

## **“The Gift of God” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 17 October 2, 2022**

- I. **2 Timothy 1:5-6** – “<sup>5</sup> I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. <sup>6</sup> For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.”
- II. **The University of North Carolina** got a new basketball coach last year.
  - a. His name is Hubert Davis... a UNC alum and former NBA player.
  - b. Coach Davis made it all the way to the Final Four in his first year, and I am really impressed by his willingness to talk about his faith in Jesus...
    - i. When asked about it he said, “[Faith is] the most important thing to me. My faith and foundation is firmly in my relationship with Jesus. It just is. And my mother was a Christian and she begged me to go to church growing up. And I didn’t want to go. I wasn’t interested in it. My mom used to always say that Jesus had a plan for me, plans for hope and a future, plans not to harm you, plans to prosper you — Jeremiah 29:11. And at the time growing up, I didn’t understand it and I didn’t listen to it.”
    - ii. Davis said he came to hate God after his mother passed away from throat cancer when he was just 16.
      - 1. That anger at God continued into his first two years playing at North Carolina (UNC)... because he couldn’t reconcile what his mom had told him with the pain of losing her.
    - iii. He then said, “One of the things that [my coach at UNC] used to do was make all the freshmen go to church. And as I went to church... I started to understand what my mom was talking about... I started to understand the sacrifice that Jesus made for me and how much He loves me, and two days before my junior year of college, I became a Christian. Instead of being upset that Jesus has taken away the most beautiful person in my life in my mom, I’m thankful every day that He gave me the best that I could ever have for 16 years.... My faith in Christ is the foundation of who I am.” <sup>1</sup>
  - c. I’m not a big college hoops fan, but this story really connected to me because Coach Davis and I are the same age, graduated the same year from high school – and we both lost our moms at 16.
    - i. Although I was never mad at God – I was hurting so bad emotionally that I rebelled against anything good and right for me.
    - ii. I spent several years spiraling into alcohol, drugs, and running from God... and honestly, I didn’t care if I died or not.
    - iii. Yet, somewhere deep inside me was a faith that was given to me by the Holy Spirit long ago in my Baptism... and in the worst of times, God put people in my life who would help me climb out of the pit.

- iv. I also look at the gift of my mom like Coach Davis – God gave me a gift for 16 years and she was instrumental in passing on the faith to me.
- d. Although people can be a great gift in our lives, the most important gift of God is our faith.

III. **St. Paul writes an encouraging letter to the pastor, Timothy.**

- a. Yes, these words are written for a young pastor, and is a part of what we call the “Pastoral Epistles” – or the letters to Timothy and Titus.
- b. In the typical style of Paul, he greets Timothy with encouragement, reminding him how much he misses him and prays for him constantly.
- c. He even brings up Lois, Timothy’s grandmother, and Eunice his mother... as the faith was passed down from them.
  - i. I often say that without parents and grandparents being a part of the faith life of the children, it is very unlikely the children will come to know Jesus.
  - ii. When you think about all the people it took... passing the faith down from person to person by the power of the Holy Spirit for you to be sitting in the pews worshiping Jesus today – it’s amazing...
- d. You see, I don’t think that Timothy’s mother, Eunice just took Timothy to be baptized and then let him figure out everything else on his own.
  - i. No, she understood Matthew 28:19-20 – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”
  - ii. Baptism is one part, and teaching is the other!
- e. Paul then writes a beautiful picture of the Gospel and the reason he suffers so much for God.
  - i. He says, “Never be ashamed to tell others about Jesus our Lord. And even though I’m in jail, don’t be ashamed about me either. God will give you all the strength you need to suffer for the Good News about Jesus. In fact, God saved us and called us to live a holy life – not because we somehow deserved it, but because He loves us from the beginning of time... and just how much He wanted to show us grace through the work of Jesus. Jesus... the one who came to break the power of death and light the way of life... and even life forever.” (2 Timothy 1:8-10)
  - ii. Our translation says we should never be ashamed of the testimony – which is another way of saying, “don’t be ashamed of the teaching”
  - iii. What we have learned in the Scriptures and life in Christ is far more valuable than any earthly treasure – it’s spiritual gold.
  - iv. Nothing in the world should overcome us with fear or shame so that we don’t pass along the teaching we know... the relationship we have with our Savior Jesus Christ.

- f. As parents, grandparents, and just the people of God, we pass along the gift of God – faith in His promises through the work of His Son.

IV. **I suppose there are many gifts of God, but it all points to Jesus.**

- a. It was His willingness to break into our dark and sinful world that gave us a chance at forgiveness.
- b. It was His suffering and death on the cross that won the great victory over satan, death, and sin...
- c. It was His resurrection that applied that victory won on the cross to us.
  - i. In other words, the victory Jesus won was given to us by grace through faith.
- d. So, as we think about the wonderful gift of God (our faith in Jesus Christ) – it is all by His work, His grace, and His forgiveness.
  - i. “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory [over sin and death] through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)
- e. And wouldn’t you know, one of the first places God comes to so many people in this world is the baptismal font.
  - i. We will experience (or experienced) Benji’s Baptism today – and that is a perfect example of parents and grandparents bringing their children to the Lord for His gifts...
  - ii. In that Baptism, God works through the water and the Word to call Benji His child and to entrust the good gift of faith.
  - iii. Now... that gift of God can be fanned into flame as they continue to teach and raise Benji up in the faith.
  - iv. Baptism leads to a life of faith that can weather the storms and challenges of the world, as Paul says in verse 12, “[We are] convinced that God is able to guard what has been entrusted to [us].”

V. **Passing on God’s gift of faith and telling about Jesus is our calling.**

- a. He gave us the gift, and we pass it on, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to work faith and fan it into flame.
- b. Thank God for people like my mom (and my dad too), who were willing to get me to the baptismal font, give me the Holy Bible, take me to church on a regular basis, and help me know the testimony – the teaching of God.
- c. No doubt, without that foundation, my life would be very different today – and I would venture to say your lives would be very different too.
- d. We all owe someone a debt of gratitude for loving us enough to be a witness to Jesus in our lives....
  - i. But no greater debt of gratitude than to God Himself – the one gave us His good gift of faith... Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Mercer, “First-year UNC coach Hubert Davis reaches 20 wins with Christ as ‘foundation of who I am,’” *Sports Spectrum* (2-23-22)