried from the womb;
even to your old age I am he,
and to gray hairs I will carry you.
I have made, and I will bear;
I will carry and will save.”

[ISAIAH 46:3, 4]

Since we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, should we fear that He will now desert us? He has promised and He will fulfil His Word.

I know the promise was first issued to Israel; but surely the promise of God applies to those whom He has chosen in Christ the Lord.

“But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.’”

[ISAIAH 43:1-3a]

You are in the congregation where you now serve by the will of God. The gifts entrusted to you are given by the will of God. Your present trials did not catch God by surprise; nothing has come into your life except what God has permitted, and He is a Father too wise to make a mistake and too good to needlessly hurt His child. You will come out on the other side.

From the Word God has given I am confident when I say, you will pass through the waters, but you will not be alone. You will pass through the rivers, but they shall not overwhelm you. You will walk through the fire, but you will not be burned. You will walk through the flame, but it shall not consume you. God is with you, and you will come out on the other side. He will not desert His child and He will not fail.

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AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST JESUS

There will be challenges we each shall face, but we shall overcome every obstacle. There will be difficulties we each must endure, but we shall overcome. We will be tested, but we shall overcome. We have received appointment by the will of God according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.

I've spoken to Christians today. I have sought to encourage you to stand true to the call you received. Paul could say, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." It would not be the end for the aged saint. He exulted, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day." That is a glorious affirmation of confidence in the True and Living God. However, the Apostle informs us that the crown of righteousness is not his alone. He concludes that testimony by saying "And not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" [2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8].

I'm ready; but some to whom I speak are unprepared. You've never put faith in the Son of God. You're a nice person, perhaps even thought to be a good person. You're religious and everyone speaks well of you; but you are unsaved. My plea is that you receive this life that God provides in Christ the Lord. It is freely given when one believes the message of life, that Christ Jesus died because of her sin and that He conquered death and rose from the dead. Now, through faith in Him, life is given.

The Word of God promises, "If you agree with God that Jesus is Master, believing with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free." You shall be free of death, free of fear, free of condemnation, free of judgement. That promise of God continues as the Apostle testifies, "With the heart one believes and is made right with the Father, and through open agreement with God's Word one is set free." Citing the Prophet Joel, the Apostle concludes, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Master shall be saved" [see ROMANS 10:9-13].

Through faith in the Risen Lord of Glory, we have life. Having life, we receive appointment to the service for which He has prepared us. I pray you have that life; and I pray you are serving as God has appointed you to serve. Amen.