

Remember the Holy Spirit

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is 2 Timothy chapter 1, which can be found on page 1197. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus.

To Timothy, my beloved child, grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelled first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control. 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.

[2 : 17] 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 Onesiphorus, 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. Amen. Amen. Thanks, Vicki. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are with us by your Spirit.

[3 : 42] Thank you that your Spirit dwells in us and is among us. And we pray that you would open our hearts to receive your word humbly. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, it's great to be with you. You may ask, why too, Timothy? Why are we starting there? Well, it is my job description. So it's going to be great for me to begin here.

And also, I hope to set the agenda for us as a church as we come into this new phase of our life together. I wonder if you were sitting on death row in a dungeon somewhere.

You knew you were going to die in the next few days or weeks. What letter would you write? And to whom? I say that because Paul wrote to Timothy, probably in, it's called probably the Mamontine prison.

If you've been to Rome, it was the prison where they kept prisoners on death row. It's still there. It had some pretty deep dungeons in it. And these are, therefore, in 2 Timothy, these are the last words we have of the Apostle Paul before he was executed.

[5 : 05] For that reason alone, we might sit up in our seats. I mean, here are in our hands the last words of undoubtedly the second most influential man ever to live, besides the Lord Jesus himself.

He knew he was about to die. Just flick to chapter 4, verse 6 to see that. Paul says, chapter 4, verse 6, I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

I have fought the good fight. I've finished the race. I've kept the faith. He's on trial. He's actually had a trial, which he's got out of somehow.

But he's going to face another one. He's actually, this is the second time he's been arrested and put in Rome. So some of you will know the end of Acts.

The end of the book of Acts was his first time under arrest in Rome a couple of years earlier. And that was a house arrest. It was more comfortable. People could come and visit and that kind of thing.

[6 : 19] And he got out of that one, as he suspected. Those of you who know the letter to the Philippians, where he says to live is Christ, to die is game. He suspects that he'll get out. And he did.

But this time, two years later, he's in chains as a criminal. 2 verse 9. He's on death row.

And he's at the bottom of one of Rome's grottiest dungeons. This time, nobody knows where he is in Rome, which is why Onesiphorus has to search earnestly for him in 1 verse 17.

The date is around about AD 64. The emperor is Nero. And Nero's persecutions have begun.

Those of you who know what Nero did, he used Christians as torches in his garden parties. Paul knows now his time is short. He got out of the last one, but he's not getting out of this one.

[7 : 28] This, by the way, explains the tears that we had read in 1 verse 4. Paul says to Timothy, as I remember your tears.

Timothy, his long-term mission partner. Now, Timothy wasn't shedding tears because he was emotionally fragile. Like a sort of five-year-old waving off his dad on a business trip.

He was crying because he, like Paul, knew that this time may be the last time he ever sees him. It was probably at his arrest in Troas.

And so, Paul's last moments on earth, last days, weeks, he writes this letter. It is his last will and testament.

And he writes it to Timothy. Timothy was Paul's best man. He describes Timothy in Philippians as serving with him like a son with a father.

[8 : 30] And he says, I have no one like him. Timothy is meant to be leading the church in Ephesus. And so, Paul is passing on the baton to the next generation leader.

The subject of this letter, therefore, is what kind of man should the faithful Christian leader be?

What is his task? You might say, what are the essentials of Christian leadership?

And therefore, what kind of ministry should we throw our weight behind if we're to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in our generation? That's the subject. That's really the heart of what we're going to be thinking about over the next few weeks.

But I wanted to begin in an introductory way, simply by suggesting to us that Timothy stands at a crossroads. You'll see the diagram on your sheets, which you may think didn't take me very long. It took me a lot longer than it looks as though it might have taken me. If you've ever tried to draw anything on word, I've already had quite a lot of stick about that illustration from the staff team.

[9 : 39] So I'm looking forward to more of that. Timothy stands at a crossroads. Paul knows that. That is why he writes this letter.

And it is the same crossroads that faces every generation of Christians. The same decision that faces us as to which way we're going to go, which direction our life is going to take.

And we can see this most clearly in 1 verse 8. 1 verse 8 is the headline of the whole letter. Look again at 1 verse 8. This, by the way, is the verse, I think, that Timothy was to pin in front of him on his desk.

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.

Now, these are very surprising words, given who Timothy is. You might think, well, that's the kind of thing you may say to someone who's just started out in the Christian faith.

[10 : 48] But Timothy's not a new Christian. By this stage, he's spent 15 years of his life on the front line of mission with the apostle Paul. And he's been a Christian for longer.

Likely since he was a child. And Paul is picky about who he takes on mission with him. Those who know the bid in Acts where there's a disagreement with Barnabas. And Paul doesn't want to take Mark, who wrote Mark's gospel, with him on mission.

Paul says, Timothy's my best man. Think who that includes. Luke, Mark, Titus, Tychicus. By this stage, Timothy is a hardened missionary.

Many of you will have heard of Billy Graham, who began his mission ministry in 1947. 15 years later, 1962, Billy Graham had already done hundreds of missions and spoken to thousands of people.

It would be like Paul writing to Billy Graham in 1962 and saying, verse 8, Billy, don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.

[12:03] Why does Timothy need this letter? Well, to understand this, we need to get something of the dire situation this letter was written into. At least four reasons why Timothy, even Timothy, might be tempted to give up at this point.

Firstly, Paul was in prison, about to die. The great leader on death row. Well, perhaps that's okay. But secondly, Paul's life's work seemed to be nearly in tatters.

At this point, the Christian faith itself appears to be on the brink of destruction. Look at 1 verse 15. You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Homogenes.

That word all is unqualified. Both leaders and churches turned away from Paul in the last two years. He mentions Phygelus and Homogenes, presumably, to say to Timothy, yes, even them, even those previously wonderful Christian leaders have turned away.

Probably because of the increased pressure and temperature of the persecution under Nero. In the last two years, you've had this wide-scale desertion of Paul among the church and of the gospel that Paul taught.

[13:34] That's the Ephesian church. Those of us who know the letter to the Ephesians. Asia. It's half of Turkey. It's the Colossian church.

Timothy is left almost all alone. Can you imagine it? He mentions Asia because that's where Timothy was, but it's certainly wider scale even than that.

Paul is deserted in Rome. No one's coming to him, and so the church in Rome doesn't seem to be doing much better either. Think about it for a second. After all those missions, Paul is sat in his cell on death row.

What was left of his life's work? As one person put it, Christianity trembled, humanly speaking, on the verge of annihilation.

And it must have seemed to Timothy as if the gospel itself had failed. What was the point in carrying on?

[14:40] But then thirdly, there was the increased threat to Timothy's life. Paul had been arrested and put on death row. What did that mean for Timothy? If he stood up now as a Christian leader, a target on his back too.

Was he actually willing to die for this gospel? And fourthly, where Timothy is in Ephesus, there was the soft siren call of an easier kind of Christianity.

Not Paul's extreme version. Notice verse 15, he says, they've turned away from me, brackets, and my gospel. It's probably not that they've stopped calling themselves Christians.

In chapter two, we hear of teachers in Ephesus who've swerved from Paul's gospel to something different. A version of Christianity that was just adjusted enough to fall on the right side of socially acceptable.

To avoid the suffering that Paul was facing. It must have been so tempting for Timothy to join them. He wouldn't have to give up the name of Christian.

[15:54] Just to give up on believing and teaching the same gospel that Paul and the apostles had taught. I wonder if you can begin to see the crossroads that Timothy was at.

One way was to stick with Paul and his message. And that way lies certain suffering. Loneliness within the visible church.

And possibly death. The other way was to go where the majority of the church had gone. To a form of Christianity which was just tweaked enough to put them on the right side of socially acceptable.

To avoid the suffering. Distanced from Paul. A more comfortable life. But one that would end in the denial of the Lord Jesus.

And in the failure to guard the true gospel for the next generation. And so Paul says, verse 8. Timothy, don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.

[17:04] Notice how personal it is. He doesn't at first say, don't be ashamed of the gospel. He says, don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. Remember who this is about, Timothy.

Jesus. Jesus, who you love. Who you know and you love. It's the testimony about him. Don't be ashamed of it. Well, what about us?

I suggest to us that Timothy's crossroads are our crossroads. The reason this letter is in the Bible is because I think every generation of Christians will be faced with the same decision.

And one simple question comes to us. Which way will we go in our generation? Which way will you go?

Will you go with Paul's gospel? Will you go with Paul's gospel? And face the suffering that goes with that? Or to something easier?

[18 : 05] I wonder if you feel this decision being pressed upon us even as the temperature rises. I heard recently of a man in the city who actually left his job.

Great job. Left his job when he found out that the firm he worked for had been founded by a Christian. Isn't that extraordinary?

It's becoming less and less easy to identify as a Bible-believing Christian without having to face some considerable disapproval. Whether it's in the workplace, in the family, or in the pub.

Do we want that? Are we prepared, verse 8, to share in suffering? Vast swathes of the church seem to be abandoning the apostles' words for an easier version of the gospel that falls just on the right side of socially acceptable.

In our context, of course, it's on the issues of sex and sexuality. We can see this in our denomination. It's not surprising.

[19 : 21] It happened in Paul's day before he even died. It will happen in ours and in every generation. The question is, what about us?

As the temperature increases, which way will we go? As individuals and as a church. Timothy's crossroads are our crossroads.

And Paul says to us, Brother, sister, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. We can't do this in our own strength.

It would be easy to miss the last five words of that verse. By the power of God. That the power comes from the Holy Spirit within us.

Paul says this three times so Timothy can't miss it. Verse 7, For God gave us a spirit not of cowardice, but of power and love and self-control. He says it, verse 8, By the power of God.

[20 : 24] He says it, verse 14, By the Holy Spirit. God, the good deposit. He actually says it too, verse 1, You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

You can't miss it. And so I think first and foremost, this gets us on our knees. Lord, please strengthen me by your power, by the Holy Spirit within us, to share in suffering for the gospel.

I have no power in myself. This gets us first and foremost on our knees. And please pray for me too. I am just as likely as anyone here to be ashamed of the gospel.

If Timothy, then me. Please pray for me. Only by his strength. So firstly, Timothy's crossroads. Secondly, and more briefly, Timothy's task.

Timothy's task. I think there are twin headline verses actually to the letter of 2 Timothy. The first is 1 verse 8. The second is 1 verse 14. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

[21 : 41] That's Timothy's task in a nutshell. In other words, Timothy was to get behind the word of guarding this gospel for the next generation.

And so therefore, his job was not to change the gospel. You see that? Guard. His job was not to change it or to improve it, but to protect it and to preserve it.

Verse 13. To follow in the pattern of sound words that he had heard from Paul. Timothy's job was not to get inventive. He was not to be listening for fresh or new revelations from the Spirit in his generation.

He was to guard what had been entrusted to him. This is the passing of the baton from the apostle to the next generation.

It's like the Rolex watch that gets passed. I mean, I don't have personal experience of this one, but like the Rolex watch that gets passed from generation down to generation down to generation.

[22 : 47] Precious. Unchanged. That is what Christian leaders are called to do. And the church in every generation.

Now, there might be a good question as to what this has to do with us if we're not a Christian leader. This is written to Timothy, after all. He was a leader. But I don't think Paul meant it just for

Timothy to be involved in this project, guard the gospel.

We can see that most clearly, I think, when we look at 2 verse 14. Where Paul says to Timothy, Remind them, that is the church, at least what's left of it in Ephesus.

Remind them of these things. What things? Everything that he's just said. Chapter 1 to 2 verse 14. Why? Because the church is to share in the same mindset and mission with Timothy.

They were to throw their weight behind Timothy. And to share in the same suffering with him. For the sake of the gospel. I think the rugby scrum is probably quite a good illustration for this.

[24 : 00] I can't play rugby. I've only played it once in my life. And I was hospitalized, actually, by someone on my own team. You can ask me about that another time. Never played it since. But I think the rugby scrum is quite a sort of basic concept where you've got the whole team throwing their weight behind the same course.

Except this scrum is an unusual scrum because it's a team that is not well liked. All the other teams hate this team. The whole crowd watching the team.

The whole crowd watching the match is pelting things at this team as they huddle together and fight for the cause. Everyone has to share in the suffering.

If you join the scrum, you join the cause. And therefore you cop it too with the rest of your team. It's that kind of picture. It's that kind of picture that Paul is painting for the church.

Which kind of Christian ministry will you throw your weight behind? Which kind of ministry will you back financially?

[25 : 05] Will we take our turn?

As generations before us took theirs to guard it for us. Well, if you want to join in guarding the gospel, you will want to throw your weight behind ministries that are unashamed of Paul's gospel and the Bible's gospel.

Timothy's crossroads are our crossroads. Which way will we go? Timothy's task is our task. Will we take our turn?

Let's pray. Paul says, 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.

Our Father, we have no strength in ourselves. Just as Timothy had no strength in himself nor Paul.

[26 : 45] But we thank you that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. And we pray that you would grant us.

Give us the power that we too might be willing to give up the comfortable life.

To share in the suffering. And to guard the gospel in our generation. For the glory of the Lord Jesus, we pray.

Amen.