

Persevere

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Date: 19 April 2015

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, and for those who don't know me, my name's Andrew, I'm one of the ministers here at Holy Trinity. It'd be great if you could keep your Bibles open at 2 Timothy 2, and there's an outline in the bulletin that you might find helpful as well.

I want to pray for us before we have a closer look at that reading. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, and we thank you that you have recorded it for our good.

And so, Father, we pray that you give us minds to understand, hearts that are encouraged, and wills to live it out. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

I heard a story some time ago about the Australian cricket team. Got any cricket fans here? One. Excellent. This is going to go down well. It was a while ago, 1986, and Australia were playing India at the Madras Cricket Ground in India.

Now, the night before the match, the then-captain, Alan Border, so we're going back a while now, asked Dean Jones, who's one of the great batsmen of the Australian team, Dean Jones, who was a Victorian, to take the prize number three batting position.

[1 : 17] The first two batters were to wear in the ball. That was their job in cricket. For the number three to really dig in and score all the runs, and they would get all the glory.

Anyway, it was Jones' first time in the number three position, and he was so nervous he didn't sleep well or eat his breakfast the next morning. And that day in India was very hot and humid, as it often is, and Jones scored 50 runs and then collapsed with dehydration.

He took some salt tablets and water, and by the time he reached 100 runs, he was stretching out the cramps in his legs at the end of each over. At 160 runs, Jones, the Victorian, collapsed.

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

We'll get someone tough out here to take your place. We'll get a Queenslander. And at that, Dean Jones, the Victorian, picked himself up and persevered to score 210 runs.

[2 : 28] And then he spent the following four days in hospital. And it was two weeks before he could spring himself to talk to Border again. Today we'll see Paul say to Timothy, Persevere.

Be strong. Persevere. Which is point one on the outline, verse one in your Bibles. He says, You then, or therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Now, remember from last week, Paul is in prison in Rome. He's soon to die. And he had left Timothy in charge of the church back in a place called Ephesus to guard the gospel from false teachers and to ensure it was passed on to future generations.

And as we saw, guarding the gospel meant not being ashamed of the gospel, like Phygelus or Homogenes, as we saw at the end of chapter one over the page, but rather to be willing to suffer for the gospel, like Paul, like Onesiphorus, who even died, we think.

And so given this encouragement not to be ashamed, but to suffer, like Paul, who's in prison, like Onesiphorus, who perhaps even died. Paul starts chapter two by saying, Therefore, you, my son, be strong.

[3 : 49] Persevere. Hang in there, he's saying. But I want you to notice one very important thing. While Timothy is commanded to be strong or to persevere, like Dean Jones, he is not to do it in his own strength.

Did you notice? Verse one literally says, be strengthened. That's the command. Be strengthened. It's a passive thing. How? Well, the rest of the verse tells us, in or better, by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

In other words, Timothy is not to rely on himself, but on God's gracious help that comes from knowing Christ. And we've already seen this already, haven't we?

Remember chapter one, verse 14, if you just flick back a page. Chapter one, verse 14, which I want to suggest is the key verse for the letter. Right hand side, middle of the page, chapter one, verse 14 says, Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you, that's the gospel, guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

You see, Timothy is not to do this relying on his own strength. He is to look to God's gracious help to strengthen him, to enable him to be strong, to persevere.

[5 : 04] And it's the same for us as Christians. You see, we don't just become Christians by God's grace or generosity, but we also continue as Christians by God's grace or generosity.

For it is God's generosity that gives us his spirit and his word and one another and forgiveness and assurance of heaven and so on. God uses all these things that he's given us by his grace to strengthen us, help us persevere.

So we had to look to these things that God has graciously given us in Christ, to be strengthened by them, to read his word and to be inspired, to pray that the spirit will convict us afresh, to meet with like-minded people and be encouraged like we're doing tonight, to remember his glorious destination, sorry, our glorious destination and be motivated by it.

This is what it means to be strengthened by the grace in Christ, to be motivated, helped, encouraged by all the things we've been given by grace in Christ.

And Timothy is to do just that. He's to be strong or be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, that he might persevere. But Timothy is not just to persevere as a Christian, he's also to persevere in his job of preaching and passing on the gospel.

[6 : 28] So verse 2 rather, he says, And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people, who will also be qualified or able to teach others.

See, just as God entrusted the gospel to Paul, so Paul entrusted the gospel to Timothy, and now Timothy is to entrust it to others who are able to teach and then entrust it to others still, so the gospel will be guarded and not lost.

A Christian man once told me that ministry is the opposite of secular work. So in the secular workforce, you don't share your knowledge because you don't want to be made redundant.

You keep it to yourself so you can keep your job. But in ministry, it's the opposite. You share your knowledge, you train up others to make yourself redundant, so that ministry can be handed down from one generation to the next.

And that's what Timothy is to do. And here we see the importance of training others so that the gospel itself will be preserved. That's why we at HCD are keen to see people involved in things like our Trinity training program, which is coming up in June, July.

[7 : 39] It's why we often have student ministers like Jimmy and Adam. It's why we promote MTS, which is about a ministry apprenticeship where we train people. In fact, I had a conversation with a guy last Friday about doing something like this.

See, at HCD, we are keen to see training done because, like Paul, we want to see the gospel guarded. And we can all be a part of this, being trained to teach the gospel to one another and to others outside the church.

I mean, Paul says in Colossians chapter 3 that we are to teach and admonish one another, which means we all need to know the word and the gospel in order to do that well. But here in 2 Timothy, he particularly has in mind those who are able to teach others in a formal way, a Bible teaching, a Bible teacher kind of way.

And if that's you, if you think you might be able to teach others, then why not think about being trained up for a full-time Bible teaching position? Why not? I mean, there are good reasons why not, but why not?

So that the gospel might be passed on. There's an MTS conference coming up in August. Why not think about coming along to that? But do notice what type of person you are to be.

[8 : 53] Timothy, it says, is to entrust the gospel to reliable or literally to faithful people. And while he has in mind full-time Bible teachers, this is still true for us all, is it not?

Whether we teach the Bible full-time or part-time at youth group or Sunday school, or whether we just teach the Bible occasionally as we teach one another, as Paul says in Colossians.

We are to be faithful to the gospel. We are to stick to the truth of it without being ashamed of it. One of the hardest things I've found about teaching CRE is that you have to agree that you won't deviate from the material you're given.

And the material, by and large, is not too bad. But sometimes it's not faithful to the word. And so at that point, as Paul says, I must obey God rather than man and teach what is faithful to the Bible.

Now, I may have just shot myself in the foot, if anyone from Access Ministries is listening to this sermon. But you've got to be faithful to the gospel. Because if you're not being faithful to the word, then what you're teaching is not the word, is it?

[10 : 04] It's something else entirely. Well, Timothy is to persevere by God's grace and in entrusting the gospel to faithful people, who can then in turn teach it to others.

Second, he is to persevere in suffering for the gospel, which is point 2, verse 3. Paul writes this. He says, Timothy is to join with Paul, who himself is persevering in suffering.

And then Paul gives Timothy three pictures of different jobs, doesn't he? Three illustrations. And some people find it hard to work out what Paul is saying here. Indeed, Paul kind of admits this in verse 7.

He kind of says, well, reflect on what I'm saying. You know, pray that God will give you wisdom, as Proverbs 2 says. So when you see three pictures together like this, grouped together, you need to look for the common theme.

What's more, verse 5 gives you a bit of a hint, doesn't it? Sorry, not verse 5, verse 3. It says, join with me in suffering like dot, dot, dot. And so I take it, each picture is a picture of perseverance in dedication or devotion, despite whatever suffering that comes.

[11 : 44] And so Timothy is to be like a soldier who is dedicated to his commanding officer, the Lord Jesus. And that means Timothy is not to get entangled or distracted with other matters in life. Now, it doesn't mean he cannot enjoy life or go to a footy game or get married or whatever.

But it does mean Jesus is to be his top priority. It does mean he needs to please Jesus even above himself. It does mean Timothy is to be devoted to Christ, to be a single-minded soldier for Christ, pleasing Jesus above all others.

And sometimes that will mean suffering loss, the loss of what he wants to do. Similarly, it says in verse 5, he is to be like a true athlete who doesn't cut corners but perseveres in dedication to the rules, despite whatever pain comes from training and competing.

And the athlete is not to cut corners to lessen the suffering, but to persevere through it. Or verse 6, like a farmer who is hardworking or dedicated to his job, despite the pain of the hard work.

So Timothy is to persevere in his dedication to the gospel, despite the pain or hard work that may come from preaching it. But notice in these last two examples here, or pictures, Paul adds some other motivation, doesn't he?

[13 : 02] He says the athlete who is dedicated to the rules, or the hardworking farmer, the athlete receives the victor's crown and the farmer receives the first share of the crops.

In other words, there will be a reward for those who persevere in dedication to the gospel, despite the suffering. A long time ago, there was a famous athlete called Ben Johnson.

I don't know if anyone's old enough here to remember Ben Johnson. Jimmy is. I would admit to that, mate. You don't know. He was a 100-metre sprinter who broke world records, and he broke it in the 1988 Olympic Games.

But then he was disqualified after he tested positive to drugs. Apparently, just before the Games, though, there was a book out, which wasn't quite an autobiography, but it was about Ben Johnson.

And the book title was something like, Winning the Ben Johnson Way. And it retailed for \$35. A week after he was disqualified, a man I know saw the book on sale for \$3.50.

[14 : 07] Johnson lost his crown, lost his title, lost his worth, all because he cut corners. And Paul says to Timothy, you're not to cut corners.

Don't dodge the suffering that comes from preaching the gospel. Join with me in suffering. Join with me in persevering as a dedicated soldier of Christ and the gospel.

As a faithful athlete. As a hard-working farmer. So that you don't miss out on your crown or your crops. Your glory. Of course, suffering is never easy, is it?

And although Paul has just motivated Timothy by reminding him that his crown and crops will make it worthwhile, Paul adds some further motivation by telling Timothy to persevere remembering three things.

And brings us to point three, verse eight. He writes, remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.

[15 : 09] This is my gospel for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained, he says. Paul says to Timothy, remember Jesus.

And in particular, remember Jesus is risen. That he is the risen king of King David's line. In other words, remember Jesus is the living king.

He's not dead anymore. And so following him is worth it. I mean, if he was dead, if he hadn't risen, then there'd be no point in serving him, would it?

I mean, you can't please a dead person, can you? So why bother? But remember, Jesus is the risen king. He is alive.

We can please him. He is the king who is in control so much so that even if Paul is bound, he says, God's word is not going to be bound. Jesus is living and we'll see his word go out and the gospel change lives.

[16 : 11] In other words, Timothy is to remember he's on the winning team. For his commanding officer is none other than the risen king. But he's also to remember others' salvation.

Do you see verse 10? He says, Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Paul endures suffering for the sake of the elect. That is, he endures suffering for the gospel so that the gospel can go out and God's people can be saved.

And there's a sense of encouragement in this. For the people are God's elect or chosen ones, he says. That is, God has already chosen them and so Paul's suffering for the gospel is not in vain.

For when the elect hear, they will be saved. They've been chosen to be saved. And so Paul's suffering will be worthwhile. It's not in vain, you see. But the thing that strikes me here is Paul's love.

[17 : 17] He doesn't know who God's elect are. All he knows is that there are more people who need to be saved. And so he's willing to suffer to see that happen. And as Paul cares about people's salvation, so too is Timothy to care about people's salvation.

So much so that he's been willing to suffer for the gospel so the gospel message about Jesus can continue to go out and to continue to save people. And I'm encouraged when I hear about people, some from this service actually, who have put themselves out there, who have told non-Christian friends at school or uni or colleagues at work that they are Christian.

even taken some social risks to share the gospel because they care about their friend's salvation more than suffering social isolation or persecution.

Timothy is to persevere remembering Jesus is the risen king and remembering the salvation of others. And thirdly, remembering the glory to come. Now Paul has already hinted at this with the crown and the crops, hasn't he?

And here at the end of verse 10, he hints at it again by saying that what awaits God's chosen people, including Timothy, I take it, is eternal glory. Do you see that at the end of verse 10? And it's this glory that Paul reiterates in the last few verses, though there is a warning attached as well.

[18 : 42] So have a look at verse 11. He says, this, or here is a trustworthy saying, for if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him, he says.

These first two ifs are two pieces of encouragement, I think. And they speak primarily of the eternal glory to come, mentioned in verse 10.

You see, if we die with Christ, we will live with him, not just spiritually live in this life, but also physically live, resurrected in the life to come in glory. And if we endure, says Paul, if we persevere, then we'll even reign with Christ.

It's interesting that Paul says, in 1 Corinthians, he says, do you not know that you will judge the world, you Christians? I was thinking, no, I didn't know that. Did you not know that you will judge the angels?

No, actually, I didn't know that. But if we endure, we will reign with Christ. We will be with him, judging and reigning. And so Timothy is to endure, to persevere with this glory in mind.

[19 : 53] I know some people have a pretty severe fear of flying. Anyone fear flying here? You probably don't want to put your hand up. I know someone here who has a pretty severe fear of flying.

And so if there's any turbulence, their heart pounds, they clutch the seat, they take fast, deep breaths. And one of the ways they persevere through it is to remember their destination, especially if they're going on holidays somewhere, tropical paradise or whatever.

Well, so too is Timothy to persevere through the turbulence of preaching the gospel by remembering his eternal destination, glory, living with, reigning with Christ.

It's the bright light at the end of the tunnel. But he's to do so with this warning in mind. Do you see the rest of verse 12 and 13? He says, If we disown him, no, he will also disown us.

If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself. I think the two encouragements of living and reigning with Christ are now balanced by two warnings.

[21 : 01] If we deny Christ, he will deny us. If we are faithless, he must remain faithful to his promises, which say, if you don't believe, if you don't have faith, then you don't have salvation.

And so for those here tonight who don't believe in Jesus, who don't have faith, who are faithless, then please hear this warning, that unless you turn to Christ, then you, that when you face him in death, he will deny you.

He will deny you entry into his kingdom and glory everlasting. And so it matters what you do with Jesus, whether you believe in him or not. But for Timothy, who does believe, Paul says, persevere by God's gracious help.

Persevere in passing on the gospel. Persevere in dedication to Christ, despite suffering. And persevere remembering Jesus, the risen king. Remembering the salvation of others and remembering the glory to come.

Well, what about us? We are obviously different to Timothy. We were not left at Ephesus to run a church and entrust the gospel to others. But if we believe in Jesus, we are to persevere in serving Christ as our commanding officer, above all others.

[22 : 21] We are to persevere in our dedication to Christ like a single-minded soldier, like a faithful athlete who doesn't cut corners, like a hard-working farmer.

We are to do it despite the suffering that may come because we follow Christ. Of course, our suffering will look different to Timothy's. After all, we're not opposing false teachers as he was.

But I suspect our suffering will come nonetheless. And it will come probably by missing out on things because we serve Christ.

Let me see if I can illustrate it. One of my old churches, a guy called Matt taught Sunday school at our morning church. And I remember being at a 21st party and although he wanted to stay, he left early so he could be fresh to teach his Sunday school class the next day.

He was a single-minded soldier who was not distracted by civilian affairs, as it were. He still went to the party, sure, but he was willing to miss out on the rest of it, which he wanted to stay for.

[23 : 27] But he was willing to suffer loss, the loss of fun with friends and so on, for the sake of faithfully teaching God's people that they may have salvation. I know of others who have missed out on being in the cool group at school because they follow Christ.

I know of others who have missed out on the party altogether because the party was on Friday night and youth groups on Friday night. I know of others who have declined promotions because it has meant too many hours and they were missing too much church.

I know others who actually changed university degrees because it was impacting their relationship with Jesus. I could tell you stories about all those things. You see, sometimes serving Christ will mean we miss out on things in this life.

That's how our suffering often comes. But I think we need to adjust our expectations. You see, we're not living for this life, are we? We're to be living for the one to come. And so we are to persevere, remembering we follow a risen king.

We're on the winning team. We are to persevere, remembering the salvation of others. And we're to persevere, remembering the eternal glory that will more than make up for whatever we miss out on in this life.

[24 : 47] I don't know where you're at with your walk with Jesus. But wherever you're at, can I encourage you to keep persevering in living lives dedicated to the Lord Jesus who died for us.

But do so relying not on your own strength, but on the grace of God in Christ. Let's pray we would. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the Lord Jesus.

We thank you that he died for us, but that he rose to life. That he is indeed the risen king. And so Father, we pray that you would help us to persevere in our dedication and devotion to him, serving him above all others, remembering who it is we serve, remembering the salvation of others, and remembering the glory to come that will more than make up for whatever we suffer in this life.

And so Father, help us to persevere by your grace in the name of your son. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[26 : 12] Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen.