



THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Sunday 29 August 2021

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

*Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who **correctly handles the word** of truth. **Avoid godless chatter**, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have **departed from the truth**. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. **Flee** the evil desires of youth **and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace**, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be **gently instructed**, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:14-26)*

We are in our second big lockdown in Sydney and Paul was writing this letter to his friend and colleague, Timothy, during his second lockup in a Roman gaol. These are Paul's last recorded words at the end of his life. And it's a very personal letter with timeless wisdom about life as a

disciple and specifically life as leader. I think Paul's instruction to Timothy here can be summarised in four words - **remind, warn, flee and follow**.

Do you ever walk from one room to another to get something and by the time you get there you can't remember what? And you just stand there looking lost, wondering why you are in this room? Or do you tend to lose a member of the 'holy trinity' - car keys, wallet or phone? It vanishes into an alternate universe (literally) and it's lost for hours... Or is there a person in your life who you just repeatedly call the wrong name? I worry about myself sometimes! I need to keep reminding myself of things or I forget them - but needing to be reminded is common to us all and it's definitely true of life in Christ.

Firstly, Paul says to Timothy, "**Keep reminding** people of these things." What are these things? Everything that precedes: of the purity and simplicity of the gospel of Grace; keep remembering the grace of God; don't forget what the good news is. But also, keep remembering that you have been saved and called to a life of obedience and surrender in the service of that Gospel; keep remembering the faithfulness of God, even when we lack it, even when circumstances would say otherwise. And I don't know about you, but I need to keep being reminded of this! It's normal that, through life, we need reminders of what is true because life has a way of making you forget. Today I fully expect that as we explore God's Word, the Holy Spirit will gently remind you of something you have may have temporarily forgotten.

Secondly, Paul says to Timothy, "**Warn people.**" We've all had a lot of warnings lately. Every day at 11am its the 'Gladwrap' - Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Dr Kerry Chant - stand there, looking exhausted, graciously taking the same painful questions from the same reporters... And they offer us a daily solemn warning, something like, "If you don't follow the health advice you may be hurting those you love the most." Thankfully we appear to be heeding this warning - and the warnings of massive fines may be helping too.

Paul is saying to Timothy, in his own context: warn people that there is no wisdom in quarrelling words; warn those who want to indulge themselves in godless chatter (and it is specifically, the indulgence of theological speculation). Paul's warning is that it ruins those who listen, they become more ungodly, and Paul specifically names Hymenaeus and Philetus, "*who have departed from the truth. Their teaching will spread like gangrene.*"

Everyone understood gangrene in a world with no Dettol! And so this image is a vivid warning of what can happen in a life and in a community when people don't restrain their words or consider their impact: a foul smelling, festering, painful mess that grows and kills like an infection that they spread to others. Wise words for today.

For example, it's easy to get swallowed up in gossip. Somehow it's gratifying to talk about others. For some, it's gratifying to indulge in non-essential theological speculations and

theories, secondary to the gospel. Paul would say these only bring distraction and destruction. Your life, and your church, can so easily get side tracked onto judging people and fixating on non-essentials. And we are being gradually rewired for this: in YouTube, the algorithm is designed to show you what you want to see, so it will keep sending you videos of similar content. It's a brilliant method of cultivating a judgemental spirit, narrow mindedness, and reinforcing misinformation.

Paul's warning includes another clue: he hopes *"they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."* Let's not miss this point: that what is often happening in lives and churches is a satanic strategy. How do you keep the church away from it's mission? Add interpersonal conflict, moral compromise, theological rabbit holes, and personal agendas. Mix it all together and voila: a church that is going to struggle to keep the doors open, let alone advance the mission. Satan's weapons are weapons of mass distraction.

So, reminders and warnings are a part of Paul's advice to Timothy, but there is something more fundamental about discipleship and leadership Timothy needs: **leaders don't lead with reminders and warnings - leaders lead with their lives.** Or to put it another way: leadership begins in your own life, not others'. And Paul says that that you are to set yourself apart to live what you desire in others. Living strong in grace is to choose a HOLY life. There is no contradiction there. Paul says:

"In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work." (2 Timothy 2:20-21)

In our house, there are all kinds of brushes: dust pan brush, paint brush, hair brush, toilet brush... But the only brush I'm going to stick in my mouth is my toothbrush! It's set apart for a special purpose. It's holy. We are to see ourselves that way: set apart, not elitist but also not common, not like all the rest: *"Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."* (2 Timothy 2:21)

Paul is talking about holiness that is displayed as your identity in Christ increasingly corresponds to your daily life, and that you simply cannot lead others well if not leading yourself well - be that as a spouse, a parent, a leader in your workplace, or a leader in your church. This has been starkly illustrated with Christians we put on pedestals, only to find they were not leading themselves well; like Hybels, Lentz, Driscoll, Zacharias. These aren't just the stories of celebrity Christians; they are our stories too - just in much more subtle ways.

Paul would say that holiness - being set apart - is promoted by forming habits of **fleeing** and **following** as a disciple. Paul says, "*Flee the evil desires of youth,*" which is most likely a reference to lustful passions. Maybe some of his congregation were partying a little too hard? But I suspect, in this context, it is also the desire to be unrestrained in your emotions and impulses, in general. Paul says:

"Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful." (2 Timothy 2:23-24)

Flee from the foolish and stupid arguments of others. Don't get worked up by them and don't be drawn into them, because then you are operating at their level of immaturity. Why would you be drawn in? Perhaps ego, the desire to smash someone's argument, make them look stupid, just to impose your power. So perhaps it's about self-gratification. Leadership is not a function of power, but of influence. Influence is not a function of position, but character. When you flee the temptations of power, ego, self-promotion, or self-gratification - you can lead from influence which, in the end, is more powerful. Only, it's an upside-down kind of power.

Perhaps another temptation of youth (though I'm not sure this ends in youth) is the temptation of resentment and unprocessed grief. Paul says that we are to be, "*kind, able to teach and not resentful.*" I think about Paul in a cell - the desertion of Phygelus and Hermogenes, and later Deemas, and Alexander the blacksmith who did him great harm - and here we have the undermining of Timothy by Hymenaeus and Philetus, and probably a bunch of bruising interactions in Timothy's life. That's gotta have an impact! I know that, and I bet you do to. Have you ever felt undermined, abandoned, misrepresented? This is life in community and leadership. And the temptation of youth - or immaturity - is to become bitter, cold and resentful; not kind. Paul says we need to flee from this because, if we let our grief and disappointment build momentum in our lives, it can break us, our relationship and our leadership. And it might cause you to do stupid things that you regret. Wise advice from a man who could so easily be cynical, bitter and twisted. Paul says, "flee these impulses." You know, we are often more willing to follow than to flee. We want Jesus *plus* our old life, and even convince ourselves that it's ok to have both because we are under grace. But it's a lie. It's really hard to follow if you don't flee whatever is hindering. Every day is a day of repentance, of letting go again and again.

And lastly, very briefly, there is what we are to **follow** after, or earnestly pursue, and it is: "*righteousness, faith, love and peace.*" Righteousness here means integrity or godliness. Faith is resting in God's faithfulness. Love and peace are the posture in which we are to relate to people. Imagine if we were known for just those four things! That, friends, is a holy life! One that actively flees what is common and pursues what is divine. And that's a life that benefits everyone.

These are lofty pursuits, so how do you bring them down to earth? How do you practically pursue these as the dominant describers and drivers of your personal life, of your family life, of your work life? My challenge to you this week is to think of one way you can pursue integrity, faith, love and peace in the contexts of your life.

So, what does Jesus want to remind you of today? Perhaps the simple good news of His love and grace lavished on you through His sacrifice. Perhaps His faithfulness in all circumstances. Or perhaps your pledge to follow Him as a disciple. Are there some massive distractions in your life that are damaging your relationship with God and God's purposes for your life? Are there mind-sets and behaviours you need to flee? And, today, would you follow, wholeheartedly pursue a holy life surrendered to Jesus? I believe that living a holy life is a life strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus. May you know that grace and may that grace empower you to love live and reveal Jesus this week.