

1999 Advent Week 1 - Timothy

by John Piper

The sermon explores the life of Timothy, emphasizing themes of grace, forgiveness, and the hope found in familial love during Advent.

Duration: 14:05

Topics: "Power Of Prayer", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

In this sermon transcript, a young man stands outside his mother's door, praying for her healing or preparation for death. He knocks and his mother, who is almost blind, asks who is there. He identifies himself as her son and she passes away peacefully. The scene then shifts to 20 years later, where the young man, Timothy, visits his grandmother's house. She reveals that his father, who had disappeared when Timothy was 16, is in the room. Timothy is shocked and trembles at the thought of seeing his father again. The sermon emphasizes the power of prayer and the unexpected ways in which God works in our lives.

Transcript

For those of you who are new, each Advent season now for these 18 years gone by, I've tried to take a character from the Bible and tell the story out of my own imagination of what might have been. The details are coming out of my head. The spiritual truth, I believe, is biblical, and my intention is that they be healing for us as a church and that they be hope-giving and faith-building and inspiring to your own life of faith.

So, this year, the first two poems are going to be about Timothy, and a couple of things about Timothy, just to keep in mind. His mother's name was Eunice. His grandmother's name was Lois.

These are all biblical facts. His father was a pagan Greek. He left his home in Lystra and went to serve in Ephesus, and later, possibly, since Paul asked him to come before winter, made it to Rome.

That's all you need to know for now. Those are kind of Christmas gifts from me to you to say, I love being here and I love the Bible and I love you and I love Christmas. Timothy, part one.

It wasn't yet two years since he had sat like this beside the three most precious people in his life, except for one. He had no wife, but Paul had come to be a kind of friend whose heart was so entwined with Timothy's that where his own desire would stop and Paul's alone begin could not be known. Two years almost since Timothy, with tears, had sat beside his mother when she died, and now, this time again, he

sat with Luke outside the wall of Rome with the Apostle Paul dead and gory on the ground, blood wet between them, where they found him after Nero's men had done their work.

Two people called him son, his mother, and the man they smote with Nero's sword, the man who wrote the other letter in his hand. To Timothy it started. To my beloved son.

These were the very words also from her in Lystra. My beloved son, please come in haste. There is no one like you to bring me comfort in the final battle with my sin.

The memory was vivid still this night as dark and winter's chill began to settle over all the seven hills of Rome and Paul lay lifeless at his feet. Almost eleven days along the coast it took, and then upcountry to the place where he was born, and through the winding streets he had not seen for eighteen years. He was sixteen when Paul had taken him away, and everyone agreed that day that it was good.

At least it seemed to be. They had never dreamed that it would be so long. And now with a letter in his hand, somehow, the boy now turned to man, would sit beside his mother's bed and try to fit her for more life or death.

Before he knocked, he stood outside the door and waited, praying for the word that if God pleased, might heal or gird his mother for the final fight, whichever God should deem as right. And then he knocked. A woman cracked the door and asked with gentle tact, Who's there? Her eyes were almost blind with four score years of being kind to everyone and watching for the Lord.

She stood behind the door and asked again, Who's there? We've got a sickness here. I think it's not a place you'd want to sell your bread. I have no bread, the stranger said, then added this.

Grandma? He saw the woman squint and move her jaw the way she used to when he was small. But since she couldn't see, he said, It's Timothy. And then, is Mama still alive? And when she heard the name, she opened wide the door and said, Can it be you? It's almost 20 years.

That's true, he said. But you still move your jaw the way you always did. I saw it through the crack.

Then Lois smiled and raised her wrinkled arms. Oh, child, your mother's heart will leap for joy. She hugged him to her breast.

Her boy, she's going to see her boy. She took his hand. Come, let her have a look.

The little house was almost just the way he left it. Dishes, dust, hot coals and earthen pots, the smell of wood-fueled fire and simmering swell of boiling soup. She led him by the hand halfway, then stopped.

But why did we stop here, Grandma? I need to tell you something. He could read the worry on her face and feel the tension in her hand. It's real strange, Timothy.

No one thought such a thing was ever done. What thing, Grandma? Your father's in the room. My what? He felt the skin turn clammy.

Timothy had not heard from his dad since he had shot an arrow through the window of the synagogue at Paul above the city square and fled. When he found out that night that Paul was free to charge him with assault because he was a Roman and the laws protected him against such crimes. His father was a Greek.

Sometimes he tolerated Eunice in his mother, Lois, Jewish stand. But when his wife and son became devout believers in the name of Jesus, he was furious and tried to kill both Barnabas and Paul. His son was 14 years of age.

The future bright. His peers would all be high officials in the province of Galatia. Win the accolades of men and make their fathers proud and rich.

But take the name of Christian in those days and every job and all the praise that mattered to his father then was lost. He disappeared. And when the boy at 16 left to be with Paul and Silas, he could see the hope was ended that perhaps his father might come home.

He lapsed now 20 years. And Timothy stands trembling by the door to see his mother die and father live again. He prayed once more.

Oh, give me grace and wisdom. What to say? And then. From where his mother lay a weak and gentle voice.

Who's there? She said. An answer to your prayer, I think, said Lois. Timothy reached out and pulled the curtain free and stepped into the room.

It was soft lit and clean. And warm because his father kept the hearth. I got your letter, mom.

I'm glad it's not too late. He knelt down by her bed. She reached up, touched his beard and said, you've turned into a man.

I'm glad you came. She winced with pain. How bad, mom, does it hurt? She smiled.

We've had bad stomachs from the start. I'm glad I've lived so long. I'd like to have another 30 years or so and raise you up so you could go with me to Ephesus.

That would be nice, my son. The Lord is good. And we'll do what is best for us.

Now, there. I sound like Barnabas. Do you remember? 18 years ago.

I liked him. He had tears. He was a tender man.

She glanced up at her husband's face. The lanced infection of his soul still dripped. And every reminder ripped his heart.

The tears were plain to see. Then Lois said, look, Timothy. Do you know who this is? His face I know, he said.

But in the place beneath, I do not know who's there. He is another answered prayer, my son. The Lord is doubly good to me.

He brought you home. And should I not now, after 20 years, rejoice with you that there are tears upon your father's face? There is a man who calls me son. And his are tears that I can trust.

He lies in chains in Rome because the eyes of some seek money more than truth and leave their lonely sons in youth. You haven't called me son for more than 20 years. I shut the door of memory a long, long time ago.

And for your double crime, I thought that you were dead. A long, still silence fell. Your heart is strong and wise, my son.

And you are right. For I was dead. And then, one night, in Ephesus, not long ago, I heard a young man preach.

No show, no flair, no haughty eloquence, just truth and passion and intense affection for his flock. He read a letter from a man that said to Timothy, beloved son, and later preached on how anyone who lives for worldly gain and not for Christ is dead and has forgot the reason he was made. And then he said, of all the words of men, the greatest is Christ Jesus burst into the world to save the worst.

And there, from you, I tasted grace. These tender words did change the face of God. I'm sorry, Timothy, that I have failed.

But it may be, tonight, that if you will not say, I am your father, yet you may, with love, accept me as your son. The blows all struck. The battle won.

His mother's eyes were closed. Her breath came slowly till it ceased. And death spread over all her frame as if a calm came down without a whiff of wind and made the ocean still and smooth.

But no one moved until the younger son lay down his face on hers and felt his father place the hand of blessing on his head to bless the living and the dead. Oh, candle one, burn bright with peace and beckon family strife to cease. Come, melt with love the hearts of ice and light the way to paradise.

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