

FULL SERVICE

1 TIMOTHY 3:1 MAY 30, 2018

Join me, please, and make your way over to First Timothy, chapter 3. Last week we started a series we're calling Faithful Sayings. They're a list of 5 important truths that the Apostle Paul shared at the end of his life and ministry. We'll see that each time he says, "This is a faithful saying," or, perhaps your translation uses the word "trustworthy". These are not just *good* principles, they are the kinds of truths that we can rely upon. We can hang the weight of our lives on them, like a mountain climber securing himself with a carabiner.

We saw last time that Paul started his list of faithful sayings with the very best news of all: That Christ came to save sinners. It's fitting, then, that the *2nd* saying on the list has to do with a person's *response* to this saving God - how it starts first in the heart but then makes it way out through the hands in real, recognizable action.

What do you want to be when you grow up? I'm sure all of us have, at some point, been asked or *have* asked this question. And, I'm sure we've all heard or given some comical answers. Generally speaking, research shows that in elementary school, kids respond in ways that are a bit more fantasy than reality, in that the statistical probability of their becoming what they say they want to become is really, really low. 'Astronaut' and 'professional athlete' are on those lists. But, your odds of becoming one or the other are around .001% and .0003% respectively.¹ By middle school, the answers to "what do you want to be when you grow up?" start becoming a bit more realistic, albeit less glamorous. At this point, more kids choose "scientist," for example. By high school, 'astronaut' is gone from the list, 'pro-athlete' hangs on, but it's at the bottom. In their places are answers that are generally more practical, realistic and attainable.

What do you want to be in God's household? I think that's a question Paul would like for us to think about today. Just like we would expect every little child to have an answer to "what do you want to be when you grow up?", even if the answer is fanciful or statistically improbable, we expect they'll have something in mind. All the more we *Christians* who understand what God has done for us should have an answer for the spiritual question: What do you want to be in God's household? What kind of work do you want to do for your King? Paul assumed that *all* of us would be regularly serving God in some capacity. That we would be active members in the Body of Christ. He said in Romans 12 that it is our *reasonable service* to come and present our whole lives to God as an offering to His glory.

In First Timothy 3 verse 1, Paul gives instruction and insight into what it means to serve God and how it should be done. Now, when we read this passage, you might find yourself thinking, "Well, Paul is really just talking about a particular office in the Church. He's talking about a specific job - that of a pastor." And it's true. The immediate context is Paul's instruction for appointing elders to oversee local churches. This is, after all, a pastoral epistle. And, admittedly, most of the people in the room tonight are not going to occupy that office. For one thing, the New Testament restricts it to men. And then it's restricted a bit tighter than that. By the way, those who are pastors are also given unique *warnings* by God that need to be taken very seriously.

But if anyone comes to this passage and finds themselves thinking, "Well, I'm not going to be a pastor, so there's nothing here for me," Paul would encourage them to pull back on that thought. Because even if we're not all meant to be pastors, every *one* of us is called to be a servant in the

¹ <https://www.trade-schools.net/learn/childhood-aspirations.asp>

Lord's household. Every one of us is called to be an active member of Christ's Body. We are *all* priests on this earth, consecrated for the Lord's purposes. So, when Paul gives us trustworthy principles for servants and service, they benefit all of us. Tonight, the principles come to us in 3 parts: Our love's condition, our life's qualification and our Lord's calling.

So, let's look at our text, 1 Timothy 3:1, and first consider our love's condition.

1 Timothy 3:1 - This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

A little clarification will help us out here at the outset. I'm reading out of the New King James version, which uses that word 'bishop.' If you have an ESV or NIV, you'll see it as "overseer". New Living renders it simply as "church leader." Now, when I hear the word 'bishop' I think of how the term is most often used *today*. It's someone with a higher level of authority over multiple congregations. I think of big pointy hats and *regional* leadership. But that's not what the New Testament has in mind when it uses this term. Paul is talking about a man desiring the position of what we would call an elder or pastor (those terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament). It was a position of leadership, but it was never meant to be one where they lorded over people. In fact, the Bible condemns that kind of activity. Rather, the office of bishop is one of service and care. Paul hints at this in his use of the word "work" there at the end of the verse. It's a *good* work, but it is a task to be carried out for the Lord. And we are to assume that the man seeking this position of service is doing so out of holy motives, not out of selfish ambition. Earlier in the letter, Paul denounced those who sought to lord over others and take advantage of people through their position of leadership.

Now, Paul says that to desire to do this *good* work is a *good* thing. And before he discusses what kinds of things this hypothetical man *does*, he describes what kind of man he *is*. What's his heart? What is the condition of his love for the Lord? In other words, *before* the technical, Paul gives us the personal. Before he starts listing out what sort of man is *eligible* for the job, he describes what sort of man he will be inwardly and he does so by saying he'll be a man who *desires* to do this work. It's not a matter of obligation or a matter of selfish ambition, it's the a matter of *personal* devotion to the Lord.

This sort of principle is *certainly* not limited to a single position in the Church. This is the starting point for any service to Jesus Christ. Paul's order here of first describing the inward desire and *then* giving the qualifications is a reminder that, when it comes to spiritual things, God always wants the heart before the hand. He's not looking for labor without love. Jesus is on record as saying, "If your hearts are far from Me, don't bother with the lip service. Don't bother with the rituals or the busy work. I want your *heart*." That's what He's after. Because, as Proverbs explains, everything we do flows from our hearts.

Now, when we read the verse we just see the word "desires" twice, but Paul actually uses 2 different terms to describe what he means. One of the words he uses means an intense, emotional longing for something and the *other* word he uses means not just to *aspire* to something, but to exert much energy to try to get it. To *yearn* for something and to *stretch* out your hand to try to get hold of it. Paul is describing a person who is not only *wanting* but also actively *pursuing*. Someone who is passionate about serving God and doesn't just daydream about it, but looks for ways to actively be involved in service to the Lord.

Paul's description here begs the question: Do I *want* to serve the Lord? What's the condition of my love for Jesus? You know, it's possible for us to be somewhat unresponsive to the Lord. We recognize what He's done, we're happy about it, but sometimes the response sort of stalls there. Remember what happened when Jesus healed the 10 lepers there in Luke 17: All 10 were cleansed, given new life, saved by God's compassionate grace, but only *one* came back to give thanks to the Lord and honor Him. "Where are the 9?" Jesus asked. "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God?"

We want to have *responsive* hearts. How should we respond? Well, with thanks to be sure, but also with the kind of *desire* that Paul is describing in this verse. An *active* desire that seeks for opportunities.

Richard Branson, the famous billionaire entrepreneur, was once talking about the many things he did to promote his company as a young man. He said, "*if you go back to when I was 15, 16, I didn't have any money and...if you're going to take on British Airways, or you're going to take on the big record companies, I had to use myself to promote what I believed in. I didn't have the money to market it. So in order to get on the front pages rather than the back pages of the newspapers, I would do anything I could to get...on the map, even if it meant jumping in boats or balloons, and trying to break world records, etcetera.*"²

In his (worldly) example, passion was met with pursuit. So, after we ask ourselves the question: Do I *want* to serve the Lord?, the companion question is: Am I *trying* to serve the Lord? We understand the difference. Most of us, at one time or another, have thought to ourselves, "I want to lose some weight." Ok. The natural follow up then is: Are we exercising? Are we watching what we eat? Are we making any effort at all? If the answer to all of those is "no," then we have to conclude we don't *really* want to lose weight all that badly, right?

So, we've checked our hearts. "Ok, Lord, I *want* to serve You. Now what?" Well, after discussing our love's condition, we can think about our life's qualifications. Just *wanting* it wasn't all that was required for a man to become a bishop in the Church. And that carries through to other service in God's house as well. After the proper heart is described, Paul starts listing real, observable qualifications.

For a man to be considered *eligible* for the position of bishop, certain things needed to be true about how he lived. And this principle of real life examination wasn't just for elders. The Apostle immediately goes on to do the same thing for deacons in the Church. In other epistles we are given instruction on how we are to live if we want to be proper husbands or wives or parents or employees. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus describes the kind of life a Christian will lead. This idea is by no means limited to one office in the Church. The *specifics* of the list may be unique to bishops, but, on a greater level, we're *all* commanded to walk worthy of our calling.

So, if we say it simply: it's *great* when a person wants to serve the Lord and be used for His glory, but, in the mean time, are they living out the Christian life? Are they *obeying* what God has commanded through the Scripture?"

For me, Moses is always a good object lesson at this point. He's there, out in the desert. Gets called by God and finally gets his heart in proper position, he's going toward Egypt to become the deliverer, but he's in violation of the covenant God had made with Abraham: Gershom, Moses' son, wasn't

² <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/richard-branson/>

circumcised. And the Lord shows up and says, “Hey, we can’t have this. I’m not just going to let this slide. I’m going to *kill* your son.” And luckily Zipporah intervenes. But one of the things we learn from that incident that as important as our calling is or as significant as our service to God can be, it isn’t *more* important than our personal obedience to our King.

So, in thinking through this faithful saying, the first thing is our love’s condition. The second is our life’s qualification and the third is our Lord’s calling.

God has a *lot* of different jobs for His people to do. Some of those jobs *seem* more mundane or more exciting, but in God’s eyes, they’re all valuable. The widow’s mites are valuable and Zaccheus’ large retributions are valuable. God is not a respecter of persons. He doesn’t love the servant who He gave 5 talents *more* than the one to whom He gave 2 talents. And, on top of that, the New Testament shows that being *eligible* to be a bishop, for example, in the Church does not guarantee *entry* into the position. It’s the Lord’s will making these determinations, not ours. When Paul planted churches, he didn’t have a meeting and say, “Ok, who wants to do what? Everybody do whatever you think you should do.” Rather, elders were *appointed* by either him or other Spirit-led leaders in the Church. Paul himself said, “I was *appointed* a preacher and an apostle.” He didn’t make the decision himself. He had the desire to serve, he was qualified to do it, and then he was *called* by God and that calling was *recognized* by the believers around him.

Sometimes the position we want for ourselves is not the one God has called us to. And, you know what, we want to defer to Him, rather than try to go our own way. The Bible is, obviously, full of examples of this principle. But it’s even common sense. We’re not even very good in figuring out what *earthly* vocation to pick. In that same study I referenced at the beginning it points out that about 80% of people *do not* end up becoming what they thought they wanted to become when they were kids. And we know why: Because as kids we don’t have all the information. And that is true to a much greater degree in the spiritual realm. God is the one with all the information and the perfect, infinite wisdom. And it’s *His* Kingdom we’re talking about, so it’s the *Lord’s calling* we should devote ourselves to. Because sometimes the people we think would be *perfect* for a particular task or ministry or position is not the person God wants at all. This happened in the life of Paul a few times. For one thing, if we had been making the decision, Paul would have been the Apostle to the Jews, not the Gentiles. He was the foremost expert on Judaism in the church. He was a genius. He had the pedigree. What does God do? He sends him to the Gentiles!

Even then, there were times when Paul thought he had a good route picked out. “Let’s go to Asia!” The Holy Spirit said, “No. That’s not what I want. I have a different calling for you.” And Paul submitted to that.

Ken Mattingly was an astronaut in the 60s. He was selected and trained to be the Command Module Pilot on the Apollo 13 mission. He was a great pilot, logged thousands of hours flying, had a degree in aeronautical engineering. The guy is a walking homerun. Three days prior to Apollo 13’s launch, he was removed from the mission due to exposure to German measles. He was replaced by a backup pilot.³ This event is dramatized in the 1995 movie. It was a huge disappointment for a man who, from everyone’s assessment, was *the right man* for the command module pilot job. He never even contracted the measles! But, when the mission went terribly wrong, Ken Mattingly was involved in helping the crew solve the problem of power conservation during re-entry.⁴ By not being in the driver’s seat, he helped save the lives of 3 of his fellow astronauts.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Mattingly#Apollo_13

⁴ *ibid.*

It reminds me of the man Jesus healed in Luke 8. Jesus cast a legion of demons out of him and we're told the man *begged* Jesus that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you." The guy was thinking, "I want to be a disciple! I want to go down this road with you!" But the Lord had a different calling. And Mark tells us that the man went on a 10 city evangelistic crusade and everyone who heard him marveled.

Maybe the Lord wants you in a prominent position of leadership in His Body, maybe He doesn't. That's His business. What's more important is that *all* service to the Lord is great in His eyes. Even the giving of a cup of cold water. If I'm not *satisfied* with the calling I've been given, well that reveals something about *me*, not about my Lord. It exposes what I'm *really* reaching for. In that case, I'm not reaching out in worshipful response to my Savior, I'm reaching out to take some glory for myself.

But here is the faithful truth from God's word: There is a place for every single Christian in the work of God and the Body of Christ. A *meaningful* place. An *active* place. To desire that place is to desire something good. Paul elsewhere encourages us to earnestly desire the best spiritual gifts so that we might be used for God's glory. As we live out our Christianity, the Apostle would have us consider our love's condition. Are we stirring up a passionate pursuit to serve the Lord? Do we *want* to work in His Kingdom? And then, are we living lives that are qualified? Are we walking worthy so that we're in position to be used when God wants to use us? And third, are we in line with our Lord's calling? Do we trust Him to make the best use of us, even if that use is different than the one we imagined?

God can use *any* of us. He wants to use *all* of us. Let's stir up our desire, stir up our gifts and be set loose to glorify Him in whatever ways He sees fit.