



THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Sunday 1 August 2021

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

This new series is a continuation of 'The Kingdom' series we have done over the past 6 months which had the aim of expanding our understanding of how good the Gospel of the Kingdom really is. And one of the key things we discovered or re-discovered is that the Gospel is so much more than just about being saved from a sin problem. The Good News stems from the beginning of creation and will continue long after our time here on earth. And we continue to rediscover that discipleship is part of the Good News; that Jesus coming again is part of the Good News; that God has a purpose and mission for our lives; that Jesus is restoring all things - not just you and me - but the whole world. This is all the Good News - the Good News of The King and His Kingdom!

And so now we open 2 Timothy with a desire that God would show us what it really means to follow Jesus, to be His disciples, to be His carriers and ambassadors of the Good News. Along the way, we will be unearthing some of the false narratives we all carry around 'discipleship' and will be re-discovering that discipleship is Good News.

We are about to do our first reading of 2 Timothy, chapter 1 - but just before we do, I want to give us some context. As we know: to read our Bible's well, to lead us to transformation, knowing context is really important.

(1) This letter is most likely written from Paul - the man who met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, who was going round trying to quash and eliminate the Christian sect, and then became its most prolific writer, advocate and teacher for the early church.

(2) This letter is most likely written at the end of Paul's life when he was in a Roman

prison, facing a death sentence - and this letter reads like it could have been one of the final letters from Paul to his very close friend Timothy.

(3) Paul is in prison because he refused to stop sharing the good news of Jesus - and even in prison he continues to do so! Telling the guards (with some of them coming to follow Jesus) and writing letters to those who are doing the same in the surrounding cities.

You just can't stop Paul. His commitment to the mission and the way of Discipleship seems relentless doesn't it?

It reminds me of a friend we have in Georges River: Joan Miller. If you haven't met Joan then you are missing out! Joan is in her 90's and is known for how she loves to share about Jesus, constantly and always. I am currently in a Small Group with Joan and you may be tempted to think that Joan has done a great job and can now begin to sit back and encourage the next generation to keep going with the mission... But nope: Joan, who has the support of her wonderful family and carers, celebrates how she now has one-on-one time with those same carers who she sees the opportunity to share the good news with! Joan's commitment to the mission and discipleship reminds me of Paul, and deeply encourages me to be bold and courageous so I can be like them.

But I am getting side tracked... Back to the context:

(3 continued) Before being imprisoned, Paul had been throughout many regions and cities starting several churches and appointing leaders to lead them - and one of those leaders was Timothy in the church of Ephesus.

(4) And as you can tell from the title of '2 Timothy', this isn't the first letter Paul wrote to Timothy - there are very similar themes across them both, yet this one seems to read more personally, to the point, and at times with a deep weightiness (as if Paul feels this could be his last opportunity to encourage Timothy).

So with all that in mind, let's now dive on in and read 2 Timothy, chapter 1:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

As I said before, learning to read our Bibles well is really important. And we should seek to discover what the original message was to the original audience in order to discover what it truly means for us in 21st Century Georges River.

We can see from the first chapter that this letter is both very personal and carries an intensity to it. This is seen in Paul saying:

- *"Timothy... I thank God For you"* (2 Timothy 1:3)
- *"Fan into flame"* (2 Timothy 1:6)
- *"Join with me in suffering for the gospel"* (2 Timothy 1:8)
- *"Guard the good deposit"* (2 Timothy 1:14 - the good deposit he talks about here is the TRUE GOSPEL that Paul has taught him)
- *"Don't be ashamed of me"* (2 Timothy 1:8)
- *"Don't be ashamed of our Lord!"* (2 Timothy 1:8)

Paul is encouraging Timothy, and also commanding a response and call to action from him.

So Why does Paul feel a need to so strongly encourage Timothy? Why does Paul continue

to command and push Timothy to fan, to guard, to join in suffering...?

It is because, this is a critical moment for the young church and disciples of Jesus.

It could be that Paul is beginning to worry that when he dies, the church itself may also begin to end – because of a lack of commitment to the Way of Discipleship: to the Gospel. And therefore resulting in some broken, simplistic, wrong gospel, a mission-less church, rife with unholy sinful lives. A church that looks no different from the rest of the world, other than what they “profess to believe”...

I wonder what Paul would say of the church today? Well, to discover that, I want show us two key things:

First, Paul wants Timothy to **commit to the way of discipleship**: committing to guarding the Gospel and mission of Jesus, no matter the cost.

This key command and theme is clearly seen throughout 2 Timothy and right here in chapter 1 from verse 8 where Paul is appealing to Timothy not to be ashamed of Paul, or of Jesus, or of the Gospel:

- *"So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, [the Gospel/Good News], or of me his prisoner" (2 Timothy 1:8)*
- *"this is no cause for shame" (2 Timothy 1:12)*
- *"Paul says he is glad he was not ashamed of Paul's chains" (2 Timothy 1:16, speaking about Onesiphorus)*

Now we need to ask the question: why would Timothy be ashamed of Jesus, the Gospel, or even Paul?

As we know, Paul is writing this letter to Timothy from a prison in Rome: *"do not be ashamed of ... me his prisoner,"* and continues on to say, *"join with me in suffering for the gospel..."* (2 Timothy 1:8)

The reasons we see that Timothy may be tempted to be ashamed of Paul is because Paul isn't really looking like a hero right now. In fact he is marked as a trouble-maker by the Romans and the Jews (remember: the promised people of God, from the Old Testament), and now he is in prison.

The temptation for Timothy to distance himself from Paul was heightened because others already were deserting Paul. It would be embarrassing to be identified with Paul and this Christian movement – because it looks like God has abandoned him! Surely if God thought Paul was right, then he wouldn't be suffering...?!

Perhaps some of the early Churches may have thought, "ah yes! The Way of Discipleship is great! Join in because look how awesome it is to be a part of something new: miracles, growth, promises – something rebellious..." But, over time, they begin to distance themselves from the shame that came with being a disciple and follower of Jesus.

Is there something that you are ashamed of when it comes to following Jesus and telling others about the good news?

And this may be why Paul charged Timothy to guard the gospel. We will go deeper into this throughout this series, but the short answer is that people were changing the Gospel, potentially because they didn't want 'suffering' to be seen as 'a good thing' and wanted people to think that if the Holy Spirit is in you then everything should be working out for you!

Are you beginning to understand what's happening behind the scenes of this letter? It is not just a battle for a what is the True Gospel, but also battle for people to live the way of discipleship as Jesus demonstrated.

Jesus' demonstration:

He was the very King of the Kingdom, and lived the life no matter the cost, and consistently invited all his followers to follow Him – no matter the cost:

- *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)*
- *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him... (Philippians 1:29)*
- And even in Acts 9:16 – Paul's life, like Jesus', was destined to suffer...

Does this come to a surprise to any of listening today?

That Jesus said following Him and His mission would lead to a life of hardship, and suffering on His account... It never seems like a 'could', but a definite 'would'...

I think it is important to pause here and acknowledge that:

(1) Paul isn't saying God is causing the suffering – the suffering comes from others.

(2) Paul isn't talking about everyday hardship, but the reality of suffering that comes from living in a broken world. Paul is talking about committing to the way of discipleship, no matter the cost, even if it brings suffering – keep going! And there are areas in our world today, where that cost is very very real!

But if a life of a disciple is meant to include "join in with suffering for the gospel", I notice I am really good at going to great lengths to avoid suffering: praying that anytime I try to live out my discipleship and share the Good News that it won't be hard or a struggle or include any suffering...

I often wonder why this trips me up, still. Why do I (and yes I'm talking about me) anticipate that following Jesus was meant to be easy? That it was meant to 'feel' easy?

(1) Maybe it's because I think the Holy Spirit will just take over and I will want what Jesus wants straight away - and if isn't easy, then it's not God...

(2) Maybe it's because when I was first introduced to Jesus and Christianity it was described as a life full of just good things, because someone wanted to show me the 'good life' and left out the 'real life of discipleship' because they thought I would be put off by the suffering that comes from following Jesus...

(3) Maybe it's because my desire for people to like me is greater than my desire to share the Good News or live out my discipleship...

This also got me thinking further: I don't think my life is made much harder because I follow Jesus (at least, not often); in fact, I think most of my joining-in with the Gospel and its mission just challenges my desire for convenience.

Perhaps God is wanting to challenge our desire for comfort and convenience here and now, because 'suffering' for the Gospel is not something we really experience.

What does it look like to lay down our desire for comfort and convenience, for the sake of discipleship?

So, I want to extend the challenge I have experienced in this opening chapter: the Good News is so good, commit to the way of discipleship, no matter the cost - just like Jesus, and just like Paul.

I was inspired by a friend who I went to college with who shared something on social media about this:

"Perhaps the martyrdom of today is not torture and death at the hands of the state or its agents, but rather, the martyrdom of a daily death where we lay down our hopes, and dreams for advancement, success and privilege in the ways of the world, and instead cling the to the cross of Jesus. Not to withdraw from the world, but to engage with it from the position of humility, accepting that it will not welcome us nor be kind to us, but instead accepting the wounds it inflicts upon us as the servants of the One it crucified."

So how do we do this? How do we live the Way of Discipleship, to remain committed no matter the cost, and to cling to the cross of Jesus?

This brings me to my second key point:

The Way of Discipleship:

The Holy Spirit empowers us to remain committed to the way of discipleship.

In 2 Timothy:1-7, we see Paul's personal touches as well as some encouragements to Timothy. Paul encourages Timothy by:

- (1) Calling back to the faithful legacy of his Grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1:4)
- (2) Explaining that Paul longs to see him to the point of tears and prays for him constantly (2 Timothy 1:3)
- (3) Instructing him to fan into flame the gift of God. (what is the gift? The 'gift' Timothy is to fan is the Holy Spirit) (2 Timothy 1:6)
- (4) Reminding him that the Holy Spirit doesn't give a spirit of timidity, but God's Spirit of power, self-discipline and love (2 Timothy 1:7)

Paul wants to encourage Timothy in his faith, his mission and his empowering of the Spirit. Paul's reminds Timothy that he already has:

- great role models around him in his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:4)
- a sincere faith (2 Timothy 1:5)
- the Holy Spirit in his life (2 Timothy 1:7)
 - which means he has God's power
 - which means he has God's love
 - which means he has God's self-discipline

That is what Timothy already has by God's grace and for his purposes. And to all of us listening today, when you put your faith in Jesus and follow Him, we too have this gift of His Holy Spirit living in us!

God has placed His flame in us!

And Paul now says that there is something that Timothy needs to do with that 'gift':

Fan into Flame:

Paul says "Fan into Flame", a phrase many Christians know and have heard before.

But how do you actually fan into flame the gift of the Holy Spirit? It begins with a life committed to wholehearted discipleship; a willingness to re-prioritise your whole life to the

agenda and will of the Holy Spirit both within your heart and with all your actions. It's not something that works well when you do it once a week or in your spare time or when you "feel" like it... But instead truly fanning into flame is an active choice and posture to have a daily rhythm of dependence, obedience and intimacy with Jesus - becoming like Jesus and living like Jesus.

And what does fanning into flame the gift of Holy Spirit result in?

- Power: To both share the Gospel and participate in the mission of God; but also power to holy, obedient living.
- Love: Not the feeling but the action of putting the needs of others, first.
- Self-Control: Control over your thoughts and actions that help you to persevere in the mission and life of a disciple.

How do you do this?

Disciplines + Practices:

- Disciplines: Fasting, reading, silence and solitude, prayer, worship - all these things that are meant to position us at the feet of King Jesus, so that He can set the agenda of our lives, so that He can shape us and change us.
- Practices: Practicing what Jesus says to do - it is not about hearing and reading more if it doesn't include practice. Jesus made it clear that foolish builders can hear the word of God, but wise builders hear the word of God and put it into practice. And it doesn't mean practicing is easy (whether forgiving others, loving others, remaining humble and gentle, being generous to others). Although it may not be easy, it is the way of discipleship and it is the life that Jesus has saved and called everyone to.

If you want to engage with more practices and disciplines, then go to our [Discipleship Resources Hub](#) on our website. And ask your Small Group Leader if you could try more practices and disciplines together as a group.

Like Timothy, if you are a follower and disciple of Jesus you have been saved and called to a holy life, by his grace and for his purposes. The Good News is truly good news; and we cannot be ashamed of the Gospel, but we must be willing to suffer and endure for it, strengthened by the power of God. This is the Way of Discipleship.

At the start of my message I shared about Joan Miller. Her commitment to Jesus and His mission in every season. I asked Joan to write an encouragement to us at GRLC and so I'll leave us with her words:

A letter from Joan:

Greetings to all at GRLC.

Yes, I miss seeing you all but am assured that God who loves us all and has led us to where we are today, is taking care of us in these troubling times.

I thank God for all who have fed into my life, prayed for and encouraged me, and this is what I want to do for you today. Keep pressing onto the prize!

God and His Word is my comfort and encouragement.

'Fan into flames' God's gift to you. Make good use of the time you have to spend with family, or those in your household, teaching and encouraging each other in the ways of the Lord. Saturate yourselves in God's Word and love. This is my joy and comfort each day. He gives us power to speak of the Lord to others and this is what I encourage you to do also. My daily carers provide me with special opportunities to speak of the Lord. Praise God for locked doors! They can draw us closer to Him.

Joan