

This morning, we, along with thousands of other churches in the Protestant tradition, are celebrating *Reformation Sunday*. It is a day we celebrate the work of Protestant reformers, such as Martin Luther, who reformed the church as they realized that the church had strayed from the Gospel and had begun abusing its power to control others. On this day, we have the story of Apostle Paul's final days from the first century.

We don't ordinarily think of the first century as a reformation of the church. However, in many respects, that was precisely what it was and with similar effects as the reformation in the 16th century. Judaism, after all, was the church of God. Israel is called the church several times in the New Testament, and the church is called Israel in the New Testament (Acts 7:38). The church is the people of God, and the Jews were, therefore, the church. In the first century, protecting Judaism from the influence of Christianity, Jesus' movement, was the mission of the church. The forerunner of this mission was Saul of Tarsus, a trained Rabbi.

Protecting Judaism was Paul's mission before his conversion, even if that meant putting Christians to death. However, encountering God personally changed his worldview, theology, understanding of God, himself, and salvation. He became a reformer of Judaism, the church, after meeting God personally, by joining Jesus' movement to recover a true understanding of the Word of God, to restore the thrill to its message of divine love and salvation by grace and begin once again to live as servants of the living God.

One of the things that we observe is that early in Paul's Ministry, Paul didn't have any disciples, which is interesting because Paul was a Rabbi. He was trained by a Rabbi. He was released by a Rabbi. Paul was a Rabbi. What's a Rabbi without disciples? He's just a guy taking a walk. Does that make sense? And so early in his life, he was all about building and building and building and building. It was all about building, making the organization awesome, and enlarging the Jesus movement. It was about making it bigger, faster, and stronger.

And then, as he aged, he realized there was something deeper that he was missing. He started to take on disciples, such as Timothy and Titus. Paul began to pour his life into them. His reformation ministry was not about the reformation of the

church or the world anymore but the reformation of the people closest to him, such as Timothy. He knew that he was going to die. He knew that he was coming close to the end. So, he writes a few more letters with the end in mind to his closest person, Timothy, which is today's text

Here is a question for us to ponder. What would we write if we knew that we were near the end of life? What would be our last words?

I came across some of the final words of famous people this week. Napoleon, right before he died, said this, "I die before my time, and my body will be given back to the Earth to become the food of worms. Such is the fate which so soon awaits the great Napoleon." It's a word of discouragement, isn't it? A word of regret? How about Gandhi, who is a world-renowned Hindu leader? Not long before he died, he said, "My days are numbered. I'm not likely to live very long, perhaps a year or a little more. For the first time in 50 years, I find myself in a slew of despond. All about me is darkness. I'm praying for light." Isn't that fascinating? Gandhi said that right before he died. He rejected Christ, and at the end of his life, he had words of regret. He died with regret.

Apostle Paul was not this way. When he reached the end of his life, he died with a note of triumph with a trumpet sound of victory. He points the way to Christians, throughout all generations, how they may live may serve Christ, and may die with no regrets. His final words sum up in one phrase, "Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2, 5).

Preach the Word in your good times and in your bad times. Be consistent in your preaching the Word until your time to be ended. Finish your mission to preach the Word. Fight the good fight and finish the race! The reformer of the church, Paul, focused on the reformation of his disciple, Timothy, at the end of his life with his final words. He emphasized that how we finish the race is way more important than how we start it because we don't get to do a "do-over." He encouraged Timothy and the church to finish strong by preaching the Word consistently.

Paul, at the end of his ministry, at the end of his life, realized that he got one shot left. And so, he said the things that mattered the most. My mom's last words before taking her last breath were, "Sunny! You are my daughter. You can do all things you want to do. So, do everything you want, and see you later in heaven!" In Korean, "써니야! 넌, 내 딸이야. 넌 뭐든지 다 할 수 있어! 그러니까, 하고 싶은 것 다하고 하늘나라에서 만나자!"

What was the last word of your beloved ones? What would be your final words to your beloved ones? What would be your legacy as you move forward? Let's spend a minute talking with the Lord about that now. *[reflection]* Thanks be to God for the blessing of the message. Amen.