



THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Sunday 15 August 2021

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

We're going to continue today with our series on the book of 2 Timothy. So let's start with our reading of 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verses 1 to 14:

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses, entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. Ad in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules. It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things. Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead, a descendant of David - that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is sure: if we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we'll also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself.

Ben led us off in the book of 2 Timothy as he took us through chapter one. It's a very powerful book. It's a very poignant book, in a way, because it's Paul writing to Timothy maybe days, maybe weeks, before he dies. Paul is in a Roman prison, locked away by Nero. Nero's going crazy at the moment - we've had the great fire of Rome, Nero's looking for the Christians to be scapegoats for this fire. So, he's had Peter arrested, probably killed. Paul is now arrested, and he's locked in this dark dungeon. Paul is waiting there, he's about to be executed, he's going to have his head chopped off (that was his privilege as a Roman citizen, that he could

actually be decapitated instead of crucified), and Paul's worried.

Paul's concerned: many in the province of Asia, many of the people who have been his ardent followers, have deserted him. They're embarrassed by him, they're ashamed of his chains, and they've drifted away - and Paul is worried. But he's not worried for himself - he's worried about the gospel. What's going to happen to the gospel after he dies? And so he writes this letter to his son-in-the-faith, Timothy.

Paul is a very bold man; I find it hard to relate sometimes to Paul. But Timothy is more of a timid character, a bit of a quieter character, and I find it a bit easier to relate to him. Paul is writing to encourage Timothy to take on the gospel and move forward with the gospel so that the gospel won't stop when Paul dies. So, 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 1, says, *"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."* I think if Paul could say one thing to Timothy, this would be it; and I think if Paul could say one thing to you or I, this would be it: be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus - because everything stems from this. If you get this, if you get the grace, if you understand the grace, everything else flows out of it. If you don't get it, you might as well skip the rest of the book.

So, he says, "be strong". The word "be strong" in the Greek is in the passive form, which means "be made strong" - allow God to make you strong. It's God that gives you the strength, gives you the power, but you need to put yourself in the place where you can "be made strong in the grace". You need to be meditating on God's grace to us in Jesus. You need to be searching it in the scriptures. You need to be thinking about it. You need to make sure you are "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus".

What is grace? Grace means that Jesus left heaven, he stepped down out of heaven and he became a man. And as a man he went to his death on that Roman cross. And on that cross, he took upon himself your sin and my sin for himself - every sin we've ever committed, every sin we ever will commit - he took upon himself on that cross and he gave his life to pay the price for our sin, to remove everything that stands between us and God. He paid the price on that cross, so that if we come and put our faith in him, we can know beyond the shadow of a doubt that we are 100% forgiven, 100% cleansed, through Jesus. That we stand perfectly in God's love perfectly, in God's grace perfectly, in God's blessings. And that is all through Jesus, through his death and resurrection. And this is just overwhelmingly good news!

Hebrews 10:14 puts it like this. Paul says, *"For by one sacrifice he's made perfect forever those who are being made holy"*. Do you believe that? Do you believe that through Jesus' sacrifice you are perfect? You're made holy, perfectly holy, perfectly forgiven. Perfectly standing in God's love, in God's blessings, in God's mercies. We need to be strong in that because everything flows from that. So, I want to encourage you to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus: meditate on it, reflect on it. If you find it hard to believe question it,

dig into the scriptures, search it out, see if I'm making this up. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Then in verse 2, Paul says, *"And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."* So, he says, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ and then pass it on to others, tell others the gospel, share the gospel with others, pass it on. And as you pass it on to others, teach them so that then they can pass it on to the next generation." And the idea is it's to go from Jesus to Paul to Timothy; then Timothy passes on to the next generation - maybe Polycarp and his mates, and they pass it on to Irenaeus and his friends - and on it goes and down through the centuries. The gospel gets passed from hand to hand until Jesus returns; and Paul says the goal of this is so that, when Jesus returns, the gospel that is being preached at that time is exactly the same as the gospel that was passed on to Paul in the first place. Preach it unchanged, untwisted, just the pure gospel that you receive. Don't let people change it or mix it around but pass it from one person to the other - and that's the goal, that is our purpose, that is what we're here to do: is to take part in this great plan where we're passing the gospel from generation to generation. That's what Paul's encouraging Timothy: to take up his role now that Paul is about to die. "You take it forward from here - it's like a baton change."

Verse 3 says, *"You, therefore, must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."* The gospel is overwhelmingly good news, it is wonderful news, that we can come into the presence of God and walk with Him - but the sad thing is that not everyone wants that, not everyone will receive that. You see, some people like to live life their own way; they don't want to come into God's presence; they don't want to walk with God and have to live life according to His directions and His plans. They want to do it their own way; they want to live in their own sins, their own ways. And so, some people will not just reject the gospel, but some people will strongly oppose it. It's inevitable that, as you you're passing the gospel on, there will be some opposition, that people will oppose the message you're trying to pass on.

For Timothy, the opposition was fairly strong. I mean Paul ended up in chains in jail, he ended up losing his life over it. For us, often the worst that we face is an eye roll every now; and then, occasionally, some people will actually speak against us and contradict us and say things about us. Every now and then, someone in our society might lose their job over the gospel - and currently there are laws being passed in our country which may mean some people eventually have to go to jail for the sake of the gospel. But mostly, for us, it's fairly minor; and Paul says, "Endure it. It's part of sharing the gospel."

Ben shared last time that hardship isn't talking about a toothache or a sickness or financial difficulties. Not those kinds of hardships. God is there to bless us and help us get through those. This is talking about hardship that comes as a result of sharing the gospel, and the

opposition that you may face. He says, "Endure. It's part of the game. It's part of what has to happen." Paul then goes on to give Timothy three illustrations of how this might work out in practice:

The first illustration he gives us in verse 4, "*No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life that it may please him who has enlisted him as a soldier.*" This is like being in the army: you've got a commander and you've got a task and you've got to do it with discipline. Now I remember back to my army days: I was a high school army cadet back in school, and we were a complete circus! I was a cadet under an officer and so they'd give me a map and they'd give me a compass and I'd have a platoon of other cadets and we'd be told here's the place you've got to get to. So off we'd set and, invariably, we'd head off in exactly the wrong direction because I had the map upside down. Off we'd go and we'd end up going through rivers and down cliffs and eventually we'd get there hours after we were supposed to be. By that time, we were too tired to put our tents up properly, so we'd half throw them together and then there'd be a storm in the middle of the night and they'd all fall down and it'd be just complete chaos... But see, we knew that we were never going to be in a war - high school cadets can't get drafted into a war - so for us it was just a lot of fun.

Paul's saying, "I want you to take this task seriously. Don't just live life as if it's all just about having fun. It's good to have fun, but remember you've got a task to do. Remember you've got a commanding officer, so take it seriously. Be disciplined about it." There's a temptation to avoid the hardship of sharing the gospel by getting caught up in the affairs of this world, and Paul's saying, "Look, it's okay, you've got to live in the world - many of us work in the world, many of us do activities in the world - you've got to live in the world but remember what you're here for. Don't get so caught up in the affairs of this world that you forget your part of this ongoing process: that is, passing the gospel from generation to generation. Remember you've got a task. You're here for a purpose and be disciplined about it to get the job done. Put some effort into it. Be disciplined."

The second illustration he gives is in verse 5. He says, "*Also if anyone competes in athletics he's not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*" We've all been watching the Olympics over the last couple of weeks. It was fantastic to have that on during lockdown! I'm generally not one who's that excited by our national anthem - it's good, I like it, but it's different during the Olympics, isn't it? When you hear the sound of your national anthem and you see the flag go up and an Aussie on the podium, you feel like you want to stand up and cheer and you get a surge of pride come through you! The Bible says that one day there's going to be an award ceremony in heaven for those who win at life - not just for those who win an athletics carnival, but for those who win at life - and you'll receive the crown of life if we've completed the task, if we've lived the life that we're called to. And so Paul says, "compete as one who wants to win the prize. Look forward to the day when we'll all stand together and we'll get that crown of life and hear that, "well done, good and

faithful servant". Let's compete as those who are competing to win the prize." But he says in order to win the prize, it's not a competition we all can win on that day. The thing is that you've got to compete according to the rules, and I think Paul's thinking of two things: what he's saying is we've got to live according to the scriptures. If we're passing the scriptures on to others, if we're passing the Bible onto others, we need to live it out in our own life. We need to make sure we're strong in the grace, that we're believing in Jesus, that we've got our faith in Jesus, and that we're attempting to live according to his ways. Whenever we fail, we're forgiven, but we need to be attempting to live according to his ways, we need to be living out what we're preaching to others.

That's the usual way he uses this metaphor. But I think he he's got something even more specific in mind on this occasion because he's talking about facing hardship for sharing the gospel; and I think what he's saying in this context is, as you share the gospel from generation to generation, and as you experience that opposition, there's a temptation to want to change the message, to twist the message a bit so that it's more palatable for the world around you. For example, in our day and age, if you say Jesus is the only way to heaven, the only way by which we may be saved, that doesn't go down well because the world says we have to preach tolerance in which any way leads to heaven. The trouble is that Jesus is the only way by which we may be saved. Jesus is the only one who's been raised from the dead - have a look back in history and see no one else has risen from the dead. You can't get saved by anyone but Jesus, and so Paul is saying, "You've got to compete according to the rules and the rules are: pass it on, just as you received it. Pass it on directly. Don't change it to make it more palatable for people; just pass it on just as it comes from the scriptures."

Remember back to verse 1, it says be strong in the grace. We need to pass it on lovingly and graciously. Sometimes people pass it on in an unloving spirit; but we need to pass it on lovingly, graciously, without twisting it, without changing it to make it more palatable. And if we face opposition for it: endure; it is part of the task that we have been given.

The third illustration he gives is in verse 6. It says, "*The hard-working farmer must be the first to partake of the crops.*" As we share the gospel from generation to generation, Paul is saying: first of all, we need to work hard, put some effort into this, work hard at it. This is your task, this is what you're here for, so put some effort into this process of sharing the gospel, of passing the gospel on. That can mean a number of things: put some effort into sharing it with your family, reflect on how's the best way I could go about passing it on to my family? What about my friends? How's the best way how can I share it? How's the best way to express it to this person? How's the best way to take it to that person? Put some effort into it. But even on a bigger level, I think one of the major ways that we pass the gospel on from generation to generation is we do it as a church. We do it as a team; and in that team everyone has a different part to play within the team. So, for me to work hard at passing the gospel on might mean spending many hours studying the scriptures so that I

can teach them accurately. For Bill Coe to work hard might mean he gets to church an hour before the rest of us to set up the car park, and then he leaves an hour after the rest of us because he's got to drop everyone home. You can see it looks different for different people, but the question is: what does it look like for you? How do you contribute to the team as we go about our task in taking the gospel out to the world? Because how you contribute will look a lot like something that you can do - that I can't do, and others can't do. What is your role? So, let's work hard as we do this task together, sharing the gospel with our generation and then ultimately pass it on to the next generation.

He says also the hard-working farmer has to be the first to partake of the crops, which takes us back to the first point: you can't share the good news about Jesus unless you're partaking of it yourself, unless you're experiencing it yourself. Do you know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you're forgiven in Jesus? Do you know of Jesus' love for you? Do you know of the blessings in which you stand? Partake of all of that first so that you can share it with others. We don't want to share just in words - we want to share our experience of the grace of Jesus. So, you have to partake of it yourself before sharing with others.

So, if that's our purpose: to experience the gospel ourselves and take it to the world; and if we're going to experience hardship; and we've got Paul here in chains, about to get his head chopped off - then the question is: why should we bother? Why would Paul bother? He's going to lose his life over it! In verse 8 and 9, he gives us two reasons. The first one he says, "remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel for which I suffer as in trouble as an evil doer even to the point of chains, but the word of God is not chained." Paul says, "why do I do it? Why do I suffer chains and eventual death for it? I do it for Jesus!" See Jesus is the very son of David. He's the one that was promised from David: the Davidic Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the ultimate authority in the universe. He's overwhelmingly wonderful. He's the one who rose from the dead. He demonstrated his power by defeating the greatest enemy of all: death. Jesus is worth it - he's so magnificent, he's so wonderful, that Paul says, "I'll put up with anything for him, for his sake, because he is so worth it!" So Paul says: why do we do it? We do it because Jesus is worth it. He is overwhelmingly magnificent. We will stand before him and see him in all his glory, and he is worth it.

But Paul has a second reason in verse 10. He says, "*Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*" Paul says, "As you share the gospel there are many who will oppose it, there are many who will reject it, many who will persecute you for it. But interspersed among them are people who desperately want to hear this message. They desperately need to hear this message. And when they hear it, they will respond in faith and grace, and they will be born anew into the kingdom, and they will become our brothers and sisters for all eternity." And Paul says, "For the sake of those people: I'll suffer the chains, I'll put up with

the hardships." And you never know - maybe sometime in eternity when we're walking around in heaven someone will tap you on the shoulder and say, "You don't know me, but I'm only here because you shared the gospel with me!"

So, I want to encourage you today, this is a powerful passage from a man who is about to lose his life. I would encourage you to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Meditate on it. Reflect on it. Read it in the scriptures. Be strong in the grace. Know how much you're forgiven. Know how much you're loved. Know how much you stand in God's blessings.

And I want to encourage you to share it with others. To pass it on not twisted, not changed, not made more palatable - but pass it on straight as it is to those around you, and to the next generation. Because that is our task, that is our purpose, and that is our privilege.

And if we face a little hardship as we're doing it, endure it because it shows that we're getting our task done. We're achieving our purpose in life and it's a worthy purpose.

And we do it because he is worth it. Because people need to hear it.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, I just praise you so much that you came to Earth two thousand years ago and you gave your life on a Roman cross. You died for our sake. You died to remove that barrier of sin that separated us from the Father. You gave your life and then you rose from the dead to show that that barrier had been completely removed. And I thank you that, because of that, we stand in your forgiveness; we stand in your love; we stand in your mercy; we stand in your abundant blessings. I give you praise for that, in Jesus' name. And I pray that you'll give us boldness to take that good news and pass it to those around us. Give us boldness. Give us courage to endure any resistance, any opposition that we might face. And I pray that you'll help us as a church to complete the task that has been given to us, of sharing the gospel to our generation. I pray particularly for every person in this church, that they will know what their part of the task is, for how they are to contribute to this task. And I pray that everyone will have the privilege of knowing that they're fulfilling the purpose for which they were created for. Again, we give you praise, we give you glory, in the name of Jesus. Amen.