

Persevere!

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] As you remain standing, let's just pray again. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that you continue to teach us through it. Father, we pray that you might give us minds to understand it this morning and hearts to live in light of it.

We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, please take a seat and if you would, turn to the insert in your bulletin. We've been using the Holman version for a little while now. There's also an outline that you might find helpful.

I heard a story some time ago about the Australian cricket team. It was 1986 and Australia were playing India at the Madras Cricket Ground in India.

The night before the match, the then-captain Alan Border, you might remember him, asked Dean Jones, a Victorian, to take the prized number three batting position.

You see, the first two batters, they warmed up the pitch and wore in the ball and it was the number three batsman's job to get in there, dig in and score the runs. Anyway, it was Jones' first time and he was so nervous that he didn't sleep much that night.

[1 : 08] The next morning, he didn't have anything to eat. He was still so nervous. And that day was very hot and humid. And as Jones scored 50 runs, he collapsed due to the lack of rest, food and water.

He then took some salt tablets and some water. But by the time he reached 100 runs, he was stretching out his legs because he had cramps in them at the end of every over. And then at 160 runs, Jones, the Victorian, collapsed.

The batsman at the other end was the captain, Alan Border, and he came down to Jones. And Jones looked up at him and he said, Skipper, I just can't go on. And Border said to Jones, OK, Dino, you go off.

We'll get someone out here who's tough enough to take your place. We'll get a Queenslander. At that, Jonesy, the Victorian, picked himself up and persevered to score 210 runs.

Though he then went to hospital for the next four days. And it was two weeks before he could speak to Border again. Today, we'll see Paul say to Timothy, Persevere.

[2 : 17] Which brings us to point one, verse one. He says, You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace. That is in Christ Jesus. Timothy, Paul wants Timothy to be strong, to persevere.

Remember, Paul is in prison in Rome, soon to die. And he had left Timothy back at Ephesus to be the pastor of the Ephesian church. But there were false teachers there. And so Timothy is to guard the gospel.

He's to persevere against those false teachers so that the gospel is handed down faithfully to future generations. Long after Paul has died. And as we saw last week from chapter one, that meant Timothy is not to fear, but to fan into flame his gift of preaching.

And he's not to be ashamed, but willing to suffer for the gospel, just like Paul. And just like Onesiphorus, if you remember him from the end of chapter one. And so Paul says at the beginning of chapter two, But do notice one very important thing.

Timothy is not to be like Dean Jones, who picked himself up and persevered in his own strength. See, what does verse one say? Verse one says, In other words, Timothy is to rely on God's gracious help that comes from knowing Christ, not himself.

[3 : 42] And again, we saw that in chapter one, didn't we? In verse eight, where Timothy is to rely on God's power. Verse 14, where he's to rely on the Holy Spirit for help. In fact, even the word in verse one of chapter two here, the word for be strong in the original, it actually translates as be strengthened.

Paul is telling Timothy not to look to himself to be strong, but to look to God to be strengthened. He's to look to God's gracious help to strengthen him.

You see, we don't just become Christians by God's grace. We also continue as Christians by God's grace, for it's God's grace or generosity that gives us his spirit, his word, one another, forgiveness and the hope or the certainty of future glory.

And God uses all those things that he's given us by his grace to strengthen us, to motivate us, to encourage us to persevere. And so rather than trying to pick himself up, Timothy is to look to God and to what God has graciously given him, that he might be strengthened to persevere.

Well, Timothy is to guard the gospel by persevering. But to guard the gospel, it also means to hand down the gospel, to entrust it to others. Verse two, he says, and what you have heard from me, Timothy, in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

[5 : 06] You see, just as Paul has entrusted the gospel to Timothy, Timothy is now to entrust the gospel to others, so that it will be passed down to generations. You see, if Timothy doesn't train up others, then who will faithfully preach the gospel after him?

You see, training is vital if we want to guard the gospel here in Melbourne. If we want the gospel to continue faithfully being proclaimed down through the generations, we need to train up others.

If we want to be a gospel-centered church, not just for our generations, but for future generations, then we need to train up others. And that training includes training not just in teaching the Bible, although that's what Paul primarily has on view here, but it also includes those ministries that support preaching the gospel, whether it's doing sounds or slide or singing or serving in the kitchen.

Those things support the preaching of the gospel, and we need to train people up in them so that the gospel is supported down through the generations. And so, can I say thank you to you who have supported training, either by training others or being trained yourselves, or even financially supporting training, like the training of our Jillian, our children's training.

That's terrific. You are guarding the gospel, you see, for future generations and for God's glory. Well, Paul says that Timothy is to entrust the gospel to faithful men who will teach others.

[6 : 33] Now, Paul will flesh out later on what it means to be faithful in verses 14 to 26, but for the moment, he continues to exhort Timothy to persevere, and that includes suffering. Point two, verse three.

He says, He says, Just as Paul is suffering for the gospel, so too is Timothy to share in that suffering.

As a soldier of Christ, Paul says in verse three. And just as a soldier seeks to serve his commanding officer or his recruiter above all else, so too must Timothy serve Jesus, even if it brings persecution or suffering.

Now, that's the point of verse four. See verse four again? He says, No one serving as a soldier gets entangled or caught up in the concerns of civilian life. Rather, he seeks to please the recruiter.

And who has recruited Timothy? It's Jesus, is it not? Jesus has saved Timothy. He's recruited Timothy into God's family, if you like. And so now Timothy must live to please Jesus above all else.

[8 : 00] He's not to get entangled or caught up with matters of life. And that doesn't mean Timothy can't enjoy life or get married, go to an AFL game or whatever it is.

But it does mean Timothy is to have Jesus as his top priority. He's not to get so bogged down in the concerns of life that he forgets Jesus. No, no, he's to please Jesus above all else, even if that includes or means suffering.

Similarly, verse five is to be like a true athlete who doesn't cut corners, but perseveres through the suffering that comes from hard work and training. I don't know if you remember Ben Johnson, the 100 meter sprinter.

He broke lots of world records and then was disqualified from the 1988 Olympic Games in Korea. He was disqualified because he tested positive for drug use.

Apparently, just before the Games, there was a book out called something like Winning the Ben Johnson Way, and it retailed for \$35. You know, Ben Johnson's hard work and all that sort of thing. And then after he was disqualified, a guy I know saw it on sale for \$3.50.

[9 : 03] Johnson, you see, had lost his crown, lost his title, lost his worth because he cut corners. Paul says to Timothy, you're not to cut corners.

Don't you dodge suffering that comes for standing up for Jesus and preaching the gospel, but rather persevere through it, he says. Persevere like a true athlete, like a hardworking farmer, so that you don't miss out on your crown or your crops.

Of course, suffering is never easy. Well, you know that. I know that. And although Paul has just motivated Timothy by reminding him that his crown and crops are at stake, Paul adds some further motivation, which brings us to point three, verse eight.

Paul says, See, Timothy is to remember Jesus.

And in particular, he's to remember Jesus as risen from the dead and the chosen king from David's line. In other words, Timothy is to remember Jesus as the living king.

[10 : 17] That's who he is. You see, if Jesus did not rise again, then what's the point of serving him? What's the point of suffering for him? I mean, he's not even going to know about it.

He's dead if he hasn't risen from the dead. What's more, if he hasn't been risen from the dead, then how can he raise us on the last day? There's no point in serving or suffering for him.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, If Christ has not been raised, then we are still in our sins and our faith is futile. But Timothy is to remember that Jesus is the living king.

He is alive. We can please him. He is the king who is in control of the world. As we see in verse nine, where Paul says that even if he is bound, the gospel is not bound. For Jesus is alive and will ensure that his gospel message continues to go out.

My friend Stuart, whom I told you about last week, used to wear certain t-shirts. He bought some cheap t-shirts and he had three words screen printed on the back of every t-shirt. And the three words were this, Jesus is risen.

[11 : 25] And he wore those t-shirts around. Now when I asked him why those three words, he said, Because it makes all the difference in the world. And he's right, isn't he? If Jesus did not rise, then there is no point in serving him or suffering for him.

But because he did rise, because he is risen, then life is not random. He is in control. We can please him. And what's more, we know that he will raise us on the last day, because he himself has conquered death.

Remember Jesus, Timothy. But also remember the elect, verse 10. This is why I endure all things, says Paul, for the elect, so that they may also obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

You see, Paul endures not just for the sake of his own glory, but for the sake of the glory of the elect. There are more people out there to be saved, in other words. And so Timothy must persevere in guarding the gospel, so that those people, those chosen ones, may hear it and be saved.

But again, there's a future orientation to it, isn't it? As I said, Paul's enduring for the sake of the elect's eternal glory, says verse 10. And all this talk of future glory, I think, prompts Paul to quote what appears to have been a well-known saying in verse 11.

[12 : 45] He says, This saying is trustworthy, for if we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. But if we deny him, he will also deny us.

If we are faithless, he will remain faithful to his promises, for he cannot deny himself. The first two lines there are an encouragement, and the second two lines, I think, are warnings.

And both are designed to encourage Timothy to persevere. For verse 12, if he denies Jesus, then Jesus will deny him, it says. And if he is faithless, that is, you know, if he gives up believing or trusting in Jesus, then, well, Jesus has to remain faithful to his promise that says, only those who believe will be saved.

And so if Timothy gives up believing, if he stops believing, then he won't be. That's the warning. And so the warning is, don't give up, Timothy, but persevere. Because if you do, verse 11, then we will live with Christ.

Verse 12, we will even reign with Christ. Did you know that? We will reign with Jesus. It's going to be a glorious inheritance, heaven. Now, I'm not exactly sure how it works.

[14 : 01] We've got different pictures in the Bible. For example, if we're all reigning with Christ, then who are we reigning over? You know, I'll have something to say on that, but now's not the time for it. But the point is, this is going to be glorious.

I do know there's going to be no more tears, no more pain, no more suffering. Just joy, fellowship, and contentment as we bask in the greatness of our Lord Jesus.

And so remember this glory, Timothy, so that you might endure suffering now in order to enjoy glory later. I just found out the other day that Chris Bowditch, our fearless youth minister, actually fears flying.

Now, it doesn't help that he likes watching shows like Air Crash Investigations. But I must admit, when I've been in a plane and the turbulence has hit, you know, my hands get sweaty and my heart starts to beat a bit faster.

And someone once told me that the trick is to remember your destination, your holiday destination. You see, you focus on where you're headed and that helps you to persevere through the turbulence. That's exactly what Paul is saying to Timothy here.

[15 : 10] He's saying, Timothy, remember glory, remember where you're headed, so that you might persevere through the turbulent times. Timothy is to persevere in suffering.

But he's also to persevere in faithfulness. Point 4, verse 14. Paul writes, Remind them of these things, charging them before God not to fight about words.

This in no way is profitable and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Now, just before we go on here, who do you think the them refers to in verse 14? He says, remind them.

Who does the them refer to? Well, at the end of verse 14, it says they have hearers. That is, they have people who listen to them, who hear them. And so, presumably, the them in verse 14 refers to people who are teachers.

Now, perhaps those mentioned back in verse 2, whom Timothy was to entrust the gospel to. And Timothy is to remind them of the things that Paul has just told him.

[16:10] That these teachers, too, are to be single-minded soldiers for Christ. That they are to endure suffering. That if they endure that, then they will reign with Christ.

But if they deny Christ, then Christ will deny them. And presumably, Timothy is to remind them of these things so that they, too, will be faithful teachers.

A faithful teacher who doesn't fight over words. But Timothy, of course, is to be faithful himself. See verse 15? He says, Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, but correctly handles or teaches the word of truth.

But avoid irreverent, empty speech. For this will produce an even greater measure of ungodliness. And their word will spread like gangrene. Hymenaeus and Philetus are among them.

They have deviated from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place. And are overturning the faith of some, he says. See, Timothy, as God's worker, is to be faithful.

[17:14] He's to present himself approved to God. Notice it's to God, not to people. In other words, he's to seek the approval of God rather than people.

Now often, have you ever found yourself reversing that order? You know, you want to please or make a good impression of people even more than God? But Timothy is not to do that.

He's to be approved to God. Seek his approval. And what's more, he's to be faithful to the word of truth or the gospel. And being faithful to the true word means avoiding false words like that of the false teachers.

In fact, the word for irreverent speech in verse 16 is literally babble. Avoid babbling, says Paul. Now when we think of babble, we think of, you know, repeating ourselves or small talk or going on and on, that sort of thing.

Is that what Timothy is to avoid? Well, not quite. Rather, the type of babble he is to avoid is the false kind. The kind that leads to ungodliness, verse 16.

[18:15] The kind that mishandles the word of truth, it says, like Hermeneus and Philetus. You see, these guys were denying the future resurrection.

The future physical resurrection of the dead. And they said that the end time resurrection, it's already happened. It's happened spiritually. That's it. There's going to be no more bodily resurrection on the last day.

That's what they were teaching, it seems. And that meant that it didn't matter what you did with your bodies now. If your bodies aren't going to be raised, you know, if the resurrection has already happened now, then you can engage in sin.

And that led to greater ungodliness, verse 16. That seems to be what has happened. We're not sure, but that seems to be what was happening in Ephesus. But either way, their false teaching led people astray, overturning their faith in the true gospel and getting them to believe in a false one.

The comforting thing in all this, of course, is verse 19, where it says, You see, despite the fact that false teachers were overturning the faith of some, God knows who his people are and he will hold them firm.

[19 : 30] Of course, they need to show they are God's people by turning away from unrighteousness. But the point here is, God will protect his own. And so Timothy is to trust God and avoid babbling.

Avoid mishandling the word of truth. I heard of a preacher once who read out John 3.16. You know John 3.16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.

And then he went from God so loved the world to saying that God is an environmentalist. And that we need to love trees and we need to look after creation. Now, it's true we need to be good stewards of the world, but that's not what John 3.16 is saying.

And at that point, that preacher became a babbler. You see, Timothy is to avoid that mishandling of the truth. He's to avoid babbling. Rather, he's to persevere in faithfulness as God's worker.

And verse 20 and 21, as God's instrument. Verse 20, Now, in a large house there are not only gold and silver bowls, but also those of wood and clay. Some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.

[20 : 36] So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the master, prepared for every good work. Now, it's Hospitality Sunday today.

And I take it that if you have a family cat or dog, just imagine you do. I assume that if you have a family pet and you're having people over for lunch, that you will not use the dog or cat bowl as their plate.

I'm guessing you wouldn't do that. Okay? That is, there are certain bowls for certain purposes, isn't there? And that's what Paul is saying to Timothy here. There are certain things for certain purposes.

And if Timothy wants to be someone who is used for the purpose of building up God's church, then he is to ensure he's the right kind of instrument, if you like.

He's to purify himself and be set apart for Jesus' use. In other words, it matters how we live. The Christian who says Jesus is Lord and then lives a blatant life of sin without even trying to serve Jesus, then he won't win people for Christ.

[21 : 42] He won't be a good example to the church. He won't encourage others in godliness, will he? And this is especially true for church leaders. The church leader who preaches on purity but then practices ungodliness.

He'll lack integrity and people won't listen to him. And people won't be encouraged to live for Jesus. And he'll lose his usefulness for the kingdom. In other words, Timothy's life needs to match his word.

And it's no different for us. And so Paul says in verse 22, So flee from youthful passions, Timothy, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

This is how Timothy is to purify himself. And it's great advice for everyone, all of us, who call on the Lord's name. We're to flee from youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, that we might purify ourselves and be useful for God.

Now, often we think when we read verse 22, you know, flee from youthful passions. We think things like greed or lust. And they are youthful passions that we need to flee from.

[22 : 54] But I think the particular passions Paul has in mind for Timothy involve wanting to win the argument. You see, Timothy is the young pastor of a church and he has false teachers there.

And his temptation might be to be proved right, to win the argument against these false teachers at all costs. And the reason I think that is because of what Paul says next in verse 23.

Paul goes on to say, Now flee from youthful passions, and verse 23, and reject foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they breed quarrels, he says.

Timothy is not to engage in silly arguments, you see. He's not to engage in disputes or quarrels. Instead, as a faithful worker, as a faithful instrument, he said, handle the word well and live rightly.

And finally, as God's slave, he is to instruct gently. See verse 24? The Lord's slave must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness.

[23 : 59] Perhaps God will grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the devil's trap, having been captured by him to do his will. See, Timothy is not to get caught up in quarrels or arguments, but he's to gently instruct.

Now that seems a little odd, given he's just been called a soldier back in verse 3 and 4, doesn't it? But we've got to remember that he's a soldier who follows the Lord Jesus. And so he is to follow his master who loved his enemies.

Timothy is to love in a way that Jesus loved. He is to be patient with people, gently instructing them in the hope that they too might be saved. Now, of course, we're not all pastors, are we?

And none of us are pastors of a church at Ephesus where there are false teachers. And so we might be wondering, well, what's the application for us? We've mentioned a few things as we've gone along, but I think there's still more application for us here.

Firstly, for those of us who are teachers, whether we teach from the pulpit or in Sunday school or Bible study or a midweek group, then we're to watch that we don't babble, that we handle God's word well.

[25 : 10] And we're to watch our life, ensuring that our life matches our words. And we're to ensure that when we teach, we do so with patience and gently instruct those who might oppose us.

And for those of you who don't teach, then you're to watch us who do, you know, pray for us, even rebuke us if we get it wrong. Gently, please. So that, though, the gospel might be guarded and the church built up.

And secondly and finally, whether we are teachers or not, we're all to persevere in following Christ as dedicated, single-minded soldiers. You know, dedicated to him who recruited us by his blood.

Even if that means suffering, we're to endure that suffering for Jesus' sake. A friend of ours called Katrina was offered a promotion at her job, at her work.

And it was a great promotion. It came with a good deal extra money. And it meant that she was able to save up for a deposit on the house that she was really after. In fact, some of her work colleagues were even a little envious of her promotion.

[26 : 14] That's how good it was. And while it meant travelling a bit, at that stage she was single, so she didn't mind that part. But in the end, what did matter to her was the fact that she was missing Bible study during the week.

And she was missing church on the weekend where she served. And so after doing the job for just three months, she gave it up. Even though that would mean having to give up and get less money.

Even though that would mean having to give up the house that she was hoping to buy. And downgrade to something cheaper. When we spoke to her, she said, look, serving and growing Jesus are just more important to me.

Now there's a soldier of Christ, isn't there? Someone dedicated to serving her commanding officer who died to recruit her. Here's a person willing to please Jesus, even if it meant suffering loss.

Loss of money. Loss of dreams. In fact, she even suffered at work. Because when she went back there, her colleagues couldn't understand why she'd given up this job. This promotion. Why on earth would you do that?

[27 : 15] And when she tried to explain that Jesus was more important to her, well, quite frankly, that didn't help either. And that was hard for her. She suffered. It cost her.

It cost her relationships at work. As well as less income. As well as her dream house. But then she remembered her true home and glory. She remembered Jesus who recruited her by his blood.

She remembered Jesus who would take her home to be with him forever. And so she persevered in following him. Friends, pleasing Jesus above others, our family and even ourselves is not easy.

It will cost. But can I encourage you to persevere relying on God's gracious help. And so that you may endure suffering now in order to enjoy glory later.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father. We do thank you that we are not alone in our Christian walk.

[28 : 14] That we do not persevere by ourselves. But we are to look to you to be strengthened. And father, we ask that you would indeed strengthen us to persevere as single-minded soldiers for Christ.

Seeking to please him above all else. Even if that will cost us. And father, we pray it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.