

Passing the Baton

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Date: 06 November 2022

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[0:00] Great. I'll just invite Cam now to come and give us God's word. O Lord our God, we thank you for this opportunity to examine your word, and we just ask that you'll bless our time together.

May my words be pleasing to you, Lord God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Good morning, friends.

As I speak to you from the book of 2 Timothy, like Mark said, I invite you to keep your Bibles open and to follow along, test my message against the word.

As we read our passage today, has it occurred to you that you are reading somebody else's mail? Have you ever done that?

Perhaps somebody has shared with you the sentiments from a birthday or Christmas card that somebody wrote to them. Perhaps you've been CC'd into an email that was directed to somebody else.

[1:09] The email was not written to you, and yet the person who wrote the email still wants you to know what was in it. As we read to Timothy, keep in mind that we are reading somebody else's mail.

Many of you are probably well aware of this, actually. Having been at HTD and having had the benefit of ministers who preach exegetically, who understand things like genre and reading things in context, wanting to understand what the original audience would have understood, this is not necessarily natural for most people in the churches in Sri Lanka.

Let's remind ourselves of what has led to this letter being written. This mail was written to a guy called Timothy. We know from elsewhere in the Bible that he's half Jewish, half Greek.

He first met the Apostle Paul in Lystra, a town or village in central modern-day Turkey, or Asia, as it was called then, where he joined Paul in his journey as Paul shared the gospel and planted churches along the way.

It's this Paul whom Timothy joined who now writes to him, as they are no longer in the same place. Paul is his mentor, and Timothy, Paul's young apprentice or protege.

[2:46] Paul, as we know, started out as an enemy of the faith. We're told elsewhere that he was trained and educated in the Jewish faith, according to the Pharisaic tradition by Gamaliel, one of the most respected Jewish leaders.

You may also remember the story of his conversion in the book of Acts. He was an enemy of Jesus and went around persecuting the church, and on the way he was confronted with the reality of Jesus as Lord.

Suddenly his Jewish education now has a new meaning. Here in this letter, in verse 11, Paul actually notes that he was commissioned as a preacher or herald, as an apostle and teacher.

By the time of writing this letter, Paul has travelled three times around Asia, that is, modern-day Turkey, and his established churches, taught believers, encouraged these new churches in the faith with letters and with return visits.

Now Paul is older. He's in prison for perhaps the second time in Rome. What is it that occupies Paul's mind?

[4 : 10] What is it that he still wants to pass on to his apprentice? Towards the end of this letter, Paul tells Timothy that he will die soon.

His time is nearly up. Paul has fought the good fight and he has finished his race. He tells Timothy of his confidence that God will bring him safely into the heavenly kingdom.

Paul's time has passed. This is one of his last letters, and may very well be his last letter. Recognising that his own time has passed, he looks forward.

Still thinking of others and what needs to be done to carry forward the mission of taking the gospel to every nation and tongue. In this letter, Paul is passing the baton on to Timothy.

And so, here he leaves some final instructions for Timothy. Now, it was a long reading, a full chapter, plus a few more verses. There's many things that I could speak about from this chapter, but I'm going to focus on just one idea, but this idea carries through the whole book.

[5 : 26] The main instruction or command to Timothy in this chapter is found in verse 14. I want to focus on this one main idea in our passage today.

Paul's charge to Timothy in verse 14 is to guard the good deposit that was entrusted to him. So, what is this good deposit, and how is Timothy to guard it?

Something deposited, something given to him, to us even. In some churches, on first impression, perhaps a person might conclude, Aha, the good deposit is the Holy Spirit.

It is true that when we come to faith in Jesus, he gives us the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit is not the deposit. If you read the verse again, you will see that the role of the Holy Spirit here is to actually assist Timothy in order to be able to guard the good deposit.

So, the good deposit is something else. This deposit is described as something entrusted to him. Well, this deposit is not something that's been put into a bank.

[6 : 45] It's not something that needs to be put away behind high fences, locked doors or inside solid steel safes, or even buried in the ground. If we backtrack a little bit, we can see what has led to this charge.

In verse 13, Paul encourages Timothy to follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me. That's the way the ESV puts it.

Sound words or sound teaching. This is what Paul has passed on to Timothy. And we get more detail about what these words are, what this teaching is, when we go back a little bit further again.

Paul describes that he has been commissioned as a herald, apostle and teacher of the gospel. This is what Paul wants Timothy to guard. The good deposit is the gospel.

This is something more precious than gold. In fact, in verse 8, it's so precious, it's worth suffering for. But it is not something that you can lock away in a safe in order to protect it.

[7 : 57] Sure, you may put your Bible into a safe or a treasure chest and not read it for yourself. But is that really how to make the gospel safe? From the text itself, we will learn how to guard it.

Firstly, follow the pattern of sound words. In the ESV, or as the NRSV puts it, hold to the standard of sound teaching.

Firstly, Timothy needs to guard the purity of the gospel. One of the dangers to the gospel is the corruption of false teaching. It's a common theme in the New Testament.

Paul deals with it in several of his letters, but he's not the only one concerned with it. Jude, Peter, John, the writer to the Hebrews, all deal with false teaching of different sorts.

Paul has even mentioned this danger to Timothy in the first letter he wrote to him. He says, As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.

[9 : 09] It's from 1 Timothy 1 verse 3. This need was very clearly seen by us in Sri Lanka. The scourge of the false gospel, the prosperity gospel spreads.

And at the start of 2020, CTS held a conference on this very topic, the faith entrusted, in the face of certain false teaching and false teachers who were becoming more prominent at the time.

The first step then in guarding the gospel is to hold fast to or follow the pattern and to keep it sound, to keep it true to the pattern.

The first step is to make an accurate copy for yourself. Make an accurate backup, if you will. Make sure that you yourself understand the gospel and understand it well.

Are you actually able to articulate the gospel if you are tested on it? Make sure that you have a true and pure copy. Now, the second way we guard the gospel follows naturally from the first.

[10 : 24] The second step is to multiply pure copies of the gospel. I don't know if you're into movies, crime novels or something like that.

So often, one of the devices that is used is a piece of evidence, this critical piece of evidence that lots of people are chasing. The good guys want it, the bad guys want it.

How many copies of it are there? What's going to happen to this evidence if it's destroyed? One way to keep it safe is to make a copy of it and keep that safe.

In our reading today, we can discern several links in a chain, several generations of Christians where the gospel has actually been faithfully passed on.

And with a little digging elsewhere, we can actually see how long this chain is. We know the story of Paul, how he was confronted with the reality of Jesus on the road to Damascus.

[11 : 28] And he testifies in his letter to the Galatians that it's through Jesus himself that Paul came to understand the gospel. As we have already noted, verse 11 reminds us of Paul's commission to take the gospel to the Gentiles as a herald, apostle and teacher.

From Acts chapter 16, we know that when Timothy joined Paul on his second missionary journey, was when Paul passed through Lystra.

But this tells us, this passage tells us that it was not actually through Paul that Timothy came to believe. Timothy already had a faith.

Did you notice it? There, in verse 5, we are told that this faith first lived in Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

And it now lives in Timothy. So, Timothy learnt the gospel from his mother and grandmother. Well, where did they learn it from? If we know Paul's story well, we know that Lystra, that is the town of Timothy, was also a destination on Paul's first missionary journey.

[12 : 47] Not just the second. So, we can be confident that the links in the chain go like this. Jesus taught Paul the gospel. Paul passed it on to Lois and Eunice, who then passed it on to Timothy.

So, we have three links in a chain. But it doesn't stop there. Paul's commission and charge to Timothy includes adding to the chain.

Did you notice it there? This is why our reading went so long all the way into chapter 2. Timothy is instructed that just as Paul has entrusted the gospel to him, he is to then entrust the gospel to others.

The fourth link in the chain. From Jesus to Paul. Paul to Lois and Eunice. From Lois and Eunice to Timothy. And from Timothy to others in the next generation.

And what characterizes these others in the next generation is that they will be faithful. They will also guard the purity of the gospel.

- [14:07] They will make an accurate copy of the gospel for themselves. And in their faithfulness, they will also teach others as well.

We have a fifth link in the chain. Jesus to Paul to Lois and Eunice to Timothy to faithful teachers passing it on to others.

I think you're following the gist. I think you get the idea that this chain is not supposed to stop at the fifth link. Each link in the chain, each generation of Christians needs to be mindful of the next generation.

And the important point that I want you to remember is that both of these elements are essential. The gospel is guarded by teaching it accurately and passing it down the generations and multiplying it by sharing it with others.

Teaching it accurately, keeping the gospel pure, and passing it on. In our Old Testament reading, we also see the importance of passing on the message to the next generation at every opportunity.

- [15:24] Deuteronomy as a whole book highlights the need to remember because the message is so easily forgotten. The respected theologian Don Carson and the anthropologist Paul Hibbert have noted in the Mennonite community that one generation believes the gospel and that comes with certain cultural traits.

The next generation, the second generation, assumes the gospel and identifies with the culture. And then the third generation denies the gospel and the culture becomes everything.

Don Carson suspects that much of the evangelical church, and I would include the Sri Lankan church and the church in Australia here, is stuck in the second generation.

That is, they assume the gospel. And some parts of the church are drifting towards or are in the third generation, denying the gospel and just living the Christian culture.

Now there are two things to reflect on here. How well do you yourself know the gospel? And how well do you pass it on to others, whether it's through mentoring or evangelism?

- [16:49] This next question, though, may help you think about it. Do you assume you know the gospel because you feel comfortable and know how to act and speak in church?

Or can you actually explain the gospel? Do you assume that those around you, the person sitting next to you, knows what you are talking about when the word gospel is mentioned?

Now I'm not wanting to make you suspicious of the person sitting next to you. Okay? I'm wanting you to reflect on yourself. Do you assume the gospel?

What does it mean to assume the gospel? The discerning amongst you may have noticed that I have used the word gospel many times today.

I have mentioned how important it is, how it must be kept pure, how it must be passed on, but I've not actually articulated the message of the gospel.

- [18:08] There are sprinkles of it in our reading today and right through his letter. Paul sprinkles bits of it through his letter when in verse 1 he mentions the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.

And when in verses 8 and 9 he mentions the power of God that saved us and called us to a holy life not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.

When in verse 10 he explains how the grace of the gospel was revealed to us through the appearing of our saviour Christ Jesus who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Later on, not part of our reading but in chapter 2 he urges Timothy to remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead offspring of David as preached in my gospel.

Do you understand what holds these ideas together? This gospel Paul explains is what he has been appointed as a herald and apostle and teacher of.

- [19:17] Is this the gospel that you know? Is this the gospel that you and your friends know? Do you know how Jesus died on the cross and paid for your sins and rose again to bring you life?

So what do we do with all of this? Of all the things that Paul could have said to Timothy in what may have been the last time they communicated, what is the legacy that Paul wants to leave with Timothy?

What was more important than all other things that could have been said but weren't? In chapter 4 verse 9 Paul urges Timothy to come to him but we don't know if Timothy actually made it.

This may be the very last thing that Paul gets to say to Timothy and he urges him to guard the good deposit that was entrusted to him. At the end of the book just before the final farewell Paul does it again but in a more formal manner.

Chapter 4 verse 1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom preach the word.

- [20:37] We have the message of the good news of Jesus and the life that is found in him. If we have come to believe surely we want others to know the good news.

the first thing we do is pass it on not in order to earn that life but by passing it on we can make this life available and known to others.

This means that the Sunday school teachers and those running Bible studies are doing some of the most important jobs in the church and you thought it was the people up the front.

Parents let me warn you you should not abdicate your God given role in teaching your own children the gospel to the Sunday school teachers. Your children should have the benefit of both but if you think this is just about children and young families you are mistaken.

of the five links in the chain only one link is between family. Are you discipling anybody younger in the faith?

- [21:53] Are you encouraging any of your peers in the faith helping to keep each other accountable in maintaining the purity of the gospel? Are you part of a Bible study group?

Are you praying for work colleagues or friends asking God to show you opportunities where you can shed some truth and light into their lives? Passing the baton is for everybody.

Are you confident that you can explain the gospel? In how many ways can you explain the gospel? There's only one gospel but there's many biblical pictures that can be drawn on when sharing with others.

Pictures such as redemption, pictures such as adoption, pictures of life and death. Are you confident that you can point people to the passages in the Bible that will help them?

And when we pass it on, we need to be explicit. If we want to avoid assuming the gospel, we need to tell ourselves and tell those around us the gospel frequently.

[23:10] Don't assume, explain. Paul himself gives Timothy direction in how to pass the baton. In verse 13, saying, follow the pattern of sound words.

The NRSV uses the word teaching, the ESV uses words, the Greek being logos. In chapter four, Paul urges Timothy to preach the word.

word. In order to not assume, we must use words to pass on the gospel. There is a saying that no doubt many of you know, preach the word at all times and if necessary, use words.

The idea being that actions speak louder than words. Actions certainly are loud, but unfortunately actions are not explicit.

it. Actions may win you an opportunity to speak the word, but actions themselves can be understood or misunderstood in many different ways.

[24:19] If, you know, if necessary use words, I'm telling you words are necessary. How can actions ever articulate the idea that nobody comes to the father except through the son?

We must be explicit and we must use words if we are to not assume the gospel. Actions are important. They must be consistent with what we learn in the gospel, but it is the message of the gospel that remains central.

Our actions in caring for the needs of others needs to conform to the gospel, not the other way around. Keep the gospel central, keep it pure, be explicit and use words rather than just assume when you pass it on.

Pass it on to everybody, even to those who already know it. Thank you.