

The Life of Timothy

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Would you turn please to the Book of Acts, first of all in chapter 13.

Acts 13, verse 15.

But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women and the chief men of the city and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them out of their coasts.

But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came unto Iconium, and the [00:01:05] disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.

Verse 5. When there was an assault made, both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use them despitefully and to stone them, they were aware of it and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about.

And there they preached the Gospel.

I was happy to fall in with your series of meetings on 2nd Timothy, and my exercise [00:02:09] to a large part has been to demonstrate the cohesion between the three pastoral epistles.

No accident that I keep repeating these statements, and we learn by repetition, and hopefully some of it will stick. If we wanted a sequence of the three epistles, I suppose we would look at 1st Timothy, then Titus, then 2nd Timothy, and you're as far on as 2nd Timothy and that's well and good. On Saturday then, having looked at the first half of 2nd Timothy 2, in the evening arising from the thought of suffering and service and reward in 2nd [00:03:11] Timothy 2, in the evening we look at various kinds of crowns that the Lord will bestow upon those who are faithful in his absence. On the Lord's Day, we looked at the use of the term pattern in the pastoral epistles. On Monday night, we looked at faithful sayings.

Again, there are only five, and we looked at them all. Tonight, we are going to do something slightly different. We all have this in common. We are either young or youngish, or we have [00:04:04] been young or youngish. Well, I'll allow you to classify yourself. Again, part of my object is to demonstrate a way of getting help from the Scriptures. You know, the Lord said to some, ye search the Scriptures, in

them ye think ye have the words of eternal life, and these are they that testify of me. Our only source of information that God by the Spirit can use in us is the Word of God, the Scripture of Truth, and this is why we love it so much. What I would like to demonstrate tonight is a method of, if you like, doing a character study. We had it in the Gospel at Oak Room on Lord's Day in the case of Abel.

[00:05:10] Tonight, because we are looking at the pastoral epistles, I would like to trace with you the known history of Timothy himself, from the first mention of him right through to what is the last mention we'll see of him, or thereabouts. There are about 24 references to Timothy, occasions where he's mentioned, and we won't look at them all. But I've listed, for my benefit, in more or less chronological sequence, in date order, the history of Timothy so that [00:06:04] we can trace it through from when we first hear about him, and at each time, I won't all the time say, now, where are you on this line of development? We are going to look at probably where and how Timothy was converted, trust the Lord, and we are going to trace through from, there's nothing in the Bible about it, but reliable historians have given more or less accurate, approximate dates as to when the various books of the New Testament were written. And if we follow through, it's a very interesting study, at each point to stop and say, now, when I was at that stage in my spiritual development, how did I compare [00:07:01] with the young man, Timothy? It's a salaried lesson, I tell you, and we'll come to it. Now, I've read about Paul and Barnabas, who were preaching, we read about it in chapter 13, and then we find that they are chased out of the city, and in chapter 14, we find that they come to Lystra and Derby, and it says, and there they preached the Gospel.

The Apostles, another thing to just put in the back of your mind, I love setting homework for my audience, as soon as possible, look up and meditate upon why Barnabas is called an Apostle. Chapter 14, verse 14, when the Apostles, Barnabas and Paul, is not in the [00:08:06] group that we would normally list as known Apostles, perhaps, but again, the use of the term Apostles, sent ones, consider in your mind why Barnabas is rated as an Apostle.

Now, my Bible, my information says that when Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel, it was about AD 45, the 45th year of the first century. We know they're a bit approximate, we know that there's this apparent confusion between the changing of the calendar and when the Lord was born. Obviously, to us, he was born in the year nothing, and then all the years follow from that. But there have been changes by various people, the way they reckon [00:09:04] things, and a lot is left to faith. But, in round terms, if we say Paul and Barnabas were preaching the Gospel at Lystra in AD 45. Now, turn to chapter 16, please, of Book of Acts. Paul, he's been on his missionary rounds, and in chapter 16, verses 1, 2 and 3, we read this, Then came Paul to Derbe and Lystra, and behold, a certain disciple was there named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess and believed, but his father was a Greek, which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have [00:10:08] to go forth with him, and so on.

If my assumption is right, that Timothy being converted either when Paul and Barnabas were preaching at Lystra, or as a result of the evangelical work that took place there in AD 45, again the historians tell us that the reasonable date for chapter 16 is AD 52.

In other words, probably, Timothy had been a believer for about seven years. [00:11:10] Think about it. If we take the place of being a believer, how much progress had we made in the first seven years since confessing Christ as Saviour? Some of you would be present the other night, when I said, to my mind, you can normally tell whether a believer is going to be anything or nothing after about two years. If you're not keen when you're young, and in particular when you're a new convert, if you're not

keen, then you never will. Or in natural things, people are late developers. It can happen with believers, [00:12:02] but nearly always, if you're not keen when you're young and a new convert, there's little prospect of you becoming a believer. A new convert, there's little prospect of you being keen or useful to the Lord later on. In any case, another way of looking at this is, if you consider yourself to be very young now, say now, here's a pattern. We've looked at the word pattern some of us. A copy, a model to base our future life upon.

Say now, if I'm impressed with the way Timothy developed as a servant of the Lord and as a Christian, is this a pattern for me to follow? Well, what was Timothy's condition after seven years? He'd come from a mixed sort of family. His grandmother and mother were Christians.

[00:13:09] Now again, if they had been converted at the same time as Timothy, when Paul and Barnabas were preaching in the area, again, they'd had the immediate care thrust upon them that there was this son, this grandson, who had to be cared for and no doubt he would learn a lot from them. They taught him the basic things, the spiritual alphabet, the sacred letters, as we would say. They taught him the ABCs. You parents, what an amazing privilege, but what a grave responsibility [00:14:02] that you've been entrusted with young lives to teach them the spiritual ABCs.

When they get to a responsible age, they will be responsible to the Lord for what they've done with that. Oh, but for the parent, for the grandparent, there is this immediate concern. Have I passed on the ABCs, the spiritual alphabet, so that they have the equipment to apply? This is why we read the scriptures with them. We pray with them every day so that when they are a responsible age, they cannot turn round and say, you never told us. Now two very good things are said about Timothy after he was converted seven years. Would the [00:15:02] apostle Paul, if he'd been in your area when you'd been a Christian for seven years, would Paul have been able to say this about you? First of all, he was well reported of by the brethren. Doesn't say he had a lovely speaking voice and a wonderful command of the vocabulary. Didn't say that he was very clever. Didn't say that he was the life and soul of the party. It says he had a good testimony with the local brethren. Another of my common sayings, I suppose, in common with many of you, if the mask slips, it slips at home, doesn't it? At work, at school, with the brethren.

[00:16:04] Oh, we do our best and we create a good impression most of the time, unless somebody treads on a tender corn. But when we get home, we relax in more ways than one. We are less on our guard. And if we let our true feelings show, it tends to be at home more than in any place. Of course, some of us can let rip wherever we are, whoever we are with. But we can't let go of the truth. But Timothy was known for what he was, that he was a believer of seven years standing and he was making progress. And the Christians who knew him best, his local brethren, they spoke [00:17:01] well of him. Again, when you and I had been trusting the Lord for seven years, what sort of brethren have said about us? Perhaps it doesn't bear thinking about. Well, he was well reported on by the brethren. And it also says this, that him would Paul have to go forth with him. In other words, here was suitable material, an apprentice to be taken along by the Paul and he knew that he was reliable enough after seven years to be useful to Paul, wouldn't get in the way, wouldn't put a foot wrong, wouldn't get himself into trouble, could be relied upon to be a help, even to the great apostle. Again, if Paul had come here, how many of the local brethren [00:18:03] would have been in that category after seven years? Well reported of by the local brethren, responding to the training given in the Christian family and recognisable by visitors as being a help and useful in the work of the Lord. Now that was after seven years. One of the earliest epistles written was 1 Thessalonians. Would you turn to that now, please? 1 Thessalonians chapter 3. It's more or less self-explanatory. I'll read the verses. 1

Thessalonians 3 verses 1 to 7. Wherefore, when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone [00:19:02] and sent Timotheus our brother and minister of God, our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ to establish you and to comfort you concerning your faith, that no man should be moved by these afflictions. For yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation, even as it came to pass and ye know. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now, when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith in charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you, therefore, brethren, [00:20:09] we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith.

Paul had moved on from Athens to Thessalonica and he needed someone, someone he could rely on, someone whose heart beat in sympathy with the apostle himself, someone who was honest enough to bring a fair report back as to how the Thessalonians were getting on. [00:21:07] This is about two years after Paul took Timothy under his wing, being converted about nine years, and yet, for this major responsibility of seeking out the truth, someone who would be acceptable to the Thessalonians, and they would accept him as an honest young man, not out to make a name for himself, but to establish the truth, and then to take back a reliable report to the apostle Paul as to how the Thessalonians were getting on again. After nine years, as a believer, would the apostle have been content, confident, [00:22:01] to ask you or me to undertake such a responsible task? It's a great thing, isn't it, that after nine years this youngish man was taken and see how he speaks of him, he says, our brother, he's not saying this young lad that I'm training, he's always making mistakes, but never mind, I'll suffer him and eventually he'll make the grade, he doesn't say that. He says, our brother and our fellow labourer, he gives Timothy the credit for having made that spiritual progress. Not only is it a sign of Timothy's progress, it's also a great sign of grace with the apostle. Now, we'll move on another five years or so, 1 Corinthians chapter 16. If you tell me you're only doing what we could have done for ourselves, nothing special about [00:23:05] this, I quite agree. That's the whole point. There's nothing better than seeing what the scripture says, comparing scripture with scripture, putting them in chronological sequence, putting them in a moral or spiritual sequence, learning the lesson and then applying it to ourselves. So, 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verses 10 and 11. Now, if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear, for he worketh the work of the Lord as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him, but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me, for I look for him with the brethren. [00:24:03] This was at Ephesus, great city.

We might, at least I might have thought, that Paul would give Timothy little jobs to do in the backwoods, where there wasn't much happening. Not many people to know what was going on, but oh, when you come to a great city like Ephesus, where they had an amphitheatre which would hold about 25,000 people, you can still go and see it. And yet, that great city, Paul, again, wants someone to help him in the work, and who better than this man who was still youngish. [00:25:05] He'd started, he'd had encouragement, he had a good Christian background, from certainly from, say, his teens onward. He'd made regular, steady progress, well thought of in his local meeting where the brethren knew him far better than people that he saw at a conference once or twice a year. He was picked out as being suitable material, and he was given responsibility, he responded, he did the work well. And here, we get to the point where Paul can speak of him as a fellow worker.

[00:26:02] Are you all conversant with the term flash in the pan? If you use the frying pan, if you put some volatile oil in and apply a flame, it'll go whoosh!

Don't open the door, let all the oxygen in, otherwise you'll have a kitchen fire. But, it bursts into flame, and within a split second, it's gone. Sadly, some of us are like that. To change the metaphor, we come in, we make a big splash, some would say the flavour of the month, another couple of months, I wonder where he went to, never hear of him nowadays. Timothy wasn't like that. He started steadily, he went on gradually, with increasing sense of responsibility, and that's the sort of servants the Lord is looking [00:27:06] for. This is why Scripture takes account of Timothy gradually, steadily, developing in his own soul, and being increasingly useful in the Lord's work. Now, Romans 16. Very, very similar things, I just want to demonstrate the breadth of witness to the fact that Timothy got going, and he kept going. Romans 16 and verse 21.

I knew a man once who was very old, he was 72, very old.

[00:28:04] And, he used to talk about the lad, the lad. The lad was late last night, I was looking out the window at 11 o'clock and he still wasn't home, the lad. It took me months to realise that the lad was 52 years of age, but to his father, he was always the lad. What's that story? Peter Pan, the little boy who never grew up. Paul didn't talk about Timothy the lad, my apprentice, my trainee, my work fellow, fellow labourer in the work of the Lord. Isn't it good to see that when progress is made, it's recognised [00:29:05] and it's given the respect and the honour that it deserves. And here, well, my margin says AD 60. He'd been converted about 15 years, standing on his own feet as a believer, useful in the work of the Lord, and he kept on going on. If you are at the age or stage where you're just beginning to get established as a believer, you read your Bible, you pray every day, and if anyone asks you to do something, you'll give it a try. And this is what Timothy did in his early days. If your intention is to be committed to the work of the Lord, remember that, well, as the saying [00:30:02] goes, Rome wasn't built in a day. Although a friend of mine said to someone else we knew, do you know why Rome wasn't built in a day? And his friend said, no. And his other friend said, because you weren't there. He tried to do everything the same day. Well, life isn't like that, is it? It's nice to be busy and hardworking, but things that are valuable take time. Things that are valuable cost you something. It'll cost you time for a start. And if, like me, you're a bit muddled in your thinking, you haven't got to give up, you've got to apply yourself even more, work harder for longer hours to make up for these brilliant people that seem to get there in half the time that you or I might. Well, in Romans here, AD 60, 15 years after conversion, [00:31:04] Paul is happy to take account of him and say, my work fell. Now, move over, please, to 2 Corinthians chapter 1. You see how similar these are? But it's a testimony to how consistent Timothy was that Paul's witness of Timothy is so consistent. And again, 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 1.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother.

I knew a Christian brother. Oh, he was one of the most amazing teachers of Christian truth [00:32:05] that I ever met. I suppose I've absorbed into my spiritual bloodstream much of, if I have anything to offer at all, much of it as to detail, I probably gained sitting at his feet and a few more. But occasionally, he used to write articles. And you know what happens with articles? I do it.

I did it at chapter 2 this afternoon. I looked at a magazine. First thing I did was to see what the articles were and who they were by. I shouldn't do that. I should accept the ministry as before the Lord and judge it in the light of Scripture. I know. But maybe like one or two of you, I find it interesting to know who wrote it. And then, we either say, oh, I'll read that article, [00:33:08] that would be good, because it's provided so-and-so. Another article with another name in another magazine, I'll say, I wouldn't touch it with a barge pole. Now, we should judge everything in the light of Scripture, but life is short,

isn't it? We have to be selective. But this brother, what I used to like was, I knew who it was, everybody didn't, but he used to sign his articles in magazine with the pen name Quartus.

You know why? Mentioned once in the Bible, Quartus, the brother. So, this writer, he wanted to be known as a brother in the Lord. Now, when Paul says about Timothy, our brother, [00:34:04] he's not dismissing him as mere rank and file and to be disregarded, of no use to anybody. He meant it as a term of respect and affectionate endearment. He says, he's my brother. He's proved himself. Well, what does the Old Testament say? A brother is for adversity. Or you need true brethren with you when things are going wrong or things are difficult. Well, this brother who was a great help to me, I knew because I knew him well, he used to like to be regarded as a brother. He thought it was a term of the utmost respect. And I'm sure that's how Paul meant it to Timothy. Later in the chapter, verse 18, as God is true, our word toward you [00:35:03] was not yea and nay, for the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.

For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him are men, unto the glory of God by us. It's not the subject, but if some of you are struggling with the words here, yea means yes, nay means no. And he says, we didn't say no when we meant yes and vice versa. He said, we said yes when we meant yes, we said no when we meant no. No confusion. [00:36:07] Good Bible expression, use great plainness of speech. Another good phrase from the Bible. And, to make it easier to understand what he's talking about, he says, think of the best example you ever could. He says, in Christ, in him, all the promises of God in him are yea, in him are amen. Well, I think if we put to those little words, longer words, which have a parallel in French and other languages, it might come through better. [00:37:03] In Christ, the truth of God is affirmed. It's stated, yea. But in Christ, the promises of God are confirmed. Amen. When you say amen, you are confirming that you are going along with what has been said. You are agreeing with it and you want it to happen. Well, Paul says, Timothy and Silas and me, we are straightforward people. We say what we mean and we mean what we say. It's another good commendation, isn't it? How sad it would be if anyone came to me and said, the trouble with you is we don't know what you're talking about. We're confused. You seem to say one thing and then you seem to say something else. It's all confusion. Paul wasn't [00:38:05] like that. Timothy wasn't like that. Silas wasn't like that. Let us try to use great plainness of speech. Let's not wrap things up in fancy words. Let's be straightforward and if we mean something, let us say it. Paul, Timothy, Silas, three seasoned workers in the work of the Lord, were straightforward in what they said and how they said it. We're doing all right for time. We're nearly there. Philippians chapter one. While you're finding it, let's pause.

Silas, think about it. Consider what I say.

If you're young, is this the pattern of development you want for yourself?

[00:39:08] Start steadily. Help where you can. Don't grumble. Be straightforward.

Say what you mean and do it and keep regular milestones of progress.

Conduct which supports what you say. Be useful if what you say isn't supported by the way that you live. Timothy did. If you're young, is that the kind of life development you intend to follow? Those of us who are a bit older, looking back, can I really say that that kind of steady progress has been recognisable in me? If not, it's never too late to improve. As long as we are here, [00:40:02] until the

Lord comes, there'll be the opportunity to make progress. But again, as I've said before, you'll never be as an old person what you refuse to be as a young person. Don't say I'm going to have my fling the next 15 years, then I'm going to be a committed believer. If you really ever intend to be a committed believer, that other scripture applies. Behold, now is the proper time. Now is the day of salvation. Philippians chapter 1 and verses 1 and 2. Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ.

It's probable that Paul was now under arrest in Rome.

[00:41:02] Whether he was in his own hired house under house arrest, or whether he was in a proper jail, prison as we would say, is a matter for debate. In any case, he was having a hard time because he was a preacher of the gospel. Timothy was a sensitive, youngish man, shy, reserved, somewhat delicate constitution. People would have understood if he'd said, oh, I can't stay here, this is too rough for me. But when the Apostle Paul was in difficulties under arrest, he's able to say, Timothy hasn't left me isolated. He hasn't deserted me. He's still here. Another implicit commendation of Timothy that he was with the Apostle through thick and thin, [00:42:07] whether things were going easily or not so easily. Chapter 2, verse 19.

To send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort when I know your state. For I have no man like minded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that as a son with the Father, he has served with me in the gospel. Him, therefore, I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.

[00:43:12] Paul couldn't move in whatever kind of restriction he was. Again, he needed to send someone on an important job. Who did he think of?

According to the date on my Bible, it's about 19 years, say, since Timothy trusted the Lord, directly or indirectly, because Paul had preached at Lystra. And certainly, it was about 12 years since Paul had singled Timothy out of the house of God. It was about 12 years since Paul had singled him out and said, I know he's useful in the local [00:44:03] meeting, but I'd like him to come and help me. Would you please spare him? You'll have heard the saying, I'm sure. Don't even think of serving the Lord in another country, in another continent, unless you're absolutely indispensable where you are. That's what we would call a paradox, I suppose. Very difficult to understand. Seems to contradict itself. I knew a young lady who lived on an island with a population of 53,000 people at the time, and she made it known she wanted to go and serve the Lord in China. At the time, a thousand million people. What is it now? One and a half billion, increasing every day. [00:45:10] Wonderful opportunity to serve the Lord. She wanted to convert a thousand million Chinese to Christ. One of our local Christian friends said, how are you going to do it? Oh, I'm going to distribute tracts. Question was, how many tracts have you given out where you live, where there's 53,000 people? Oh, that's no good to me. I want to work in a large field where there's a thousand million to be converted. And it was quietly suggested to her that if she hadn't enough interest to serve the Lord in her own locality where there were 53,000 people, there wasn't much prospect that [00:46:05] the Lord would use her to convert a thousand million Chinese many hundreds of miles away.

Well, what happened in the end, I'm not quite sure. But certainly, Paul said, this man Timothy, I've known him, he's worked with me for 12 years, and he's never let me down. Again, if you're a helper in the work of the Lord, can your fellow worker say that about you? He, she never let me down, always keeps the promise, always finishes the job, doesn't get weary halfway through, always anxious to tell

people about the Lord. Well, this was what Paul was able to say about Timothy. One last comment.

[00:47:07] Hebrews 13, 23.

Hebrews 13, Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. I can't resist this.

Who wrote the book of Hebrews? God.

One question you will never trap me with in a Bible reading is when you say, [00:48:02] who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews? When we get to a verse like this, brethren, try hard to say, would you say from verse 23, it proves that Paul wrote the epistle to the Hebrews? I would say, it's the wrong question to ask. The whole point of the epistle to the Hebrews is there's no intermediary between God and men, particularly between God and Hebrew Christians. They were used to angelic mediation. They were used to having someone like Moses, Aaron, Abraham, and so on. Someone like Moses, Aaron, a priest, a Levite, and so on. But since Christ came, wonderful thing, we can approach God direct through Christ. [00:49:05] It's about the speaking of God and we learn in the first few verses of the first chapter, God has spoken in his son. So if you want a sensible answer, don't ask me in a Bible reading, did I think Paul wrote the epistle to the Hebrews? But that's by the way, the important thing tonight about verse 23 is this, we've gone right through in more or less chronological order, the history of the young man, Timothy, as a picture of developing usefulness in the service of God. It hasn't quite come through in other verses, but it's come through in this. Delicate, tender, gentle.

[00:50:06] He was prepared to suffer in the service of the Lord. That's when it gets tough, isn't it? Popular, acclaimed, everybody thinks you're wonderful. People flock to hear you and clap you on the back. Aren't you doing well? The devil's work. You lose your concentration. You lose your alertness. Oh, but when it's tough, like with Paul in the other epistles, certainly, he gets to the point, doesn't he? When he writes to Timothy and said, now, don't expect to be universally popular if you serve the Lord. You get a lot of opposition. You'll get a lot of abuse. People will gossip about you and they'll spread stories about you that bear little, [00:51:04] if any, relation to the facts. But keep going. Then, Paul got abuse from unbelievers. That was fairly straightforward, he expected that.

But what was much harder to bear was when he suffered abuse from believers. Have you heard this? Listen. If you want joy, serve the sinner. If you want sorrow, serve the saints.

It's a telling remark, isn't it? Serve the sinner. When they're converted, they'll think you're wonderful, as you have been in bringing them to the Lord. Don't expect to be universally popular [00:52:01] if you serve the Lord's people. The devil will ensure that. The more straightforward, direct, and helpful you are in the work of the Lord, the more the devil will ensure that opposition, persecution, sneering, mocking will come your way. Mind, if all that opposition is because you're an awkward person, you can't grumble. We cannot hide behind that if we are just a nasty piece of work. But the more we are like the Lord and do the right thing in the right way for the right reason, the more we can be assured that somewhere along the line we'll suffer. Timothy, hard-working, industrious, steady, regularly developing Timothy, it got to the point where he suffered [00:53:02] because of the work of the Lord. And it didn't put him off, it kept going. I think I can see the wisdom of God in that this is the last touch that we read about Timothy as a man, that suffering, opposition, didn't put him off. Let us make sure that we commit ourselves, however old we are now, to follow this pattern of regular, steady

development and particularly if the Lord uses us and opposition comes along, let's not be put off if we have to suffer for the testimony's sake. It was true uniquely about the Lord, it was true of Paul, it was true of Timothy, and if we keep working hard, it'll come to you and me. But it's a cause [00:54:01] for thanksgiving, isn't it? It's the book of Acts, isn't it, where we read there were those who counted it a great honour that they were considered worthy of suffering for the name of Jesus. Let us likewise esteem it a privilege. I think the hymn I had selected was 462.