

Be Steadfast, Timothy!

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[0 : 00] All right, we're continuing on through the letter that Paul wrote to Timothy, the second one. So please open your Bibles up to 2 Timothy. We're in chapter 3, and as you flip open, let me just remind us what's going on here.

Paul is writing this letter from prison. He's writing it to Timothy, who has been a leader in the church in Ephesus, a city in the province of Asia, which is now modern-day Turkey.

And the tone of this whole letter has been encouragement and instruction and warning. If we look just back over the last chapter, chapter 2, we see that Paul has been encouraging Timothy to continue in the cause of Christ, no matter how difficult things get.

Serve like a soldier, he said. Run like an athlete to win. Work like a hard-working farmer. And Paul reminded Timothy, just in the last chapter, about the gospel, emphasizing the kingship of Jesus and the eternal life and glory that await those who believe in him.

And then as we continued on in chapter 2, we saw Paul encouraging Timothy to live a holy life, to set himself specially apart for the honorable purposes of God.

[1 : 26] In contrast to how some of those false teachers were doing, they were giving themselves to the dishonorable purposes of the devil, said Paul.

Last Sunday, we heard Paul warning Timothy about how things would be difficult in the days ahead. How these last days, this last part of God's great story from Timothy's day until the end will be characterized by religious pretenders and false teachers and depraved infiltrators who claim to know God and have an outward form of godliness but can be recognized as false by their persistent sinful attitudes and behaviors.

Their love of themselves. Their love of money. Their love of pleasure rather than God. And these kinds of people, if they do not respond to gentle instruction with repentance, Paul says we're to avoid and to have nothing to do with them.

Well, now as we come to verses 10 to 15 this morning, we see Paul now contrast himself with these false teachers and influencers. So if the point of what we heard last Sunday in verses 1 to 9 was to help Timothy identify religious pretenders and false teachers.

The point of these next verses that we're looking at this morning is to assure Timothy of who he can trust and how he can be confident that his faith is well placed.

[3 : 05] And so let me just read the passage for us here in 2 Timothy chapter 3. And I'm just going to start it up in verse 8 and we'll read right down to the end of 15. Just as Janus and Jambras oppose Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth.

They are men of depraved minds who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far, because as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

What kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra? The persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 35] So what is Paul doing here? Paul is reminding Timothy of why he, as an apostle of Christ Jesus, can be trusted.

He's saying, Timothy, unlike these false teachers and religious pretenders who are claiming to have revelation from God and to speak for God, you can trust me. You know me, me, Timothy.

Quite literally, you have closely followed my teaching, my way of life, my purpose. And Paul lists nine things from his life.

This phrase here, it's a little different translation on screen, but literally, you have closely followed. The sense of this is not like how we might closely follow, you know, a story in the news from a distance.

The verb that's used here, the context here, it implies a much closer kind of following. It implies intimate knowledge.

[5 : 39] Timothy, you were there. You were with me. Timothy was there himself when Paul first came through his town. He heard Paul's teaching firsthand.

And then later on, he traveled with Paul and worked together with him. And so not only does he know the teaching of Paul, but he knows Paul's character. He knows Paul's attitudes and his conduct.

You closely followed my way of life, says Paul. You know that my living matches my confession. You know my purpose, he says.

Timothy, you know the reasons why I've been doing all that I've been doing. You've witnessed firsthand my faith, says Paul.

Why was Paul doing all that he did in the cause of Christ? It was because he believed that Jesus really is the Christ. And Timothy, you've seen that in my life.

[6 : 50] You've seen it. You know it. He says, you've seen and known my patience, my love, and my endurance.

This is the big difference between Paul and the false teachers and the religious pretenders mentioned above. If you glance back up to verse 3 of chapter 3, people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money.

They'll be without love, said Paul. Without love, lacking love. But Timothy, you've seen firsthand my genuine love and concern for you and for others.

You've seen the patience that I've had towards all kinds of difficult people and how I've borne with them. Enduring all kinds of things for the sake of Christ and his good news.

Timothy, you have seen and you have known my persecutions and sufferings. Paul really belabors this point.

[7 : 59] He expands on it. He says, what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.

And we notice there that he's very specific about three spots where Paul was persecuted. Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What's the significance of these three locations?

All of these are places in Timothy's home region that are fairly near to each other. Antioch was a city where the Jews became angry that Paul was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

And so they began in that city to contradict Paul and it says to heap abuse on him and incite the leaders of the city against Paul and Barnabas until they had basically expelled him from the area.

So what did Paul do? Well, he carried on to the next city just down the road, Iconium. And Paul proclaimed Jesus there. And some of both the Jews and the Gentiles there in that city were plotting against Paul to mistreat him and to stone him, it says in the book of Acts.

[9 : 16] Paul escaped just in time. What did he do? He went down the road to the next city, Lystra. And in Lystra, Paul performed a miraculous healing.

And the people there began, they became confused and they started trying to worship Paul and Barnabas.

It says in the book of Acts that they thought Paul and Barnabas might be the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes. It was kind of a kerfuffle there. And then in the midst of all that, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and they won the whole crowd over and they stoned Paul, so hurling rocks at him violently, they dragged him outside the city and they left him for dead.

You can read all of this in the book of Acts or at least they thought he was dead. What's the significance of this? Well, Lystra is the town that Timothy was from.

That was his hometown. That's why Paul's reminding Timothy of these locations because Timothy, you were there. you saw how they treated me.

[10:25] You saw how they persecuted me. You saw how I suffered. Reflecting back on all that persecution and suffering, this is what Paul says. He says, yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

All my persecutions, all my sufferings, up until this day, the Lord has rescued me from all of them. Not that Jesus kept him from suffering or being persecuted, but that from out of the midst of that persecution and suffering, he rescued me.

He delivered me. And Paul sort of takes a step back here to make a point. Verse 12 and 13, he says, in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

While evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. And there's a lot here.

A general truth, a general principle of the Christian life for all followers of Jesus is that we will be persecuted. We will be opposed. And we kind of notice a contrast in this verse.

[11:39] There's those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus and then there's the evildoers and imposters. They kind of share, at least in the moment, a different course.

The Christ followers will be persecuted, he says. But somehow the imposters, they seem to avoid that, at least for the time. I think Paul's making the point that persecution and suffering are marks or are evidences of true faith in Jesus.

Paul wants Timothy to remember his sufferings and his persecutions because they are evidence that his faith in Jesus is genuine. Why?

Because people generally won't choose to suffer or even to die for what they know is a lie or for something that they don't even really believe in.

Kind of believe it but not really. They won't suffer for that. What are the marks of the false teachers and the imposters? Well, if we just glance back up to verse 4, we see that they're lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

[13:00] They'll take the easy road, the comfortable road, the path of least resistance. Pleasure and persecutions are like opposites here. They love pleasure, they love comfort and so when the moment of decision comes, they're not going to choose to suffer for the name of Christ.

But Timothy, you know that I was willing to give up all of that as I risked my life and suffered painfully in the cause of Christ. Paul's main purpose here is to anchor Timothy.

Yes, there will be difficult days in the days ahead because of wicked people and imposters who creep in and deceive. But remember how the teaching that I gave you matched my life.

People are going to try and say all kinds of things about me. They'll try to discredit me. But Timothy, you were there. You heard me. You saw me.

You followed me closely. You can trust the gospel message that I gave you. You know that I am the real deal. I am no hypocrite. I am no imposter. I practiced what I preach.

[14:16] Speaking of imposters, in verses 12 and 13, last Sunday I suggested that the first half of this chapter was not so much about the world in general or unbelievers in general, but specifically about religious pretenders and devious spiritual influencers, false teachers.

And this is kind of confirmed as we get down here to verse 13 where Paul draws this contrast between all who seek to live a life devoted to Christ and those who are evildoers and imposters. Imposters. We notice that word. Someone pretending to have a form of godliness, but it's just a form. Someone confessing the name of the Lord is up in verse 19 of chapter 2, but not turning away from wickedness.

In a manner of speaking, Paul's kind of reiterating what he just said in the previous verses. These kinds of people, evil doing imposters, will go from bad to worse.

This is going to be the normal behavior of some people who are confessing Christ. We need to be careful how we understand this statement that evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse.

[15:38] We need to be careful that we don't lose sight of what Paul just said up above in verse 9. He made two statements. First, he said, they will not get very far because their folly will be clear to everyone.

Then he said that they will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. So Paul is not saying that these evildoers and imposters will be more and more successful at deceiving the true followers of Jesus.

I think verse 9 up in chapter 2 kind of says the opposite. They're not going to be successful. Their folly is going to be clear to the true followers of Jesus.

So in what sense will they go from bad to worse? Well, Paul doesn't really flesh this out in a lot of detail except to say they will be deceiving and being deceived.

It could mean that as time goes on there will be more of these kinds of people. It could be that as time goes on the sheer number of lies and deceptive doctrines being promoted, false teachings, will increase.

[16 : 49] It could mean that the deception as we get closer to the end will be of a higher quality and caliber perhaps more and more helped by the deceptive work of the devil and demonic influence.

And we glance back up to verse 26 of chapter 2. It could be that the evil being done by these evildoers and imposters is just that much more widespread and influential in the world all while claiming a form of religion, a form of devotion to God.

That's implied with the word imposter. My sense is that the closer and closer we get to the end when Christ returns, the truer that these words in verse 13 will feel that things are getting worse.

we also notice in this verse that these evildoers and imposters are not only doing the deceiving but that they themselves are being deceived.

This suggests that many of them will actually believe the lies that they're spreading. They themselves have bought into them hook, line, and sinker.

[18 : 08] Again, we glance up to verse 26 of chapter 2 where we see that Timothy's false teaching opponents are described as those who have been ensnared by the devil and taken captive to do his will and it seems without even realizing it they need to come to their senses.

They don't even really understand what's going on here. Let's come back for just a moment to Paul's statement about Christian persecution here in verse 12.

everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. First, we should know that this was something that Jesus himself said in John chapter 15 verse 20.

Remember what I told you. A servant is not greater than his master. if they persecuted me they will persecute you also. Jesus said a similar thing in Luke 21 verse 12 specifically applying to his disciples but also in principle to all of his followers.

He said before all this speaking of some of the things that will happen at the end they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison and you will be brought before kings and governors and all on account of my name.

[19 : 43] That's actually being fulfilled right now as Paul writes this letter in prison being brought before kings and governors on account of the name of Jesus.

So Jesus taught that generally his followers would be persecuted. next we should appreciate the immediate relevance of this statement to Timothy.

Paul is in jail he's soon to be executed as we've already heard the majority of professing Christians in the whole region where Timothy lives the province of Asia have deserted Paul that's back in chapter 1 verse 15 they're distancing themselves from him things are getting hard.

One of the major things that Paul has been doing in this whole letter is calling Timothy to join with him in suffering for the gospel and so in Timothy's day this was written in his region and time it's not an understatement for Paul to say everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

This would have felt so true to Timothy and to everyone in his church in light of all that they knew was going on. That's the second thing about this statement on Christian persecution.

[21 : 06] Finally I do think it's important that we take this as an enduring principle not just for that time but also for the centuries that followed and even for today but not to the point that we judge and criticize Christians who are not presently experiencing persecution.

Persecution is the normal for the true devoted follower of Christ Jesus and that's because we live in a fallen and sinful world. It's a world in the words of Paul full of unrighteousness that seeks to suppress the truth that in the book of Romans but we've been called to proclaim the truth.

It's a world full of darkness and evil deeds said Jesus in John chapter 3 while he is the light that exposes that darkness we're proclaiming the king that was hated and that was rejected and that was murdered by the majority.

So for those reasons persecution in its various forms and degrees is to be expected just for seeking to live a life devoted to Christ Jesus.

However, that does not mean that we should automatically question the genuineness of a person's faith simply because they have no persecution in their life at the moment.

[22 : 40] In the larger story since Jesus came, there have been notable exceptions to this general principle. There's been times and places where by the grace of God in answer to the prayers of his people, God has given his people favor in the eyes of leaders and governments and he's brought renewal and revival in whole regions.

And if God works like that in a place, then we should expect the natural expectation is that this principle of persecution may lessen in that place for a time.

there was a time when many of the early settlers and colonists of North America were either Christian or if not, were at least raised to respect and uphold Christian values by their parents and grandparents in England or in Europe.

And so in Canada and in the U.S. in the past 100 years or so, we've enjoyed much less persecution than the norm because of the way that our nation and our society started off.

There was a time not that long ago when everybody went to church. That was just the thing. And so their Bible believing, Christ-centered churches all over North America like ours, who for the past several generations have known very little of government interference or anti-Christian violence, but have enjoyed tremendous religious freedom.

[24 : 14] But of course all of that is we're starting to see is now changing. It's shifting back to the normal for Christians around the world and for Christians throughout the centuries.

So that's thing number three about Christian persecution. This does apply to us, but we just need to think about it carefully. Some people have used this verse in really weird ways.

They've kind of looked at it and said, well, since this is true, that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, and I'm not being persecuted, well then we must not be living faithfully.

Therefore, maybe we need to pray, we need to ask God to bring some persecution our way. I don't think so. That's not what Paul said in the first letter to Timothy.

Pray that we might have peace and favor in the eyes of governments. So let's not pray and ask God to bring persecution. Let's not fear that our faith is less than genuine simply because we've experienced very little of it.

[25 : 13] let's just keep focusing on being faithful to King Jesus and on declaring him whatever comes our way. Let's thank God for the freedom that we have had to gather and to worship and to speak about Jesus.

But let's not be surprised if in the days ahead, persecution is much stronger, opposition has much more teeth than in the years behind us.

verse 14, Paul writes, but as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of because you know those from whom you learned it and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

promises. So no matter how bad things get, Timothy, continue on in what you have learned and become convinced of. Think about that.

What is that? Well, it's the truth of God, the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. And who has Timothy learned these things from?

[26 : 27] Well, Paul's already just mentioned himself. He says, you know me, you know my life and my teaching, but Timothy, you also know the truth of God and what led you to all this in the first place from your mother and your grandmother.

They're the ones who taught you the holy scriptures which was the foundation to you receiving and accepting and believing the gospel. Paul mentioned them earlier in the letter back in chapter 1, verse 5.

Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, and how they had a sincere faith. And so I think that's who he's probably referring to here. They were the ones that taught him the holy scriptures since the time he was a young child.

You know them, Timothy. You know the genuineness of their faith. You know their conduct. You know that they have integrity, that their love was genuine, that they were faithful people.

And at this point, Paul shifts and he actually encourages Timothy not just to anchor his faith and his knowledge of his mother and his grandmother and of Paul, but he encourages Timothy to anchor his faith in the scriptures themselves.

[27 : 41] And oh, I hate to do this, but we're going to hold off on these next verses until September. 16 and 17, the verses that follow are some of the most important verses in the entire Bible.

memorizing these verses when I was a kid and being reminded of them over and over again in Bible college has made all the difference in my life. These verses for me have been one of the golden keys to my Christian growth over the past two decades.

They're the foundation of all my preaching and teaching and any spiritual leadership that I've been able to give. And so they really do deserve their own sermon.

And we're going to dig into them deeply in September when I return from my sabbatical. But let's just collect up some of the things that we've heard already this morning in these few verses we looked at.

Paul's main thing here is to encourage Timothy to be steadfast. Difficult times are coming.

Persecution is intensifying.

[28 : 47] And it's going to get worse. Evil people and imposters are going to make it hard in the days ahead. And so be steadfast Timothy. Continue in the gospel which you have learned, which you have heard from me and from others.

Follow my example just as you have until now, Timothy. Look at my life, my way of life. Look at my approach to things, my purpose. Look at my faith.

Look at my patience. Look at my love. Look at the opposition I endured. Paul really puts himself forward as just this example of the truth of the gospel.

An example to follow as the days get darker. We often wonder, what can I do to encourage my kids to be steadfast in their faith?

We've been teaching them at home. We've been teaching them here at church for the kids that are in alive. And as they grow up, we know that they're going to face the full pressure of our world to be anything but a devoted follower of Jesus.

[29 : 59] How can we encourage them to be steadfast? Paul's encouragement here for Timothy is his life. How I have lived.

You know, Timothy, since the beginning when you first believed and came on those journeys with me. Let's not underestimate the power of a life lived for Christ to encourage others and to help them be steadfast.

Isn't this what we want to be able to say to our own kids and to the younger Christians in our church? Son, difficult times are coming.

And it's going to continue to get worse. Evil people and imposters are going to make it hard in the days ahead. But be steadfast. Continue in the gospel, in the word of God that you have learned from us.

Follow my example, son, just as you have until now. Look at my life. Look at my conduct. Look at my purpose. My faith. My patience.

[31 : 11] My love. The hardships I've endured and how Jesus has rescued me through all of them. Be steadfast, my son, or my daughter, young man or young woman.

To be able to say that, though, requires that we're living that ourselves, that we have a life lived for Christ to point to, doesn't it? It requires that we ourselves are living with gospel conduct, striving to live uprightly.

It requires that we ourselves are living with gospel purpose. It requires that we're really trusting Jesus, and I mean really putting the full weight of our lives on his word and his promises.

To encourage someone like that requires that we're actually living patiently with others. I mean, if Paul had been an impatient guy, he wouldn't have been able to say this.

No, Timothy, you know my patience. You saw it. It requires that we're actually loving one another truly from the heart. This is the kind of life that will encourage our kids and our young people to be steadfast, even through hard times ahead.

[32 : 33] They need to see that our faith is real. They need to see that we have more than just a form of godliness that lacks power. Like the impostors up in verse 5.

They need to see that Jesus Christ really does live in his people and change them and changes them. How will they see that unless we ourselves are, like Paul said, wanting to live lives fully devoted to Christ Jesus.

Before the days of GPS and electronics, when sailors lost their way at sea, how did they find their way? They navigated using the stars at night.

And the apparent position of the stars in the sky changes with the rotation of the earth and with each season. You can see kind of the movement over a time lapse of the stars. But one particular star was especially useful. It's the one right in the middle. The north star, Polaris. It was so useful because it's just uniquely positioned directly above the earth's rotational axes. [33 : 47] And as the earth turns, every other star seems to spin around and move. But the north star appears to stand still. And so no matter what time of night or what season it is, following Polaris will lead a traveler who's in the northern hemisphere due north.

And so in this dark world that we're living in, which is getting darker, our young people are being bombarded with all kinds of messages. And some are having doubts. And some are getting lost in the sea of deception, in the sea of misplaced priorities and misdirected loves. How will they find their way back?

I want my life to be like Paul's. A spiritual north star. Pointing to Jesus. Pointing back to the gospel. And how it's true. Pointing constantly, day after day, week after week, year after year, till the day that I draw my last breath. life.

[34 : 56] So that no matter how tough things get for my kids, for the youth, for new Christians, for anybody else watching my life, that they will have a view of the way.

A view of what's true. Should they leave home like the prodigal, that they'll have a way to see, yes, the power of the gospel is real. I saw it in my dad's life.

And so I hope that's your heart and prayer too. Whether you have kids or not, there are people watching us. They are searching for the way.

And we have an opportunity through our lives to show them that this really is the way. Jesus is the way. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you that you are patient with us.

None of us, not even Paul, lived perfect lives. We struggle with sin. We struggle with impatience. We struggle with not being loving as we should.

[36 : 10] we are tempted to take the easy way out. We would rather be comfortable than suffer. But I pray that you would work in us, that we would become more and more like Paul in these words.

That our lives would point to you and bring glory to you, that we be like spotlights on you for everyone in our world to see. We especially pray for those in our families, our children, and our young people that we're connected with in various ways.

Lord, it's a difficult world to live in. And we see the things that are online and we just gasp at some of these things. We ask that you would work with power in the hearts of our children and in our young people, our youth, and that you would not allow them to be swept away or deceived, but that you would lead them and guide them through our lives.

Please do that through us, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.