

The Promise of Life

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the profound significance of the second epistle of Paul to Timothy, written from a prison cell, highlighting the sacredness and human tenderness of the letter. It explores Paul's unique bond with Timothy, his farewell message, and the imminent danger he faced under Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians. The sermon emphasizes Paul's surrender to God's will and the promise of life in Christ Jesus amidst impending death.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1, Acts 26:16, Galatians 1:15, 2 Timothy 1:12, John 10:10, Colossians 3:4, Ephesians 2:1, John 14:6, Romans 6:4

Topics: "Faithfulness in Trials", "The Power of Surrender"

Description

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Transcript

Of the Apostle Paul to Timothy, forgive me, the second epistle of Paul to Timothy. I think you all are well aware that the Apostle Paul is writing this letter from a prison cell, or at least he is dictating it from that context to Timothy. And to us it's the second epistle of Paul to Timothy.

But for Timothy, who received the original document, it was to him an incredibly meaningful and indeed sacred document. And I can't imagine that he could ever imagine receiving a piece of mail, a piece of correspondence more sacred than this. And as we proceed, I hope that will become more obvious to us.

The fact is our circumstances of course are very different to Paul's and indeed to Timothy's. Nevertheless, as we read this epistle, we recognize very quickly that it is to us a piece of sacred text. To us it's sacred because it's been incorporated into our New Testament.

Paul will actually say a little later in this epistle that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and has unique and particular purpose and benefit. And I don't know that Paul, when he was writing this, would have appreciated that the correspondence which he was preparing and then sent to Timothy would in fact be included in the sacred book that we have before us in the Holy Bible. But we thank God for it.

We appreciate it and we appreciate its sacredness first and foremost, as I'm saying, because we believe that it is part of the sacred Word of God. But we appreciate it also because there's a human value in it as we read this. I don't know how many of us can read this epistle without being touched very deeply on a human level.

And we recognize quickly that the book is filled with human tenderness. I want to explain these things as time goes on, not necessarily just in this passage, but in this session rather, but in the days ahead. But it's a letter of farewell to Timothy.

Paul has been traveling with Timothy for about ten years by this point in time. He's accompanied him on two of his missionary journeys. And there's a unique bond that was established between the two.

Paul refers to Timothy as my own dear son in the faith. It was a unique relationship. I'm not doing a very good job of setting the scene here.

But the fact is, this will be the last document that Paul will write to Timothy. We believe it's the last document that he wrote. He actually wrote 13 books of our New Testament.

Almost half of the New Testament was authored by the Apostle Paul. If, in fact, he was the author of the book of Hebrews, which is a debated issue, then it would be 14 books that he wrote. But I believe that when Timothy received this, Timothy had a pastoral responsibility in Ephesians where he'd been positioned by the Apostle Paul on the last of the trips they took together.

And here, now knowing something of Paul's situation in his imprisonment, and recognizing, I believe, very quickly, if he hadn't already appreciated it before he received this, that this would very likely be the last and final word he would hear from Paul to him. You can imagine just how important every word would be. It's like I'm thinking of someone who has a dear friend who is perhaps on their deathbed, and they're just about to leave this scene, and they're saying something to the person sitting by.

And we can appreciate just how important those last words would be. We can imagine leaning forward so that we don't miss even a syllable of what is being said, because this is a sacred moment in the life of that individual. This was certainly true on this occasion.

And I feel as though when I read this epistle, and I've read it very many times over the years, and I love it deeply, but I feel as though I'm reading it, or I'm listening, if you will, over the shoulders of Timothy. He's the one who's reading it first and foremost. It was to him, but then there's a sense in which we, because of the graciousness of the Spirit of God, he's caused us to have access to these words, and we sense as though the Spirit of God is speaking through the Apostle Paul, and he's speaking to me, or he's speaking to us as we read it.

All of this tends to heighten our appreciation of every word that we find here. And as we look into the epistle again, we're immediately, and I'm speaking personally, but I think it's true for all of us, but I'm immediately conscious of the importance of this, because it's God's Word, and secondly, because of the very, very human element of the bond of true fellowship and interaction between these two people, something we know just a little of ourselves in our own lives. What Paul will say in this document is important because it's turned out to be God's Word to his people, but it's also, of course, very important, and was to Timothy, because of the circumstances at that time which Timothy was experiencing.

The fact is that very dangerous conditions were prevailing out there where Timothy was seeking to minister the Word of God. We remember how that Paul had met with the elders in that church in Ephesus. We remember the last occasion when they were together, and on that occasion, Paul is commissioning and saying some very important things to the elders, and one of the statements he made was that after his departure, there would be those who, in the words of the old King James, who would be like grievous wolves who would come among the flock, and they would alter the message.

They would divest the precious truth of the Gospel, of its truth and indeed of its power, and this, of course, was of great concern to the Apostle Paul, as we can be very sure. Apart from the challenges that the church and churches were existing from within, there was just the prevailing situation in the nation and the nations at large at that particular time. We know that within the context of the Roman Empire, that Emperor Nero was currently on the throne, and whereas he'd started out in his leadership as the Emperor with promise, and there were many people who really appreciated him, we're told, not in Scripture but in history.

But at this particular time, Nero was spiraling downward into insanity, and a fire had occurred in Rome. You've read about it, I'm sure, where a very significant part of the city at that point was burned. It was a very, very serious situation, and the question was what had caused it or who had caused it, and certainly there was a powerful rumor that was rippling through the people that in actual fact Nero himself had started the fire, and it could very well be that that was the case, because he was anxious to rebuild the city after his own ideas and so forth and modernize it.

So that could very well have been, but it became very intense and very serious was the criticism and challenge to him, and so it has been suggested that he seized upon an opportunity where he could divert this blame from himself to others, and the people that he chose to blame for this was of course the Christian church, the Christian people, and they became his scapegoats to bring distraction from him, and as a result that gave him, if you like, some degree of authority to go about the brutal, brutal murdering of the Christian people. It was a time of very, very serious and terrible distraction. It's almost certain in my mind that the Apostle Paul is now in his present circumstances because of Nero's hatred for the Christians and for this mission that he was on, and there's a little bit of background, but as I've suggested the book itself is a treasure to us, and I'd like to sort of do an introduction to it today and then perhaps, Lord willing, to spend a number of weeks moving through this epistle in the days ahead, but I'm going to limit myself today to just one verse, and that will be the opening verse.

I'm not going through the whole epistle one verse at a time like this, but I want to do that as an introduction this morning. So that verse, 2 Timothy 1 and verse 1 reads, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. Who is writing it? Well, it starts out Paul, but we remind ourselves, and we shall observe this as we move on a little further this morning, that the name which was his birth name was in fact Saul, and that's how we find him as the story opens in the book of Acts in chapter 9. But then shortly after his dramatic conversion, time has elapsed and the next time we find him referred to, he's referred to as Paul.

And I understand that Paul was the Greek version of his name, and it may very well be that since he became aware that God was sending him not just to the Jewish people but to Gentile people, that it was more appropriate that he used the name Paul. That may well be true. It's also been suggested that the word Saul means large or great, and the word Paul means little.

That may be true also. And if that is true, well then there's some extra significance to be found there. But we cannot possibly underestimate the impact that this man, I'll choose to start off by calling him Saul of Tarsus, that this man had upon the people who were alive at that time.

But indeed, it would be true to say that he's one of the most outstanding people in terms of their influence on the nations right up here until the present time. Because we have, of course, these writings here and through the scriptures and so on. The whole western world had been made very aware of the apostle Paul and so on.

He was born in a town called Tarsus, which was a very important city at that time. It was the capital city of one of the Roman provinces. We can read more about this in the book of Acts if we wanted to go there, in the province of Cilicia.

And he was taught, because he was raised in a Jewish context, by a teacher, a rabbi, a doctor of law called Gamaliel. We find him referred to on two occasions in the book of Acts. But evidently he was a very highly respected teacher and Paul was taught by him.

He was a Pharisaical teacher and so Paul's teaching was all focused in on the fact that he himself, as the result of a number of issues we're not discussing just now, he was a Pharisee. A Pharisee of the Pharisees, we'll read him saying about himself on yet another occasion. But one of the features of the Pharisees, and this was most certainly true of Saul of Tarsus, was that he was jealously defensive of the theology that he was exposed to, to the Jewish law and so on.

And so here he is as someone who has been, on a human level, born into this privileged situation, sitting under this highly effective teacher. And he emerges as someone who has been trained as a Pharisee in this very elite sect of Judaism. He would have then become aware, since he was approximately the same age as Jesus Christ, but he would have been made aware at a significant moment in the development of his own life and his own ministry, as we shall call it, that there was a competing sect that was emerging, a new sect that was emerging among the Jewish people.

And these were Jewish people who were being converted, it seemed, not to Christianity, because the word Christianity had never emerged at that particular time. It wasn't that they were being converted to something that was entirely new in that sense. They were actually being converted to a line of thought, and that line of thought was being presented that this Jesus Christ was in fact the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

And clearly, as under the preaching of people like the Apostle Peter, and we know from Acts chapter 2 to start with, the tremendous impact that his ministry had in the power of the Holy Spirit to see thousands of Jewish people opening their minds and opening their hearts to the fact that this Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah. To people like Saul of Tarsus, this was the most outrageous thing that could be suggested. And of course not only to him, but certainly to the Pharisees, but to many more than merely they.

The idea that this Jesus of Nazareth, this Jesus of Calvary, this Jesus of the Cross was actually the one that their prophets had prophesied concerning and claiming that he was the Messiah was just utterly a scandalous thought to them. You might remember, if your mind is moving widely, Paul writes to the Galatians later on after these days, and he speaks about the, if such and such and such and such was to take place, I'm not getting into the detail, he said, then would the offence of the cross cease? In other

words, Paul had no problem with the fact that the cross was offensive. He saw that it was part and parcel of the Gospel.

It would be offensive to those who were not open to receive its truth. But the word that's translated offence in our Old King James Bible there is the word scandalous. He's saying, he's going along with what must have been his own thoughts in those earlier days with respect to this Jesus.

Of course, the Jesus of Nazareth was one thing. Could any good thing come out of Nazareth? But to talk about this Jesus as the one who was actually executed on the cross at Calvary, that was the final word. This was utterly and totally scandalous.

Because, of course, Saul of Tarsus would know very well that the ancient scripture said, cursed is everyone that hangs upon a tree. So it just didn't make sense. It was outrageous.

There was no way that this could be the truth. That's how he would have viewed it. And I'm very sure, beyond a doubt, that he, Saul of Tarsus, was aware of Jesus.

Because that was the name that was being preached and proclaimed. That was what this whole new movement was all about. So, of course, he'd heard of Jesus.

He may even have seen Jesus. And whether he did or whether he didn't, I can't be sure. But I do know this, that he wrote to the Corinthians on an occasion, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and he said, Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth we know him no more.

We don't want to read more into that than is right and is proper, but it seems to me to suggest that he had seen him. After the fact, of course. But would he not have become aware of what was going on, who this man is? I'm just looking at it from a purely human point of view.

I would have expected he would want to see who this person was that was causing this stir at that point. And now, after Calvary, of course, it's more than a stir. There's a whole swell of converts who have turned their lives over to him and so on.

And one thing that impresses me about this man, Saul of Tarsus, I need to start calling him Paul in a moment here. One thing about him was, there's not a complacent bone in his body. That's what strikes me.

He's an activist. He's been raised believing certain things to be true, and he believes them with all of his heart. It's not that he doesn't believe in God.

He's a God-fearing man. He's a man completely familiar with Scripture. He would have memorized massive amounts of the Old Testament Scriptures.

That was all part of his training. He'd listened to one of these great Jewish teachers. He believed with all of his heart in God.

And this was his problem. When he heard and when he saw what was happening amongst the Jewish people, that they were actually being converted to this sect, to all intents, and believing this outrageous message about this man Jesus, it was so deeply and profoundly offensive to him. And he couldn't just sit by.

He couldn't just sit at home and kick his lazy boy chair thing out and just relax and get on with the next game show. He's an activist. He's all in to this.

And with that in mind, let me just read a few verses to you from the 26th chapter of the book of Acts. On this occasion, Paul is giving his testimony. Again, it's not the first time we've come across it in the book of Acts, but on this occasion, in chapter 26, he's talking to King Agrippa.

And this is what he says about himself. He says in verse 8, Which thing I also did in Jerusalem. And many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests.

And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme. And being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

He condemns this man and his bitter hatred for Jesus. Another rendering of this puts it this way. He made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

That's from chapter 8 in verse 3. This was the story. This was the background of this zealous, pious Pharisee in his opposition of anything that bore the name Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus who was executed at Calvary. And then I'm reading on in this 26th chapter of Acts.

And saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Let's just pause there for a moment. Another translation which you may have translates the word pricks as goads.

It's a reference to some kind of stick that would be used to discipline or attempt to discipline a large animal like an ox or something and so on. And this is Jesus speaking to him. He doesn't know that yet.

He knows that he is in the presence of a mighty deity. Something incredible is happening. He's been brought to the ground along with his comrades on this occasion.

And he hears this voice speaking to him and using the word Saul as you notice then. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads or to refuse to be influenced by the goads. And this tells me immediately that prior to this moment, I've taken into account the kind of picture of him I've tried to paint of these recent days and his opposition to the church, that his conscience was being troubled.

Referred to here as the pricks or the goads. I believe we can say with certainty, backed up by these very words of Jesus, that the Holy Spirit was actually working upon this man and working upon his conscience. And added to that, there would have been the impact that would be made upon him.

Inevitably, as he carried out his dreadful deed in taking these Christian believers unto death in many cases, surely he would have been profoundly impressed by the very spirit of these people. And their responses to this brutal persecution that he's inflicting upon them. I don't know, there's no story that I can find that would help me to know the broader picture.

Paul himself tells us that it was a big mission he was on. But what I do know, I know about one man that was involved in all of this. And I can read about him in chapter 6 of the book of Acts, if you'd like to turn there, if you're following me in this way.

In chapter 6 of Acts. And there's a long section here. I'm just going to pick out a verse.

I'm looking at the last verse of the chapter actually. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him. And that him, of course, is Stephen.

All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. That's the kind of thing that I'm trying to refer to when I'm thinking about the pricks to his conscience. The ways in which God, by his spirit, was troubling him.

And I'm saying, surely, as he carried out these acts that he was so sure were right and pleasing to God, surely he could not miss the sweet spirit, the spirit of Christ himself, that was being manifested in these people that he was harming so terribly. And that is certainly confirmed as I read here in this section. I'm looking further on in chapter 7 of Acts.

And well down in verse 54 I read, And when they heard these things they were cut to the heart. Stephen had been speaking, of course, and preaching. And as he moved on through that message that he was giving on this occasion, recognizing very clearly that his own life was going to come to an end almost imminently, he doesn't hold back at all.

And you can sense that as you read through what he's saying and reach this particular point. And when they heard these things they were cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus on the right hand of God and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice and they stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord and cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep. Saul of Tarsus witnessed this.

He'd acquiesced. He'd given his support. We read his own words earlier.

He gave his support to the deaths of these people. This was certainly just one of those occasions that we're able to read about here on that occasion. If I can turn your attention back to chapter 26.

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. He asks the obvious question. Who art thou, Lord? Who art thou? Picture him.

And he hears these words, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. Amen. Those three words, they would be like a bullet from a gun.

Those words would come crashing into his mind, crashing into his heart and into his emotions. I can't even begin to imagine how profoundly shocking these words were. The image, I've used it before.

We've all seen these tests of autos to see how safe they are in crashes. And we've seen them going maybe just 30 miles an hour and running into a solid steel barrier or whatever. And the damage that it does to the vehicle is shocking to us.

When I read this passage with that kind of illustration in my mind, I'm thinking this apostle, he's travelling along at 100 miles an hour and he runs straight into solid concrete as it were. He's stopped. He's arrested violently with these three little words.

I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. Amen. He comes to a dead stop.

He's not merely on the ground. In his spiritual life, everything, everything has just collapsed. Everything is, you know, we'd say today is up for grabs.

He's totally and completely bewildered by what is happening. And then the Scriptures go on and Jesus says something else. He says, But rise and stand on thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen and those things in the which I will appear to thee, delivering thee from the people and from Gentiles unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and the inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Don't you think this is amazing? I mean, if those initial words were as shattering to him as I am trying to suggest to you this morning, what about the words he continues to say that this one who is the Jesus of Nazareth, he was the Jesus of Nazareth when he lived there, that he's the Jesus of the cross. The message that these people are preaching about him and his resurrection and his ascension back to heaven and this message that sort of represents the otherwise familiar teachings from the old Scripture but they're now moved upon by the Spirit of God as Peter preaches, for example. And he's applying those ancient prophecies in this new context so that Peter will say this, referring to Joel's prophecy, for example, he says this that you're seeing is that that he spoke about.

These were the kind of thoughts, they wouldn't be formed well yet for this man Saul of Tarsus but these are the issues that are there somehow unthought through yet but everything is challenged and he is the guilty one. Would he be seeing in these fleeting seconds, would he be seeing faces of some of those people like Stephen and others that he'd given authority to, to be killed? He was a murderer, he says that himself on another occasion. He was committed to destroying the church, he was committed to violent destruction, now in these milliseconds he's seeing it, he was actually kicking a bent against the very Messiah of God.

And as if that wasn't sufficient shock for him, he now hears this very one, I am Jesus whom thou persecutes and he goes on to say but rise from the ground, stand on your feet Saul, this man of staggering defiance who's actually not disqualified by any of that. Jesus still wanted him, what an amazing thought. Maybe he's been trying to get your attention, I don't know, I don't know your story or what goes on in your heart of hearts.

Could it be, although our situation is very different to this man Saul of Tarsus, but perhaps there are areas in our own lives, in our own thinking, in our own understanding where as Paul would say of himself later, that he did those things in ignorance, he didn't know what he was doing. And it's quite possible that very many people today who are professing to be men and women of the Christian faith are actually not where they should be, they're not living the way they ought, they're not responding to the goads that the Lord is bringing against your conscience. And it's time to begin to pay attention and this is of course exactly what this man Saul of Tarsus did.

And he opened his heart up to God and he surrendered to him, his surrender to God could not be exaggerated, his surrender to God was unreserved, it's staggering. We can be impressed profoundly by the grace of God toward him in spite of everything, choosing him and so on, but we must pause from the human view of what took place, say this is just remarkable the degree to which he allowed God to impact his life and change his life. He was transformed beyond recognition, he was entirely a different person, this man who had been such a zealous persecutor of the church had become and would become its greatest promoter of the church of all time.

Immediately he adjusted the rudder of his life as it were to change course, he hoisted the sail of his heart and his life and abandoned himself to the wind of God's Holy Spirit, he was God's man to go God's way. And frankly I'm certain in my own mind that as I use that as the great illustration, this is surely the reason why there are so many who profess to be Christians, but it's not really working out. Many people sense deep in their hearts it's not the way it should be, I'm not where I should be would be a common confession I'm sure and so on.

But in so many cases the failure has been that we've not abandoned to God, we've still wanted to sort of maintain our traditions and maintain our links and things and the way we've believed over so many years and so on. Certainly for those of us who are older to open ourselves up to begin to accept and embrace things that are not quite the way we've always believed them to be is very difficult. I can look back in my own life and I can look back on my early twenties, the time when having been raised in a Christian home and believed many things that were well taught to me in those days and yet my life wasn't being lived as a true Christian man should live.

And God interrupted my life and I'm so grateful that he broke in on my life at that stage, at an early stage when I was still formative and I wasn't 70 some years of age set in my ways and sort of well this is the way it always has been, this is what I believe and that's that. But I was in company certainly with my wife but certainly with others as well, other young people who came under these profound impressions of a Christian life that was deeper and richer and more transformative than anything we had seen the gospel to be. And we went for it and we allowed God to bring about many great changes in our lives, changing our whole view of priorities and things that were also important to us in our lives were immediately changed and we thank God for interrupting us, for speaking to us and for granting to us the grace to make those changes.

It may be that God is wanting to do something like that in your life even today but this was very wonderful. I'm thinking just now of that story that Jesus told, remember the man who, he saw this precious pearl in a field and he wanted it and how could he guess it, he wasn't going to steal it. So he did it legitimately, he went out and put all of his money on the table somewhere and he bought the whole field and that gave him access to the prize.

God's looking for that kind of response from men and women today. We were prepared to just buy the field, just go for it. Saul of Tarsus did that, he went for broke, he was an activist I was saying at the outset, he was someone who couldn't be nonchalant and just sit by, he wasn't a nominal Christian, I know there weren't Christians then but do you get what I'm trying to say.

He grabbed hold of the truth with every fibre in his being and he just changed course through 180 degrees and wholeheartedly went on to serve God as we know so very well. What's interesting to me is in that Timothy verse where we start in, he said that he was made an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle is

someone who was sent, apostolos is the word, it means to send forth or be sent forth as a messenger.

And isn't that exactly what Jesus was saying to him when we read in Acts 26 that God had a plan, I've got a plan for your life, you are to become a messenger, you are to become a messenger. A messenger of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message which will deliver people, the message which will set people free, which will transform, we read all that, these are Jesus words. And to bring healing into the lives of men and women and that was what part of his apostleship was, much more could be said about that certainly.

But he goes on to say that he was made an apostle or this messenger of Jesus Christ by the will of God. In other words, and we're having no trouble recognising this at this stage, he didn't volunteer for this, he didn't wake up one morning and think I'm going to just change my religion. No, it was God who broke in on his life, it was he who took, God who took the initiative and spoke to him as we've been seeing already and so on.

It was all part and parcel of God's will for his life. He would say himself on another occasion writing to the Galatians, he said, I profited in the Jews religion above all my equals in my own nation, he said because I was more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of the fathers. But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace to reveal his son in me that I may preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.

Neither went I up to Jerusalem with them which were apostles before me but I went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus and so on. This is Galatians chapter 1. The fact is Paul was made clearly aware of the fact that this Jesus who was now revealing himself to him had a plan and a purpose for his life in spite of all of this brutal behaviour that was so much part of his life. Prior to this occasion his mercy and his grace was abundant toward him and he had a plan for his life and it would be later that it would become clear to him and he would see what I've just read to you from Galatians 1 that even before he was born God had this plan and purpose.

It wasn't that God sort of came up with an idea when he saw this zealous man going that he'd make a good man for me. No, he'd been chosen and selected before the foundation of the world. He was one of God's elected people and it dawned upon his heart and from that moment he carried this unique message, the message of the gospel.

And notice here in our verse, verse 1 of 2 Timothy, he says, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. That is a magnificent statement. I don't know how you view that.

According to the promise of life. It's the only occasion in the scriptures where Paul uses that phrase and it is without doubt a very succinct, tight little statement of a few words used only here which refer clearly to what he himself will call, yes, the glorious gospel of this blessed God. This is a reference to the gospel here.

The promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, that's the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what he's going to be talking about repeatedly as he goes through this epistle and so on. There would be, in making that statement right at the beginning of this letter, and during the night last night I read through 1 Timothy and these two letters, I'm not sure that I know, I think it probably would be about five years maybe between the two letters, but they're so different because his circumstances were so different.

This is the second time he's been in a Roman prison. The first time he was in a Roman prison, we read about it toward the end of the book of Acts. After a period of time of living in his own hired house, do you remember, with Roman soldiers guarding him and so on, but he was exonerated and it's quite clear that there were troubles that he took part in after that as time went on.

But this time it was different. Everything was different this time. For him, physical death was imminent.

Execution could take place and he knew it would. It was inevitable. It could take place at any moment.

Even as he's dictating this letter, the execution could have gone. It was just some unsuspecting moment. It could be any time it would happen.

And isn't it interesting in that context where his own life was really on the line in a big way, he would be taken out to an appointed place where he would lose his head according to tradition. He knew that was going to happen. But in that context, this gloriously optimistic, in the truest sense, this optimistic man of God is writing to his beloved Timothy and he refers to himself as he sets the stage for what he's going to say.

This is Paul writing. This is Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. Can you see the contrast? His cell is a damp, dark hole in the ground according to tradition.

They say you can see it if you go over to that part of the world. I don't know about that. But the fact of the matter is it was a horrible situation he was in.

I know he was cold and I know he's looking for some extra clothes to wear and you read about that later in the epistle and so on. The shadow of death is over him, physically speaking, but his spirit is alive. His spirit is buoyant.

He could have just said the gospel but he chooses these words according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. What a wonderful spirit. What a wonderful man.

He's confident that physical death is not going to be the end. He's totally confident of that. Outwardly he's sitting in that dark, dank cell but inwardly he's standing on the solid ground of the promise of God, the promise of life in his own heart.

What does he say? Just looking lower down in the same chapter. For the which things, verse 12, I also suffer these things. Nevertheless, I'm not ashamed.

I'm not defeated. I'm not giving up. I'm not ashamed.

For I know whom I have believed and I'm persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. Can you hear his spirit? Can you hear his heart on this occasion? Outwardly, the executioner is at the door. Inwardly, the promise of life is embedded deeply into his spirit and into his heart.

Amen. I think also I could just add this term, the promise of life in Christ Jesus, much more could be said than I am able to say this morning. One of the features of it, as I hear it, having noted the contrast of his physical condition and the truth of this great statement, but it's a broad, this statement has got, what can we call it, transcendent breadth to it.

It's a huge statement. This is a statement which is reminding this inspired apostle that this plan, this plan for his life, this plan of salvation was conceived before time, before time was. That's where the promise was conceived, in eternity in the heart of God.

He would be very familiar with the Old Testament scriptures. He would be familiar, for example, with the words recorded right back in the beginning of Genesis where there is a reference in connection to the seed of the woman. Clearly, in that statement, there is a hint of the one who would come, who would crush the head of the serpent at that time.

The promise was there and we could leaf our way through the Old Testament scriptures. Remember Jesus did this with those two disciples on the Emmaus Road. He showed them himself in all of the scriptures.

That must have been the most incredible walk that those two men took with Jesus. But he showed them how all the scriptures were about him and would be fulfilled in him. This was the promise of life.

It was there, conceived in eternity. It was there in Genesis. It's there woven like a golden thread through the ancient scriptures and through the ancient prophets' words and so on and becomes realised in the person of Jesus Christ.

It's in Jesus Christ. Him who said, I am come that you might have life and you might have it more abundantly. The apostle himself would say on one occasion, Christ who is our life? He knew what he was talking about.

And as we find him in this cell, he's completely immune from fear and he's completely immune from hopelessness. This was Paul's gospel. Do you remember he refers to it as my gospel on one occasion? This was the gospel that Paul preached.

To him there was nothing, there was just nothing that could compare with this. He was totally gripped with its truth. It was the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.

And we know that he went out and he preached it. We know he went out and he taught it. We know that he went out and defended it.

We know that he wrote it. But pre-eminently he lived it. He lived this great truth.

It was his only hope in life. It was his only hope in death. And this is our gospel.

It's the gospel of God. But it's the gospel that is committed to our trust. I believe, and I said this a week or two ago, that the baptism in the Spirit which John the Baptist talked about is indeed a baptism into the life of God.

It's a baptism into life. This life that he's talking about here, Charles Wesley said this, scatter thy life to every part and sanctify the whole. He's talking about our own hearts.

This is the intent that God has for you and for me. To scatter his life in every part of who you are. Every part of your heart, your emotions, your desires, your goals, your purpose, your worship.

Amen. And I believe that if you truly will surrender in a way not unlike the Apostle Paul's, abandon to God, that he could do that for you even today.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/TZ0EF5OE7EM.mp4>
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