

# 'Take hold of eternal life!'

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now I wonder if everyone has found yourself holding on tightly to something. Maybe like that. In case you're wondering, that's the MacPack Pro advertisement.

! Or maybe it's your precious pooch, Chin Chin the Chihuahua, deciding to take on the Pitbull Terrier in your neighbourhood on your morning walk.

Or for some of you, I'm sure it's that first date, holding on to your lover's hand for the first time, and not wanting the moment to last.

Sorry, end. Just so you know, don't grip too tightly, and cut off the blood circulation.

So we've heard the phrase, I've been holding on for your dear life. And that's when your life or something is precious, and it's at stake. And you're clinging on so as not to lose it, lose your life, lose someone you cherish.

[ 1 : 25 ] Well, as we finish off in Paul's letter today, he's encouraging us to do something similar. But that is to take hold of life. Grasp life that is truly life.

And that phrase, you can actually see repeated twice. The first in the section, the first one from verse 11 to 16, that first section, where Paul instructs Timothy as a man of God, he says then in verse 12, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.

And then in the next section, as Paul encourages the rich to lay up eternal treasures, he says in verse 19, do so in order that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

And Paul, of course, is speaking of eternal life here, not just life on this earth, physical life, but life that comes only through believing in Jesus, which Paul has already explained in 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 15 and 16, is only possible because Jesus came to the world to save sinners, dying in our place so that we don't have to pay with our own lives.

This is the true gospel which Paul has been proclaiming and teaching consistently through the letter. But now he says to take hold of that life, which means we are to cling on tightly and not let go, no matter the cost or circumstance.

[ 2 : 58 ] Of course, we know that Paul is not speaking physically. It's not like we've got to hang on to something, but metaphorically. And what he does now is expel out what this looks like in practice.

And what he says is not a surprise because we've already seen some of this in the letter. So let's begin reading from verse 11, where Paul says to Timothy, So we see then that taking hold actually involves the acts of simultaneously fleeing fleeing and pursuing.

I wonder how many of you have ever been chased by a wild animal. Nope. Okay. Angry dog? More likely.

Swarm of bees? Magpie, as I'm riding down a bike trail. Fleeing means you run, don't you?

As fast as you can, without stopping. Run without looking back until you think you're past the danger. Now Paul says, flee from all this.

[ 4 : 31 ] And so what is he talking about? Well, he's referring to the last section, isn't it? What we saw last week. As a man of God, commissioned as God's minister, Timothy is to flee the love of money and all the evil it results in.

He's not to be like the false teachers, motivated by greed. And Paul has already explained how it was their selfish desires and their bad motivations that has led to false teaching and ungodly behaviour.

So to flee really then, it's not just to run away from those actions, but to deal with it at their root causes. At the level of our motivations and desires.

Is Timothy motivated by selfish ambition? Is even the desire for doing ministry pure or fueled by the need to be respected or loved?

If ever there was the slightest hint of impure motives, then Timothy needs to flee from them because it would lead eventually to ruin and destruction otherwise.

[ 5 : 41 ] And Paul says that even as Timothy is running away from evil, he also needs to chase after what's pure. Flee, but then pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

And do it with the same passion and vigour as fleeing. And if you look at the list, it doesn't just deal again with actions or behaviour, which righteousness and godliness are conduct. But it deals with motivations. We are to do it with faith and love. Fueled by our faith in Jesus and our love for God and his people. So this is not a godliness that is false piety, right? Because last week, it was godliness in order to gain financially. No, Paul says that our godliness and righteousness should be fueled by true devotion to Christ. Having the right motives. And then thirdly, he also talks about the manner in which we are to do it. Pursue it with endurance and gentleness.

[ 6 : 45 ] That is, stick at it. Don't give up. Be gentle in your approach by showing kindness and patience to others, forbearance and grace.

Now, all of this, Paul calls the good fight of the faith. And so we can see, can't we, that this is not a fight where we're actually being aggressive to others or combative with the world, but rather, it is the fight that is an internal struggle or wrestle with our own character and our own sin.

It's a wrestle to try and shape and mould ourselves to be like Jesus. Running away from evil and temptation. Putting to death sinful and selfish motivations.

Repenting. Admonishing to ourselves, saying, you know, Mark, stop it. What you're thinking is selfish and greedy. Or, positively, reminding ourselves that, you know, we do it, because this is what would please God.

This is what God is like, so do the same. And friends, Paul says here that the eternal life that we're given is not just a gift, which it is, because we can't earn it.

[ 8 : 00 ] But in verse 12, he talks about it as a calling as well. We're called to live out this gift of eternal life. This gift is not something that we wait until we get to heaven to get it, but now, from the moment we believe, we've been given eternal life in order to live it out.

We're called. And so, we need to embrace this with joy. Because God is calling us to live our best life now. I know it's something you hear often, don't you, you young people?

Always getting asked, whether it's at the university or whatever, or on TV, are you living your best life now? Well, in Christ Jesus, we're called by God to live our best life by fighting the good fight of faith.

Living the best life is about fleeing ungodliness and pursuing righteousness, godliness, motivated by faith and love, and doing it with gentleness and endurance.

That is our calling. That is the calling to live out our eternal life, which is the best life of all, now. And then Paul says to Timothy, let me remind you too that this is the good confession that you made before many witnesses some time back.

[ 9 : 30 ] You see, whenever there's a baptism or confirmation, and we're going to have a service next week for three of our brothers, one aspect of what is occurring is that good confessions of faith are being made in the presence of witnesses.

The same thing happens if you're already married in the Christian marriage. Or, for me, as I was ordained as a minister or as missionaries are commissioned, promises are made to live out this faith, whether it's a disciple, married couple, Christian parent, or in Christian service.

And so if you've ever done any of these things before, you know, get married in a church service or been baptized or confirmed, whether you realize it or not, you have made solemn promises which God expects you to take seriously and to pursue wholeheartedly.

Now, conversely, if you believe in Jesus and you're not baptized or confirmed yet, then, you know, here's my little challenge to you. To take hold of eternal life tangibly by making a good and public confession of your faith.

To say in front of witnesses that, yes, I know that Jesus has saved me and I want to live out this life because I'm called to do so.

[ 10 : 53 ] It's an expression of your faith. And it's something that is valuable. Yes, God will hold you to it, but it is something that God will also affirm and strengthen you for.

Now, Paul then here in verse 13 gives Timothy a further charge as though to reinforce this public confession that he made earlier. And he says, Now, if you look through the Bible, there are numerous occasions where people are asked to make promises in the presence of witnesses. And often it's accompanied by a charge or challenge. So the Old Testament reading that Jetty read, Moses was giving the people the command to follow God before they were entering the promised land.

And so in Deuteronomy 30 verse 16, we read, I command you today, that's what Moses says, to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees, and laws. Then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you're possessing.

The choice Moses gives the people is either life and prosperity or death and destruction. And notice in verse 19 that in this instance, the witnesses are the heavens and the earth.

[12:28] He says, This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live, and that you may love the Lord your God.

Listen to his voice. Hold fast to him. Same phrase that Paul uses. Hold fast. The Lord is your life. Again, eternal life. And he will give you many years in the land he swore to give your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And for Moses to summon, you know, when you summon the heavens and the earth, you're summoning all of creation, aren't you? You're asking all of creation to witness to their response. To be their witness as to this charge. And so it is an important charge, isn't it? As they were about to enter the promised land. And Joshua does the same, actually, at the end of Joshua, after they've entered the land.

So chapter 24, verse 15, which I won't read the whole thing, but it says, But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.

[13:37] The gods before you. Or, as Joshua will, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And then, of course, the people said, No, no, we will serve the Lord.

And Joshua said, Great. Verse 22. You are witnesses against yourselves, that you have chosen to serve the Lord. And again, we can see how solemn this charge is because Joshua says that they collectively are witnesses against themselves.

They are meant to hold themselves accountable for what they've just promised. Now, of course, when we get to Timothy, who are the witnesses? It's God, firstly, isn't it?

The one who created all things and gives life, including the eternal life that we're to take hold of. And then secondly, it is before his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as I said, came into the world to save sinners so that we can have this life that is truly life.

Now, if you look at that, God and Jesus, there's no, you can't trump that, right? That's as good as you can get as your witnesses. And that's the same, isn't it?

[14:52] At your baptism or confirmation or at your marriage or when you're making commitments as parents. And I'm not saying any of this as to overwhelm you.

It's always before God. Or to discourage you from doing it, to say, oh, it's before God, I better not say it. But rather, actually, to spur you on, knowing that if God himself has witnessed these promises, if he's heard you and he has, then he loves nothing better than to honor your desire and to give you the power of the Spirit in order to fulfill them.

Notice as well that here, Paul says that Jesus is not merely a witness, but he's also our example because Jesus himself made a good confession in front of Pontius Pilate.

And actually, it was his good confession that has allowed us to be saved so that we can now make this confession before the Lord. And the thing about good confessions is that it's not just about promising to do something good.

It's actually fulfilling it, sticking to it as well, which is what Jesus did before Pilate. Now, it's interesting, actually, when you go back to the Gospels and you see actually what Jesus did testify to in front of Pontius Pilate, there's not many things that he actually said.

[16:24] Jesus was actually more silent than speaking. But what I think Paul is saying is that when he made the good confession, what Jesus did was not to shrink back from the cross.

He didn't say, oh, no, no, Pilate, I'm not the Son of God. Spare me, spare me. Neither did he say, you liar, Pilate, I'm going to send the angels to come down and wipe you out.

He did neither of those things. Instead, his good confession was to stay silent so that God's will could be done, so that he could be led to the cross to fulfill his promises made to the Father. And so the same goes for us as well and Timothy. Making a good confession requires us to see it out to the end. And Paul here is giving Timothy another charge as though to sort of G him up and to just spur him on so that what he made good confession in the past, he can now commit again to doing and therefore endure, do it without swat and blame until Jesus comes.

So have you realized that the Christian faith is for the long haul, right? We love seeing Christians, people becoming Christians, and it's a joy really to see people coming to sort of Christianity explored and then for them to say, yes, I want to become a Christian.

[ 17 : 56 ] But it is also just as important to see these brothers and sisters and encourage them to keep going in their faith. When things are hard, when there is temptation to say, no, keep going.

Remember the good confession you made and don't fall away. And of course now, Paul, as he's contemplating Christ coming again, he sort of breaks off, isn't it, into a sort of doxology, a hymn of praise, because he can't help himself.

As he's thinking about the one that's preparing for this coming day, all he can say is, God, the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see, to him be honour and might forever and ever.

Amen. Friends, when things get difficult, let us fix our minds and our hope on God and realise who he really is.

Let us have a vision, as Paul does, of this blessed and only ruler, the King of kings, the one who is immortal, lives in unapproachable light, and yet one day, when we see him face to face, we will be in that very presence.

[ 19 : 20 ] That is what our eternal life is preparing us for, to be with him and his son forever when Jesus comes. All right.

Paul then now moves on to address the rich in the church. That's verse 17 onwards. And he says, Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, which richly provides us with everything, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

We heard last week that to be rich is not to be sinful, right? It was the love of money, not money itself, that is the root of all evils.

But the thing about being rich, of course, is that it is always a temptation, isn't it, when we are rich, to turn what's really God's blessing to us into a source of our pride or into something that we idolise and put in place of God.

When we do it, what it does is ensnare us and actually threaten the thing that is even more precious, the thing that is stored up for us, the thing that we are to lay hold of, eternal life.

[ 20 : 45 ] So Paul warns the rich not to be arrogant, not to put their hope in wealth, which is uncertain, but in God instead. Because wealth is not the thing that saves us.

God is. And when we put our hope in God, we put our hope in the one who provides everything for our enjoyment. Every blessing we have in this life now and in the life to come, material or spiritual, is from God.

Do you realise that? Do you know that? Jesus himself said, don't love money but God, right? Matthew 6, verse 24, no one can serve two masters.

Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. You cannot serve both God and money.

So, knowing this, how do we cultivate a mindset, right? We can say we hope in God, but what does this look like in practice? Well, Paul says in verse 18, command them to do good.

[ 21 : 50 ] Be rich in good deeds and be generous and willing to share. Generosity, in other words, is the expression of our faith that will help us to cultivate a mindset that hopes in God rather than money.

Now, when you do something that's truly good, it is actually an act of generosity, isn't it? By contrast, if you do something knowing that you'll be compensated for it, that is more like a transaction, right?

So, I've seen rich people being very so-called generous, and I don't want to doubt their motives, but some of them, as a result of their generosity, know that what they get in return is lots of publicity for

their fame, for their business.

So, it's actually rather transactional, isn't it? They know that their generosity will pay them back. But true generosity is giving without expecting anything in return.

And so, that means that actually we can be generous with more than our money, right? It's not just the rich that can be generous. You can be generous with your time, with how you help others, how you give time to listening to them.

[ 23 : 05 ] You don't have to be financially rich to be generous. But, it comes from a mindset that knows that because the Lord has blessed you, whether it's financially or otherwise, you want to be like God.

You want to be rich in generosity. You want to be rich in good deeds, just as God is. And that's why, if you've been around for a few years at Holy Trinity, you know that in October, when we have our Thanksgiving Sunday, we encourage people to respond with generosity as well.

Yes, stand up and thank God for all the blessings in your life, but why not acknowledge as well by giving God's blessing to you?

And then Paul says this rather surprising thing. Because even as I said that we should do good without expecting anything in return, Paul says in verse 19, actually that our generosity will not go unrewarded by God.

Can you see? Because when we are rich in good deeds, we lay up treasure for ourselves as a firm foundation for the coming age so that we may take hold of the life that is truly life.

[ 24 : 20 ] Now, I'm not sure how many of you remember this from way back, but a number of years ago as I was preaching here on the parable of the shrewd manager, there was an analogy that I used that I think is still appropriate for today, so I'm going to use it again.

What happened was that I slipped, can you see this? This is monopoly money, \$500, the highest nomination, yep. I slipped this into the Sunday, actually I didn't slip it, I stapled it to the newsletter that was handed out on that day.

and I offered the first two people to come to me after the service if they came to me that I would exchange their monopoly money for \$10.

Now, any sensible person would do it, right? No, you don't want it? Because what you're doing is exchanging fake monopoly money with cold, hard cash.

I'm not offering that today, sorry. But when we are generous, a similar exchange is occurring, right?

[ 25 : 33 ] We're all attracted with, I don't know, the amount of money that we have in our bank or how many property, maybe, how many properties you all have or nowadays, gold bullion, I hear that's on the up.

But you know, from a heavenly perspective, all of that is monopoly money. We heard last week you can't take it with you, but even if you can, it's going to be worthless in heaven.

Not going to work with anything, all right? So, what God does, though, is offer us an exchange system where we can trade in our earthly monopoly money, right?

for real treasures in heaven, right? Through generosity and good deeds. That's how you exchange it. When we're generous and rich in good deeds, we're trading our monopoly money, which we have to use to be generous, for heavenly treasures.

Now, ultimately, the real treasure in heaven is God himself, right? And the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to be in his presence, we want to enjoy him, we want to be living and loving him and him to love us.

[ 26 : 47 ] But, there's also another aspect, I think, that when we're generous on earth, and let's say we use our money to support gospel work, or we use our money to help brothers and sisters in need, so as to encourage them to persevere in their faith, then what we're doing, as well, is we're making sure that all these relationships that we now enjoy, these treasures, so look around you, your treasures to each other, whether you like it or not, these are the treasures that we will get to enjoy in heaven as well, by our generosity, by our help, by our giving on this earth.

So friends, the first aspect of taking hold of life in that first section was when Timothy, Paul said to Timothy, the man of God, to flee ungodliness and pursue righteousness, something we all can do as well.

We are to do it with gusto and to fight the good fight. But the second aspect of taking hold of eternal life is that all of us who are blessed by God, who are rich in material terms, should take hold of what is truly life, that is not the life of luxury on this earth, but spiritual and abundant life that we have now

and into eternity, take hold of that by being generous and overflowing in good deeds.

I think many of you are too young to remember the show Lifestyle of the Rich and Famous. But anyway, it doesn't matter, you probably know what the show is all about, right?

They'll have a segment on looking into someone's luxury super yacht, you know, seeing how the bedroom is even bigger than my own bedroom at home, you know, the widescreen TV is, you know, bigger than mine.

[ 28 : 37 ] Or they'll be like popping the \$10,000, \$100,000 penfuls or whatever and swirling with caviar that's, you know, \$2,000 a bite, something like that.

I think about rich people and I, look, I know I'm making fun of that but, you know, the thing about rich people is that they know how to indulge, don't they? Fine food, leisure, you know, great clothing.

I want to suggest that if we want to be spiritually rich, that we should indulge as well. And what we're supposed to indulge is generosity.

Let's, as people who are rich in Christ, let's indulge in generosity. And what do I mean by that? That means let's take pleasure in doing good.

Let's, you know, let's almost go over the top when it comes to helping people. You know, do you enjoy helping people? I hope you do.

[ 29 : 41 ] Not to say, oh, what a great guy I am but you're doing it because, you know, this is something that this is part of eternal life, isn't it? To do good. To be rich in generosity because we've been blessed by God.

And so that's just a natural thing that we want to indulge in because we enjoy it so much. Okay, Paul has two more final verses. Kind of, sort of, it sort of made sense to end in verse 19 but anyway, he's got two more verses so let's cover it.

And I think what Paul is doing here is he's returning to the start of his letter to remind Timothy again why he's writing the letter. Timothy's responsibly as the leader of God's household so that by doing the right thing the whole church together can take hold of eternal life.

And so what does he say? Verse 20 and 21. He says, Timothy, so he's addressing Timothy directly now, God, what has been entrusted to your care? What has Paul entrusted or has been entrusted to Timothy?

Timothy's care? Well, if you go back to chapter 1 verse 11, it says that it's the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God which God has entrusted to Paul, that's he entrusted to me, which now Paul entrusts to Timothy.

[ 30 : 57 ] And so Paul is saying to Timothy to guard the gospel truth, guard the truth that Jesus has come to save sinners and we can believe in Jesus to have eternal life. Appoint elders to teach it with him so that they may turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge which some have professed and in so doing have defiled from the faith.

They are to teach the truth in order to safeguard the church against false teaching and false teachers so that no one in God's household will depart from the faith but rather that they will live out both life and doctrine and save themselves.

Nothing less than the eternal life that God has given us is at stake. And Jesus has already died so that we can have this freely, we don't have to pay for it, but we are now then called to take hold of it. We believe in Jesus, this is our gift, but now we are to take hold, to make full use of this gift, cling on to it with great commitment and vigor and persevere, don't let go until Jesus returns.

That's what we're called to do as individual Christians, but that's also what we're called to do together as the household of God. So let's pray and ask God to help us. Father, thank you for the gift of eternal life that comes through the gift of faith in your Son.

[ 32 : 31 ] Help us to make a good confession, to fight the good fight of faith, to pursue godliness, righteousness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Give us joy in doing good, particularly for those of us who are rich.

Give us a vision of the treasure that we are laying up for ourselves when we put our hope in you and not in earthly wealth. and as a church, help us to guard the gospel which has been entrusted to our care and to eagerly await the coming of your Son, Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.