

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on January 28, 2018 at Victory of the Lamb on 2 Timothy 1:8-10.

Series: New Year Revolution

Today's Focus: Purpose

“You Have a Call! (Because of God’s Purpose and Grace)”

- 1. A call to believe in Jesus as your Savior**
- 2. A call to share his life-giving gospel**

A couple months ago now, Pastor Bill walked into my office and I told him, “I got a call last night.” So he sat down in the chair thinking I wanted to talk about a difficult phone conversation that I had with somebody because that’s one of the blessings of team ministry—you can talk things through, support each other and get helpful advice. Until I said, “No, it wasn’t one of those calls. It was one of those *call* calls. One of those God gives through a church where they want me to be their pastor.” And I told him about the call I received to Divine Savior Church in Doral, FL.

Now to be sure, not everyone has a call to serve in the public or representative ministry of God’s Word like this. This special kind of call comes from God through his church. But at the same time, did you know...*you* have a call from God? That’s right! Each of you has a call that you’ve received completely because of God’s purpose and grace. I want to help you see today how powerful this truth is that you have a call from God! It can alter the eternal trajectory of people’s lives, including yours!

As always here at our church we draw truth from the Bible, God’s holy Word, and the text we’re going to learn from this morning is 2 Timothy 1:8-10. As I read it the first time here, just see if you can get a sense of what your call from God is. **⁸So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**

Sounds amazing, intense...full of emotion, doesn’t it? It helps to understand the context. The words you just heard me read were penned by the Apostle Paul. 2nd Timothy is the name of the letter. It’s actually the final letter (of 13) which Paul wrote in the New Testament. It’s his farewell letter in a sense. You see he was writing these words from Rome where he was in prison for the second time because of his testimony about Jesus. But this time he knew he was not getting out. So he wasn’t resting comfortably in retirement somewhere on a Mediterranean beach. He was in danger of being thrown to the lions in the Roman Coliseum for being a Christian missionary who boldly testified about Jesus Christ no matter what the cost.

So Paul wrote this letter to Timothy—a young man who was serving as the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a church Paul had started years before. It was full of people he deeply loved and cared about. And now while Paul was a long ways away in a Roman prison, Timothy was their pastor serving them in Ephesus. Meanwhile, Paul was pretty much all alone.

You ever feel that way? Well Paul did have one friend whom he could talk to. Luke was there. Faithful Luke was a physician who wrote the gospel that bears his name as well as the book of Acts in the New Testament. Luke accompanied Paul on a number of mission trips and now, of all Paul's companions, he was the only one around when Paul really needed friends the most. Because it's not like Paul could Facetime with his dear brothers and sisters in Ephesus. He couldn't text back and forth with Timothy over there. He couldn't just stay in touch with what was going on by checking his Facebook news feed every day. To communicate he had to write and send a letter to be carried by a guy named Tychicus whom Paul trusted enough to make sure it made it all the way to Timothy in Ephesus.

So the whole tone of 2nd Timothy is different from Paul's other letters. Paul sounds like a man who is reflecting on his life—especially on what he had to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Check this out. At the end of chapter one Paul mentions in this letter that everyone close by has deserted him including Phygelus and Hermogenes. We don't know who those two men were, but that must have stung. In the middle of chapter two Paul mentions two more guys by name: Hymenaeus and Philetus, "who have wandered away from the truth" and whose false teaching was spreading "like gangrene." Ouch. It would break my heart to hear that any of you wandered away from the truth of the gospel of Jesus, or if you stopped going to church, or if you started quarreling or stirring up controversies that hindered the mission of the church. As a pastor there's nothing more I want to know than that my friends are united in faith and will get to share heaven with me! Then in chapter four Paul mentions a dude named Demas who deserted him "because he loved the world." You ever lose a close friend or family member because that person was lured away by their love of the world? So painful. Finally, Paul tells Timothy to be on guard against a guy named Alexander the metalworker who did him a great deal of harm while in Ephesus. Super tough situations. So taking that all in...let me ask you...do you get the sense that being a Christian is an easy thing or a difficult thing?

It sounds like a difficult thing, doesn't it!? Have you ever been deserted by friends? Have you ever been tempted to feel discouraged because of the world you live in? Have you ever been tempted to doubt whether or not it's all worth it? Yet here's the encouragement that Paul tells Timothy and what he's also telling us: **⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.**

Now on the one hand maybe this doesn't start out sounding so encouraging, right? "Join with me in suffering" doesn't sound like the slogan of any successful American business that I've ever heard. It doesn't sound like some of the pop culture versions of Christianity that you might read in the latest devotional bestseller. It may not be the message that you came to church to hear. But notice carefully that Paul says this isn't just a call to suffer for no purpose or no good, but **"for the gospel, by the power of God."**

Friends, the first thing God to know about the call you've received is that God has called you by the power of the gospel to believe in Jesus as your Savior. Did you know that you need one—a Savior that is? Someone to rescue you from the consequences of your sins, to raise you up from the grave, and to keep you from going headstrong to hell.

You know the story of how God called the apostle Paul to faith? Paul was known as Saul at that time. And Saul was as far from being a Christian as there could be. Some of you might not think you're the kind of

person God would want in church or you know someone who thinks they couldn't ever become a Christian because of what they've done. Well Saul was actually the ringleader of the first major persecution movement aimed at eliminating Christianity before it could even really get started. Saul was the foremost persecutor of Christians until one day the risen Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision and changed the trajectory of his life. And you know what really changed for Saul that day when he met Jesus? His eternal destiny! And all because of God's purpose and grace. I mean did Saul do anything to deserve a second chance? Did he do anything worthy of earning the comfort of God's love and a clear conscience? No. Not by a long shot. What he deserved was for Jesus to strike him down and for God to cast his soul away forever. What he received instead was grace—the undeserved love of a Savior who came to rescue sinners like all of us who could never earn God's forgiveness on our own.

Paul wrote to Timothy previously about this amazing, undeserved love of God that he experienced: ¹⁴**The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.** ¹⁵**Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.** ¹⁶**But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life** (1 Timothy 1:14-16).

Friends, you too have a call—a call to believe in Christ Jesus as your Savior. And it's a call completely because of God's purpose and grace! For me I received this call when I was baptized as an infant and the Holy Spirit planted the seed of faith in my heart. As I grew the Holy Spirit nourished and grew this faith as my parents took me to church and taught me the stories of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And so through God's Word the Holy Spirit continued to increase my faith organically over time which is how God promises to work. Through my confirmation instruction I was further strengthened in the saving truths of the gospel leading up to a vow that I took that I would rather suffer death than ever deny my dear Lord Jesus Christ who sacrificed his very life for me. So what can I say? Can I take credit for the many ways in which God has worked in my life so that I would have opportunities to know my Savior? Of course not! I have been called to believe in Christ Jesus as my Savior and all because of God's purpose and grace!

Well you know what, friends? So have you! You have a call—a call to believe in Christ Jesus as your Savior! No matter who you are or what family you're from. Doesn't matter if you didn't grow up in a home like mine. It doesn't matter what you've done or haven't done with your life up to this point. Each of you has a call from God—a call to believe in Christ Jesus as your Savior for the forgiveness of your sins and it's a call based on God's purpose and grace. ⁹**He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,** ¹⁰**but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**

Just think what this all means. Before you had ever done anything good or bad...before you ever came to church...God loved you. Before you spoke a word...God was singing over you. Before the beginning of time...God already had a plan to save you knowing full well how little you would deserve it. And now throughout the course of your entire life he has been at work so that he could call you through the gospel to believe in Christ Jesus as your Savior. You want to talk about purpose? Well God has always had one big

purpose in your life and that's for you to learn how much he loves you! For you to learn the joyful certainty of the victory that his own Son, Jesus won for you so that you can spend eternity with him. Friends, you have a call from God—to believe in Christ Jesus as your Savior! This is a holy calling because of God's own purpose and his amazing grace.

So how will you respond to it? This is why Paul invites us to join him in suffering “for the gospel, by the power of God.” Because even if you or I have to suffer temporarily, we know that Jesus gives us immortality. You know what immortality is? The word in Greek literally means “impervious to corruption” or “not subject to decay.” It means those who believe in Jesus Christ will live forever. For believers, physical death is simply a transition to the eternal life we were always meant to have.

This is why we don't just have a call to believe in Christ Jesus as our Savior. We have a call to share the life-giving gospel message of his victory with a world that's dying all around us. That means living for others, as Christ lived for us, in such a way that we can influence them for Christ and proclaim what He has done. Friends, wherever you go and whatever you do...how can you live your life in such a way that others would be influenced to know the life-giving gospel of Jesus through you?



This week something horribly, terribly wrong happened within the church family of one of my friends. {pic} 19 year-old Karson Whitsell, a member at Illumine Church in South Carolina, was shot and murdered while at work in the middle of the day. There is no way to make sense of this other than it reminds us that we live in a world where sin is very much real. As her pastor Kent Reeder said, “Only the power and victory of the resurrection Christ won for Karson can counteract this evil. Karson is home, with her Savior. Despite all the bad, this is a good thing.” Now to me what was also amazing

was the statement that her boss shared with the media. He said...

“Karson was an extraordinary young woman who worked for us at the Peach Stand as a cashier since 2016. She was an emerging leader, always happy to help, and we counted on her to fill in occasionally for managers. Karson cared about her coworkers and our customers, and at 19, had already begun doing church mission work to help people she had never met but were in need...Our prayers are with her family and everyone affected by this tragedy.”

My prayers too are with Karson's family and everyone affected by this tragedy. At the same time what a testimony of Karson's faith that her boss at work, her coworkers and customers recognized the she lived her life in such a way as to help others, to show her Savior's love, and to help share the life-giving gospel message of Christ's victory—the victory she is now enjoying at her Savior's side. She worked as a cashier at a place called The Peach Stand but at the same time realized God had a gospel sized purpose for her life. Over 100,000 people watched the candlelight vigil led by her pastor where he got to share the life-giving gospel that Karson believed and lived out. Through that message our gracious Lord was calling out to everyone to believe in Jesus, to be saved and become immortal like Karson.

Friends, you also have a call from the Lord. A call to believe in Christ Jesus as your Savior and a call to share the life-giving gospel until he calls you home. And all because of his divine purpose and grace. Amen!