

Series: 1 Timothy

Sermon: "Youngers, Olders and Veiled Glory"

Text: 1 Timothy 4 and 5:1-2

RGJR/FBCCS 8-2-25 **UNEDITED**

- Statistics can be tricky to work with. Some months ago, I had all of us who were gathered for worship write their age on a scrap of paper. Then I had Beth determine the **average** age.
- The result is on one of those scraps. I keep it here in my Bible. That's one of those things that will mystify my kids or be really special to them when they go through my stuff after I leave this world. *"Oh, look the number 52 must have been really special to dad! He has it here in his Bible along with his favorite country song lyrics, adjusted for preaching, **"God is great. Beer is good (changed to) life is good. People are crazy."***
- I don't know why I kept the answer to that survey—that statistic of an **average age of 52**—in my Bible.
- Maybe I did it because it made me wonder if you all were lying through your teeth. You look a lot older than 52.
- Maybe I kept it because I am a *hoarder*.
- But there it was and still is—that **number 52** which was the average age of those gathered to worship that Saturday.
- I thought it was surprisingly young! But then I remember that statistics *lie* or at least they can *mislead* if we read them wrong. A couple of younger families were here that day with their kids. The MacFarland boys alone were young enough to skew the average. If I would have tossed out a few of the *outliers* at either end of the sample, we would have come in with quite a bit older an age for those of us still doing church together on Saturdays as FBC.
- I don't know if you have noticed it but I'll tell you a little *secret*, *"There are a lot of **old** people around you making up those who gather on Saturday for worship and still call themselves FBC.*
- But here is another *secret*...the definition of "**church**" means it is more than just those who gather at one place at a certain on a

certain day. So, by that broader definition, FBC still has some younger folks connected to it as well. ***But that is a sermon for another time.*** But, even if I get to define "church" my broader way, we can't hide the reality that, while we were not looking, aging has taken place among us. We have changed TOGETHER in that regard.

- I was talking with a pastor of a large church about this a few weeks ago—this business of an ageing church body. I believe he said he was 60. The church he pastors has tried to have in place a succession plan for a smooth transition from his ministry to the next guy who will preach and lead. I didn't get all the details because of the wedding background music, but it didn't sound like it was going to be easy.
- I think he would have agreed that a transition of pastors, in our sort of churches, from one generation to the next, is symbolic for the overall need to transition generationally in a church. The pastoral change is just one obvious, visible part of that inevitable change.
- All along, I have had a great desire *not* ever to divide FBC generationally on mission. I have also desired to transition leadership along the way serving as multigenerational partners in ministry. *This is only my **personal opinion**, but I think we have failed to do that very well.*
- Generational transition in most areas of *individualistic cultures* like ours usually proves to be very bumpy and even destructive to shared values. When it goes wrong, it usually appears, depending on one's perspective as either a *younger* or an *older*, like the younger generation is simply rebelling against mommy and daddy's ways to acquire their own significance. AND, to the *youngers* it looks as if the previous, older generation, is clinging selfishly to all the power and resources to hold on to their acquired significance.

- In many years of ministry in churches in different countries, I have been in both spots in churches before—a younger rebel and a significance clinging older person.
- Even in less individualistic, more tribal, cultures such as that of the **OT** people of God, the Children of Israel, generational transitioning that holds on to values and doesn't cleave one people into two groups divided by generations, is very difficult.
- When it came to the Israelites who left Egypt with the promise of a new home provided by God, ultimately God had to allow to die or even kill-off nearly the entire previous generation (including their big dog leader Moses) before the next generation could be free from their influence to trust God or not trust God in their own right.
- Interestingly, two older guys from the older generation didn't die but got to go on with the new generation into the land to possess it as God had promised. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, watching their own older generation die, *Joshua* and *Caleb* went in with the "kids." Interestingly, Joshua and Caleb were the two men known for their crazy faith which said, "*Don't be afraid. Trust God and let's not try to land this Israelite rocket ship short of God's goal because we face giants in the land!*" They trusted the LORD and wanted to keep on risking in faith as opposed to grumbling about their feet hurting like most people in their generational cadre were likely doing by then.
- *Joshua* and *Caleb* inspired and even led the next generation because, as they had grown older, they had not grown old and afraid so that they clung to a desire to feel in control and safe in their living for Yahweh. As men of risky faith, they then helped set up the less experienced next generation to battle crazily for God—to risk life for the Israelite mission. ***But this too is another sermon.***

- At a more individual level, the story of ***King David*** and his son ***Absalom*** came to my mind.
- Absalom had good looks and charisma. He cunningly knew how to use the attention to get people on his side—to accept his *agenda*. As only the younger, 3rd son in line to the throne, Absalom still wanted the power—the significance that his dad had as king. He was willing to do most anything to get it. He ended up fighting his dad's armies with his own personal troops to achieve his *agenda* but lost when his beautiful flowing hair got caught in a tree and trapped him so that he was executed there.
- King David had ordered that his son not be killed but generational battles for power and significance often go badly wrong because of the pragmatic, sinful means used to attempt to bring them about.
- It seems to me we also see another illustration in our day *politically*. We are living through a dividing of *fake tribes* and *generations* in our country because the older generation of politicians doesn't yet want to give up whatever it is they get from being the political leaders and the younger generation wants what they have. The *olders* have their reasons not to trust the still forming wisdom and skills of the next generation. But, both sides seem to be seeking personal ***significance*** regardless of the cost. One way or another the transition will come but this pragmatism and sin will be destructive before that happens.
- ***Last week***, I told you I had two *big-idea* sermons from my prepping possibly to teach *1 Timothy*. I have been waiting to talk with the FBC Elders to decide if I want to preach through that entire book or not.
- The ***1st big-idea*** sermon related to *1 Timothy* was about the now clear-to-me careful, deliberate construction of the biblical text in a way that pointed to the *main idea* upon which all the details of the epistle were meant to rest. "***God's glory! God's glory!***"

- That main idea was that the church of *Ephesus*, above all else—above all their personal desires, preferences and needs for significance, ***existed instead to glorify God***.
- What that meant was that that church was there in Ephesus to make the ***all-consuming glory*** of the ***One eternal, immortal, invisible*** God—knowable to the world—to display God's glory in a still-veiled way as the Body of Christ. The Lord Jesus was again invisible, having ascended into that consuming glory of God. That full glory would kill us if we saw its fulness in our current flesh-enshrined condition. His Church was thus to make him "*visible*" in a veiled way.
- The ***2nd big-idea sermon***, today's, comes from the presence of 2 smaller ideas next to each other in *1 Timothy*. I know that these ideas speak truth but I remain ***mystified*** as to how these two ideas actually work side-by-side in ONE, united church Body like FBC.
- The FBC ***pirate-ship experiment*** I have been involved with for 23+ years has today ultimately not provided me with an answer to my conundrum over these two realities co-existing in the church.
- Before I give you the verses that hint at the 2 ideas, I need to give you some context—this time, particularly ***biblical-historical context***.
- The Apostle Paul came to Ephesus from Corinth on a missionary journey. He was likely glad to leave Corinth & loved Ephesus. He first preached the Gospel in the Synagogue but soon moved down the street establishing a missional school in the *Hall of Tyrannus*.
- As far as we know, Paul spent more time in *Ephesus* than in any other missional location—almost 3 years.
- Timothy had connected with Paul and joined him on this journey.
- Estimates are that, by the time of the letter we call ***1 Timothy***, Paul would have been from ***50 to 60*** years old and Timothy would have

been in his **30's**. Interesting difference in ages—almost like a **generational** difference, *right*?

- After Paul left *Ephesus*, the church, to some degree, devolved into some people using it as *stage* to gain personal significance. Paul wrote the *Epistle to the Ephesians*, in part, to begin to touch on these problems. In that letter, he made it clear that the *church* existed for the sake of the **cosmic redemptive mission of God** and not for any person's personal significance no matter how they were trying to boost that for themselves in the church.
- It then seems to have gotten worse. Paul, then 50+ years-old sent Timothy a **30-something year-old** to **RE**-teach the truth about the God, Jesus' church, the mission and their part in it to those self-seeking Ephesians. Some of them wanted to be the **kings** and **queens** of the church controlling it by deception.
- So, a relatively **elderly** man, Paul, entrusts what we would probably think of as a **youngish** man to deal with some very difficult, confrontational issues in the *Ephesian* church.
- I just now labeled Paul as being **elderly** because the **average** life-expectancy in those days was no higher than **35** years at the most. But remember, *statistics are tricky*. The reason the average life expectancy was so low was the extremely high mortality rates among children and infants. If one made it past childhood, a man might actually expect to live to be 50 or, less often, even 60 before dying. 50-60 still seems pretty young to me and probably to most of you these days but that was *old-age* in Paul's day.
- This means Paul was *old* and *youngish* Timothy was actually a somewhat mature mid-life 30-something for those days. We look at those ages very differently. The definitions of **old** and **young** back then can be confusing to us.

- I have given you this background because ages and maturity are relative to the time and the place. "Young" Timothy is not being called as a teenager or a 20-something year-old to address 70- to 80-year-olds as we might think of the designations of *young* and *old* in our context. However, the text still reveals that age issues were indeed there in Ephesus. They were part of the problem.
- Timothy was still being treated as a **younger** man by the **older** men and women he addressed. That culture respecting age was probably even more sensitive to the difference causing a greater problem.
- The evidence of this age issue is in one long text in **1 Timothy 4** and then, immediately, a short text in **5:1 & 2**.
- **I'll read 1 Timothy chapter 4...** The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³ They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.
- Deceived and then deceiving teachers were peddling their personal, self-designed religions of *dos* and *don'ts* to gather their own followings based on their made-up, self-righteous distinctions. Timothy was supposed to address this deceptive strategy with its agenda used by controlling people. **Now, continue with verse 6...**

⁶ If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with

godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance ¹⁰ (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

- These physical restrictions were falsely claimed to display godliness. But true godliness is what God is like and it is eternal. The purpose for displaying true godliness now is for all people to know where they ought to put their real hope. *The purpose of this false godliness was control of the church stage by self-aggrandizing significance seekers.*
- Now, look at **verse 11** and pay careful attention to **verse 12**. It introduces the first part of my **conundrum...**

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- There is clearly an age issue in the church. Timothy and, thus also his truth-teaching, are being dismissed because he is treated as being too "*young*" to talk about such things—too *young* to know what he is talking about—too *young* to have any actual voice in the church.
- I'm going to make an assumption here based on my experience in situations like this. It wasn't the *younger* people rejecting Timothy's teaching due to his age, it was most likely the *older* people. It was most likely those older men who led the church and the older men

and women, some of whom, had gained control and were using the church for their own significance rather than to display godliness.

- This sort of issue is not uncommon in churches even up to our day. Those who are *older*, and in control, often look down on those who are *younger* pointing to that generational gap.
- When the motive for doing this is sinful, as it often is, it is because those who are *older* do not want to give up their own platforms of personal significance to those who are *younger*.
- Here is a fact. ***I am now an "older."*** I get that. I admit this problem. I see the great temptation in it. I recognize the fear of losing significance. I have hoped I would not succumb to that temptation—but OH! MY! It is a strong temptation. Can all of us ***olders*** admit this?
- A person only needs to be involved in one experience of taking the car keys away from a parent who is too much of an *older* to still be driving or moving a parent out of their own home to understand this powerful and painful dynamic of *olders* clinging to sources of false security and significance. I have watched olders who, in their minds, again became a *Marine* or a *policeman* because those were old times when they felt significant. *Oh, the stories many of us could tell!*
- But ***chapter 4*** raises only one part of the equation. The other part is hinted at in ***5:1-2...Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.***
- Many motivated *youngers* I know struggle to get this dynamic right—to live in a way that reveals a *veiled godliness* through the church rather than a selfish seeking of new personal significance.
- Timothy, could easily have said *"You old guys are in God's way. He would have been right in the case of some of the olders. He might have felt justified to say "Get out of the way or get out of here!"*

- But, Paul said, **harshness** toward old men and women, even if you are right Timothy, is not the way to display godliness in the church.
- I chuckle as I have been in a number of cool new church facilities setup by "youngers" this past year. You know the ones often sleekly decorated in all black with no view to the outside. I laugh as I go in, usually for some activity for which they have rented out their facility. I chuckle as in the entry way or lobby I find receptacles offering free *sound-deadening ear plugs* for their worship services. The signs might as well say: "*For you few nearly dead **olders** who complain that our absolutely very godly worship music is too loud.*"
- That's the BIG sacrificial loving concession of the **youngers** to the **olders** in their worship supposedly **TOGETHER** of the **One eternal, immortal, invisible** God. My bet is they don't need to break the budget on the line item for replacing ear plugs because they are used by so many olders taking part in their worship.
- Look, the reality is, in our pragmatic, individualistic culture **and** that is also much of the current church culture, when the *youngers* don't feel like they are getting their way—when they feel insignificant in a church—they usually just leave and go start their own church with a *cooler* name that is as different in style from mommy and daddy's church as they can make it.
- As I said, last week's big-idea sermon **amazed** me but this one still **perplexes** me as to the solution. Maybe I have it all wrong and God starts *His* new cool things this way. However, I don't often find obvious *godliness*—even in a veiled way, exuding from such generational divisions that are mostly about style preferences.
- I suspect the answer is actually there in the text. *Oh, look youngers, maybe it is there in **the 2nd half of 4:12***. When you feel that your "youthfulness" is being looked down upon what are you to do? You are to stay TOGETHER and be the best possible **example** of godliness that you know how to be—in speech, life, love, faith and purity—in every area of living that matters.

- You are to **read Scripture** to people (how can they object that you have *that* wrong?). Teach the truth of the WORD (not *your* truth but the Word's truth). You are to show that church what it is that you truly value—what actually controls your life and your vision for the church. Show the *olders* that you are in this for **God's glory** not simply to take over the *olders'* long held self-significance performing stages in the church for your own glory.
- *Youngers*, need to be aware as Paul has warned Timothy here, sometimes we *olders* are stuck in the flesh and thus beyond learning to respond to change in a godly way. Sometimes, no matter how well you explain it, no matter how much love is behind it, no matter that the motive of the *youngers* is true godliness that shows God's glory in a veiled way—sometimes we *olders* still get angry and lash out when the *metaphorical keys to church* are taken away because that is taking some of our self-made significance away.
- This is at least part of why Solomon, in **Ecclesiastes**, advised that we are specially to remember to serve our Creator before we get too old and set in our ways and beyond easily changing—before we likely become more about safety and control than about flying around in a rocket ship to missional places unknown.
- **Now, please let me very open with you about the why of my perplexity**...Most weeks following this worship time, I get to spend time studying the Bible with a small group. We are usually all males, ranging from middle-schoolers to 70-year-olds—including a wide variety of ages in between. We used to have some women in the class but, sadly, we seemed to have chased them to other classes.
- Sometimes we are blessed with visitors who have wonderful insights as was the case with Jason's mom, a widow herself, being here when we were talking through the section on widows in the church.
- Here's what we are doing together in that class right now. We are going verse-by-verse through 1 Timothy. The group is essentially doing the 1st step of **inductive Bible Study** producing interpretive

observations and questions to answer in order to know what the text itself is saying.

- At times we do move on to do some of the 2nd step of **interpretation** and even more rarely some of the 3rd step of **application**. In other words, we really are just carefully studying that Bible book together, aloud across the divide of these different ages.
- When we got to this section in **4 and 5**, addressing something to **youngers** and indirectly to **olders** we spent quite a bit of time on it.
- We concluded that, even in FBC, where we **olders** and **youngers** love each other & want to serve the LORD missionally and have done so alongside each other for many years...even in FBC we have not done very well at generational change.
- **Importantly**, we both saw in ourselves, **youngers** and **olders**, the propensity to try either to gain or try to hold on to self-made significance in the church when the Word of God here was saying that this is wrong. We, concluded that we **olders** and **youngers** are both rather supposed to hang on to godliness and make significance only about the blinding glory of God veiled on display in FBC.
- We admittedly saw from both ends of the discussion that there was sometimes **pride** and **selfishness** involved in relating to each other rather than **humility** that looked like Jesus and that would be able to display God's glory as we served Him on **God's cosmic redemptive mission... TOGETHER**.
- Even after this careful *observation, interpretation and application*, of God's Word in this context, the **olders** (speaking mainly for myself now) still felt like the some of the **youngers** would not accept that the **olders** still have some wisdom they need even as they begin to lead in FBC.
- I believe, at the same time that some of the **youngers**, felt that we **olders** still hold very tightly to controlling and trying to shape FBC to protect the future of FBC by "**saving**" it in our desired form.

- Doesn't this conflict of perspectives sound so familiar? We love each other deeply. We have worshipped and served God together on the mission. Yet, this conflict is real and has shaped this church.
- ***I am perplexed? But God is not perplexed!***
- I personally don't have a **direct** solution, possibly because any prescriptive solution of mine would be tainted with a desire to hold on to my significance by being right and being the *savior* of FBC.
- I do have *ideas* and an **indirect** solution I can apply in my own life.
- As an *older*, I need to act out of grace-empowered, Christ-dependent sacrificial *humility* rather than any personal desire for holding on to self-made significance by somehow being the *savior* of FBC.
- As an *older*, I need humbly to continue unwaveringly teaching the truth of the Word to *olders* (that has lately been mostly here on Saturdays at 10:30 in this gathering).
- As an *older*, I also need humbly to continue to speak that truth as well to all the FBC *youngers*, with whom I stay in contact.
- Yes, you don't always see them (you may have seen a few more if you were here for *Survivor Sunday*) but many are still out there and are still connected. However, many just don't find it helpful or edifying to anyone to be a part of what we do gathered on Saturday.
- Yes! For some of them this is a selfish rebellion against mommy and daddy for personal significance. But for many others it is because they do not want to participate in what they see as an inevitably *safely controlled landing of the dangerous missional rocket ship they have loved*. So, they now find that missional connection in other nodes of the amazingly varied and big overall Body of Christ.
- *I don't know the answer. I'm not even sure I know the true question!*
- I do know that the Word teaches both *olders* and *youngers* not just to **say** they are humble but sacrificially to **do** humble acts for the sake of the mission to display the veiled glory of God in the church.
- *[Joshua & Caleb? OK. But FBC should now be of the next generation.]*