

Remember the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] 2 Timothy, chapter 1, beginning at verse 8. Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.

But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Homogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesophorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me.

May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. And you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus. Thank you very much for reading.

[1 : 5 1] Let's pray again. Our loving Father, we thank you that you are with us by your Spirit.

And as we come to your word, your living word, we pray that you would humble our hearts. We pray that where our hearts are hard, you would soften them.

Where our hearts are unbelieving, you would grant us faith. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, do keep that passage open in front of you, and there is an outline on the back of your sheets, if that's going to be helpful. Last week, we looked at Timothy's crossroads, or as somebody pointed out to me afterwards, technically, Phil, what you drew was a Y junction, not crossroads.

But Timothy's Y junction doesn't quite have the same ring. So I'm going to stick with Timothy's crossroads, but it was a good point and well made. Thank you. Timothy's crossroads, verse 8, don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.

[3 : 1 2] This week, we're going to look at two verses, 9 and 10, where Paul moves to show why there is nothing to be ashamed of.

Okay, so in other words, last week, we looked at the what, verses 8 and then 11 to 14, don't be ashamed of the gospel, but guard it.

This week, we're looking at the why, sandwiched in the middle, verses 9 and 10. There's nothing to be ashamed of here.

A recent YouGov poll found that 10% of the UK public think that a Catholic would be unsuitable for public office.

16% of people thought that a Muslim would be unsuitable for public office. And 19% of people thought that an evangelical Christian would be unsuitable for public office.

[4 : 13] Isn't that interesting? Probably wouldn't have got that 20 years ago, 30 years ago. We talked about the temperature rising in our culture if you're going to be a Bible-believing Christian.

A couple of years ago, a young lady came along to the Moorgate Talks, which is what I hope to help with in the city, and some of you have been along to that. And she was converted through the gospel.

She heard the good news about Jesus, Jesus' love for her, how he died for her, how he was going to give her eternal life and bring her to live with him forever.

And she was so filled with joy, as people are when they realize who Jesus is, that she then went back to the office and started telling her colleagues and sharing her faith.

She organized a lunch for her team, where she shared her faith. And as she retells it, she knows the details, she was sacked from her role two weeks later, really for that reason.

[5 : 16] Although officially, I presume they couldn't have given that reason legally. None of this is new, of course. Have a look down at verses 11 and 12, which we had read.

the apostle Paul sitting in a Roman dungeon through the gospel. He says, for which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do.

In other words, standing with and proclaiming the good news about Jesus. Do you see that? That is why Paul suffered. And so it has always resulted in suffering.

if you're going to stand for this gospel. As sure as night follows day. As we saw last week, we can't fully grasp the significance of this letter unless we understand the situation.

The apostle Paul is in prison on death row. These are the last words we have of his before he was executed by the Romans. The churches across the ancient world that he had established through his ministry were deserting him at this point, left, right, and center, under this new and real threat from the Romans of dying for the faith.

[6 : 43] Timothy, to whom Paul is writing, is at a crossroads. One way lay to remain faithful to the testimony about our Lord, the true gospel, as taught by Paul, verse 8, but to face inevitable suffering and possible death.

The other way lay to deviate from true Christianity to an easier form of it that was more socially acceptable and would allow him, therefore, to avoid suffering where the rest of the church had gone.

What a temptation for Timothy. Now, I want to begin by making an observation from chapter 1, which is that one of the things that is most likely to make us walk away from the faith in the end is suffering.

Possibly the thing that is most likely to cause our leaders to walk away, Timothy, of course, was a hardened missionary, is the prospect of suffering.

You see that in 1, verse 8? Paul makes this link three times. 1, verse 8, don't be ashamed, but share in suffering instead. 1, verse 12, as we've seen, which is why I suffer as I do, but I am not ashamed.

[8 : 12] And 1, verse 16, may the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my suffering, my chains.

Why do so many good leaders drift away from evangelicalism over the course of their lives? Some of you would have heard of Nazir Ali, who was a good evangelical bishop in the Church of England, has drifted away from evangelicalism.

Well, here's the answer. Not because of the message. Not because the message loses its clarity or truthfulness, but in order to avoid the suffering that comes with it.

And I just want to pause here because at this point, the rubber was hitting the road for the church as Paul wrote this letter. And it was exposing the shallow depth of much of the church as Nero brought in this persecution.

It was hitting the road for Timothy, who was genuinely facing death. So the question becomes, what happens when the rubber hits the road for us?

[9 : 25] Will we stick with the gospel then? And in verses 9 and 10, Paul serves up to Timothy three precious reasons why there is nothing to be ashamed of here.

And the point is that though the whole world and his dog were to walk away from the Lord Jesus, don't you walk away, Timothy, or each of us.

And you can stand up unashamed and preach this gospel, whatever the response. And I think in verses 9 and 10, we also have an amazing insight into the aspects of the gospel message that were most prominent in Paul's mind as he went to his death.

The key to understanding verses 9 and 10 is there in verse 12 where Paul says this. He says, I'm not ashamed for I know whom I have believed.

Not what I've believed, but whom I've believed. And that is what verses 9 and 10 are about. They're about the God in whom Paul has put his trust and for whose gospel he's not ashamed to die.

[10 : 40] Three things. Number one, secure in the arms of a sovereign God. Verse 9, God who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

Paul knows whom he has believed and that he is secure in his sovereign arms. I think verse 9 is about the sovereignty of God.

And this is a certainty that is available to every Christian. And just look down. First he says in verse 9, God who saved us and called us to a holy calling.

Notice that God has not only powerfully saved us from sin and death and judgment in Christ. But he has also called us to a holy calling.

I wonder what you think Paul means there. Now this is important in the context. What is this holy calling to which he's called us? And there is a surprise here and that the holy calling to which he's called us is not to dress up as a monk and go and live in a castle somewhere.

[12 : 02] The holy calling is to suffer briefly with Christ now and then to live with him in eternity. That is the holy calling that God has given to his people.

That is why Paul describes himself in chapter 4 as being poured out as a drink offering. You read that? Have you wondered why he describes himself as that?

As he's describing his death, his upcoming death. He describes himself as being poured out as a drink offering, the holiest possible way of describing his death.

Like a sacrifice in the temple, pleasing to God. Why? Because it's part of the holy calling to which he's been called. And I think you can see the holy calling spelt out in 2 verse 11, in 2 verse 11, which is the sort of summary of this calling to which we're called, where Paul says, the saying is trustworthy.

If we've died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. And what a holy calling, therefore, to become like Christ, to die with him, the holy one, and then to live with him.

[13 : 24] And so, therefore, the brief suffering that we must go through now is no accident, but is part of God's privileged calling. He has saved us and called us to a holy calling that he has long purposed for us.

Now, that changes our whole perspective on life. called long ago to a holy calling to suffer briefly with Christ now in this life and then to reign with him in eternity.

That's not a bad calling. And that's not all. This salvation and calling was given to us in Christ by God's grace long ago.

Verse 9, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. Notice, when did he give us this salvation and this calling?

Before the ages began. That is, Paul knows that God's love for him and all God's people in Christ, as someone has put it, is an ancient love.

[14 : 44] that stretches back before the creation of the world. Have you ever thought about that? Known by name, saved in Christ and called to this holy calling, suffer now briefly, live with Christ forever.

All given to you before Genesis 1, verse 1. Before the creation of this world. Before times eternal. Isn't that extraordinary?

Absolutely blows the mind, doesn't it? And I think this is about security because it is not, therefore, and never was dependent on our good works.

Our lives lived, our spiritual performance, our prayers, the strength of our faith, the number of times we've been to church, never dependent on any of that stuff, but simply and only on the generosity and kindness of God.

And so, as Paul sits in his prison cell, chains on his hands and legs, on death row, he knows that he's secure in the arms of a sovereign God that nothing has gone wrong.

[16 : 09] It would be so tempting for him, wouldn't it, to think, something's gone wrong, I'm about to die for this. No, this is the holy calling. The holy calling is on track. And this then is the security that Timothy needed to know as he stood at the crossroads.

And it is a security that every Christian can know as we stand at a similar crossroads. I was chatting to one of you after the service last week.

A school of thousands, a Christian union of free. It feels lonely to be a Christian, doesn't it? Many of you in your workplaces, and I've sort of spent a lot of time with the guys in the city, men and women, tiny Christian groups surrounded by thousands of people who couldn't care less and who actually find the gospel offensive.

Well, if it feels lonely to be a Christian now, it's no more lonely than it was at that point for Timothy or for the apostle Paul as he sat in the bottom of this prison.

And Paul would encourage us, brother, sister, you rest in the arms of an everlasting sovereign God who has saved you and called you to a holy calling to share in the suffering for Christ and then to live with him forever.

[17 : 40] Well, secondly, there is nothing to be ashamed of because God's salvation is real and true and that has been shown to be the case in history. There can be no doubt of the truth of it and that is where he moves in verse 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus.

I think those two words manifested and appearing give away what Paul is getting at which is that this long-planned salvation planned in the secrecy of the heart of God before ages began has now been splashed out publicly in the life and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God in history.

On earth, 2,000 years ago. You'll remember the Olympic opening ceremony, some of you, from 2012. Actually, our wedding boat was in it so when we were on our boat on the Thames and we saw these two helicopters fly through Tower Bridge and we sort of thought, well, that's interesting, a bit unusual but didn't think more about it.

Then as we were watching the opening ceremony, we saw the James Bond entrance and we realised at that point that that was... and we actually saw the corner of our boat published to millions across the world except I've tried to look it up since and somehow it's been edited out so I'm not sure, I can't understand why anyone would do that but anyway, so you won't see it but it was there, I think.

that opening ceremony would have taken years to plan, say four years, five years, ten years but then there was the night itself when it was finally splashed out and publicly, unmissably shown to the world.

[19 : 31] That is what Paul's getting at in verse 10. God's salvation has not been done in a corner, Timothy. This is not a mysterious secret that we're being asked to believe for which there's no evidence, no, this is about fact and reality displayed in Christ who lived and died and rose again.

it is the fulfillment and public splashing out of God's long promised salvation. Jesus' enemies tried their absolute best to discredit him and they couldn't.

That's why they had to arrest him at night and get one of his friends to betray him because it was open, it was public. There was no denying what he was doing.

As Timothy sat alone in his front room in Ephesus sipping his thick Turkish coffee and wondering whether it was worth it standing up and preaching this gospel, whether it was worth sticking with it, perhaps wondering whether it was true.

You ever been there? I think Timothy was probably. Paul says to Timothy, you know it's true and though the world and his dog walk away, don't you walk away because it's true.

[21 : 04] I'll always remember sitting in a room with a few other guys and for some reason I'd squeezed in there, I don't really know why I was there but we had an audience with John Chapman which some of you may have heard of him, an Australian minister and missionary and he was coming to the end of his life, he must have been in his mid-80s at that point.

Anyway we were sat there just listening to him really and he said something that I don't think I'll ever forget because I wasn't expecting him to say anything like it. He said that every morning he'd wake up and be assailed by doubts.

Is it true? This is a guy who'd spent his life preaching Jesus and he'd say to himself, he'd ask himself, what am I doing with my life?

And he'd find, he'd have to remind himself with this question and I won't try the Australian accents with this question. Chapo, has anything changed since yesterday?

Is Christ any less raised from the dead than he was last night? Is the tomb any less empty? Well, get up and get on with it, you lazy coot.

[22 : 19] That's what he said. I don't know what coot means, something unflattering in Australian. Paul says, don't forget the undeniable facts of history, that God has not left his salvation in the dark.

It is not a mysterious secret. he has published it, he's brought it into the light, and there is no doubt anymore through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And so therefore, don't walk away from the truth. There's nothing to be ashamed of here. It has now been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour.

And it may be that someone needs to hear this particularly today. And one of the things you can do is go and read a Gospel again.

That's why we come back to the Gospels again and again. To come back to the salvation that has appeared and manifested through our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

[23 : 23] Well, thirdly, and more briefly, there's nothing to be ashamed of because God's salvation is forever. It is wonderful. Just look at the end of verse 10.

Our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. There is no stronger word for getting rid of something than to abolish it.

The Atlantic slave trade was abolished in our recent history in the 1830s, a great moment, but greater by far, if we can imagine it and believe it.

The abolishing of death. Aren't those wonderful words? How precious those words would have been to Paul as he sat in his cell about to die, weeks to live.

Isn't that the answer to the cry of every human heart? Try and think of someone you know for whom the abolishing of death isn't the answer to the cry of their heart?

[24 : 35] Well, that is what Jesus has done, and he's done it publicly. He's brought it into the light through his resurrection. There's no doubt.

And once death has been abolished, there is nothing left but life and immortality. And so it's okay, Paul says, as he sits in his cell, Jesus really is a saviour to die for.

Think of the future. And boy, did Paul practice what he preached. Well, we all need to ask ourselves, do you believe it?

And if you believe it, will you live it? Well, how to conclude? With any Bible text, we've got to ask what the purpose is.

Why is it here? And I think the purpose of these two verses is very simple. Don't be ashamed, because there's nothing to be ashamed of. As the rubber hits the road a bit more in our culture, which way will you go?

[25 : 48] In your school, in your workplace? And as the rubber hits the road, as a church that abandons us, which way will we go?

Don't be ashamed, because you are secure in the arms of an everlasting God, who has saved you and called you to a holy calling before the foundation of the world.

Don't be ashamed, because his salvation is true. Don't be ashamed, because his salvation is forever. And I think there are two dimensions of this not being ashamed, if you like, private and public.

Private, so therefore don't walk away, Timothy. Don't walk away from this God, this gospel, this saviour, whatever pressures you're under.

Public, so therefore stand up and preach it, Timothy. There's nothing to be ashamed of. We have the truth, without doubt, Christ manifested, and we preach a saviour, who answers the deepest cry of every human heart.

[26 : 55] Don't be ashamed. There's nothing to be embarrassed about. There's nothing embarrassing about Jesus. I remember, as I close, Steve Jobs, do you remember him?

The persuading, I think it's quite a well-known story, the founder of Apple, and he was persuading an executive from Pepsi to come and join him.

And he said this sort of memorable phrase, you've got a choice, you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or come with me and change the world? And I think that won him over.

Well, we might say in light of what Paul says here, do you want to give your life to making people's lives a bit more convenient before they die, to selling phones, or to introducing people to the one who has abolished death?

It's a bit better, isn't it? Let's pray as I close. Father, we thank you so much for Jesus, that he is a saviour to die for.

[28 : 06] There is nothing not to love about him, and there is nothing to hold on to in this life, there is no need to, because of the future that you have called us to, because we are secure in your arms.

We thank you that even just in these three verses, there is enough here for us to give our lives to serving and following the Lord Jesus and suffering with him, that we might reign with him.

So, we pray, Father, in each of us in our situations, that you might strengthen us, and cause us to stand up and in whatever situation you've given us, to be unashamed of the testimony of the Lord Jesus.

And we ask it in his name. Amen.