

The Courage from Christ

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Preacher: Peter Watson

[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of October 2001.

The preacher is Archbishop Watson. His sermon is entitled The Courage from Christ and is based on 2 Timothy 2, verses 1-7.

When everything else goes, it's family that matters. It's those people that are really your own children, your own grandchildren, your own wife, husband, parents.

Now there's something of that and that very tender part of us that doesn't always erupt to the surface that comes out in this reading we've just had where St Paul, the great apostle, is writing to his very, very dear friend and we believe Paul was single so that his close friends were like his children or his brothers and sisters.

Those who are a bit younger, and Timothy's one of those, he speaks of them as if they're his children. And despite the sort of vocabulary that we have here, this is a very tender piece of writing.

[1 : 2 3] St Paul is writing to Timothy as his own child and Paul knows that he's probably not much longer for this world. I was just checking with Paul in the vestibule before we came in that my understanding is that right, that probably this second letter of Paul to Timothy's is the last thing Paul wrote.

And some months later he was probably executed and Paul knows that time's running out. And so almost everything we read from Paul in 2 Timothy are like, what am I going to say that really matters?

There's nothing here that doesn't matter. These are like the last things. If you say, this is the last time you're going to speak to this person.

You'll never see them again. What will you say? It's that kind of characteristic or that kind of character attaches to this second letter of Paul to his dear friend Timothy.

And we mustn't ever forget our beginnings. We mustn't. And that's what really is being put before Timothy here. Timothy, don't forget.

[2 : 3 8] Don't forget where it began. Since I've become Archbishop, I've had a couple of reporters have interviewed me and asked me about this and about that.

And inevitably, if it's about me personally, it comes to what were the main influences in your life? And I think the single most important influence in my life was my dad.

And I hold my dad way up here. For me, he's my hero. And I sometimes wish when I think back, because he lived to 92, so I was very privileged to have my dad for so long.

And I sometimes wish I'd done more with him. I sometimes wish I'd spent more time talking to him, because I see him in my mind. He's a very decent man.

What I would hope that all Australians were like my dad, in the sense that he was such a good person, such a gentleman and such a gentle man, a man, but a very kind, fair sort of person.

[3 : 43] Maybe I've exaggerated. Maybe I've made him more of a hero than he really was. But he looms very large in my mind and in my life and in my memory. And I know it would be one of the worst things I could do to forget that, to forget what I think is his beneficial influence upon me.

And I thank God for that. Now, Paul is actually speaking like that to Timothy. Timothy, don't forget the beginnings. And he says, Timothy, he calls him my child or my son.

And then he uses the phrase, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. It's an unusual way of speaking. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And when I think about my own beginnings, and as we've heard two testimonies tonight, I think about my own beginnings as a Christian, how I came to faith, and I won't give you the whole story, but I can actually pinpoint moments in my life that had significance upon me.

I can remember my mum when I was, I think I was probably the earliest memory I have is when I was four. I think I was, certainly before I was going to school. So it must have, and I don't think you can remember much before that.

[5 : 00] And our mum used to, my brother, I was listening to my brother and I, Gary and I, and she would put us on her knee in the bathroom when she cleaned our teeth before we went to bed. And she would say a little prayer.

And she would say, Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child, suffer my simplicity, and the rest of that beautiful little child's prayer. I can remember when I felt I was too big for that, and I said, Mum, I've got to say my own prayers now, which meant I stopped saying my prayers.

But I can remember when that stopped. But, you know, that had an enormous impact upon me. From that, as the first speaker said a moment ago, that had, from the very beginning, I had this overwhelming sense of God and Jesus in my life because that very impactful influence of my mum.

And then I could go right through. I had church and Sunday school, and at school there was a very strong ISF group that I belonged to, and then I went to more theological college, and then I was ordained, and then all the wonderful rich experiences I had as a parish minister, three parishes in Sydney, and then I was made a bishop, and then I came down here too and had the extraordinary privilege of becoming the Archbishop of Melbourne.

And all those moments have been very impactful. It's very emotional. Some of those things are very... They make you feel terribly inadequate, and they're just big moments of influence in your life.

[6 : 35] And Paul is saying, don't forget them. Don't forget those promises you made. Don't forget when you said this, and when somebody taught you that, and somebody opened the Bible up to you, and your heart was warmed, and you had a new understanding of who God is.

Don't let those things ever go away from you. And I know that at the very heart of my faith is the realization that Jesus Christ is God, and he has come into the world, and I understand the universe, and I understand that there's a God, and I understand that I'm precious to God, and all that is concentrated in my understanding of who Jesus Christ is, is that that is the very heart and center of the Christian faith.

And so that's what Paul is now saying. Now, Timothy was a minister who was in charge of a group of churches. Paul was like a kind of bishop, and one of his ministers was Timothy, and he's giving him a charge and saying, well, now, Timothy, at the very heart of your ministry is the strength you will have from understanding this phrase, grace that is in Jesus Christ.

It's an unusual way of speaking, but what it is really saying is understand the love that God has for his creation.

that, like a parent created, creates a child. I think of my Elizabeth, who's, you know, all the way over there in London, and if anything happens over this, what can we do to help?

[8 : 16] It's a long way away. So your love for that person is just very powerful and almost hurts, because there's something very powerful between parent and child that's almost impossible to explain until something goes wrong, and then you know it's there very powerfully.

Well, God has a hundred times more powerful affection for us. He is the cosmic parent who made every one of us and loves us so much, and sometimes we forget that.

We hear it, oh, God is love. We hear that. We don't let it really sink in. You know, God loves us so much that on the cross on Good Friday when Jesus was dying on the cross, God, as it were, is weeping.

God's heart is breaking because men and women just ignore him, men and women, but we're his children. We're his creation. And so be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Be strong in understanding that God loves you so much that he sent his Son into the world. Be strong. Be strengthened by the knowledge of God's love filling your life.

[9 : 36] So he's saying to Timothy, don't try and pretend to be what you aren't. I'm not asking you to get a false sort of courage and to be a kind of person because Timothy, we get some clues that Timothy was a reasonably timid person and easily bullied maybe.

And a lot of us are like that. It's not a false sort of courage that Paul is saying to Timothy. Be strong. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Be strong in your understanding of how much God loves us and has moved towards us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

He allowed him to be crucified on the cross. We're going to celebrate that in the Lord's Supper tonight. at the very heart of the Christian faith. There's nothing more central to our understanding of Christianity than the cross.

That's why it's the symbol. That's why it's the badge of the Christian faith. The death of Christ on the cross. There is the explanation or the displaying of God's heart pulsing with love for his creation.

For you individually. For me individually. So that's what makes me strong as an archbishop. Not because I've got a big job or and I haven't really. These days archbishops haven't got big jobs. A lot of work to do.

[10 : 51] But not big jobs. Not really. Not really. What makes us strong whether whoever we are wherever we're coming from is the understanding of who God is and what he has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And then he lists three very simple words to sort of fill that out. And he uses the word entrust. He uses the word endure.

And he uses the word please. Three aspects of what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Which is we're concentrating tonight in a baptism and in confirmation and in reception.

We're actually going back to first base. We're going back to basic principles. We're sort of rehearsing the whole basis of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

And that's what Paul is actually saying to Timothy. So how is this strength this realisation of how much God loves us that's our strength as Christians not bullying or some this worldly kind of strength but a spiritual strength that pulses away inside us these three ideas entrust.

[12 : 04] Now what he's saying to Timothy is Timothy make sure that people don't misunderstand the faith entrust to faithful people what you've heard from me.

Now what we're doing with for instance when we say the creed is we're saying there are there is a correct way of understanding God and there are many incorrect ways of understanding God.

People have got all sorts of strange ideas about God. We all have and we need correcting and that's one of the reasons that Christians for 2000 years have recited the creeds to say well now this is what God is like not like that not like that he's like this God is Father God is Son God is Holy Spirit God created the world Jesus died for our sins Jesus was raised again Jesus has gone to heaven the Holy Spirit has come into the world there is a thing called the church there is something called forgiveness of sins there is something called the resurrection of the body and life everlasting that's the Apostles Creed a little bit more in the other creeds so there is correct understanding of God and there are many incorrect understandings of God so it doesn't matter what we believe all roads don't lead to Rome and all roads don't lead to heaven all gods don't lead to heaven despite what the world around us says that's not true there is correct teaching and Paul is saying to Timothy

Timothy you make sure that when you delegate others to teach the faith they teach what is correct in one of his important letters Paul said to his readers look I want to give you the very guts and heart of the Christian faith I want to tell you something that is of absolutely first importance there are many things you can learn in the Bible but this is at the very heart and centre of it and so he says in 1 Corinthians 15 to the church in Corinth as of first importance this is of first importance nothing more important than this that Christ died for our sins that he died and was buried and the third day he was raised from the dead nothing more that's at the very heart and centre of the Christian faith so at the very heart of what it means to a follower of Jesus Christ is seeking to get over the years over the years of our lives a correct understanding of who God is and how he works and what he has done for us in the person of his son and that's why this thing called the Bible is so basic to our faith one of the great sadnesses about contemporary world the contemporary

Christian world too for that matter is fewer and fewer people have a good working knowledge of the Bible and the very heart of our understanding of the Bible are the four Gospels because in the Gospels we come face to face with Jesus Christ and I ask you a very tender gentle question but a real one when was the last time you picked up a Gospel and read it from beginning to end the 28 chapters of Matthew or the 16 chapters of Mark or the 20 or so chapters of Luke or the 21 22 whatever it is chapters of John you can do it on a Sunday afternoon in a modern translation and we need to do that because that's how you and I personally encounter Jesus you encounter Jesus as the words on the page come alive in your mind and you actually see him for yourself you don't need some preacher to tell you who Jesus is you've got it for yourself first hand knowledge so the first thing a working knowledge and a correct working knowledge of who God is for yourself that's the first way you make sure you are strong in the faith in the grace that is in

[16:11] Jesus Christ the second word is endure endure he's saying to Timothy Timothy it's not going to be easy the easiest thing in the world is to give up the faith saddest but easiest because we are tested and the world around doesn't make it easy in fact the world around can make you feel a bit of a fool sometimes so there's a whole range of ways in which faith can be pushed out of us whole range of ways and so one of the most important things is stickability endurance to the end I say that to young clergy full of enthusiasm as they begin 25 35 whatever it is they first curacy their first parish and I say to them what really matters is not so much now although this matters now but where will you be when you're my age and I'm 65 where will you be when you're my age will you still be as enthusiastic about the faith and about leading congregations as you are now endurance is what counts and

Paul gives Timothy illustration of what that means the third thing is pleasing and by that he means he talks about not getting caught up in civilian a soldier is a person who seeks to please his commanding officer and doesn't get caught up in other responsibilities he's an athlete must compete according to the rules and if he doesn't compete according to the rules he or she is disqualified by that Paul is saying to Timothy your primary role in life your primary task in life is to please God is to please Christ that is the grid through which we put our actions our ideas our values our ambitions we put it through the grid of what would God want of me what would Christ want of me he wants the best for us but that's the grid we put it through so

Paul gives to Timothy the overall idea of my son his love for him he wants the best for him I want you to be strong in your understanding of what God has done for you in Jesus Christ and here are three ways in which you think of make sure what you believe is correct don't allow wrong ideas to come into your head make sure that you do those things that will help you endure to the end and make sure that the way you're leading your life you are pleasing God you are pleasing Christ and that's what I say to the 20 or so people who are here tonight one to be baptized many to be confirmed and one to be admitted some young some a bit older all receiving the same message and my prayer is that as they begin this night so they will end in the years that lie ahead and that all of us together will one day stand before God and see him face to face

Amen