

WHY FEAR WHEN YOU CAN DARE?

Today's Text: 2 Tim. 1: 1-18

Extracts:

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance *the genuine faith that is in you...* Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind...* For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed, *for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. Hold fast the pattern of sound words... in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus* [2 Tim. 1: 3-8, 12-13]

Since winning the gold medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, beating Brazil in the semi-final and Argentina in the final, the Nigerian Olympic football (soccer) team has come to be fondly referred to as the Dream Team. It won the silver at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and there were high expectations as Dream Team VI prepared for the recently concluded Rio 2016 Olympics in Brazil.¹ However, the team ran into serious financial difficulties and found itself stranded in Atlanta, USA. Delta Airlines which has a daily flight between Lagos, Nigeria, and Atlanta heard of their predicament and offered to lift the team into Brazil, barely a few hours to its first group match against Japan. Nigeria beat Japan, 5-4, and went on to win the bronze medal. A Japanese plastic surgeon, Katsuya Takasu, was so impressed with the team's resilience that he flew to Brazil and gave the team US\$390,000 (\$200,000 as bonuses and allowances and \$190,000 for winning the bronze medal). Takasu said, "This team showed resilience and fought the hardest to achieve success, despite all their problems- some people could have given up but they didn't."

The team was demoralized but it refused to bow to the circumstances. Where did their daring spirit come from? The team prayed together before and after each match. The players taught us not to fear when you can dare. That is the same message that Paul conveyed to Timothy two thousand years ago, that God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind. How can we apply that to deal with our own frustrating situations? Let us find out from today's interesting study.

¹ Story is based on Oluwashina Okeleji, "Rio2016: Nigeria Olympic football team receive '\$390,000 gift'," BBC Sport, Sat., August 20, 2016; <http://www.bbc.com/sport/football/37148817>

1. Background: What you require to dare rather than fear

The Preacher says, “A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart is at his left” [Eccl. 10: 2]. We know that the heart that pumps blood in our body is on the left and there is no heart at all on the right side of the body. The word of God says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [Prov. 9: 10], and “wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her” [Prov. 8: 11]. Therefore, according to the Preacher, a foolish person walks by sight but a wise person by faith! That is why believers are to walk by faith, not by sight [2 Cor. 5: 7]. *In other words, if you want to dare, you have to rely less on your five senses and much more on faith.*

A good illustration of that principle can be found when Paul and his travelling companions came to Caesarea on their way back to Jerusalem from his third and last missionary journey. He spent a few days in the home of Philip the evangelist who had four virgin daughters that prophesied. A certain prophet called Agabus joined them from Judea. He took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” On hearing that, everybody got scared and begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul replied, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” So, when they could not stop him, they said, “The will of the Lord be done” [Acts 21: 8-14]. Was Paul’s “stubbornness” based on genuine faith or incurable optimism?

Paul went on to Jerusalem where he was arrested and tortured. They brought him before the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin, but, being a Roman citizen, they could not treat him as a criminal without following the Roman judicial process [Acts 22: 22-29]. Roman soldiers became his protector against the arbitrariness of the Sanhedrin! Then, one night, the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome” [Acts 23: 1-11]. So, when the Roman governor, Felix, wanted him to be tried in Jerusalem (where conspirators had vowed to waylay and kill him), Paul appealed to Caesar. The governor agreed, saying, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!” [Acts 25: 1-12]. Caesar, the Emperor, lived in Rome! From that story, Paul walked boldly and fearlessly because he walked by faith- he was following the word of God to bear witness of Him in Rome.

What does walking by faith mean to you? What does that mean to the average believer? Most of us who have been raised on a diet of logic and science operate on the platform that what cannot be proved does not exist. So, emphasis is on facts- what are empirically verifiable: what you can see, hear, touch, taste or feel. But the word of God defines faith as “the *substance* of things hoped for; the *evidence* of things not seen” [Heb. 11: 1], and without faith, it is impossible to please God [v. 6]. Evidence and substance are empirical but hope and the unseen are not. *So, what makes faith superior to sight? Simple! God gives you the*

privilege to see in advance what to expect in the future. Therefore, you have more information about the circumstances you are facing or going to face. So, with such abundant foreknowledge, why should you fear when you can dare? That is the question that Paul wants us to answer from Chapter 1 of his Second Letter to Timothy, the focus of our study today.

Each new day, given the turbulent state of the world today, with economic hardships, social unrest, natural disasters and more, there is so much uncertainty. We fear for food, security, progress and more. We fear for our loved ones, our flocks and our citizens. With refugees pouring into our neighbourhoods from a different culture, we fear for our culture, our religion, our race. Hypertension is on the rise. But should believers operate under such uncertainties? Who and what do they believe in? Paul's letter to Timothy, the young pastor of the church in Ephesus, becomes very helpful here, especially as he wrote it from prison!

Paul drew Timothy's attention to critical issues to focus on in the face of challenges to true worship. Let us focus on the following, among others:

a) *Know the stuff of genuine faith*

Paul called to remembrance the "genuine faith" that was in Timothy which first dwelt in his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. He reminded Timothy to "stir up the gift of God which is in [him] ... **for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind**" [2 Tim. 1: 5-7]. Genuine faith manifests in our exercise of power, love and a sound mind that can only come from God. Therefore, fear will have no power over us.

Take the exercise of power, for example. When the children of Israel were camping by the Red Sea after Pharaoh had allowed them to leave Egypt, they were shocked to see Egyptian troops hard on them. We are told, "So they were very afraid [and they] cried out to the LORD." Moses, the man of faith, said to them, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" [Ex. 14: 9-14]. God told Moses what to do- to stretch out the rod in his hands over the Red Sea and divide it. The children of Israel passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground! When the Egyptians tried to follow, God asked Moses to stretch the rod again over the sea and all the Egyptians with their chariots drowned! We are told, "Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt, so **the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses** [vv. 15-31].

With such confidence in your God by Christ Jesus, you can exercise love through forgiving **whatever** wrongs others have done against you. You can

focus on *values* that please God, not on *valuables* that can take you away from Him- comfort, political correctness, etc.

b) *The Holy Spirit is the giver!*

Paul wrote, “I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying of my hands” [2 Tim. 1: 6]. Recall what Paul did earlier when he came to Ephesus, the church where Timothy was now the evangelist [Acts 19: 1-6]. He met twelve disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They replied that they had not as much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit. In response to a follow-up question, it turned out that they had been baptized “into John’s baptism.” Paul told them that John’s baptism of repentance was not enough; they needed to believe on Him who would come after John, on Christ Jesus. So, Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus Christ, and when he had laid hands on them, “the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”

We learn from that story that genuine faith can only be given by the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12: 9], “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” [Rom. 8: 14]. *It follows that the spirit of power, love and a sound mind that believers are to exercise can only come through the Holy Spirit. When we wander to the right and to the left, we will hear His voice and return/remain on the true path of faith [Is. 30: 21].*

c) *You are to walk by it at all times!*

Paul also wrote, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in you” [2 Tim. 1: 13-14]. For genuine faith to hold, you must become and remain the temple of the Holy Spirit “who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are [no longer] your own. For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” [1 Cor. 6: 19-20].

Emphatically, Paul wrote, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” [2 Tim. 1: 12]. *So, from today to the end of your life on earth, you are to walk by genuine faith if you want to dare instead of fearing for, “To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” [Rom. 8: 6].* How can we apply genuine faith in fighting our earthly battles?

2. How to apply genuine faith to fight your battles

A popular saying is that if you cannot stand the smoke, get out of the kitchen. But what if you are the cook? If you leave, who will supervise the cooking to ensure that the pot is not burnt? However, let us not deceive ourselves to think that people of faith are super-human! Nevertheless, by applying the following simple steps, we can surprise ourselves with the outcomes:

a) *Understand the circumstances facing you*

The first thing to do is to have a good idea of the situation that you are facing. **Remember that God will not do for you what you can do for yourself.** The popular illustration I use is when Jesus came to raise Lazarus from the dead. Before He got there, the family had wrapped up Lazarus' body, put it in the rock-grave and rolled a stone over it. When Jesus arrived, the first question He asked was "Where have you laid him?" As God, He should know! The second statement He made was "Take away the stone." He could have blasted it off with a mere command! After raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus said, "Loose him and let him go" [**Jn 11: 1-44**]. If He could raise him up, He could command the ropes to break! Therefore, what the people could do for themselves; they did not need God to do it for them!

By the time you do a proper diagnosis with your spirit of power, love and a sound mind, you may find that you have actually been focusing on the dribbler (attitudes shaped by Satan and his human agents) instead of on the ball (the key issues at stake). Then, you may be able to discern what God has already equipped you to do and where you need His help. For example, before the ship taking Paul to Rome set sail, he advised them, "Men, I *perceive* that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives" [**Acts 27: 10**]. That was the sound mind of a man of genuine faith in action.

Always remember: it is not lack of faith to feel pain or danger. For example, when Paul came to Macedonia during his missionary journeys, he faced odds which he wrote about as follows, "Our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless, God who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus" [**2 Cor. 7: 5-6**]. **Let your fears drive you to God.** For example, when King Jehoshaphat found Judah surrounded by enemy troops from several nations, he "feared and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" [**2 Chron. 20: 1-3**].

b) *What has God said about it/them?*

Faith, the word of God says, comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God [**Rom. 10: 17**]. It is presumptuous to act when you have not heard from God on a matter. A verse from the Bible may address your situation

but was it given to you by the Holy Spirit? In the Jehoshaphat example, it was while they were fasting and praying that the Spirit spoke to somebody in their midst that the battle was the Lord's. So, instead of leading with troops, Jehoshaphat put praise singers in front. Without throwing a weapon, he won a decisive victory [**2 Chron. 20: 14-22**].

c) *Go with God!*

Once your faith walk is anchored on the word of God, go forward on it with boldness, no matter how daunting it may seem. For example, the disciples in Damascus had heard of the atrocities committed by Saul (later Paul) against believers in Jerusalem. Then, they heard that he was on his way to come and destroy all of them. In the midst of their fears, the Lord appeared to one of them, Ananias, to go to the street called Straight and “inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying, and in a vision, he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” With that boldness, Ananias went there, laid hands on Paul and said, “**Brother Saul**, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” [**Acts 9: 10-17**]. Brother Saul? That is genuine faith at work.

Indeed, power, love and a sound mind that come with knowing and totally relying on God can make you dare rather than fear. Then, like Paul, you will be able to say that you *know whom you have believed and that He is able to keep that which you have committed to His care against that Day*. That is the message for us in today's study.

3. **Conclusion: Jesus is with you to your last day on earth!**

Jesus has assured believers, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you... that where I am, there you may be also” [**Jn 14: 1-3**]. Elsewhere, He added, “These words I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” [**Jn 16: 33**].

Satan may be roaring around you, looking for whom to devour. But resist him, steadfast in faith, and he will flee from you [1 Pet. 5: 8-9; Jam. 4:7]. Why should you fear when you can dare? Jesus is with you all the way. All shall be well. All is well.