

Read 2 Timothy 1:1–5 in your favorite translation. I will print the NET–2 translation.

1:1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to further the promise of life in Christ Jesus, 2 to Timothy, my dear child. Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord!

3 I am thankful to God, whom I have served with a clear conscience as my ancestors did, when I remember you in my prayers as I do constantly night and day. 4 As I remember your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 5 I recall your sincere faith that was alive first in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am sure is in you.

INTRODUCTION TO 2 TIMOTHY:

The book of Acts closed with Paul in prison in Rome, around A.D. 63. The common belief is that he was acquitted and released, returned to Greece and Asia Minor, was later arrested again, taken back to Rome, and executed in about A.D. 67 or 68. This letter was written while he was awaiting martyrdom.

In A.D. 64, a great fire destroyed much of the city of Rome. The people suspected that Emperor Nero himself had set fire to the city. Though an inhuman brute, he was a great builder, and the purpose behind setting the city on fire was urban renewal: he wanted to build a new and grander Rome.

While the city was ablaze, Nero, according to tradition, played the fiddle. Historians have commonly regarded it as a fact that Nero was the perpetrator of the crime, and that in order to divert suspicion from himself he accused the Christians of burning Rome and began to persecute them.

The Bible makes no mention of Nero's persecution of Christians, though it happened in New Testament times and is the direct background of at least two New Testament books, 1 Peter and 2 Timothy. It was this persecution that led to Paul's martyrdom and, according to some traditions, to Peter's also.

Our source of information is the Roman historian Tacitus. He knew that the Christians did not burn Rome. But they needed a scapegoat for the emperor's crime. Here was a new and despised sect of people, mostly from the humbler walks of life, without prestige or influence, many of them slaves. Nero accused them of burning Rome and ordered their punishment.

In and around Rome, multitudes of Christians were arrested and put to death in many cruel ways. Some were crucified; others tied in skins of animals and thrown into the arena to be killed by dogs or thrown to the wild beasts. There were some tied to stakes in Nero's gardens, pitch poured over their bodies, and their burning bodies used as torches to light Nero's gardens at night.

It was probably in the wake of this persecution that Paul was rearrested, in Greece or Asia Minor, possibly at Troas, and brought back to Rome. This time by the government of Rome rather than by his own choice, by appealing to Caesar; this time as an alleged criminal.

We do not know for certain why he was arrested by Rome. Wasn't Paul the world leader of the people who were being punished for that crime? And had not Paul been in Rome for two years just preceding the fire? It would have been very easy to lay this crime at Paul's door.

While waiting in the Roman dungeon for the time of his departure, he wrote this last letter to Timothy, his bosom friend and trusted co-worker, begging him to be faithful, in spite of everything, to his calling as a minister of Christ, and to hurry to Rome before winter.

(Information above taken from Halley's Bible Handbook.)

COMMENTS:

Out of that dark hour came one of the noblest passages of Scripture. He would soon be executed for a crime he did not commit, and his friends left him to suffer alone. The cause for which he had given his life was being wiped out in the West from the outside, by persecution, and in the East from the inside, through false teachings.

Yet there is no hint of regret that he had given his life to the service of Christ and the church. No hint of doubt but that the church, though now apparently defeated, would eventually be triumphant. And no hint of doubt but that the moment his head was cut from his body, he would go straight to the arms of Him whom he had loved and served so devotedly. This letter is the exultant cry of a dying conqueror.

Now in v. 1 Paul begins his letter by identifying himself and defending his apostleship. He was an apostle of Jesus because of the will of God. He had not chosen that position. God had chosen him. The purpose of his ministry was to advance this life-giving message of Jesus.

In v. 2 he clearly identifies Timothy as the one to whom he is writing. He calls Timothy, “my dear child,” which is why most people believe Timothy was converted under the teaching and preaching of Paul. Then he speaks a blessing to him as was his custom. Many writers would offer grace and mercy, but Paul adds peace, the special gift from God which passes all human understanding.

In v. 3 he reiterates that he served God with a clear conscience as did his ancestors. He has long ago admitted that he didn’t deserve to be an apostle because he had once persecuted the Church of Jesus Christ. He said he did it in ignorance, but was not living under the grace, mercy and peace of God.

He also makes it obvious that prayer was not part-time activity for him. He assured Timothy that he prayed for him both day and night. His reference to remembering Timothy’s tears, is possibly a reference to him being present when Paul was arrested by the Roman powers.

Perhaps even more important, he is suggesting to Timothy that now he is ready to cry because he needs the comfort and joy which he will bring to Paul. He will find joy in their relationship because he is convinced that he has a genuine faith because he has seen that also in Timothy’s mother and grandmother.

The fellowship of faith is a positive influence in the lives of many Christians. As Paul approached the end of his earthly journey he knew his own need for the encouragement of others.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Who are you encouraging in the faith and Christian life? I know there are plenty of people who need that. A positive word from you, an offer to provide help or assistance for a ministry he or she supports can make a difference. Try it, you might like it!