

# 1999 Advent Week 2 - Timothy

by John Piper

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*The sermon explores the story of Timothy and his father, Paul, and how they faced challenges and struggles, but ultimately found strength and encouragement in their faith and trust in God.*

**Duration:** 13:05

**Scripture:** Luke 12:35

**Topics:** "Faith Journey", "Sharing Gospel"

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker reflects on the journey of faith and the importance of holding onto the truth of God's word. The speaker recounts a story of Timothy, who faced challenges and doubts while traveling to Rome. Despite the hardships, Timothy's faith in God remained strong, and he chose to follow in the footsteps of the apostle Paul by preaching the gospel in Rome. The speaker emphasizes the value of faith and the eternal impact of sharing the message of salvation.

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## Transcript

Timothy part two. At thirty-four, some saw him old, some young, but only two were bold enough to call him little child. His mother and the man reviled through all the world as foolish Paul.

And by some strange design, a call was sent from both, unknown to each by letter, if perhaps to reach and summon Timothy to leave his church in Ephesus and cleave to her in Lystra, him in Rome. To help him, as they say, get home. In Rome, Paul lay in jail to wait the whim of Nero's fear and hate and wrote, Dear child, almost bereft I lie, for Luke alone is left.

In Lystra, Eunice lay diseased and wrote, Dear child, I would be pleased if you would come and help me die. And now, how should a son reply? Two loves here, two loves, and one must wait and neither can, and none is lesser than its ardent twin or likely in a war to win. One love will lure him west, one east, yet neither summons most or least.

How then should such a love decide when one child's heart cannot divide? He made his choice on this, If I in God's good will before they die could see them both, then first I should attend whom I more likely would survive, and then give my goodbye to him with whom I well may die. And thus he made his journey east, and watched with love as Eunice ceased to breathe, and felt his father's touch and blessing on his head with such a power after twenty years to make and double all his tears. And then he sailed for Rome.

Before he left, he took his father's hand and swore, If I survive my time in Rome, then I will come and take you home with me to Ephesus and care for you and Grandma Lois there. But if I don't, then Father, hear this word from what Paul wrote to cheer my soul if he should die. The fight of faith I have fought long with might, but not my own.

The bloody race is all but done. I set my face like flint to finish well, and grace has given strength to keep the pace. The precious faith my soul has kept, and now with all enticements swept away by prison, age and hope, I lean with longing toward the rope, the scaffold, fire, or sword, where I will shortly meet the Lord.

Goodbye. I love you, Father, much today, and thank you for your touch. The journey on the sea to Rome was rough, and winter waves with foam rolled early round Aegean isles, and frigid winds stole sailors' smiles and made them tell dark jokes.

What's worse, they asked the passengers in verse, than winter on the sea, but none could answer. Tell us. Have your fun.

And so the mates with flashing teeth replied, Why, winter underneath. Then Timothy with boldness said, Ah, yes, good mates, but there's a dread much worse than both. Come try your skill to solve my riddle now.

What still is worse than winter on the sea or underneath? Come answer me. We can't imagine anything, they said. So tell us.

What's the sting that's worse than winter on the sea or underneath? Then Timothy replied, To freeze above the swell or drown, it's worse to wake in hell. Nobody laughed. But in the days to come, the sailors found their ways to ask him, when the waves were high, if he knew how to safely die.

And he would take his precious scroll that Paul had sent to him, unroll a portion, then the sailors, iced and cold, declare the warmth of Christ. At last in Rome, a winter's night, so cold and clear and moonlit bright, that one could see his comrade's breath, or not, and mark the signs of death. Found Timothy and Luke outside the city wall where they had cried till there were no more tears to cry.

Too late. Too late to say goodbye. Paul lay between them dead, beside the Osten Way where Nero's pride was fed again with Christian blood.

He stared down at the red-streaked mud and murmured simple phrases from the letter in his coat. Please come before the winter, son. Please come before the winter, son.

Too numb to feel the bite of night, all he could feel was this. Too late to be here when he needed me. Too late.

Too late. My son, please bring the great cloak when you come. I'll need it in the winter.

And there he lay so thin, blood-soaked with just a shirt. And son, please don't forget the books. It's done, my father, I did not forget.

I have the parchments too, and yet, too late. Too late. Oh, father, did you need them at the end? Forbid, oh God, that I withheld the food he needed just before they hewed him down.

Oh, God, no books, no cloak, no friends but one. And thus he broke off murmuring. His satchels lay around him now in disarray, all full of things to make Paul strong and able to endure the long, hard winter of a Roman jail.

Luke, watch the force of guilt assail the battered faith of Timothy. Then said, Now listen well to me, young man. The greatness of our friend and father did not simply end as if a sword could silence what he preached and wrote.

What you have got there in your letter did not fall nor ever will. The voice of Paul was not the mutterings of man and will not perish in the span of one short life. It was the voice of God.

Now you must make your choice. Go follow now the feelings of your guilt and come to naught, or love your father better and believe. Let not the face of guilt deceive.

You did not err in caring for your mother as you did. One door of sacrifice is all that we can enter at a time. But be assured, this is not so with God.

While we in single pathways plod, God treads ten thousand ways and takes all our unplanned delays and makes divine appointments of them all. And so it was with you and Paul. He paused and riveted his eyes on Timothy and said, One dies and sows the seed.

Another lives and bears the fruit. God takes and gives. He was not late in Rome today, nor was your eastern trip delay.

And now to know his plan and way, keep vigil till the morn and pray. When Luke awoke, the sunlight broke through crimson clouds and smoke from all the fires of Rome spread haze above the city like the blaze of some great furnace of a king in Babylon. You know, we'd sing if Paul were here, he said.

He had a song for every plight, both bad and good. Luke watched as Timothy methodically arranged the three large satchels at his side, then took from one a precious well-worn book and from another Paul's great cloak. He stared a long time at the smoke above the city wall, then stood.

He lifted up the cloak and hood, looked down at the apostle Paul, then put it on. Is that your call? Luke asked, What are you going to do? I'm going to preach in Rome. And you, my friend, what of your night of prayer? I'll bury Paul and join you there.

And then Luke said, You're very young to die. I think Paul called it dung, what we who know the Lord will lose when we lose all but Christ. Strong views, and I doubt much they were designed for older men, as if we find that youth should trade their God for earth and find in it a greater worth.

More souls are lost by fearing death, I think, than risking life. Is breath more precious than the soul? He smiled at Luke and turned to go. A wild and solid hope filled all his frame.

And in his hand, a book, a flame. Now let the fire of candle two ignite the wild and solid view that God, our God, is never late. And let it burn until the weight of this all-conquering truth consumes our fear.

And even by the tombs of fallen martyrs makes us dare to ask, Whose mantle will we wear?

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