

# Strength in the Day of Adversity

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Preacher: Nigel Kenny

[ 0 : 00 ] I know I've said it already, but good evening. You're all welcome here. And it'd be good if as many as possible could stay behind and spend some time with us.

! And I always do this when I preach, but I think it's so important, and I'm going to keep doing it. Keep your Bibles open. And there's a couple of reasons for that. And it's Paul's last letter that we read, 2 Timothy.

We don't know for certain, but it feels likely that he died shortly after this was written. He was in prison, and some think he was awaiting his execution.

And as I've been working my way through this book of 2 Timothy, I wonder if Timothy actually read it when Paul was still alive, and the impact that that would have had on him if Paul had already died. We don't know that for certain, and it's wrong to speculate too much on things the Bible is silent on. But it was written to Timothy. The relationship was close between Paul and Timothy.

[ 1 : 11 ] As I said before, it was father-son. It was teacher-pupil. It was the best of friends all rolled into one. It was a relationship of love and support both ways.

Paul saw Timothy as a trusted lieutenant, but realized that Timothy was a needy person and sought to help him as best as he could with all these things.

Timothy looked up to Paul. He did often what Paul asked him to do and relied on him heavily for support. And this is Paul's last chance to give that support, and it crams in lots of guidance in a very small space.

And when you read it, you get the feeling that Paul knew that the guard was changing and the baton was being passed to the next generation.

And he wanted to make sure that Timothy, his trusted and beloved friend, had all the tools and the guidance that he needed to keep going. And what you find, sorry, I think some background is useful for what we're going to talk about later, but from the start of the letter until verse 13 of chapter 2, there's an extended appeal to Timothy.

[ 2 : 31 ] He tells him to stand tall, to hang tough, and suffer if he has to. And I'm not going to talk through it in detail, but he reminds Timothy of the authenticity of his faith, with the genuineness of his calling to be a missionary and a minister of the Word.

And he reminds him that that has been publicly verified. He stresses the centrality of the gospel and how he should remain loyal to that, even if it involves suffering.

And finally, what he does is he uses a series of illustrations to emphasize the key things he will need. There was a soldier which captures the idea of dedication and following orders, regardless of the cost.

There was the one we read of the athlete to show that he must play by the rules and not cut corners on preparation or participation if he wants to obtain the final prize.

And finally, in that section, there's the farmer which captures the idea of you've got to work hard and be diligent because that is a requirement.

[ 3 : 47 ] And then we come to the bit that I want to look at this evening, where instead of focusing on Timothy and his needs, he turns his instruction on what Timothy is to tell others or us, if you like, on God's work, even in very difficult situations like what they were facing.

And let me read a few verses, verse 16, and what we read. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.

And their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have sworn from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened.

They are upsetting the faith of some. And I'll go into more detail on that as we go along. But Paul's guidance here is actually quite simple because it's about things you should do and things you

shouldn't.

But it's also about the way that you are or the character traits that you should and shouldn't have if you want to be useful in the service of the kingdom.

[ 5 : 05 ] And it's a bit of a... Some books of the Bible are very logical and ordered, but this one and maybe the book of James, they jump about from one thing to another.

But he gives, I'm going to say, three things where we can say, if we want to be useful, what are the three things that we can do that we'll look at tonight?

And the first one is to watch the chat and the debate that you get into. And we have this idea in the world today that everyone has a right to be heard and that talking things through is the...

To a degree, there's truth in that. Talking can be good to help understand or attain clarity. It can help us build and repair relationships.

It can solve problems. We talk to teach, to inspire, and to discipline. It's part of the way that we communicate about everything that we do.

[ 6 : 14 ] Our minister talks to us to explain the Bible. We have Bible studies and we talk things through in our prayer time, prayer meetings or prayer groups. We talk to God sometimes out loud and sometimes not.

But what the Bible tells us here is there are limits to talking. And there comes a point where it's better not to engage when certain types of things happen.

At the lower end of the spectrum is what we find in verse 14, where it says, not to quarrel about words, which does no good.

I think that that's the lower end of the spectrum. It's more frivolous and pointless things. And I could think of so many examples of this sort of thing from my experience in church life.

But the worry is that when you talk about them, somebody actually does think they're important and somebody might be a little bit offended. But I've got two examples where if you are offended, you shouldn't be.

[ 7 : 24 ] But there are two examples from my own experience. In the church I grew up, it was having a bit of a refurb. And there just happened to be a vigorous debate about whether the carpet should be blue or red.

The blue camp, if I call them that, they pointed to cultural and historical traditions. And have you ever heard the term true blue?

Well, Rangers fans, I'm not trying to offend you, but it's not about you. It's really not. But it originated in Scottish. I'm sure it was before this as well. But it originated from the term true blue Presbyterians.

And that was a term that was used to describe Scottish Covenanters. And why? Why? Well, Scottish Covenanters, they had a blue banner. I had a look across the Atlantic because there's lots of Presbyterian schools and colleges out there.

And without fail, they're nearly all blue. I even found Presbyterian football teams called the Presbyterian blue hoses and so on.

[ 8 : 36 ] And in our own church, we have the blue book. Our denominational logo is a burning bush, which remarkably is blue. But in the red corner of this debate, there was the argument that we shouldn't be bound by cultural and historical norms that had no biblical basis.

And there was everything in the debate. From red would be a nice change to red illustrating the blood of sacrifice and so on.

The other debate of my youth was about words that we use when praying. And there's a body of opinion that said, anything other than thee and thy when referring to God in our prayers was disrespectful.

The counter-argument to that was that the so-called vulgar tongue was a principle in which the church was based. And the use of words other than thee and thy and the use of the wonderful tongue had been wonderfully blessed in the past.

So why not keep that principle going? And if you could see both these examples, it really didn't matter if the carpet was red or blue.

[ 9 : 53 ] It really doesn't matter if you use the words thee or thy in your reference to God in your prayers. What matters there is the attitude of your hearts and your minds. And what was common about both these things was the problems that they caused, these wordy debates.

Sometimes the debates was pitched in a theological way when they're clearly not. Sometimes they were portrayed as an issue of faith when they are not. Sometimes they generated rouse when there really was nothing to rye about.

And people used their intellectual capability or in some cases their force of personality to win the argument regardless of the cost that it brought for pointless things or wordy things, if you like. And these type of things the Bible tells us is do no good. They do harm. And Paul doesn't tell us here to talk a little bit more.

Go for a coffee, different environment in a neutral, with neutral colors in the background and all that type of stuff. He doesn't say get a mediator to help you. What he says is just don't do it.

[ 11 : 08 ] Avoid it. Don't get involved because it will bring you and everybody else harm. But at the other end of the spectrum we have something worse.

And different translations translate this in different ways. But they are all in the same zone. But Paul says, they refer to things like irreverent babble, godless chatter, profane and idle talk.

And as I say, this goes further than what was in verse 14. But this is the sort of thing that is wrong, something that is contradictory to what the Bible says.

And maybe it adds to what the Bible says. Maybe it takes away from what the Bible says. Maybe it just plain ignores it or makes stuff up. And the example that we read earlier was with Hymenaeus and Philetus.

And their argument was that the resurrection, the physical resurrection had already happened for believers. And that was a very dangerous argument because the implication was that when a believer dies, that there is no physical resurrection to follow in the future for them.

[ 12 : 26 ] And that is not what the Bible says. But if you flow that logic through even further, it calls into question the physical resurrection of Christ.

And if you flow that logic through even further again, what that does is it undermines the whole basis of our faith. And every believer who calls himself faithful, because without that physical resurrection of Christ, then our salvation is nothing.

It's irrelevant and meaningless. So this sort of thing, this far-out, dangerous, non-biblical talk, you can see the danger.

It's speculative, it's intellectual, and it's spiritually destructive to those who fall into that. All it will do is lead people away from biblical truth.

So dangerous, Paul says, is that it's gangrenous. It's an infection. It can cause major damage. And at worst, it may have to be cut out or cut off.

[ 13 : 36 ] And for this sort of thing, Paul doesn't say, avoid it. Just stay away from it. He says, don't give it airplay. He says, don't allow it any time.

But rather than just avoiding it, you've got to stop it. because of this destruction it will do to your church, to yourself, and the people who are lost as a result of it.

So that's the first thing, if you want to be useful. Avoid the pointless stuff and positively root out and chase away all the chat and all the debate that is not biblical because you'll protect yourself, you'll protect others, and you will protect your church.

And I think the second point, it's a shorter one, and a really obvious one, is that you have to handle the Bible correctly.

And to quote one of the commentators I read, we must give it straight and get it straight. And it really is that simple. We only have to read the Bible and see what it says about itself to know that this is true.

[ 14 : 51 ] Look for me in 2 Timothy 3 and verse 16. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may complete, acquit for every good work.

So it's inspired by God and it's relevant and useful to every situation. Psalm 12 talks about the Bible being truthful and pure. 1 Corinthians 4 says the Bible sets the standard for what is right and it's wrong.

And it shows that it's authoritative. Hebrews 4 verse 12 talks about the power of the Bible. John chapter 5 talks about the Bible being centered on Christ.

And I could have given you a much longer list than that. But the Bible is perfect. It's pure. It's useful in every situation. So why do people want to play around with it and mold it to their thoughts rather than relying on what is there?

They shouldn't. It's a fool's job. And so our presentation of the Bible, it should be all the things required by the verses I referred to.

[16:10] It should be direct. It should be undeleted. There should be no deviation left or right by adding things to the Bible or taking things away.

We shouldn't use the Bible to make points that are not there in the portions that we are looking at. Or we shouldn't use it for applications that aren't relevant.

And we've all been there. We've all listened to sermons where the Bible has been shoehorned in to support a position rather than the other way around.

We've all heard sermons or maybe been at Bible studies or other places where there's something badly wrong being put forward often through a lack of knowledge or desire to be controversial.

And then these are the sort of modern day equivalent of Hymenaeus and Philetus. These are the people who promote things that are just plain wrong.

[17:15] And there's so many ways that we see this, that people adapt the Bible to suit what they believe rather than the other way around. And one of the things that they do is that they, particularly within churches, they emphasize certain elements of the Bible at the expense of others.

If I look at liberal Christianity and I know that's a very wide term, it often has a focus on social justice and Jesus' humane teaching, but it downplays things like judgment and sinfulness and miraculous events.

And because they leave those things out, it opens them up with the ability to align with so-called progressive social agenda.

And this is why Christians or people who call themselves Christians can be supportive of things that damage our unborn children that are looking to end the life of the sick before their time and end up with crazy views on morality and the damage all these things does.

How do they do that? They do it by emphasizing other bits, some bits of the Bible and leaving bits out. And then there's the other side of the coin. There's something a bit more fundamentalist which often focuses on judgment and do's and don'ts.

[18:41] And what it does is it misses out the ideas of forgiveness and love. And as a result, they become very judgmental and harsh. So don't mess about with the Bible because when you look and compare, when you compare these things with the straight and true presentation of the Bible, you see the importance of getting it right.

It is simple, it is truthful, it honors God. It leaves people in no doubt of their sinful condition and their need for a Savior and the hope that they have, that they have a Savior who can give them a sure salvation should they ask.

It gives clear guidance on how to live life and gives us instruction how to steer between things which are fundamental and other areas where we have more freedom to choose.

But if we deviate from that, you can see it creates division, it creates confusion, it distracts from our Lord because people are so confused that rather than having their eyes on Him, they can be tied up in knots.

And I've already mentioned the division within the church because it's clearly not focused on God. And this is what Hymenaeus and Philetus had done.

[20:07] They led people away through their mistaken and dangerous views on resurrection. And 2 Timothy here has a very ominous warning to people who do that.

It says, the Lord knows the people who are His. And it also goes on to say that the people who promote something that's wrong, there'll be a day of reckoning for them and they will be dealt with most harshly.

So that's the second point that we should stay true to the Bible, not left or right, but straight on. And the third thing that Paul advises us here is to pursue purity.

And the original question I asked at the start was, how can we be useful in a context where there's a world who opposes us, who doesn't understand us, who's indifferent to us, but how can we be useful when there's people in our churches that can pretend to be Christians even when they're not. And we looked at the type of chat and dialogue and debate that we should and shouldn't have. We talked about the Bible and how that should and shouldn't be treated.

[21:30] But now we come to the bit which is about us all personally. It's about the way we should be and the way we shouldn't be. And Paul deals with it in much the same way as he's dealt with in the previous points.

There are things which are, there's things which we should do and there's things which we shouldn't. Or the way he describes it here, there's things that we should run away from and other things that we should run to.

and to do this he uses an illustration of a great house with a range of vessels, some of which the Bible says are honourable and some which are dishonourable.

In this illustration, the great house is the church and it reflects the fact that the church is made up of genuine true believers and sadly others who aren't.

There'll be people here tonight who aren't genuine and true and that's just a fact of life in the church. But if you want to be truly useful, you have to cleanse or purify yourself and this is the only condition that's laid down by the master of the house and if you do that, if you do purify yourself, even the most humble of people and even those who think of themselves as little use can play a wonderfully useful role and the purification talked about here is to remove all the dirt all the dirt from the desolates.

[ 22 : 59 ] It's the false teaching that confuse and damage our minds and the people around us. It's about cleansing all the things that get in the way of your relationship with God and his people.

What Paul is saying here is that your Christian character must be good and he's very strong here. It's a non-negotiable but it's not an easy thing. to have a good Christian character.

I grew up in an environment where I think I feel sorry for younger people today because when I was young it was much simpler. There's a clear definition of what was right and what was wrong and what was expected.

I do accept that sometimes the rules of right and wrong came dangerously close to sort of unintended and damaging legalism.

But now we're in a world which rather than emphasising do's and don'ts it emphasises faith and it emphasises our personal freedoms in the faith.

[ 24 : 08 ] And there's a danger in that because it encourages a view that faith is secure. So because your faith is secure you can do whatever you want because one day you'll end up in heaven anyway and if you're thinking that way or if you're behaving in that way well stop now take a breath reset your life because an upright Christian character is totally non-negotiable for your usefulness in his service.

But the purification is not just once and done type of thing. It's a lifelong task and Paul elaborates for us on what that means.

And as I said earlier it's about running away from things which he refers to here as things like youthful passions. And Paul isn't youth bashing here and if you're sitting there thinking that the way to protect our church is by not allowing our youth to have any role or service then you're taking this passage totally out of context and applying that word incorrectly.

All that Paul is trying to say is here that when you're younger your mind and your body are at their physical and mental peak but at the same time you're less likely to have the life experience and biblical knowledge to use that well.

So he tells you to avoid some of these things. It's the wrong exercise of sexual desires outside of a marriage. It's an impatience to get things done rather than to do them well.

[ 25 : 52 ] It's a greater tendency to want to enter into debate and dialogue even when you've not enough knowledge to know if you're right and wrong.

And we are told we are to run away from those things as fast as you can and keep running. And younger people, if you think we're picking on you, we're not. Because there's other parts of the Bible not mentioned here which says that one of the tendencies that happens when you get older is that you're less able to take advice.

So if you're one of those older people like that, you run away from that too. It's not just about younger people, it's about you as well. But as we are running, we are to run towards something much better and much more lovely.

A life of faith, a life characterized by love and righteousness and somebody devoted to peace. It is somebody who doesn't seek a quarrel.

It doesn't mean that we avoid arguments. Paul was bold, direct, controversial when the truth of the Bible was at stake, but it means we are to be people who avoid unnecessary quarrels about things which are frivolous, wordy, or futile.

[ 27 : 12 ] We are to be gentle, both when we are positively building people up, but when we are correcting people as well. We are to correct with love rather than a harshness.

We have to be truly pastoral, and all the things of saying we are to be like Jesus. And what did Jesus do when people were hungry?

He gave them food. When people were ill, he healed them. When people were oppressed by the religious rulers of the day, he stuck up for them and pointed them in the true way.

When people were excluded or at the edge of polite society, he went out and met them and ate with them. And this is how we are to be.

we are to be honourable and upstanding Christians. It's a bit old-fashioned and may sound a bit naff, if I'm being honest, but that's what the Bible says.

[ 28 : 17 ] And why? Why do we be like this? Because we want to bring people in. We want to show them the path of hope. And we want to lead them to eternity spent with God in heaven.

and we want them to be free people, free from the captivity that so many of them are in and so often they don't even know. And you won't do that if you spend your time arguing with others over pointless or frivolous things.

You'll positively lead them away and put them off if you go away from the direct presentation of the gospel or its message.

And your usefulness will be limited if your Christian character is wrong or if you don't practice what you preach or you're compromising areas of your life away from the eyes of the church.

And you will drive people away if you're unloving and harsh. Jesus loves so much. He's our example. He loves so much.

[ 29 : 26 ] He was prepared to give his life. He was prepared to pay the price for arson even when he was sinless himself. He was prepared to be separated from his father at the time of his death.

And that is the example that is presented here. I want to close now. One of the problems I have is I really struggle for a good ending.

Normally what I do is I leave it to the Bible to end or I quote somebody else but this time I think we'll sing our conclusion. I'm going to ask you all to sing a hymn.

We sung two hymns by Francis Ridley Havergal tonight. And the reason for this one is the hymn comes from a poem that was written, her poem, and it was called A Worker's Prayer.

Quite sad that they didn't keep that title. And if you look at it, verse one and two, she writes a hymn that captures that she wants a love for the lost who are in great need.

[ 30 : 42 ] Verses two and three, it's about a love for the Bible, its truth, and a desire to be taught so that she can teach. Verse four, it's a desire for a full Christian character.

And verse five, it's a desire to be used. So let's sing our conclusion. Watch the words, it's important, it was chosen for a reason.