

"Taking Hold of Eternal Life"

1 Timothy 6:11-16

Our theme this year has been 'eternal life'. I'd like to combine praying for persecuted believers with eternal life because this is how you endure suffering by taking hold of eternal life that we have. Paul uses this phrase 'take hold of eternal life' when he encourages Timothy to teach truth in spite of false teachers infiltrating the churches in Ephesus (where he pastored) and to take hold of eternal life and not get caught up pursuing the riches of this life. But he also uses take hold of eternal life because persecution for Jesus was a common occurrence in his day and that he needs to be like Jesus who gave the 'good confession' when He knew He was going to suffer at the hands of Pontius Pilate.

Let's review what eternal life means. Back in January we looked at John 3:16 and discovered that eternal life is something we receive the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ. Contrary to how we've always used John 3:16 – [if you believe in Jesus you'll go to heaven when you die] – eternal life is something we have now, that lasts forever. So eternal life then is the promise from God and the confidence in God that we can live a Godlike life now on earth with the assurance that we will be with Him when this life ends. If the gift of eternal life at salvation is not the assurance of God's never-leave-us-nor-forsake-us-presence for all of this life and forever, then that means we are totally on our own.

Yet Jesus assured us that His Spirit would be "in us" when He left this earth (John 14:17). If we don't have the assurance of eternal life now, how are we going to confidently point out false teaching? How will we choose the riches of God over the riches of the world? And how can we endure suffering for the gospel if I am unsure Jesus is with me by His Spirit?

Jesus said in 15:5

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Eternal life is more than just the assurance of heaven when we die but the ongoing present reality of Jesus' life in us that enables us to find our identity and satisfaction in Him. He invited the Samaritan woman

John 4:4 ... whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

A spring is that which keeps flowing, keeps providing, keeps replenishing itself. We have this now. We can be satisfied internally when we are struggling externally.

So as Paul closes up his first letter to Timothy he encourages him to hang on to the reigns of the assurance of eternal life because there are going to be some rocky bumps in this life. Like what?

¹ Tim. 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

So Paul tells Timothy that by mentally clinging to the assurance of eternal life he will be able to,

Reject Covetousness and Pursue Righteousness **(6:11)**

Notice how Paul puts the two together much like his “take off the old self with its practices and put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator” (Col. 3:9). Flee covetousness and pursue godly qualities. We’re not told exactly how but the false teachers of Timothy’s day were motivated by making money from it. The love of money is the root of evil, Paul says.

Flee from that which never satisfies (vv.6-11a)

Godliness with contentment is great gain. We will leave everything behind when we die. People who pursue earthly riches will find their hands ultimately empty and their eternal destination an unending life of suffering. “Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (6:10). These are the ‘things’ we are to flee from because they won’t satisfy us. We weren’t made to be satisfied by the things of earth. We were made to be satisfied in God. Solomon wrote,

Ecc. 5:10 Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. ¹¹ As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?

Paul knows we are made to pursue that which satisfies us so he says flee this, and instead,

Follow that which produces spiritual benefits (v.11b)

Like righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. It seems a little surprising that Paul, who is Timothy’s mentor and close friend, doesn’t use his name here. Instead he says ‘But you man of God’. This does two things. First, it helps us apply this more readily to ourselves because we also are men and women of God. Secondly, if Timothy struggled with confidence and feared people and persecution (which seems to be the case especially when we read 2 Timothy 1) than to call him man of God is very uplifting. Because ‘man of God’ was a title not used very often in the Old Testament. It was used of Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah Elisha and a few unnamed prophets. So Paul was encouraging Timothy by referring to him with this exclusive phrase.

Pursuing means to constantly follow hard after. The more you pursue the things of God, the more satisfying God becomes for us. I was listening to a message earlier this week and the speaker used a food illustration to teach this truth. He said diet changes appetite over time. If we change an unhealthy diet to a healthier diet, after a while we’ll notice that our appetites will have adapted to the new diet and our appetite for what we used to eat will gradually disappear. Same applies spiritually. If we change our unhealthy and non-spiritual disciplines to spiritually healthier disciplines, we will find our appetite for the things of God improve. For example, if you have the habit of first checking your email or text messages or Facebook or the news before you read Your bibles or pray, then that is the

'diet' you establish and you develop an 'appetite' to chase after those things first. But if you change your spiritual diet to spending time with God first and checking those other things afterwards, then you will notice over time your appetite to be with God first will become your new habit. God satisfies us. If you don't believe me, try it. *'Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are those who takes refuge in Him'* (Ps. 34:8)

Paul obviously understands pursuing godly qualities will not be easy. So he tells Timothy that

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Faith Requires Effort and Sacrifice **(6:12-13)**

¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession,

The word for 'fight' is more of an athletic term than military. It's the word we get for 'agonize'. Paul tells Timothy that pursuing the things of God requires effort and sacrifice. So fighting the good fight of faith means,

Exercising your faith in God's Word consistently (6:12a)

Do you we put the same amount of effort and time into spiritual exercise than we do physical exercise? Earlier in 1 Tim. 4:8

⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Physical exercise only helps for this life. It's important to stay healthy but it's not the most important exercise. The good fight is faith in Jesus. When we live surrounded by faithless people our faith is constantly being challenged. We need to work at knowing what God's Word says to stand firm against temptations to sin, hold our ground when God's truth is challenged and remain true even if persecuted – which Paul is building Timothy up for. Reading God's Word and knowing God through prayer are the best exercises we can be involved in and even better when we do it with a group of believers.

'Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession' is a reminder to Timothy that expressing your faith is something we are to do regularly. So

Express your faith to your fellow believers (v.12b)

Is probably what he's referring to about his past confession. Perhaps when he was ordained or more likely when he was baptized. He would have made a public declaration of his faith in Jesus. But Paul says continue doing that. And do it in community in the sense of keep each other accountable. Encourage each other in the faith by gathering together and talking about your faith, your trials, your doubts and your hurts. I encouraged you to write out your story a few weeks ago and I have received a few of them. I still want to hear yours because even as I read them we still struggle with discouragement and assurance. We need fellowship to constantly be encouraged in our walks with God.

And even to those who have power over us to hurt us (v.13)

Keep the good confession like Jesus who boldly stood against Pilate. How did Jesus keep the good confession?

- He declared He believed in a greater and future king and kingdom that Pilate couldn't see in spite of the fact that Pilate was a leader in the most powerful earthly kingdom at the time
- He declared He believed Jesus was the Messiah and would rule over the very kingdom that Pilate had rule in
- He declared His faith in God, in a future literal kingdom and a future literal rule of Himself knowing He would suffer horribly for believing what He stood for

That's the example Jesus left for us. That's what Paul was telling Timothy to be prepared for. By the time his second letter was written to Timothy (in about 2-3 years) Paul would be arrested for his faith and await death by beheading.

There are people in our life who are in positions of authority and use them to hurt us. Many countries in the world have the legal power to hurt Christians, but that is temporary power. And an abuse of power that they will have to answer to God for. That is why we can stand up to them, even if we are persecuted because we know they will be punished by God for it.

How long must we do endure?

Endure Until Jesus Returns **(6:14-16)**

¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Paul truly believed Jesus would return in his lifetime. And he obviously believed

Jesus' return is guaranteed (vv.14-15a)

There are two main words to use when referring to the coming of Christ. The one Paul carefully uses here is the word we get for epiphany. In Paul's day the word epiphany was used to describe the emperor's public appearance in all his regalia. Paul was encouraging all of us, the earthly kings who parade around in their crowns and robes are living on borrowed time. Jesus will show them all up. His arrival will be visible.

Rev. 1:7 Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." So shall it be! Amen.

And when He visibly returns riding on His white horse as Rev. 19 describes

He will depose all earthly Lords (v.15)

For Paul to write down 'God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,' in a document that would have been publicly read, would have been treasonous. The emperor was deemed as a god and the god of all gods. Not so, says Paul. God alone is the true and only God and His Son the true and Only King. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord.

And even though right now He is unapproachable in the sense that we can't see Him, we look forward to the day when

He will be accessible and grant us immortality (v.16)

Only God can give us eternal life by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul encourages all believers with these words that persecution will come but there is a greater future kingdom that we put our hope in and a greater loving, wonderful King whom we will serve forever under His safe and glorious rule.

To have placed your faith in Jesus gives you eternal life now; the assurance that all these promises are and will come true. Paul encourages us to take hold of it, to grab on and cling to this promise especially during trials and in the event we need to endure suffering for it. And we can endure til the end because we know Jesus will return to reign and rule and we will serve Him and enjoy Him for all eternity.

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