

THE PROMISE OF LIFE

Ted Schroder, April 11, 2010

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 1:1)

Paul is writing, at the end of his life, from a prison in Rome. He was chained (1:16) like a criminal, because he was accused of promoting sedition against the Roman Empire by proclaiming Jesus as Lord, and refusing to worship Caesar as Lord. (2:9) Only Luke is with him to tend to his needs. (4:11) He was awaiting trial, and was not expecting to be acquitted. Execution loomed. The Neronian persecution of AD 64 had gathered him up in its tentacles. One half of Rome had been destroyed in a fire. The Roman Emperor Nero had been accused of starting it and reciting his poetry while Rome burned. He passed the blame onto the Christians, many of whom were arrested and horribly executed. Tradition has it that Paul was condemned to death and beheaded on the Ostian Way. Peter is believed to have been executed at the same time. Before his death Paul sent this message to Timothy, and through him, to the church. It could be said to be his last will and testament – his final words.

He begins with his personal greeting which identifies himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. This identity reminds us why we are reading it today. The writer is not just one among many followers of Jesus Christ, he is an apostle. He is one of those few – the Twelve - personally selected by Jesus from the rest of his disciples. He gave them this special title: ‘apostles’ (Luke 6:13) - those sent out with a special commission to represent him and teach in his name. The qualifications to be an apostle were that they had been with Jesus throughout his ministry, and that they had been witnesses to his resurrection. (Acts 1:22) Paul testified that Jesus appeared to him, after his resurrection on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:5) This experience resulted in his conversion and his commissioning as an apostle. Jesus said to him: “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you....I am sending you to them [your own people and the nations] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place in the family, inviting them into the company of those who begin real living by believing in me.” (Acts 26:16-18) The Lord’s words ‘I send you’, in the Greek are ‘I appoint you’, that is ‘I appoint you an apostle.’

This commissioning Paul could never forget, even in these last days of his life, chained in a prison in Rome. It was not something he took upon himself. It was conferred upon him by ‘the will of God.’ It was God’s plan and purpose for him. He was not self-appointed. He responded to the call of God on his life. This knowledge that he was called and chosen for this task, despite his personal failings and weaknesses, gave him enormous confidence and certainty in the face of suffering, criticism and persecution. God was working out his purpose through his life.

What is this purpose? His vocation is to communicate ‘the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.’ That is how he understood the gospel of Jesus: ‘the promise of life.’ Jesus said: ‘I came that you may have life in all its fullness....I am the bread of life...I am the resurrection and the life’....I am the way, the truth and the life....I give you eternal life.’ “Indeed, the whole Bible may fairly be described as a divine promise of life, from the first mention of ‘the tree of life’ in Genesis 3 to the last chapter of the Revelation in which God’s redeemed people eat of the tree of life and drink of the water of life freely.” (John Stott) Jesus promises to give us this life of God, the life of the kingdom of God, through being born again of the Spirit. This promise is to be

communicated to the world by the apostles. It is remarkable that Paul, despite his situation, facing death, would be writing about ‘the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.’

What does this have to do with us today? The task of the apostles was to found the church, which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. (Ephesians 2:20) We are the inheritors of this apostolic commission. In fact we believe that we are members of ‘one catholic and apostolic church.’ (Nicene Creed) We belong to a fellowship of believers that is universal and apostolic, i.e. based upon the gospel that the apostles proclaimed and, like them, commissioned to communicate this promise of life that is in Christ Jesus to the whole world.

Who are you by the will and purpose of God? What has God called and commissioned you to be and to do? In what sense are you also apostles, i.e. sent out to communicate this promise of life that is in Christ Jesus? If so, how do you do it? How do you embody this promise of life that is in Christ Jesus?

It was Paul who brought this life to Timothy. It was through Paul that Timothy became a believer. Who brought the promise of this life to you? How did you become a believer? Who embodied this promise of life to you? Let me tell you about the person who embodied the promise of this life in Christ to me.

Harvey Teulon was the minister of our church in the 1950’s when I was a teenager. Raised in New Zealand of French Huguenot extraction, after graduating from university he traveled to the University of Cambridge in England to study theology. He was ordained in England to serve as assistant to the famous Anglican evangelist, Bryan Green, at St. Martin’s-in-the-Bullring, Birmingham. On returning to New Zealand he came to our congregation in his early thirties. He was an unassuming gentleman, with a slight stammer, and was not a great preacher. However, he invited to our church a number of noted evangelists to conduct missions or revivals. It was during one of these, under J. Edwin Orr and Corrie ten Boom, that I made my commitment to Christ. Mr Teulon shared his library with me, and lent me books about missionaries and the Bible. One volume, about the conversion of a Chinese Confucian scholar, *Pastor Hsi*, by Mrs Howard Taylor, made a lasting impression on me. It was through his discipling that I started reading the works of the Anglican Evangelicals, such as Thomas Cranmer and J.C. Ryle, whose portraits hang in our Chapel office. He introduced me to daily Scripture reading using the Scripture Union guides that I still use some 54 years later. He was 86 when he died in June 2006.

I wrote to his wife, Pat, about how much Harvey had impacted my life. In her reply she said, “He was such a vital person, with a faith that he was able to pass on to others; and for nearly 56 years we shared a partnership – almost made in heaven...Harvey’s funeral service was one of great celebration and thanksgiving.... Harvey was a family man too, and we have 10 grandchildren...He loved his family. Harvey was also a remarkable man – he had great insight into all that was going on, both locally and worldwide, he had a keen intellect, deep spirituality and insight, friendliness and exceptional pastoral gifts, and all this he shared with me.” His motto, inscribed on his memorial card was “By Love Serve One Another.”

It is such an apostolic witness that I aspire to be. If only I could merit such a description by someone who knew me that well. What about you? How are you communicating the promise of this life in Christ? How are you embodying it to others and so fulfilling God’s plan and purpose in your life? You could do no better than to make Harvey Teulon’s motto your own: “By Love Serve One Another.”

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