

Unashamed and Anchored

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Preacher: Campbell Brown

[0 : 00] But the Bible, it has a whole series of personal relationships.! Despite quite a large age gap between them, and also despite the animosity of Jonathan's father, Saul, towards David, their relationship, it was devoted, it was loving, and it was really sacrificial, and no more shown by their very last time together when Jonathan helped David escape the assassination attempt by Saul, his father.

We have other relationships like Elijah and Elisha, where Elijah was the older man, he was the guide, he was the teacher. Elisha was devoted to him and wouldn't leave his side right up until the very end of his life.

And then in the New Testament, we have Jesus and John, and the Bible tells us that John was a disciple, that Jesus loved the one he was particularly close to.

And if you read in the Gospels about the Last Supper, you'll find something there that John was resting against Jesus during that meal.

And if you want a bit more culture than what this church is normally used to, you can go and look at the painting of the Last Supper, and the only disciple who has contact with Jesus is John.

[1 : 53] And I think one of the more telling things was one of the very last acts that Jesus did on the cross when he was coming close to death. He gave his mother to John to look after.

And remember, Mary had other children, but Jesus entrusted to John. And all these sort of relationships have their own messages.

And maybe this is too much of a generalization, but I think it's helpful, because Ruth and Naomi, it was about the power of loyal love and the role of kindness.

David and Jonathan, it shows the enduring nature of a true friendship. And what it means to have sacrificial love and support for each other.

Elijah and Alicia was very different. It was about leaders training and leaders mentoring the next generation of leaders that was to come. And Jesus and John, it was just a close family relationship full of mutual love and support.

[3 : 04] And Paul and Timothy had a very close relationship. And Paul was a man of many friendships, as I said many times before. His writings are full of lists of names of people he commends and remembers.

But the special bond that he had was with Timothy. And from the outside, it looks a strange one.

Paul was an old man now. He had done a lot in his life, and a lot of it had not been easy.

There had been beatings. There had been shipwrecks. He had been imprisoned on occasions. He had clocked up the miles. He had been hated by many.

He was hated by people from his own Jewish background. And he was hated by people of Gentile backgrounds. He says in the Bible that he had known things like sleepless nights of hunger.

And his ministry was often complex and difficult and full of disappointment. And I know recently, last year, when we went through 1 Corinthians, man, what a guy.

[4 : 09] How did anybody keep going in that situation? And I think you can see there, he was a strong man. He was naturally tough. He was fearless. He could mix it with just about anyone.

And in many ways, he was quite self-contained. But Timothy was very different. He was young. He was timid. He was shy, possibly quite introverted.

And when we read about him in the Bible, we quite often hear about his needs. And maybe just a few examples.

And in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, for example, it says there, When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord as I am.

And in 1 Timothy chapter 5, for example, verse 23, it says there, No longer, he's talking to Timothy here, No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

[5 : 21] He pushed himself hard, and he was a weak man, and he needed practical advice on how to deal with that. And if you go back to chapter 4 and verse 12, let no one despise you because of your youth, and so on.

So he was needy. He was young. He was a very different man. He needed a lot of help and guidance. But yet they had an incredibly close bond. They were mentor and mentee, if there's such a word.

They had, if you look at the very first couple of verses of 2 Timothy, they had a father-son type relationship. And it says to Timothy, my beloved child, Paul, while not his physical father, was the one who had brought him to faith.

The man who grew up his faith and was a constant presence in his life. And there was mutual support, mutual love. They loved to be with each other.

They agreed when they had to part. But it was also a time in their lives when they were separated, and they needed each other more than ever. Paul at this time was in Rome.

[6 : 34] It was probably at the end of his life. And while we don't know when he died, the thinking is here that he was in prison waiting his execution in the coming weeks or months.

And in that prison, he was isolated and lonely. I've read a few times about how he had been deserted by the church in Asia, and only Onesiphorus had sought him out and given him aid.

For Timothy, he was out without his rock, his mentor. And he would have to ply on in his own way without Paul to guide him, to prepare the way, or to have his back.

And that takes me very much as these other relationships had. That takes me to the point, one of the themes of their relationships here, and what I want to deal with this morning, is how to keep going in your faith when times are tough.

And even in the good times as well. And this is a constant theme in the Bible. To name a few, Joe struggled with the loss of family, fortune, and the opposition of his friends.

[7 : 43] King David, he struggled with life on the run, and what I'm going to call sort of temptations of power. Peter the disciple, he struggled with his pride, with his impulsiveness, and his bad temper.

Peter the disciple, he struggled with his pride.

In the time where your love for the Lord has just fallen away, and your faith has suffered, your purpose has gone.

And maybe your role in the work has just fallen away. And that can be a result of many things. It can be lazy Christianity.

You're just not doing what you should be. Maybe it's compromises in your life that expose you to things that aren't right or helpful. Maybe it's a difficult or a broken relationship.

[9 : 04] Maybe it's poor health of you or people that you love. Maybe you've lost someone dear to you. Or it's the stresses and strains and pressures of life at times.

And for young people at camp, I feel for you because your life is so much harder than mine. Well, it's at your age. Because, you know, one of the things as parents, I have two teenagers now.

And one of the things I hate to do is just say no at times. There are things you can't watch on TV. There are sporting events, particularly sport, that you can't go to because it clashes with church or other things.

There is music that you shouldn't listen to or movies you shouldn't see. And we hate as parents having to do these things. But we do it for your good. And sometimes that makes you doubt.

And we understand that. I didn't have that one when I was young. I grew up in a time where pretty much everybody went to Sunday school. Where everything stopped on Sunday. Where most people went to church.

[10 : 08] And it was so much easier for us. It's harder for you today. And we feel that for you. And what we have here in the Bible is a template or some useful points to help us deal with that.

Those situations that we are in. And we are not going to deal with the whole of the chapter. We are just going to pick one or two points out. But the first thing that Paul did was he looked back and he remembered and he reflected on his life.

And if you look at verse 5 for example. I am reminded. I am reminded. That's the first three words. Or verse 6. For this reason I remind you.

And this requirement to look back is not something that is so good these days. It's a world of looking ahead. It's a world about plans and planning.

And I find a quote when I was preparing for this. It says don't look backwards if you want to look forwards. It's not a quote that I can attribute to anybody. But it's what you call sort of business motivational quote.

[11:16] The sort of thing that those of you have been in the working life. Just shake your head and bang it off the wall. But it's common.

It's out there. You find it in music. You find it particularly in political speak. Where so many politicians. They talk only about the future. Because they don't want to admit the mistakes they made in the past.

The only time they do talk about the past. Is when they are criticising somebody else who made a mistake. But we see it in our workplace. We have it in our churches at times.

And it's just about everywhere. And sometimes I kind of understand that. We can't change the past. We may have to admit our mistakes.

And face up to our weaknesses and our failures. Sometimes the past is painful. You can hear my accent. I grew up in Belfast during the Troubles.

[12:15] And there's a whole industry now. A tourist industry that analyses the Troubles. And points people. And I don't want to remember that. For me it's about my dad being called out as a key holder.

It's about my mates in school who had no dad. To me that's painful. I don't want to face up to that. But I know that I have to.

But it's important. The biblical pattern is that we do look back. It's an important part of Christian life. And Paul shows us the right way to do that.

In verse 3 he looks back at his own life. In verse 4 to 6 he looks back at Timothy's life. And what does he do when he looks back? He looks back. The first thing I think he does is he looks back to bring a little happiness.

A little light to his day. And that's okay. I'm repeating myself a little. But these were dark days for Paul. Impending execution. Rejected by his own and his dearest.

[13:27] Only Onesiphorus and Timothy to call on. And he separated from Timothy. The one who he loved so much. The one he had worked so hard with.

And he looked back at happier times. He looked back at the time where he spent in Timothy's home. His time with Timothy's godly mother. And grandmother.

He looked back to the times he had spent with Timothy. In missionary work and working in churches. And why did he do that? Well it tells us in verse 4.

So that he may be filled with joy. It's good. And it's helpful to look back to the happy times. Maybe the day you got married.

The day your children were born. Your first job. The day you passed your exams. The family event.

[14:26] Where it was so good to get everybody together. That we all remember. And for me it was just a bit of an ordinary day. The day I look back to. It was a Saturday. It was a sunny day.

The children were playing in the back garden. And we had a bit of a slope in the back garden. We had a bit of a small water slide. And they were playing in that all afternoon. Laughing and giggling. And just enjoying and amusing themselves. Ruth was in the garden. I was the vegetable man in our house. So I planted and grew them. But Ruth did flowers. And she was planting and tending her flowers.

And I was sitting there. Doing my favourite domestic chore. My wee happy place. Where I was sitting in the wall. On the sun. Polishing shoes. A bit weird I know. But that's my happy place.

But I just remember when I was doing that. Feeling wonderfully blessed. I remember thinking that life just doesn't get any better.

[15:33] And in tough times you should look back to those days as well. Because it will bring you joy. It will remind you what life can be like. And it will remind you.

And show you that God is good. The second thing he does is he looks back to help with his own assurance. Remember again the extreme situation that he was in.

And it feels only normal that he would be saying. Is this really worth it? And most of us will not face that extreme situation. But we will face situations that make us doubt.

Well Paul's example is how to deal with that. He doesn't mention it here. He doesn't mention it here. But he can look back to that day on the Damascus road where he became a Christian.

He can look back to his appointment as a preacher, apostle and teacher as it says here. And that was important. Because it verified the genuineness of his faith.

[16 : 36] And it verified the role that he had played all his life. He looked back at his suffering both now and in times past.

And what could he say? And I'm summarizing here. But he says, I know my Savior. That's what he says. I know him. I know him personally. I know my faith is real.

And I know that whatever the situation, that he will take me through it. And he will let me down. So that's the second thing. He looked back for assurance.

But he did a similar thing for Timothy. Timothy was not like Paul. He needed constant encouragement and support. He suffered from health issues.

And he needed prompting and pushing all the time. And he reminded him of his Christian upbringing. He reminded that he was the one that laid on his hands.

[17 : 36] If you like, Paul was the one who commissioned Timothy. And much like Paul, that was confirmation that his faith was genuine. And that was confirmation that his gifts were adequate for the role that he had to do.

And it was a wee push to remind him not to stop and not to give up. So keep going in the faith. It can be tough at times.

And if it hasn't been tough, if it isn't tough now, there will be times in the future when it will be. So one of the things you do is not to look forward but to look back. Look back and see the role of God in your life.

Look back and remind yourself how he's been good to you. And how he's guided you through the ups and downs of life. And look back to the day or the time or the experience you had in becoming a Christian.

And look back to how God has used you in some way or other. And look back. And when you do that, you will understand that your faith is secure.

[18 : 45] And that you are in safe hands. And that you're not on your own. So that's the first point. Look back. The second point is that when to keep going, we have to understand that we're not relying on our own strength but the power of God.

And it's a short point. Paul was in a precarious position. Timothy, with his personality and health issues, from a human perspective, looked like somebody who was going to fail.

Now his mentor was going to be taken away. But it was precisely that realization of their own weaknesses that made them strong. Because they realized that they knew that the only thing they could do was rely on God for their strength.

And we all have weaknesses. We all have gaps in our talent. We all look around at others and see that they have gifts that we don't have or are way more talented than we are.

But realizing these weaknesses is exactly what you need. That weakness is not your weakness. It's your strength. So if you're feeling weak and helpless in your faith, if you're wondering, what can I do?

[20 : 01] Well, that's brilliant. Because that just makes you a prospect for the Holy Spirit. A prime prospect. And if you ask for help, he will give you all your strength that you need.

And all the gifts and talents and support that you need to do it. It's not me. Who makes this sermon strong. It's God who will make it strong if it is. It's not yourself who will make your Christian journey strong.

It is God. And he will provide all that you need, as I said, for a strong and useful faith. And he is the one that will give you the love you need to keep reaching out to people who are lost, even when they oppose you, want to hurt you, or are mean to you.

But on the other hand, if you're feeling confident, if you're feeling that your faith is indestructible, if you're feeling that you're the best person for every job going in this church or whatever church you're from, then prepare to fail.

Because you're relying on yourself. Because you're relying on yourself. And as Ruth said earlier, we didn't plan this, but it's too big a burden to carry. You can't do it.

[21 : 17] And rely on your God. And he will take you through the best and the worst of times. And the final point I want to make is to be bold and unashamed.

And the Christian faith, it isn't a cozy thing. In the days that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, to die on the cross was a scandal. If you're from a Jewish background, it was a cursed death. If you're from other backgrounds, it was a death that was reserved for the worst of people. And the idea that salvation was dependent on somebody who died on the cross was abhorrent to some and totally ridiculous to others.

How could someone who died on the cross be our only hope for salvation? And it's not quite like that today. It's different, particularly in this country. We don't face persecution. We don't have to be scared coming here. But we will face opposition. I don't know if you noticed the news this week, but there was a former politician who left their party after many years.

[22 : 26] And there's many reasons for that. But one of the reasons that they give was a disgust that a godly Christian person had a leadership position in their party.

So we will face opposition even here. But back to yourselves. Maybe we worry we'll be laughed at. We are concerned that nobody will listen. We think we don't know enough.

Maybe we are concerned that we will miss out, as I've said earlier. Often there will be a fear that we'll cut ourselves off from the people that we need to help.

And against that background, how have so many people in churches responded? Well, they dial back on the message. They avoid talking about biblical things.

Bible messages are amended or adapted to filter out the inconvenient truths or the things that we worry may cause offense.

[23 : 28] And we can look at churches and Christians who have gone down that road. And what is the result of that? Well, we sang a little bit about it earlier. But it's confusion.

It's destruction. And it's affliction. And at its worst, you're leading people to destruction, not leading them away from it. The price of being ashamed of the gospel is too high.

And it's not one that we should be prepared to pay. So when Paul tells us, so Paul tells us then that we have to be bold.

We can't be unashamed and not be bold. One of the things I mentioned earlier, he tells Timothy to fan the flame. Don't let the fire of your faith go out or go cold.

Take action to stoke up that fire in your belly. Take action to make sure that it goes strong, that it burns brightly and strongly and so strong that people can see it.

[24 : 30] They can feel it and even hear it in the way that you are. And you're to be bold even to the point of persecution, suffering and death.

We hope that nobody in this church will have to face that. Paul was facing it. Other Christians in parts of the world are facing it. But we should be bold even up to that point.

And we should look at the examples of our forefathers, our Savior himself. He was laughed at. He was persecuted. He was rejected by his own. He was arrested.

He was put on the cross and he died for us. He was bold. He wasn't ashamed. Paul wasn't ashamed and he had endured many of these things as well.

And to overcome these things, as I said, you have no option but to be bold. But we can be bold with confidence. And what I said earlier, that we are not relying on our own strength, but we are relying on God's.

[25 : 32] So we can be bold. We can be bold because of the examples of people that have gone before us and what they have done. And the way that they have been blessed.

But we can be bold with confidence as well. Because the message we have, it's the most powerful thing. I don't think it will offend anybody here, but I'm going to say it. I was at a church not so long ago where they had a bad news story.

And they wanted to put it at the end because they didn't want to undermine the message of the Bible. And they got it the entire way wrong. Because the Bible is the most powerful thing.

Way more powerful than the bad news that they had. And they should have done it the other way around. The Bible is the most powerful thing. It was powerful enough to overcome your sinfulness and rebellion if you're a Christian this morning.

It's powerful enough to change the most hostile and defiant of people. It's powerful enough to bring peace and love where there is hatred, distrust, and conflict.

[26 : 39] And this passage tells us it's powerful enough. It's the only thing in this world powerful enough to overcome death itself. And it doesn't mean that we won't die or face death.

It doesn't mean that death is abolished. It just means, as it says elsewhere in the Bible, that death has lost its sting because of the promise of eternal life thereafter for those who believe.

And I need to close. One of the facts of Christian life is that there will be times of doubt. There will be times of decline.

And there will be times of what we used to call backsliding. But that is something that can't be allowed to persist or take root. It's a price for you and it's a price for others that is too harsh and can't be paid.

So you need to take action to prevent that. And this chapter here gives us some pointers on how to do that. It's help from other Christians.

[27 : 40] It's a responsibility that we all have to help each other in good times and bad. But it's a personal responsibility as well. A personal responsibility to look at God's role in our life and the plan he has had for us.

It's a personal responsibility to look back and see how we've been blessed. It's a personal responsibility to look back at how we came to faith and use that as motivation to keep going and to keep pushing forward.

And we have that responsibility as one that we can't compromise or dull down or limit in any way. And this will not be easy.

Maybe for some of you, you will pay a very high price to be there. But you can take that strength with boldness and with a sense of purpose. And you will be given strength beyond what you think you have or what you can manage.

Because that power comes not from you, but from God. And I want to read just a few verses to finish. I struggle with ending sermons. And sometimes I just leave it to the Bible to talk itself.

[28 : 52] Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though its mountains tremble at its swelling.

And then look at verse 7 and 11, which repeat themselves. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Amen.