

Keep it authentic

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 January 2022

Preacher: John Woods

[0:00] A little bit earlier when Mark's telephone went off, I don't know if you kind of heard the story of the 14 year old chess player who was just poised to checkmate a grandmaster in a final.

! You have to be careful, don't you? It's amazing how a small thing can make a big difference in people's lives.

Okay, now it seems a bit dark up here. Are there some lights up there? It doesn't seem quite as light as normal, but on such a bright day. Oh, that's it. That's nice. Thank you very much.

So, 1 Timothy, you're going to be looking at this letter in the next while. Someone has said that 1 Timothy dresses as a little letter, but it functions as a powerful statement about the purpose and nature of the church in the world.

And we must not misjudge a biblical book for its brevity. Sometimes, you know, good things come in small packages.

[1:27] And there are, in the words of 1 Timothy, great power if we give attention to them. And I've actually preached all the way through 1 Timothy, and obviously I'm not going to do that so now.

I'm only going to preach on the first part of 1 Timothy. But I really enjoyed preparing to speak to the preaching group about preaching 1 Timothy, because it's always good to kind of have a picture of the whole thing.

And the whole thing of the letter seems to surround those two ideas of being authentic and being gospel-centered. And I suppose, in a sense, you could say that they are one and the same thing.

To be authentic is to be gospel-centered. Not to be gospel-centered as a church is to be phony. To miss what is central about the Christian life and faith is to be phony and totally unsatisfactory.

So power is buried within these words. And what does this letter say to us today? Well, I think the first thing it says to us is that Christianity is clear, intentional, and authoritative.

[2:44] Clear, intentional, and authoritative. Christianity is not vague. Christianity does not leave us guessing. It's very clear about its intentions.

It's not like those boyfriends who are constantly making a girl wonder about their intentions. No, Christianity is clear about its intentions.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the command of God, our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, our hope, to Timothy, my true son in the faith.

Christianity is not painting by numbers. It's not making it up as you go along. Christianity comes with a resounding command from heaven.

The apostle speaks by the command of the living God. He speaks and intends to be heard because this message deserves a hearing.

[3:49] You'll hear the phrase in this letter. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. And that's the spirit of this letter. Paul is speaking with the authority of an apostle, giving a message that is his clear commission to unfold the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ for the first century and for every century.

Now, Timothy and those who will follow him will not speak as apostles. They'll not speak with that command, that commission to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, someone who lays the foundation of the Christian faith.

But they will still stand with the authority of the message that the authority of the apostle has proclaimed.

He doesn't pass on the mantle of apostleship, but he does pass on the commission to pass on the apostolic gospel to another generation. And that's where we stand in the 21st century. We pay attention to Paul because we want to make that message known to others. God's definitive will has been made known in the world.

[5:07] We can be clear about it. We can be sure about it and we can pass it on. Now, of course, in the 21st century, authority is a dirty word in many circles.

People are nervous about authority, nervous about people taking control. But, of course, Islamists understand authority.

Authority is not being authoritarian. It's not being coercive. It's not taking advantage of the vulnerable. Authority is simply grasping that there is truth out there, truth that compels us, that draws our attention, that causes us to listen.

There's truth that gives us the theory of everything, that helps us to understand what it means to be part of our world, and help what it means to know our God, to experience his forgiveness, and to be released from our guilt.

God has spoken. As God's spoken, creation came into being. As the word became flesh at the incarnation, so in the New Testament gospel, God has spoken.

[6:25] We listen because God has spoken. Why should we hear the revelation of God has come? So Christianity is clear, intentional, and authoritative.

And we don't apologize for proclaiming the truth that we proclaim. We're not embarrassed. And Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.

Now, there is a tendency in the 21st century, in the marketplace of ideas, where Christianity sometimes can be marginalized, for our voice to go low, to feel that we have very little to bring to the table, that no one's going to be listening.

Now, we need to be careful not to raise our voices and rant. No one wants that kind of preaching. People want preaching which is to them rather than at them.

But people also want a true word. They want truth to live by. Truth that will transform them. Truth that will actually connect them with the eternal God.

[7:40] And this is it. Christianity is also personal and relational. So Paul speaks with the authoritative tone of an apostle, but then addresses Timothy, my true, genuine son in the faith.

The apostle steps down from the height of authority. And like Jesus, when he washes his disciples feet, is able to express the most tender relational terms, as he speaks of Timothy, his son in the faith.

The R factor of the Christian church is the relational factor. It is relationships that make Christianity attractive.

It's not proclaiming a bunch of ideas. It's proclaiming a person. It's not laying upon people demands that are unreasonable and impossible to comply with.

It is offering an invitation into a relationship with God, the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. Fellowship, friendship, relationship within a body of believers.

[8:59] There are things that we can only understand concerning the gospel as we see the gospel worked out in relationship.

What does it mean for God the father to make people his sons and daughters? What does it mean for people to get on with God, to come into a relationship with God?

One of the pictures of that is how people come into a relationship with each other within the church. How they relate to each other. How they experience love and harmony.

It is as people see that relational wonder that they realize that something is happening here that is not usual.

Now we live, don't we, in an age where there is generational conflict. Where, I remember one young lady in our church. She's now baptized and a member of the church.

[9:57] She was for many years an alcoholic. I met her when she was an alcoholic. And she was at a meeting. She was at a meeting of a management group in Lansing for the local family centers that we were involved with

as part of our work for the food bank.

And she breezed in. And I remember her first comment. Everybody over 30 is dead. I can remind her of that sometimes because she's over 30 now.

But she also said, you know, I've been sending my boys to the messy church. It's brilliant. I kind of thought, man, it's kind of interesting juxtaposition, isn't it?

You know, everyone over 30 is dead. And I kind of love messy church, which generally speaking was kind of run by people who are well over 30, has to be said. There can be a kind of generational divide and division.

But here, the older apostle is saying to the younger Timothy, who obviously from this letter and the next letter was conscious of being a little youthful and appearing youthful.

[11:12] And he is one of those very fortunate men, you know, who are in their 30s, who are still asked for proof of their age. It's kind of rather wonderful, isn't it?

I only get kind of checked concerning age if I'm trying to qualify for a pensioner's discount. Which I suppose is a kind of compliment in that they might not believe that I deserve it.

But, you know, I think as the years go by, that's going to be less the case. What a lovely thing it is when older men, younger men, older women, younger women recognize the beauty of Christian relationship.

That which is forged by gospel work in their lives. When I first went to Lansing Tab, we had a couple of ladies who then were in their late 80s.

And one of them, when she turned 90, said, I still like to go around and visit the old people. Now, Doris lived until she was 102, actually, and she continued visiting the old people.

[12:31] And what was delightful about these women, Doris and Nora, was that they took time to be interested in younger people.

I think the young people were interested in them. I think possibly the sweets that they secreted around themselves was something to do with that. But there was a sense of recognition of a spiritual care and interest in their lives, which is very beautiful.

The gospel does that. Christianity is personal and relational. The church will not grow beyond its relational ability. It will not be able to welcome beyond its ability to welcome.

It will not connect beyond its ability to connect. One of the things that strikes me about the Apostle Paul is his capacity for people. You know, if you read something like Romans chapter 16, which is kind of a long list of people.

Obviously, his heart was wired up relationally. He was an ideas man. He obviously loved doctrine.

[13:39] He gave us so much of it. But some people, you know, who are interested in ideas are not interested in people. And some people who are interested in people are not interested in ideas. Hey, we've got to combine those things, haven't we?

We need a clear, authoritative gospel, but we need a relational base. We need, when people come into the church, for them to think, oh yeah, there are people like me here.

You know, I could feel included here. I could feel welcome. I said yesterday at our racial justice seminar, diversity is a reality.

Inclusion is a choice. And that's right, isn't it? One of the lovely things about Calvary Church, and it is a lovely thing, is that there is a welcome here for people who are not white British.

That there is a multicultural, multi-ethnic feel to the church here. And I think that's a very precious thing. To be preserved and to be developed in the coming time.

[14:45] Because Christianity is something that is very interested in the personal and the relational. The Timothy Project.

Paul is writing to Timothy, but he's not just writing to Timothy alone. He's writing this letter, and the assumption is that other people will read it. Well, we're reading it, but other people will read it in the first century too.

John Calvin said this, We must not think that this letter was written by Paul for the sake of this man only. It's a letter designed to make wider ripples in the Christian church throughout the centuries.

And to be an instruction manual for all those who will seek to preach, and all those who seek to be part of the church of Jesus Christ.

And that's why it's such an elaborate opening, isn't it? One of the most elaborate openings of any of the letters of the apostle. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.

[15:51] It's a very grand opening. Because he's wanting to say, hear ye, hear ye, listen up. This is really important. Something to say that's not just a single use, but it's going to have continued traction and value throughout the centuries.

Christianity is personal and relational. And it's personal and relational because Christianity is about Christ.

Jesus, the God who is up close and personal. The God with skin on. The God who draws near. Christianity is about Christ.

Do you notice in those first two verses that grand opening? Three times Paul uses the word Christ Jesus. Two verses, three references to Christ Jesus.

There are three more references to Christ Jesus in the second half of the chapter. And it's quite clear what his emphasis is. You know, what do you stand for?

[16:57] Well, I'm standing for Christ Jesus. We hear Paul's name once. And we hear Christ Jesus' name six times in the opening chapter.

That has a certain message, doesn't it? It models what is a focal concern for the apostle. We're told, aren't we, that in Antioch in Acts chapter 11, the believers were first called Christians.

The word Christian only appears three times in the Bible. By all accounts, it was an insult. But it was an insult that captured the grain of what these people actually stood for.

They are Christians. It's obvious. They go on about him all the time. They talk about him. They seek to communicate Christ.

That's their message. Christianity is about Christ. When I teach preachers to preach, one of the things I say to them is wherever you're preaching, in whatever part of the Bible, make sure you leave the people with a picture of Christ.

[18:16] I do warn them that when they're preaching on the Old Testament, they mustn't put Christ in the Old Testament. But by God's grace, they must let him out.

You know, sometimes you can listen to preaching over a period of time and you begin to realize that Christ doesn't feature centrally in the sermon.

If Christ is mentioned, it's a tacked on idea. It's not integral. Paul wrote to the Colossians in Colossians 1.28, We proclaim him.

We proclaim Christ because Christianity is about Christ. Of course, it's about so much more, but it certainly is not about less.

And Christianity is gospel-centered, as we've already mentioned. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the command of God, our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, our hope.

[19:23] You'll encounter that word Savior and salvation and saved a number of times in 1 Timothy because God's great enterprise is to mend our fractured world, is to rescue the lost, is to reconcile those who are far off from him.

That is his task because that's who he is. God is a Savior. And it's interesting, isn't it, that even when the first human beings rebelled against God in Genesis chapter 3, what God does is give a promise of a redeemer.

The fractured world has a picture of one who will crush the serpent's head and bring relief to our world and rescue.

It is God's nature to reach out, to rescue, to restore, to draw near to us. What did Jesus say? All that the Father has given to me will come to me, and all who come to me I will never drive away.

It's in his nature to draw people to himself. If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself. It's his nature.

[20:40] He's Jesus. It means Savior. It's what he does. And it's what we do. What did William Booth say about his Salvation Army?

I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. We're about rescuing.

We are not the Jesus Admiration Society. We are the church. And the church doesn't simply admire Jesus. We preach him. We don't simply admire the salvation that he has come to win.

We seek to proclaim it so that other people will be one. How concerned are you about the lost? Sometimes churches are concerned about empty seats. They're sometimes concerned about declining membership, or indifference, or lack of commitment. But how concerned are we about the lost?

[21:49] Lost, helpless, without him. Christianity is focused and targeted.

And that's important. The message of Christianity is not something that's going around in circles. It's something that has a very specific purpose.

It's targeted. We know what it's after. We know what it's seeking to do. What is the aim? Well, there in verse 3, as I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay here in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

These promote controversies rather than God's work, which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and sincere faith.

Christianity is focused and targeted. And, of course, our growth as Christians always involves those two elements, doesn't it?

[23:15] Learning what to avoid and learning what to embrace. Learning what we should move away from and learning what we should move towards. And that's what Paul makes very plain here.

And that means, this focus, avoiding harmful distractions. Someone described our culture at the beginning of the 21st century as a culture of distraction.

I saw a young man this morning. He'd obviously been delivering papers. He still had his bag around his shoulder and he was pushing his bike and he was just in front of me and I needed to walk past him and maintain a kind of social distance.

He was on his phone. He was doing something on his phone. He had a bike and he had the bag and he was navigating the path and I had to avoid him. A culture of distraction. He had a bike and he had a bike and he had a bike and he had a bike and he had to avoid him.

He had a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike and a bike.

[24:36] that don't really matter at all. It's always good to identify things that we worry about that God's not interested in because they are to be avoided.

And we are always to identify the things that God is very concerned about that we sometimes overlook. Quite frankly, that sentence is enough for you, isn't it?

Avoid what harms and embrace what is helpful.

As Eric Harmer, who used to be up the road in Morscombe, used to say, keep the main thing the main thing. You've probably heard him say it. I think he probably copyrighted it.

Keep the main thing the main thing. Pay no attention to myths and endless genealogies. Now, one of the features of Israel was that they did value their racial purity.

[25:43] They valued the purity of the line. We see it in the New Testament. The Gospel of Matthew, Gospel of Luke, they give us the genealogy of Jesus.

They like to see their bloodline. But unfortunately, their interest in genealogies was an interest that was exclusive.

It was trying to actually say that they were special and that no one else was. Pay no attention to myths and endless genealogies.

We must not think that we're superior to anybody else because of our pedigree, national, spiritual. You know, just because our father or grandfather or great-grandfather was a Christian or a Christian preacher doesn't mean that we kind of get a free lunch. Grace doesn't run in the bloodline.

[26:46] That's what the Gospel is about, isn't it? We all need to be rescued. We all need to be inducted into the spiritual hall of fame by God's grace. There's no other way to come.

Avoid controversial or worthless skepticism. When people are interested in things that ring their bell but don't really build people up, it's worthless skepticism.

We've all heard, haven't we, about the medieval debates. How many angels can you get on a pinhead? We kind of laugh because we think, you know, can that be true?

Well, yes, it was. People did have those debates, theological debates in the medieval time. People have similar debates. Now, I'm not going to press any buttons.

But you know what gets people heated. And you know that what gets people heated doesn't always build up fellow believers. And the person who's interested in speculation, they tend to bend and wear down our ears with their constant questioning.

[28:04] But they don't seem to drip any of the oil of encouragement into our lives at all. You know, if God's not particularly interested in it, why should you get so excited about it?

If God's interested in it, go for it with all that you are. So our eyes are drawn to Paul's target.

And the target is there in verse 5, that crucial statement, the goal, God's work, which is by faith, the goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

faith. This is what God is after. He's after the people experiencing God's love in their lives.

The primary task that Timothy has is not exposing error. That's important. We do need to say, that behavior's wrong, those ideas are wrong, we need to avoid those.

[29:08] But that's not the primary task. The primary task that Paul has for Timothy is to promote love. I've told you before, I like Augustine, the ancient preacher Augustine.

And he talked about reading and preaching scripture. And he said this, so if it seems to you that you've understood the divine scriptures or any part of them in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up the twin love of God and neighbor, then you have not understood them.

If what we're excited about doesn't build up love for God and love for others, it's not important.

Or it's not all important. The goal is love. The goal is love, says the apostle.

The beating heart of the Christian is a loving heart. Love for God and love for people. That's the goal. That's what God wants.

[30:15] See, God is love. That's why he wants you to be like him. And of course, this goal of love is expressed in a pure heart, a good conscience, sincere faith.

Being authentic. Being real. How do we best love our neighbor? By being someone who doesn't disappoint them.

By being someone who doesn't disappoint them by being phony. But actually encourages them by being real. By being the kind of person that people can say, I know I can turn to you because I know I can trust you and I know that you'll not let me down.

I know I'll not get rejection. I know I'll receive welcome, concern, interest, and care. Why am I afraid to tell you who I really am? Someone once asked.

Because I think that you'll not like me. There are a lot of people out there afraid of Christians, afraid of the church because they assume that the church will simply be a rod of condemnation, a slam door of rejection, rather than a place of grace, love, welcome, restoration.

[31:41] You know, we are, we are the father standing in the road as the prodigal returns. But sometimes we as the father say, look what the cats brought in and where did you get that earring?

instead of welcome. Here's the ring, here's the shoes, here's the gown, and here's the party.

My son was dead, but now he is alive again. the heart, not an emotional thing, but the personality center of the human being, pure, captivated by God, trusting and resting on him.

Hey, we're nearly finished. Children are arriving back, so we're nearly finished. We know, of course, that the law is good in itself and has a legitimate function, says Paul.

Some of the false teachers were trying to reintroduce Old Testament law into the bloodstream of the Christian church, suggest that the law was the way that people grew in their faith.

[33:03] But Paul's words are fascinating there, aren't they? We know that the law is good, verse 8, if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous, but for lawbreakers and rebels and a whole long list of stuff that breaks some of the ten words that we read of in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy chapter 5.

The law lists sins from the outside of us. The gospel shapes life within us.

The law lists sins from outside of us. The gospel reshapes the life that is inside us. someone said imagine a map that only tells you where you shouldn't go.

How useful would that be on a journey? I want to tell you, you're going to go on holiday but you're not going to go to Rome, you're not going to go to Paris and you're not going to go to Luxembourg. Off you go. The law tells us what not to do but it doesn't tell us how we can know God.

[34:28] It can't do that, can it? It is a straight line that shows our crookedness but it's only God who can rescue us and make us new.

So beware false teaching and embrace sound teaching. So after that long list there in verse 10 he says whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which he entrusted to me.

Sound doctrine literally healthy doctrine. when we embrace the truth it makes us spiritually healthy. When the church embraces the truth it makes the church spiritually healthy.

We don't want a church on a life support machine. We want a church which is vibrant and healthy and seeking to bring health to others, spiritual health to others.

Sound teaching. End with a story. Story told of a fool. A fool is outside on a day like this sunny and hot and they're sitting by a river a flowing river and they need to get to the other side.

[36:01] There's only one problem the fool can't swim. A moment later they see a wise man go past come to the edge of the water step into the water and walk to the other side.

And then the second man second wise man comes to the water's edge and does the same thing. And immediately afterwards a third wise man comes steps into the water and moves over to the other side.

And the fool thought to himself it can't be so difficult. Those three they all walked across the river they got to the other side so he stepped into the river and then started screaming and shouting because he was sinking beneath the rushing water.

One of the wise men looked back and said if we'd have known he wanted to cross we'd have shown him where the rocks are. of course sound teaching are the rocks aren't they?

Healthy teaching are the rocks that help us to navigate that river and get across. Sound teaching that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God which is entrusted to us.

[37:27] we enter into the joy of God we enter into the blessedness of God when we take him seriously we listen to his message of salvation and we allow his transforming truth to make us a people of love and authenticity in a world that is sometimes cold harsh and disappointingly phony.

What's the mission of Calvary Evangelical Church in 2022? It is to stay close to this Jesus don't take your eyes off Jesus Christ Jesus trust him follow him and model the lifestyle of love and rescue and authenticity which he shows us let's pray God pray God to to!

God God