There is great excitement in the heavens and on my mountains for what I the Lord am about to do. Many of my people have been without hope and joy and know no expectancy but have walked in darkness. The key to the light in this time of preparation and birth pangs is faith. You must believe that I am going to do what I tell you, that I am the author and finisher of the promises and even the faith words in your own spirit. Wait upon Me and see what lies ahead.

Anonymous

Celebration Service for Merger of
New Wine and Lighthouse Church

Prayer Study 393

First Love Ministries of Perry, Georgia USA

Today we celebrate one, I believe, of the most significant events that has taken place in my lifetime in Perry, Georgia. As a congregation you must remember the words of the Apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians 16:9: *For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.* These words were written by Paul to the Church at Corinth. He was, however, speaking of the Church in Ephesus.

The Apostle Paul wrote ten epistles, if you count 1st and 2nd Corinthians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, and 1st and 2nd Timothy as one book each and leave out Hebrews whose authorship has never been clearly established, although it is my personal belief that is a Pauline epistle. Seven of those epistles were to churches, and they parallel the 7 churches in Ephesians, although the list of names of each list is not identical. For example, the letter to Smyrna in Revelation parallels Paul's letter to the Philippians, where the theme in both is *joy in spite of suffering.* The other three letters were written by Paul to individuals: Timothy, his spiritual son; Titus, one of Paul's closest and most trusted companions; and Philemon, one of Paul's converts from Ephesus.

Today I want us to look briefly at Paul's letters to Timothy. Paul in the last years of his life is writing to his beloved spiritual son Timothy, a young pastor. First Timothy deals with a church that is in revival. The church is growing and thriving, and Timothy is its much-loved pastor. What an exciting time to be in ministry. In 1st Timothy Paul lays down some guidelines to keep

the growing church on the right track. He warns Timothy to be vigilant against false doctrine, to safeguard public worship, and to develop mature leaders. Timothy was a good soldier for the Lord. His very name, which was given to him by his Christian mother Eunice, means *Worshiping God* or *Honored by God* or *Valued by God.* Here was a young pastor who wisely followed the counsel of the experienced apostle. Mostly likely Paul was actually the one who led young Timothy to Christ, and he definitely ordained Timothy as a minister of the Gospel. Paul served as Timothy's spiritual father, and Timothy consistently sought Paul's instruction.

Second Timothy deals with the church under persecution. A cruel and mentally insane emperor of Rome, Nero, had come to power. Nero wanted to rebuild Rome putting his own statue everywhere. Many believe that Nero himself set Rome on fire in 67AD so that the Romans would have to rebuild Rome to Nero's specifications. To avoid blame, Nero proclaimed that it was the Christians who started the fire, and the persecution of Christians became more widespread and intense. Ephesus was the city where the Romans sent a proconsul, and since it was the major city of Asia Minor, Rome designated it as a place where Christians were to be purged and made an example to all the Christians in Asia Minor. During these difficult times, many believers died for their faith. Others defected to save their own lives.

At first Paul was imprisoned under house arrest, which permitted him to have visitors and hope of being acquitted. Eventually Paul was placed in a cold Roman jail where he was regarded as an evildoer by the government without any hope of being released. Almost all of Paul associates, except Luke, had abandoned him but others he held dear were in other places in Asia Minor, doing the work of the ministry, Timothy being in Ephesus pasturing the local church, and Paul writes this second letter to his *beloved son* urging him to come to him as soon as he can and to bring a cloak. Paul knows his life will soon be over, and he writes those beautiful words: *For I am already being poured out as drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith* (2nd Timothy 4:6-8). This book of 2nd Timothy was probably Paul's last written words.

I would urge both pastors here today to read 1st and 2nd Timothy. In the interest of time, I will not be able to cover much of these powerful epistles, but I do want to speak these words from 2nd Timothy 4:1-5 to Pastor Jarvis and Pastor Zane:

1. *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.*

   The word charge here means to earnestly command. Paul is telling us here that all of our works on earth will be judged by no other but Jesus Himself who is coming back for His Body of true believers and who will come this second time as King Jesus.

2. *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*

   The greatest advice I could give to Zane and Jarvis today is to *preach the word!* The Word of God is inerrant and Holy Spirit inspired. Men wrote as the Spirit gave them utterance. We are seeing a tremendous shift in America where the Word is no longer revered and believed. Even many church leaders are picking and choosing what they want to believe and are leaving out essential doctrinal verses of the faith. A study done in 1982 found that 82% of Methodist pastors did not believe the Word of God was inspired by the Holy Spirit; 81% of Presbyterian pastors, 89% of the Episcopalian priest, and 57% of the Lutherans also did not believe the Bible was inspired.

   The word translated here as *be ready* is also translated as *instant* and is from a Greek word which means *to stand upon*, as *to take a firm stand or a hard position.* It is a term taken from the military that means *to stay at one's post.* Jarvis and Zane's post is the pulpit of this church. The phrase *in season* in the Greek means *good, happy, pleasing or pleasurable times.* The Greek word for the phrase *"out of season"* means "*bad times*." Rick Renner translates this phrase "*Be ready in season and out of season"* this way: "*Take a firm stand and resolve to stay at your post! Regardless of whether times are good or bad, that is*

your post-your place of responsibility-so dig in, take a firm stand, and resolve that you are going to be faithful."

It is your duty as shepherds of this flock to convince others to follow Christ, rebuke or warn members of this body for sin, exhort or comfort, and do so with patience and by teaching the Word. Yet you must remember the words of Paul in Romans 2:4: *The goodness or kindness of the Lord leadeth to repentance.*

3. *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;*

   We are already seeing people running to pastors and teachers who are not teaching the full Gospel of the Word of God and who are calling good, evil, and evil, good. And today many are coming to the House of God thinking the whole service is about "ME." James T. Draper in an article from the Baptist Press in 2003 said, "People shop for churches like they shop for automobiles or groceries. People want something that fills their needs. We have missed the boat because we think Christianity is about us. It is *not* about us. It is about God and His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. He has chosen Christians to play a significant role in showing the world what His kingdom looks like. Western Christianity has retreated from the battle for the souls of people into the pursuit of personal comfort."

4. *And they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.*

   There are many fables being promoted today. The most diabolical fable is that there are other ways to go to heaven besides just Jesus.

5. *But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

   We must be watchful today as Satan, knowing his time is short, revs up

his army. It is also time to stop being wimps and sissies about our walk of faith in Jesus Christ and to win people to Jesus. I just finished up a study of the seven churches of Revelation. Two of the churches received no commendation from Jesus. In other words, they were not failing in all areas and had no good points. One was Laodicea, which I believe is our present age, and I also believe that a ministry or church becomes Laodicean when there is no longer any emphasis on evangelism.

We, at First Love Ministries, believe in the priesthood of all believers. In other word, everyone who calls himself a Christian is call to minister to others in some way. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit only enhances this call and empowers believers in their ministry efforts. However, because the enemy hates real ministry, ministers are always under the potential of an attack from the enemy. Years ago, I read the following taken from High Point Church in Macon's *Scepter* publication:

The longer I am in the ministry, the more I realize how vulnerable and how prone we are to falling, and how it is only by the grace of a faithful God that we can keep faithful and finish well. Ministry is an incredible and awesome privilege. It is also an incredible and awesome responsibility. Our trust must be in the Lord and not in ourselves if we are to be faithful to the finish line.

It is possible to finish well. I am so thankful for the example of those who keep faithful to the end. They are setting a pattern for us. Their lives preach even more powerfully than their preaching. On the other hand, I've seen many servants of the Lord, who ran the race well, become disqualified. Today they are out of His service.

We have an incredibly active enemy, Satan, who is always attempting to cause God's servants to stumble. I want to share with you what for me personally have been nine of probably the greatest potential pitfalls in my service to the Lord, although the list is not exhaustive. <u>There are recurring areas of vulnerability.</u>

Losing the Wonder

Neglecting Our Personal Relationship with the Lord

Proclaiming Truth We Are Not Living

Relying on the Natural

Leaving the Pathway of Humility

Settling for the Status Quo

Serving Without Love

Losing Perspective

Seeking Comfort and Convenience