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Wise for Salvation
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2 Timothy 3:14-17

Have you ever thought about your last conversation with someone you really cared for?

I know I have. That is the kind of conversation you want to go well. You will remember it for a very long time.

Paul's second letter to Timothy is in some ways his final written correspondence to his true son in the faith. The Apostle Paul had not had the easiest path to faith. It was filled with good intentions, detours, twists, turns, sprinkle in some persecution, being shipwrecked, rubbing elbows with dignitaries, even being bitten by a highly poisonous snake on the island of Malta and surviving (*Acts 28*). Not exactly your run of the mill believer's resume. But he stayed with it, no matter the difficulties he faced.

Now Paul had his legacy to consider. What kinds of lessons might he want his faithful friend and fellow preacher to remember most? What inspiring words could he impart for those times when that sermon just wasn't coming along? What would Paul want Timothy to remember as he served and suffered for Jesus throughout the rest of his life?

If you are like Paul, you have had someone in your life who brought you to faith, cultivated, watered, and pruned your faith, and helped you walk a little more closely with Jesus. For Paul, that person was Barnabus. Wouldn't it be amazing if we all had a Barnabus (*Acts 4:36*), someone who always saw the good in us no matter what, even and especially when everyone else counted us down and out? It was Barnabus who first encouraged Paul in his fledgling Christian faith (*Acts 9:26*). Paul knew what it meant to grow up in the Jewish faith and then meet Jesus, so he had a particularly close connection with his own protégé, Timothy. Just as Barnabus had encouraged and called forth the best from Paul, now Paul could do the same for Timothy.

Let's dive in where we left off in *2 Timothy 3, verses 14 through 17* to see how Paul encourages Timothy in his faith.

But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (New Living Translation)

I think it is so fascinating that Paul, who knows better than anyone that works do not lead to salvation, tells Timothy about the importance of knowing the Scriptures that make him wise for salvation. Paul also knows that having special knowledge doesn't save a person as many of his letters reflect his refutation of the truth of the Gospel in the face of Gnosticism, which taught that people need access to a secret, hidden knowledge in order to be saved. This was apparently a popular teaching in Paul's lifetime as Christianity began to take shape. Let's explore the thought of works and salvation a little further as Paul would have understood them.

In the Jewish Wisdom Literature books, which we studied in the Hebrew Bible in our Journey through the Bible, the lesson is taught time and time again that wisdom is more than intelligence; it is knowing what the right thing to do is, and then doing it. That may sound simple, but how often do we know what we should be doing, but don't really want to do it? or we do what we think is the right thing to do without really understanding the motivating 'why'? The wisdom literature, such as Proverbs, would have been familiar to both Paul and Timothy, and so Paul encouraged Timothy with respect to its teaching. "You know the Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation." Paul didn't mean that a person's knowledge of the Scriptures can save them; rather, as those scriptures taught, he knew that salvation needed to be lived out as much as anything. Only God provides ultimate salvation, and as we learn God's ways, we act and live in accordance with this salvation. Because God has forgiven us, we can forgive others. Because God first loved us, we are free to love fully. Because God brought about our deliverance and salvation, we can be attuned to becoming instruments of God's divine deliverance and salvation in the lives of others. How wonderful to know!

Being wise for salvation:

1. begins with belief. We must believe that God exists, as we will read in Hebrews. That's the beginning of our relationship.
2. grows in the midst of a community of faith. As we come into contact with others who share our life experiences, our belief, our call, and our faith, we are strengthened in our growing faith.
3. comes from a foundation of knowing God's word, of both comprehending and storing within our heart God's word. We understand the spirit of the scripture even more deeply than the words themselves.
4. means understanding that we are saved not by good works, but for good works. God has much good work for us to do in the world, and part of our being redeemed is participating in the redemptive work God is doing.
5. And lastly, being wise for salvation means receiving God's grace as a free gift expressed in Jesus Christ. Only when we accept this grace unconditionally can we allow it to change us and give us a heavenly perspective.

Paul gives Timothy an incredible parting gift. Whether or not they are ever able to see each other again, Paul is able to communicate without a shadow of a doubt the depth of his love for Timothy, his gratitude for their relationship, and even impart encouragement for Timothy's personality that is sometimes prone to fear and uncertainty. Would that we all had such a friend in Jesus, who knew our

weaknesses and chose to see the best, who called forth the character that they knew lived in us by God's grace, and who could clearly convey the depth of the importance of our shared faith. Paul knew Timothy would need encouragement, just as Barnabus saw that Paul needed encouragement and support. *I wonder, which are you: a Paul, or a Timothy; a Barnabus, or a Paul; an Aquila or a Lydia; an Elizabeth or a Mary?*

Whichever you are, I pray that you, too, may live wise in the knowledge of your salvation, that it will produce good works that others can see and glorify God in heaven, and that you may fully grasp the depths to which God loves you and delights in having a relationship with you. Perhaps if he had heard them, Timothy could relate to the words of this beloved hymn of faith.

"I Know Whom I Have Believed"

I know not why God's wondrous grace
To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.

I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through the Word,
Creating faith in Him.

Refrain:

But "I know Whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day."

I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,
Of weary ways or golden days,
Before His face I see.

I know not how this saving faith
To me He did impart,
Nor how believing in His Word
Wrought peace within my heart.

I know not when my Lord may come,
At night or noontide fair,
Nor if I walk the vale with Him,
Or meet Him in the air.

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Prayer:

Loving God, thank you for the gift of your salvation. Thank you for bearing with us, always seeing the best. We praise for your calling us out, diamonds in the rough, by your mighty hand. Amen.

Celebration in Song: "Diamonds in the Rough" sung by Marvin Dolinger

While walking out one evening not knowing where to go
Just to pass the time away before we held our show
I heard the Bethel mission's band singing with all their might
I gave my heart to Jesus and left the show that night

While reading through the Bible some wondrous sights I see
I read of Peter, James, and John by the Sea of Galilee

And Jesus when he found them he bound them very tough
And they were precious diamonds he gathered in the rough

(Refrain) The day will soon be over and digging will be done
And no more gems be gathered so let us all press on
When Jesus comes to claim us and says it is enough
The diamonds will be shining no longer in the rough

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is the first scripture you memorized?
2. Think about your favorite passage in the Bible. What makes it so special for you?
3. How do you spend time in God's word during the week? Are there ways you can engage God's word in new, creative ways this week?
4. How does the Hebrew Wisdom Literature define wisdom? How does this definition resonate with you?
5. Where do you go for renewal and restoration? Have you been there lately?
6. Just as Paul was a mentor for Timothy, so Timothy continued the work of ministry, sharing God's love and the good news of Jesus Christ. With whom can you share God's word or be an encouragement today?