

Ship Wrecked Faith

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Our God and Father, as we turn to your word, we ask that you, by your Holy Spirit, will take your word and apply it to the particular and unique circumstances of our different lives.

Give us ears to hear and hearts to obey. We ask in Christ's name. Amen. It's indeed a quiet landmark in the history of our times that the Bishop of Tokyo should be here this morning and should bring such greetings.

Thank him very much for speaking to us in English, because I'm sure we couldn't return the honor done to us that way. But there is indeed a good many people, young people in the parish, who are going to teach in Japan and who are going into business in Japan and who are traveling to Japan. And I think it would be wonderful if we had some way that some of those young people at least might make contact with the church in Japan and maybe even be able to do for your congregations what you've done for us in bringing us greetings and, in a sense, tying some of the bonds which over the years have been stretched to the breaking point.

And now something really new is happening in our world. And we see at least a glimpse of God's kingdom in the various kingdoms of our world.

[1 : 41] I want to talk to you about 1 Timothy, chapter 1, this morning. And I want to start by telling you that we have in the parish here a number of small Bible study groups that meet mainly in homes.

We would hope that everyone in the parish would not just belong to the Sunday morning congregation, which is large and tends to become impersonal by its own weight, but that you would also belong to a small group where you are praying and studying and reading and sharing and having fellowship together.

There are probably 200 to 300 people doing that in the parish at the moment, but it would be great if all of us could consider that to be a part of our church life.

Steve James has started the Read, Mark, Learn courses, which I've looked forward to for a long time, simply because it is absolutely basic training in the gospel according to St. Mark.

And St. Mark then becomes, as the first and shortest of the gospels, becomes in a sense a key to the whole of scripture. And I would like the whole of our parish to be grounded in the gospel of Mark so that they would have that as a valuable key in studying the rest of scripture.

[3 : 08] And a thorough study of Mark's gospel should be part of the life of all of us in our Christian growth and maturing. Ernie will start a noon-hour brown-bag lunch Bible study in which he'll survey the whole of scripture in five weeks, and the notices of that are in the green form, which everyone should have because it tells you everything that's happening in the parish between now and the new year.

There's a businessman's Bible study on Wednesday at 7.30. There's a Bible teaching session at the cathedral at 12 noon on Wednesdays to which you are warmly invited.

You will find in your parish newsletter a guide for personal Bible reading, which you can use individually.

And you will find in the bulletin today the outline really of the sermon, the chapter of the sermon is based on, and you can use that either as a group guide or a personal study guide in looking further at this text from 1 Timothy.

Now, Timothy is in Ephesus. He's in charge of the church. The church in Ephesus was a very dynamic church. It was the key church from which many of the churches in the Roman province of Asia had their beginning when Paul went there and day in and day out and night in and night out argued for the truth of the gospel among the Jews and among the Greeks and established a church there from which spread the church in all that part of the country.

[5 : 00] Ephesus was a dynamic city. They considered themselves to be the temple keepers for Diana of the Ephesians. It was a totally pagan city in that regard.

They had riots there. They had all sorts of problems in the church getting started there because the gospel caused controversy wherever it was preached in the New Testament, and I would to God it caused controversy today instead of meeting with the wall of massive indifference, which we have learned is the best way of turning it off in our society.

When Paul visited the Ephesians, the last time, as he suspected, he told them that among the congregation at Ephesus would come wolves who would seek to destroy the congregation. And he said, the enemies of your congregation are members of your own congregation. They're not people brought in from the outside. The most difficult thing, I think, for the whole of the Anglican Church in Canada is the number of people who are loyal to the church, loyal in church attendance, loyal to the traditions of the church, and totally ignorant of the scriptures. And that, I think, is where most of the problems for our Anglican Church come from. And that's why I think it is fundamentally basic that we confront the scriptures.

[6 : 32] You will know that it is a long-standing tradition that people in extremity of any kind should be offered the Holy Communion, and that the priests of the parish should go around and give communion to people.

I'm very rarely asked to do that, and very often when I offer to do it, people said no, with the implication being I'm not that badly off, that I need that.

But the purpose of taking communion to people is that you enact with them, in their illness or in the particular stress of the moment, you enact with them the truth of the gospel.

It's a kind of acting out of the gospel message, as you make known to them the love of God in Christ, and share that love with them in the tangible way of sharing bread and wine, and the words of Christ, this is my body and this is my blood.

So that the whole structural life of the church comes from sharing together the word of God, whether visually in the sacrament or through the study and reading of the word of God.

[7 : 47] And we minister to one another by that word of God. So what I want to do briefly this morning is take the first chapter of Timothy and show you how Bible studies need to work in order that churches are not destroyed, not by the opposition that's around them, but by our relationship to one another.

If we are not being renewed by the scriptures among ourselves, then we don't have to have enemies outside the church. We have them all here.

So look at it, will you? And I want to put you through it, and I'm just extracting from this first chapter of Timothy the whole concept of how a Bible teaching program works in a congregation.

In chapter 1, verse 4, it's called the divine training. If you look at it, you will see that it reads, they're not to occupy themselves with myths, endless genealogies, which promote speculation, rather than the divine training.

The divine training is that pattern of teaching which is to be the substructure of the whole of the church. The church is dependent upon divine training, training for all members of the congregation, of every age, of every level of intelligence, of every level of understanding.

[9 : 17] This divine training is the basic rules of the household of God, how we relate to one another. It's God's design for us. It's a lifetime process, and it's a process which, as God provided for his household in the wilderness by giving them manna day by day, so God's household now lives in dependence upon the daily provision of the bread of the word of God to sustain life and health.

We can't live without it. The second thing I want you to see is how, in the face of this, a congregation goes bad.

It goes sour. However, the way it happens is, as Paul warns Timothy, is that instead of the historical proclamation or the proclamation of the historical gospel, myths start coming in.

Religion and myths go together. Most people think religion is made up entirely of myths. Karl Barth has called Christianity of the gospel the true myth.

And when people try and separate the Jesus of faith from the Jesus of history, they find that you can't do it. You can't reduce the person of Jesus Christ to myth.

[10 : 50] He is inextricably bound up in history. And so, when the church gives way to myths, then it gets away from the historical foundations on which it is built.

Not only do myths come in, but endless genealogies, as though they had meaning. The meaning you have is not the roots of your family, but the roots of your new life in Christ.

Genealogies end, as a subject of religious speculation, with the birth of Christ. Then it talks about speculation. And do you know how often into our Bible study groups comes the religious speculator, who wants to know this or that or the other thing, and so the whole focus of the teaching gives away to vain speculation.

You will know how there grows up in a Bible study group self-appointed teachers who take advantage of the Christian charity of their fellow members to spout and spout and spout and spout as though they had something to say when they have nothing to say.

There are people whom Paul says are fascinated with words, fascinated with their own speaking, but their words are empty of meaning and full of authority.

[12:21] And that's what happens. And that's what most people, this is how they hear religion in our day, empty of meaning and loaded heavily with authority, not recognizing that in the book of Ecclesiastes we are warned that a fool multiplies words in the face of his own ignorance.

You might make an immediate application of that to the fool that's standing here multiplying words. But you have to test that by the scriptures.

He then warns them in chapter 1 and verse 8 that one of the things that happens is you get trapped in the law. And when he tells them that they get trapped in the law, he says the law is for the disobedient, the ungodly, sinners, unholy, profane, murderers of fathers, murderers of mothers, manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.

Now he's giving you the raw material out of which the church is to be made, those people. And it's to be made as they confront the law and are brought to repentance so that they can hear the gospel.

But having heard the gospel, they go on from there. He then tells them that they must be aware of the great danger that confronts them in all Bible study groups.

[13:59] And that is rejecting conscience. We are so used to rejecting our own conscience, to layering it over so that we never hear from it, to quietening it, to silencing it.

And when we get into Bible study groups, we discover that religion is one of the best ways to quieten our conscience because we're acting so holy that our conscience has to shut up.

I've been to church, don't talk to me. You know, that's... When exactly... Paul says to Timothy, it's these people who reject their conscience who...

to whom... who make shipwreck of their faith. And what the... the function, the purpose of Bible study group is to sensitize your dulled conscience that you may face and deal with the problems in your own life.

The reason you read the scriptures, the reason you subject your mind and heart to the scriptures, the reason you pray that God will use the scriptures is to sensitize your mind to the scriptures.

[15:13] And so, if you follow this chapter through carefully, you'll see that people who reject their conscience are ultimately rejected from the church because the church is the place where you face your conscience, not the place you hide from it.

And that's what happens to two people at the end of chapter one. But also, Paul teaches here, that if you reject your conscience, you will end up rejecting the scriptures.

You won't have intellectual arguments against the scriptures. It will be your guilty conscience that is dismissing the scriptures. Okay, that's what can happen to make Bible study teaching, Bible study and teaching in a parish go wrong.

But now it tells you what the purpose of it is, and I want just in a few moments to tell you how that works. chapter one, verse five, that the purpose and the aim of this program of teaching the scriptures is love that issues from a pure heart.

When you understand the scripture, you are not awarded a certificate, you begin to love. In other words, this study of the scriptures and exposure to the God of the scriptures tends to bring into your heart love.

[16:42] Somebody told me that they've been asking for some support in the work they do around the church, and they're really mad at this congregation because they're not getting the support they'd like to get.

And then this person prayed, and as they prayed, God gave them a love for this congregation, a recognition of the pressures people are under, a recognition of how busy people are, a recognition of how there is much willingness to help, but it's very hard to get the time to do it.

So that instead, here was an example of the scriptures producing love in somebody's heart instead of bitterness and criticism in a sense of being deserted. And that's what the scriptures do.

They produce love in your heart for people, people who are even in the categories of the sinners in that catalog that is used here. Love in your heart, a good conscience, and as you begin to deal with your personal issues, to let the light in on your personal issues, you begin to grow spiritually.

As you begin to look at those things which you've tried to suppress all your life, things begin to happen. As you're asked to look at the issues that confront you.

[18:04] Love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. And this is all based on sound doctrine, the doctrines of the gospel which are healthy and health-giving.

Then in our group, then what we need is, let me just finish with this. I have to stop. The practical testimony of somebody who talks in the first person.

This is how it happened to me. And Paul does this when he says, you may say, who am I? Lots of people have trouble with St. Paul. And Paul delights to tell them who he is.

He says, I thank God who's given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord. He judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him.

I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly and in unbelief. And so he gives this testimony of how God met him and how he met God through the scriptures.

[19:12] And how God acted towards him in mercy and how he poured upon him grace and faith and love. But then having experienced that himself, Paul immediately breaks out and says, and what he did for me, he can do for you.

That's where the verse that Steve pointed out to us this morning comes in. Paul says, what he's done for me, he can do for you. Because this is a faithful saying, worthy of all men to be received. It belongs to everybody that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. So it's not that I have been made elite. I am one who needed this most, who qualified for it best because I was the chief of sinners and Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

So what happened to me is meant for all, Paul says. And then he breaks into that wonderful statement of spontaneous worship and says, to the king of ages, immortal, invisible, God only wise. Now that's what happens. That's the impact of the scriptures. The aim, love, faith, a good conscience, the expression of our personal gratitude to God for confronting us and the recognition that if he can confront us, then there is nobody that the gospel is not intended to confront and to bring to faith in Jesus Christ.

[20:46] that's the divine training. That's the thing that is to be central to our life as a congregation. There's a warfare involved in this, he says, but you hold onto it and you fight this warfare holding faith with a good conscience.

you don't swerve from it. You grip the shield of faith against all the fiery darts of our world because you are under divine training by the word of God.

There's much more there. Let me pray. God, our Father, as we look at this scripture, we are made very much aware of how we need so much to be subject to the divine training.

Our minds need to be subject to your word. Give us grace that we may find the time in our busy lives to make this a priority that you will, by your word, through the ministry of your Holy Spirit, bring us under your divine training.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. I do ask that we turn straight to prayer now, if you would kneel or sit to pray.

[22:43] One of the greatest things in this life is sincere, heartfelt prayer. Tennyson said, more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.

Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, we pray for the church throughout the world and that this time we remember especially the church in Japan.

grant, we beseech thee to all bishops, their clergy and the people of Japan, wisdom, patience and perseverance to know and do your will and to know that the love and prayers of the church in Canada are with them always.

we pray for Bishop John Takeda and those who travel with him that you will be with them in their work and grant them a safe return home.

Father, we pray for our own bishop, for the clergy and people of this parish. Guide us, Father, that we may behave in such a way that others outside the church may see in us the love of Christ and be brought into thy fold.

[24 : 17] We pray for all who are sick, particularly those known to us. We pray for the elderly, the elderly, for our children and for those in any kind of trouble.

Father, you know our needs before we ask, so we commit ourselves into your safe keeping. We thank you for all your blessings and ask that we may, with your help, be your faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' end.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen. Continue in prayer together.

page 238 of our Book of Alternative Services. Hear what comforting words our Savior Jesus Christ says to all that truly turn to him.

come unto me all that labor and are heavy laden and I will refresh you. Hear also what St.

[26 : 10] Paul says. This is a true saying and worthy of all to be received that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

God's God's God's God's name. Let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God. Together.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things and judge of all people, we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed by thought, word and deed, against thy divine majesty.

We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. have mercy upon us, most merciful Father, for thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, save.

Forgive us all that is past and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory of thy name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life.

[27 : 55] Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.