

2 Timothy 2:1-7

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Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

[0 : 00] Let us turn over to the second paragraph of God's Word, the second decrys of Paul to Timothy, chapter 2, and we'll deal with a section tonight beginning from the beginning of the chapter through to verse 7.

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and so on. Second Timothy, chapter 2, at the beginning. Now, as we continue with our studies in this letter, and as we progress with them, we have always to carry with us the great purpose for which Paul was writing this letter to Timothy.

Paul, as you recollect, was facing death. Death was very imminent. This was his second imprisonment. And knowing that Timothy was to assume the responsibility of leadership in the church, knowing that he was naturally timid and diffident, he encouraged him and exhorted him to be courageous and to be strong in the Lord.

And in the face of all the difficulties that he was to confront, especially in view of the fact that there was a great tide at the time running against the Christian church in the form of persecution and defections from the faith, he encourages him and exhorts him not to drift with that tide.

Be courageous, be strong, seems to be the hallmark of this epistle and the watchword and the cry of Paul to Timothy.

[2 : 25] And in the passage before us here this evening, he first of all directs him to the source of his strength. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Now, you know that there are people, as I mentioned here two or three weeks ago, there are people who are naturally endowed with courage and with strength.

Men like Peter, for example, who are not afraid to face the enemy. And men who are prepared to testify to their faith and to witness to the grace and to the reality of that grace, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are other people for whom it isn't quite so easy to be courageous and to be strong. There are some people who are diffident and people who tend to sort of draw back.

Now, even for a person who is strong in the faith, he is not at any time to rely upon his own strength, upon his own courage, upon any gifts or endowments that God has blessed him with.

[3 : 53] They can, of course, they can come in very handy, as we say, at times. But Timothy here is directed to that source from which he must draw his strength and his courage at all times, namely the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

In other words, he is not to rely upon himself. He is to rely upon the grace of Christ. Now, the question for us, therefore, is this.

What exactly is the grace that is in Christ Jesus for us? And though there are many ways in which that question can be answered, I think in view of the context, in view of the general drift of the letter, it means surely this, the strength that Jesus Christ communicates to those who trust in him.

For example, when Paul wrote an earlier letter to the church at Philippi, he referred to the fact that he had learned many things in life.

He says, I know, he says, what it is like to have nothing. I know what it is like to have plenty. I know what it is like to be free and gloriously free.

[5 : 28] I also know what it is like to be in prison. In prison. I know, he says, all these circumstances. And in them all and through the years, God has taught me to be satisfied with himself, to be content.

I have learned in whatsoever circumstances I am in, therewith to be content. It was a learning process for him. Just as it was for Jesus himself.

Though he were a son, yet he learned obedience through the things that he suffered. And in that same letter to the Philippians, Paul goes on to say this.

In these circumstances and in these situations, God has ministered to me in such a way that I can do anything through Christ who strengthens me.

And that's what he says here to Timothy. Timothy, if you want to be strong, if you want to be courageous, if you want to stand up in the name of the Lord, and if you want to witness in his name and for his sake, if you want to carry the torch into the camp of the enemy, into the very heart of enemy territory, you can only do it through the strength that Christ can communicate to you.

[6 : 55] And that's what every one of us here tonight needs. And the letter, of course, being addressed to a young Christian minister, it's application, it's applicable to every Christian, in whatever situation he or she may be in, the only way you can face the enemy, and the only way you can win through, is by receiving the strength that is in Christ and is available to you in Christ.

Receive it to yourself and go on in that strength and be able to say with Paul, I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me.

Well, no. At the end of this letter, almost at the very end of it, in verse 17, Paul says something else.

When he says, I was to answer before the Roman authorities, they ask me, why are you here? Why are you imprisoned?

What do you have to say for yourself? What do you say in your own defense? Well, he says, at first, my first answer, no man stood by me, all men forsake me.

[8 : 11] I pray that God not lay that to their charge. Notwithstanding, he says, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, that by me, the preacher might be fully known, that all the gentles might hear, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

There was a man now who learned the meaning of being strong in the Lord. A man who was all alone, right in the midst of enemy territory, there to answer for the faith.

He looked to his right, to his left. There was no one with him. Again, he had to experience what the Lord Jesus experienced. They all forsook him and fled. But, says Paul, the Lord stood by me and strengthened me.

And you know, who knows, but that you may be here tonight, perhaps finding life rather difficult, the going rather rough, the opposition rather strong and fierce.

at times you may feel that you've been swept off your feet and away from your Christian moorings. The only thing that will help you stand is the grace or the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 26] That's what he tells Timothy. You remember, he says, the source of your strength. Is there anyone here tonight who has forgotten that?

Is there anyone here who needs to be reminded of you where your strength lies? Then he goes on, secondly, to remind him of the responsibility that has been given to him.

The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.

In other words, you hand on the message that you have received. The teaching that you have been given by me in the presence of witnesses, we're not very sure what this was, but it's obvious that Timothy had been at one time instructed by Paul himself.

Well, he says, you heard that from me. Now, your responsibility is to hand that on to other witnesses. You commit that to faithful men.

[10 : 37] And these faithful men will hand it on, will teach it to others also. This is what leads you and me here tonight in this church.

That over the years, from the very time that the gospel came to the island of Lewis, people received it and heard it, believed it. And people got to grips with the teaching of the Christian faith.

And they went out. And they taught other people. And these people received it through. And they in turn went on to teach it to their generation.

And so, from generation to generation to generation, the gospel has unfolded and the gospel moves on. The gospel is a movement.

He refers to that movement in the second epistle to the Corinthians. It is a wonderful movement, a glorious movement. And we, who have received the truth, and who know the truth, have a responsibility to hand the truth on to others.

[11 : 48] Some of you may have a commentary on the second epistle of Tim Paul to this epistle written by John Stott. And the illustration he uses is one which is well known to us all.

The illustration of the Olympic torch. It starts off at a certain point. And runner after runner carries that torch. Until the day when the Olympic games are opened, the final runner in that movement runs into the stadium up the steps, places it where the light is to build it and the flame burns throughout the Olympic games.

That's the imagery that we have here. You have received it from me. You now hand it on to others. These others will hand it on to those coming after them.

Make sure that the truth survives and make sure that the truth flourishes. Now, this of course has to be applied to ourselves as well.

This is the supreme responsibility of the Christian church and of the Christian in the church. Christian parents have a responsibility to teach the truth to the children.

[13 : 13] The Christian church has a responsibility to teach the truth to its children at various levels of the children's development as they grow up in the church.

That is the function of the Christian church. And then from these various activities amongst the young you branch out then to the activities that you have amongst and for the old.

Services such as these. Various fellowship meetings and conferences and conventions and so on. And from them the church the truth is disseminated.

It spreads its way through the community from the church into the community.

The great function of the church is to teach the great truths of the word of God to all with whom it comes in contact.

[14 : 19] And that is your responsibility as well may I say tonight to the Christian here to the individual believer to those of you who know the truth you have to pass it on pass it on explain the truth the great truths of the word of God that is what the church exists for.

And that is its principal function. Then one wonders really to what extent we are seeking to fulfill that as a church ourselves.

and I needn't go on any further really but to ask that question I often wonder if we are in the business of handing on the truth to those who are coming before us.

I often wonder if we who are members of the church are as concerned about these things as we ought to be. I was preaching recently in a place and I must say that I was preaching on this passage though I hope that my approach to the passage tonight is different to what it was then and I happen to make reference to something which perhaps may have ruffled a few feathers and no doubt because I said the thing I was misrepresented and misquoted and probably nothing I said in the whole sermon nothing mattered but that I only spoke about 30 seconds on the thing but this is usually what happens.

I often wonder if I often think the history few months ago we in our various congregations in this island throughout the free church were looking at the history of the free church and some of us here were looking at the history of the free church in this island and some of you may know that when the revival hit the area of Ness in the early 20s under the ministry of the late Reverend Brody MacLeod he initiated a series of services called evangelistic meetings because he felt there was a real spiritual interest abroad in the area and he set up these evangelistic services so that the unconverted could be would be given the word of God with an evangelistic thrust there was a man who had a vision for the church who saw the need that was present at the time and he initiated these things and people responded and they were a tremendous influence for good right throughout the whole island as they were taken on board in community after community and the thing just took off today we have the same services 70 years afterwards services which have totally lost their meaning but we hang on to them because they were there and because there is a natural reluctance on the part of people to give up what has been a part of the fabric but it's only been a part of its fabric for 70 years and we seem to lack the vision today that these men had they initiated in the church that which was to benefit the church and that which benefits the church not one iota today is kept in it because it's part of the furniture well I suggest it's time we got rid of that furniture and introduced something else into the church whatever it may be perhaps something along the lines that Paul is telling

[18 : 40] Timothy here perhaps a special meeting a special times when the great teacher of the word of God and the great doctrines of grace could be emphasized and bring in here people who are well qualified to proclaim these things to explain these things to the people because the Christian church is in danger of losing these great doctrines of the faith and once the Christian church is weak and at that level its fabric begins to fall this is our responsibility teach and teach and teach and hand on the teachings then thirdly he says again exhorting him and again encouraging him you he says remember that as a Christian you've got to act and work and live in a particular way and to illustrate this he brings before him and before us three metaphors

Timothy says be like a good soldier Timothy be like a dedicated athlete Timothy be like a hard working farmer that's what he deals with in verses three to six first of all then he introduces this image of the soldier thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ no man that warreth and tangleth himself the affairs of this life that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier as Timothy was dictating this letter he was chained to a Roman soldier there are some who believe that he was chained to two soldiers hand hands and feet he had ample opportunity during a period of two years imprisonment to witness

Roman soldiers he lived at very close quarters with them he spoke to them he communicated the gospel to them and he was taken gripped by their dedication by their commitment to the service in which they were engaged and to the empire whose interests they espoused he was taken up by their whole heartedness by their willingness to serve and to suffer and to endure the difficulties that are associated with soldiering now Timothy says as a soldier of Jesus Christ you endure hardness you accept all the difficulties and all the privations that are associated with being a

Christian a Christian minister and a Christian witness you concentrate on your task avoid he says as he says here look at these soldiers he said you don't find them entangling themselves with the affairs of this life that is not their concern they're soldiers and they're soldiers to please him who has chosen him to be a soldier now he says that's the way that you should be as a Christian who chose you to be a Christian was that your own choice did you decide to become a Christian no he said God made you a believer by his grace who chose you he says to be a minister was that your own decision certainly wasn't the last thing on earth Timothy would have wanted to do who put him where he was God did and you remember he says whose you are and whom you serve you're there he says to please him who has made you a soldier and you be dedicated committed wholeheartedly to his service some years previously

Paul wrote a letter to the church at Corinth and in that letter it was so he was being asked one question in chapter five of that letter second epistle to the Corinthians why do you live the way you do why do you preach the way you do why is it that you give yourself in this kind of service what motivates you two things he says in verse nine of chapter five he says I want to please Christ when Christ comes again I want to live in such a way that if he comes when he comes I will be well pleased to him and something else he says I know that one day I am going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to render my account Timothy remember that you are a soldier of

[24 : 16] Jesus Christ and you are in this business you are in this war you are in this army not to please yourself but to please him what's wrong with Christianity 1993 what's gone wrong with evangelicalism why has a Christian lost ground because we've lost that motivation because so many of us live unto ourselves not unto him how many times have you heard Christians and young Christians say I don't care I'll do what I like perhaps you're not so young and you may be tempted to say the same thing and where does that kind of philosophy that kind of attitude where does it lead it leads you away from Christ leads you perhaps ultimately out of his army you cease to be a soldier you cease to be a witness you cease to be a real believer because you're out to please yourself not him

Timothy says you be a good soldier and you forget the things that tend to drag you aside the things that tend to trip you up avoid them give them a wide birth and be above all things prepared to please him and in doing that he knew that he would have to endure hardship as he puts it here hardness things would become very difficult life would become very cruel people become very cruel why do you take that stand what are you afraid of why not what are you to lose are you afraid of people at home are you afraid of the christian church are you afraid of your elders your minister are you afraid of your parents go on why not these are the arguments the christian has to avoid he's got to please his master timothy you be like a good soul then the second metaphor is this timothy you be like a dedicated athlete that's the meaning of verse 5 if a man also strive for masteries he is not crowned except he strive lawfully again that reference to the olympic games no doubt you remember that runners from those days when they were on the race they didn't receive a gold and a silver or bronze medal they received a garland of flour this was the crown of victory that the winner received and the meaning of as I said the meaning of the word man's time for master is just the athlete running in a race he will not win the prize unless he runs according to the rules now what are the rules for an athlete some of you know this better than I do you know the rules for an athlete he is again dedicated he is committed some of you have seen some of them being interviewed on television

Linford Christian Lisbon Paul and people like that they're up at the crack of dawn sometimes before the dawn break before the day break they're toggled up in their running shoes and they're running mile after mile after mile pounding the roads and the hills building up their strength building up their energy building up their muscles because they're involved in something which demands commitment and when the great day comes and the race that they're running has to be run according to certain rules if they're in a sprint they've got to stay in the lane if they're in a longer race they've got to break out of their lanes after a certain time there are rules that they've got to abide by they're not allowed to trip up their opponent they're not allowed to obstruct they're making for that tape that's the sole objective to break the tape before anybody else but they'll never do it unless they're committed and unless they abide by the rules in recent months we've heard of athletes who have emerged from

China and some of the great feats that they've undertaken and the times that they've recorded are being questioned because there is a great suspicion that they're on drugs that these times are drug and juice that their runners are drug and juice and these that's not keeping to the rules nowadays we're approaching the time whenever every athlete will have to be tested for drugs so be it and it's good that that has come to make sure that they're above board that they're honest now he says Timothy you be an honest Christian you be dedicated to your Lord you give yourself heart and soul to the task before you you are running as he said to the church at Philippi I run to the church at Corinth rather I run so you run that you may obtain the prize

I am not perfect he said to the Philippians yet I want to be and I press on towards the mark I see the tape the tape is heaven itself perfection before my Lord and I don't want to be taken aside by anything that's my goal that's what I want and I'm striving for it what's the problem today we're not dedicated we're not striving the way we are we're not keeping the rules that's the problem it's so difficult isn't it so difficult to get up in the morning to read the bible so difficult to give part of the day to prayer and meditation so difficult to sit in the house put your feet up turned on the telly when perhaps you ought to be in the means of grace so difficult to get up and get out and go and do and run so so very difficult well my friend this is what he says to

[31 : 21] Timothy you be a dedicated athlete and perhaps I don't know if one of the doctors present could attend to someone perhaps the office bearer could open these doors if you're feeling as hot as I am I don't know how you're sitting here I think it's all right someone's been yes doctor sorry doctor gray I think you could help be like a dedicated athlete and then finally he says to Timothy be like a hardworking farmer farmer of course the farmer's task is very different to the soldier and to the athlete one difference is this there are times when the soldier and the athlete when their lives perhaps are relieved by the presence of pomp and ceremony and excitement and applause soldier may be on duty on a state occasion the athlete the athlete running receives a medal and there's a great ceremony and great applause but the farmer isn't like that the farmer is working and working and working his great objective is to take in the harvest to receive fruits for his labor like the soldier and the athlete he's got a clock to watch he's up early he's working he's trying he's putting everything into it the same ideas he is dedicated hardworking because he's looking towards the fruit he knows what he wants at the end of the day that's why he's working in his fields all the time making sure that they bring forth the fruit that he's wanting for himself that he may prosper well so it is with the

Christian you he says you work at your Christianity how often do we find that in the New Testament work out your own salvation with fear and trembling work at it like a math student and the teacher or the tutor puts a paper in front of him there's a sum on it there's an equation there he says to him you work that out bring it to its conclusion find the answer that's what we do without Christianity we've got to work at it bring it to a right conclusion and the conclusion again is conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ becoming like the Lord Jesus that's the end product so it is with the Christian no victory for the soldier unless he gives himself to soldiering no crown for the athlete unless he dedicates himself to his task and no harvest for the farmer unless he toils at his farm and look at the man who wrote these words and I'm nearly finished the blessing look at the blessing

God gave to this man the apostle Paul I don't know how old he was when he wrote this letter but he had been ministering he had been witnessing for Jesus Christ for about 30 maybe to 40 years and no doubt my explanation could be given for the great fruit that he had on his labour he had travelled thousands of miles without the modern convenience that we have today he had preached in the open air the temple the synagogue he had preached to Jew and Gentile he had preached to soldiers and farmers he had preached to young and old he had preached in sickness and in health and the Lord had mightily blessed his labour why well of course one answer is that the Lord himself sovereignly blesses anyone's labour but someone answered that question this way I find myself wondering he says if we attribute it sufficiently to the zeal and the zest the almost obsessional devotion with which he gave himself to the work he gave and did not count the cost he fought and did not heed the wounds he toiled and did not seek the rest he laboured and he asked for no reward except the joy of doing the

Lord's will and God prospered his efforts oh my friends if only you and I were more wholehearted in our Christian commitment and in our Christian self how many of us are playing at being Christians how many of us how many of us are prepared to take as it were a half step but not the full step how many of us are taking a step and not prepared to enter into the marches and the long march and to the toil and the fatigue and the discipline that Christianity demands it's become far too easy to be named a Christian today far too easy but there's more to it than judge the badge of a

Christian profession being on a lapel think he says on these things consider what I say and the Lord give the understanding in all things meditate on these things study them do them see if it's worth doing these things that's your side of it and God's side is this he will give you understanding in all things there's a book been published recently some of you have no doubt bought it in English happy Norman and if you read that book you'll come across that there are stories told of a man who was quite exceptional man who had wonderful experiences spiritual intuition and so on when you read that kind of thing and of similar men women days gone by you sit back and you say to yourself

[38 : 56] I wish I was a Christian like that what kind of Christian well an unusual Christian Christian my friend these were exceptions to the rule the rule for each one of us is to be what God wants us to be to do what God tells us to do to consider these things take them on board look at them do they apply to us if not throw them overboard if you can be a Christian without putting these things into practice so be it throw these injunctions and these exhortations to the four winds and then people will see you to be what you are not a Christian if you're going to be one and if you're going to work at it you've got to these exhortations on board take them in into your life tonight let me take them into mine and let just begin to live accordingly think on these things and if you do these things the Lord will give you understanding the Lord will give you light this is always a pattern you don't become a superhuman mystical

Christian by sitting back and doing nothing you become the Christian the Bible demands you to be and expect you to be by putting these things into practice perhaps someone sitting in this church tonight is saying this to himself or to herself I came here tonight to hear a sermon and here's a man who has preached to Christians all night I'm not a Christian I'm sitting here it has no relevance whatsoever to me my friend it has you cannot be a Christian without coming to Christ Christ and receiving the grace and the strength that is available to you in him and he promises that if you come come unto me I will give you what you need and by coming to

Christ you set out on the road of Christian living and then these things become applicable to you so no one in this church tonight is allowed to opt out no one can walk through these doors tonight and say that wasn't for me that was for so and so it is for you because he bids you come and he bids you be strong and he bids you love God's demands are upon you as they're upon everybody else because one day you will stand before his judgment seat and he will ask you this what have you done with my claims upon your life let us pray bless to us Lord thy word oh to thou make it living in our experience and a blessing to our souls by thy grace and by thy spirit have mercy upon us and guide us now and forgive us for thy name's sake amen amen thy and thy amen for thy and thy charger