

How Unceasing Is My Remembrance

"I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers, in a pure conscience, how unceasing is my remembrance of thee in my supplications, night and day longing to see thee, remembering thy tears, that I might be filled with joy ..." (2 Tim. 1:3f).

The second letter to Timothy is presumably Paul's last letter. He is in prison and there is no uncertainty as to his fate. In his letter to the Philippians he was doubtful, yet hopeful, that release would shortly come to him (Phil. 2:24). And, according to strong traditions, Paul's two year imprisonment in Rome concluded with release for him (Acts 28:30). Certain passages imply he had been freed from prison; namely, he had left Titus in Crete to ordain elders and urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus as he departed for Macedonia with the charge that he teach certain men not to teach a different doctrine (Titus 1:3; 1 Tim. 1:5). In Luke's history of Paul there are no time frames into which these two events might be factored in; leaving open the possibility that the two letters of Titus and 1 Timothy were written in the one or two years between a first imprisonment and second imprisonment. Still, it is certainly possible that the "great gaps" in Luke's history of his activities might have allowed such events to have occurred sometimes during his third journey; there is a distinct possibility that a visit to Corinth was made during that time which Luke chose not to mention.

This letter of 2 Timothy begins with the usual salutation and Paul's words: "*Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord*" is found in all his letters, with the exclusion of the word "*mercy*." Interestingly enough (although with no special apparent significance), the word "*mercy*" in the otherwise universal greeting is found exclusively in Paul's letters to Timothy. Not even his letter to another of his "sons" (Titus) includes "*mercy*" in his greetings. We do not know "why."

While Paul taught in every place that the law given by Moses had been removed, he denied he had veered from the faith of his forefathers. He showed in many instances that the law was temporary (a "*schoolmaster*" to bring us to Christ, Gal. 3:24) and he consistently affirmed that following the law led him to that stand. Jeremiah had prophesied of a New Covenant God would make with Israel and when Jeremiah said, "*a new covenant, he made the first old, nigh unto vanishing away*" (Heb. 8:13). It was Paul's contention that every God-fearing, God-honoring Jew would embrace Jesus as the Messiah, just as he had done. Jesus was the promised seed of Abraham, sent to bless every nation, beginning with Israel. "*I thank God*" are the beginning words of this sentence. But for what does Paul "*give thanks*": for

God's grace, mercy and peace? For the delightful memories of Timothy in his faithful service to God? For Timothy's love and deep care for Paul, evidenced by his tears?

And, when was this demonstration of tears given: at their separation from each other when Paul exhorted him to remain in Ephesus as he departed into Macedonia? We cannot know. It was enough that this reference to Timothy's affections for Paul be known by him and Paul. The letter was not preserved to permanently chronicle this moment in their lives; it was preserved because of the Spirit's exhortations, through Paul, to all future generations of Christians on many other important matters. It is in passages such as this, however, that we glimpse the humanity and frailty of Paul. He seems so untouched by circumstances that would capsize us that we are almost cannot see his courage and strength in the midst of trials. What courage it took to obey the gospel, "*counting all things but loss for Christ*" to accept stoning; be beaten with rods by Romans, whipped by his countrymen; to be unjustly a prisoner, unfairly imprisoned for two years; to calm the fears of fellow shipmates who were terrified by the perils of a storm. But, he had fears, anxieties and dark moments, just as the rest of us, and this passage shows how his emotions were affected by Timothy's show of affection.

Remembering Timothy's tears brought him joy; joy that at least one soul in the world appreciated the sacrifice and self denial he made that he might fulfill this role as an apostle to the Gentiles. His stalwartness, in the midst of his trials, makes us appreciate him even more!

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