

The Compass

Week 43

OT Readings: Jeremiah 39:1-52:34
NT Readings: 2 Timothy 1:1 – Titus 3:15

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Jeremiah chapters 39-45 narrate the final days of Judah, the capture and destruction of Jerusalem and the events that follow. Chapters 46-51 are oracles concerning other nations; chapter 52 an epilogue that includes events of the exile itself.
- Notice how even after the city falls God still is at work to show mercy and give aid to the survivors (chapter 42), yet the people remain hardened against God and refuse His overtures.

New Testament

- Around the time Paul writes 1 Timothy, he writes to his co-worker Titus whom Paul has assigned to the difficult situation in Crete. He urges Titus to “complete our work there.”
- Paul writes 2 Timothy from what we believe is his final Roman imprisonment leading up to his death.¹ Paul’s concerns both for Timothy and the gospel come through in this Paul’s final letter.

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Jer. 39:15-18. Jeremiah is big-picture stuff, filled with significant historical moments and events. Judah unravels before our eyes; the Babylonian presence encircles the city with death as they besiege the city. Events accelerate toward their tragic conclusion; the city falls, everything changes.

Change in life can come incrementally or suddenly. Judah’s experience in these last days is what we call “discontinuous” change – radical, disruptive, traumatic, crisis. Their world is falling down around them. Yet, God sees, He hears, even under *these* kinds of circumstances.

In the midst of these intense and critical last days of Judah, God is so concerned for one person who trusts Him that He gives Jeremiah a word for that *one*. Surely there are bigger things to be concerned about!?! Not for God! And Ebed-melech is not even a Jew. Yet because he trusts God, God is concerned to assure him – I have you, I will care for you, I will deliver you – don’t be afraid.

When the world is collapsing around us, God will speak to us – He sees and knows and cares! He has not lost track of us in the midst of any confusion and difficulty that might surround us. No matter our situation, He still is in the “hair counting” business and we can trust Him.²

Application: “What about me? How does this apply?”

2 Timothy 1:6-7. It might be easy to pass over this verse because of its familiarity and miss the point. Try out this translation:

“That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess through the laying on of my hands. God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power and love and self-control.” (New Jerusalem Bible)³

This translation puts the Spirit front and center, rightfully so. The “gift” is a reference to the Holy Spirit Himself.⁴ It is the Spirit that gives us power, love and self-control (or self-discipline). It is the Spirit’s presence in our lives, His leadership, that enables us to live fully and completely for God in the way God intends. Paul reminds Timothy of that initial moment when Timothy was “filled” or received the Spirit’s life and power, which in Timothy’s case came through the laying on of Paul’s hands.⁵

Perhaps the interesting idea here is that we can and should “fan the Spirit into a flame” in our lives. The implication is that somehow the flame of His power and presence can die down. Surely this is not God’s intent - Paul says we are to be “continually boiling, seething in the Spirit” (Rom. 12:11)!⁶ How can we fan this flame? While Paul doesn’t give us specifics, clearly it is something *we* are to do: “*you* fan into a flame.” Fundamentally, it is about our relationship with Him. Two quick thoughts: 1. Is there anything that dampens or hinders His power, love and self-control in your life that needs to be removed? Are you quenching His fire in your life through neglect? Disobedience? 2. Are you staying focused on Him so that *He* is your passion, your heart’s desire? Are you responding to His voice, His overtures of love, *His* passion for you?

Difficult Question of the Week

2 Timothy 3:1. Q. “What does Paul mean about the ‘last days’?”

Over the last century or so, American Evangelicals have shown a great deal of interest in the subject of the “last days.” Typically this has been a concern to find in current events the fulfillment of prophecy that show how God’s “end time events” are now being played out. We may be surprised to discover that the NT understands “last days” quite differently than many of the popular ideas within the American church.

Jewish thought in the first century AD saw history in “eschatological” terms. They lived in the “old age” that would pass away into the “new age” with the coming of God’s kingdom and His Messiah. Jesus redefined this schema by introducing a “revised” understanding of the kingdom. The kingdom was *present* in Him as He established it with the intention that His followers would continue His kingdom work. However, the *consummation* or conclusion of His kingdom would only come when He returned again. Theologians have to come call this understanding of the kingdom “the already and the not yet”.⁷

What does this have to do with the “last days?” Simply this: NT believers saw themselves living in the new age which had begun with Jesus, yet they recognized that they still lived in the old age; there was an overlap, they lived “between the times.” In effect, the old age was passing away and it was in its “last days.” They did not see the last days as some future time period, rather as now present in their time period – they were living at the end of the old age, in the final days of the old age which was passing away.⁸

The evidence within 2 Tim. 3:1 that this is true is to be found in the context. Though Paul uses future tenses (what “will” be true in the “last days”), he speaks as though these things are a present reality (3:5). The characteristics of evil he lists belong to the last time, the time “in between the ages” where the old and new overlap.⁹

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¹ Tradition has it that Paul was martyred in Rome by Emperor Nero during Nero’s infamous burning of Rome in 64AD. Jesus followers become a scapegoat for the fire and many give lose their lives at this time.

² Luke 12:7.

³ Gordon Fee translates 1:6-7: “For which reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give to us the Spirit of cowardice, but of power, love and sound-mindedness.” The Good News Bible for 1:7, “For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.” This makes good sense of the passage.

⁴ The Holy Spirit is called a gift in several places, notably Acts 2:38, “and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” See also Acts 8:19-20 and 11:15-18. F. F. Bruce, “The gift of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself...” (*The Book of Acts*, rev., NICNT, 71.)

⁵ There is no magic to the laying on of hands; there is no formula. The Spirit is a Person and all we need do is humble our hearts and invite His presence, power and love to overwhelm and take over our lives.

⁶ The NLT is very weak in Rom. 12:11, “serve the Lord enthusiastically.” We do not live our lives with “enthusiasm,” rather in the Spirit’s presence and power.

⁷ The kingdom is “already” present in the world since Jesus first coming but awaits Jesus return to bring its fulfillment, thus it is also “not yet.” The writings of George Eldon Ladd are helpful in this regard.

⁸ 1 Cor. 10:11; Acts 2:17; 1 Peter 1:20; Heb. 1:2; 1 John 2:18 and our present passage, 1 Tim. 3:1. This is what Paul means in 2 Cor. 5:17, “...the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” It is about the new creation for individuals because of the new thing God has done in history through Jesus and His kingdom.

⁹ Many readers will find this quite difficult because of how we have been taught to think about the “end times.” Consider it like this: the end times began in the first century AD and we are part of that same end times. As God works out His “new age” purposes in the world, we, like them live between the first and second comings of Jesus, awaiting His return and the full

coming of the new age of the kingdom. We live in the present time in the power of His Spirit working with Him to further His kingdom purposes.