

'Remember Jesus Christ'

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Our reading is from Paul's second letter to Timothy, Timothy 2, and I'm reading from chapter 2, verse 1 to verse 13, 1195 in the Church Bibles, page 1195, 2 Timothy chapter 2, 1 to 13.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and the things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, and trust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commander. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Remember, Jesus Christ raised from the dead, descended from

David. 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. 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.

Here is a trustworthy saying. If we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thank you. Good morning, St. Silas. So my name is Martin Ayres, and I'm the pastor here if we've not met before, and it would be great help to me if you could keep that Bible passage open, page 1195, as we look at that together. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you find that helpful, to see where we're going. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Just those words from verse 7. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

[3 : 14] So gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word to us, and we ask that you will enable us to hear your voice clearly, to reflect well on what you make known to us, and that in our hearts we would be transformed by the renewing of our minds, as you promise for your people. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, I don't know if you saw last week, but McDonald's announced last week that they are closing for good in Russia.

And I remember the day that McDonald's first opened in Russia. It was global news. They opened, the Golden Arches appeared in Moscow, and there were queues all down the streets of Russia, of Moscow. And it was because there was this great symbol of Western culture arriving in the former Soviet Union. So if you were to think of a symbol that encapsulates our culture, what would it be? Would it be the Golden Arches for you? The Christian writer Jim Packer, some years ago, thought about this, and he chose the hot tub as a symbol that encapsulates our culture today. And he chose it because it says something about our culture compared with the generations that have gone before, with our ambition for indulgence and comfort. The people who get attention on TV and in social media are less captains of industry and more captains of leisure. And we tend to think, that's when I really live, when I can put my feet up and I can enjoy leisure time. I've got nothing against hot tubs, but when Jim Packer chose the hot tub as this symbol of our culture, the article he wrote was not called hot tub culture. It was called hot tub religion. Because his point was, when a culture wants comfort and esteems comfort and leisure, they will want religion that caters for that.

So they'll be attracted to a message that says, come to Jesus, he'll make you more comfortable than you would be without him. So what does God say about coming to Jesus? Well, last week we started a series in this letter, 2 Timothy. It's one of three letters that we have in the Bible that were written by the Apostle Paul, an early church leader, to co-workers. And Timothy was a trusted co-worker for Paul. They'd been companions for 15 years. When Paul writes his letter to the Philippians, he says of Timothy that he's sending Timothy to Philippi because he says, I've got no

one else like him. So I take it that Paul and Timothy both had ministries that God approved of, successful ministries in God's eyes. But this letter is written by Paul from prison, probably a second imprisonment that he had in Rome around 66 AD as persecution of the church was increasing in the

Roman Empire. And he writes, we saw last week, he writes as though these may well be his last words in chapter 4. He makes that clear. It's the last words we have in our Bibles from the Apostle Paul.

And Timothy, who he's writing to, is also in a perilous situation. He's got detractors and he's got deserters. Because when the world turns the heat up on the church, on Christians, if you can put distance between yourself and what you believe and the apostolic gospel, the message that's causing offense in the world, then you can get out of the heat. That's what the churches are doing in Paul's time.

[7 : 22] And so Paul writes this letter. And it's a letter that can reshape our own understanding of, as a church, what we're aiming for and what we can expect living in the time between the apostles and then writing down the Bible and Jesus' return. Last week we heard this big idea that God has given us a job to do. God has entrusted a work to us. And the job is to be guardians of the gospel, of his gospel message, the good news about Jesus. So we saw that in chapter 1. If you just look up in chapter 1, verse 13, Paul says, 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. Be guardians of the message that Paul has preached and written about, about Jesus. And then we were given two alternative pictures of real life people that model things for us. One picture was in verse 15, another in verse 16, and then he turns to Timothy at the start of chapter 2 that we've just looked at and says, you then. So here's one model, here's another model, what will you do? So just look at the first picture. It's the picture of every other church leader in Asia, which is where Turkey is today. Verse 15, you know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me. Just think how much pain there must have been behind that statement from Paul.

How did he keep going? And then there's the alternative, one man on a Sifras, a man from Ephesus where Timothy is leading a church, who went to Rome and in verse 16 he says that he was not ashamed of my chains. He wasn't ashamed that Paul was in prison for the Christian faith. And in verse 17 he says, he searched hard for me until he found me. So that's the model for Timothy and for us of what it means to be a guardian of the gospel. Either we're kind of proclaiming it like Paul or we're standing with the gospel man like Onesiphorus, standing shoulder to shoulder saying I'm not ashamed to back the gospel man. And even though everyone in Asia did this, Onesiphorus did that. And then Paul urges Timothy, you then, verse 1, be strong. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that's in Christ Jesus. Why does a church leader need to be strong? He needs to be strong to do the things that

Paul's going to tell us about in this letter. He needs to be strong to guard the gospel by speaking of it faithfully when he's under pressure to change it. In chapter 1, as we've just seen, keep what you heard from me as the pattern of sound teaching. In chapter 4, when we get there, he charges Timothy, the kind of climax of the letter, preach the word faithfully. In chapter 2, he urges Timothy that when people oppose him, he should gently instruct them and be kind to everyone. And for these things, Timothy needs to be strong in the grace that's in Christ Jesus. And it's worth asking, when you're a member of a church, whether here or somewhere else, what do you want your church leaders to focus their energies on? If you're going to be not just an attender but a partner in the life of the church, what will you encourage your church leaders to focus their energies on? Where should they devote the strength they have? In football, we have a phrase, when there's a massive match, the manager says, leave everything on the pitch. Leave everything on the pitch. In other words, don't come away from the pitch with energy still left that you could have given that you didn't give. Well, in ministry, what's the pitch that you want your leaders to leave everything on, to devote themselves to?

Second Timothy says, it's guarding the gospel by proclaiming it and teaching it. And it costs everything because of the need to stay faithful to the scriptures and to be patient and to be careful. And the task is way beyond anyone in their own strength. So we should see people in church life committed to that task but inadequate for it, weak, because the strength comes from Jesus. Verse 1, you then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And this morning, we hear

specific ways that Timothy, as a faithful pastor, needs to be strong to guard the gospel. The first one is, pass the baton, pass the baton. So let's look at verse 2 together. The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

[12 : 31] I think this would have seemed very counter-cultural to Timothy and the church that are receiving this letter because when you're kind of under attack as the church and Christians are being rounded up and locked away in prison and being martyred, I reckon you'd just be thinking about survival.

Just about trying to endure for your own life. Timothy might have just been thinking that. And today, sometimes, as we see a story of kind of church attendance decline in Scotland over recent decades, maybe we would think to ourselves, you know, I'm worried about where the culture is heading, but I just hope my church stays around long enough to see me out. But Paul says to Timothy, under all that pressure, even while he's the man in the ring, that he needs to think continually about replacing himself. I've said it's pass the baton on the sheets there in the notice sheet, the point pass the baton, but it's actually not pass the baton. That's a flawed picture because in a relay race, you pass the baton on one-to-one, don't you? You kind of, you see guys running along and they get to the next person along and they just make sure the baton goes along to one more person. But Timothy is not meant to just find one guy that he can trust. Paul wants the gospel to go viral. So at the start of verse two, you've got the things you heard me say in the presence of many witnesses. Paul was promiscuous with the truth about Jesus, promiscuously telling others. There's nothing Masonic about the Christian faith. You know, there's not kind of secrets that people hold on to and disclose to you when you get a bit more in with the in crowd. No, rather, Paul says, the things you heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, promiscuous preaching, he says, the things you heard me say, first generation. Then there's Timothy and the many witnesses, the second generation. He says, entrust those things to reliable people, third generation, who will also be qualified to teach others, fourth generation, all in one verse, as the gospel is passed on by each faithful guardian to many people, reliable people, so that they can in turn pass on that message, unchanged to the next. In the pandemic, we became experts on new things, didn't we? New words. And one of them was the R number. Do you remember the R number? And you're waiting to hear what the R number was each week. And you knew that if it was less than one, that meant that each person with COVID was passing it on to less than one person, and we might get some freedom. And if it was higher than one, it meant that the virus was spreading exponentially, and the kind of the restrictions would go up. We also learned about variants, didn't we? And Paul wants the R number for the gospel minister to be much higher than one. He wants to see it multiply, that everyone who receives the gospel is reliable to pass it on to others, and the R number is greater because it goes viral. And as we learned about variants with COVID, you know, Delta and Omicron and these variants, when it comes to the gospel, the only message, we heard last week, the only message that can destroy death and give us immortality so that we live forever, there's going to be variants that are deceptive and destructive because they distort the truth and lead people to an eternity away from Christ. And so Timothy has to look for reliable people who won't vary the message. Men and women, you can count on, because they have the qualities that Paul is calling for in this letter that they're willing to guard the true gospel and not be ashamed of it so that they are godly and they train others. So what would it look like if you walked into a church that has grasped this charge of chapter 2 verse 2 of 2 Timothy? What would a healthy ministry in a church look like? What are you looking for in a church? Well, if a church has got it about passing the baton on, I take it that if we went into their meetings on a Sunday or midweek, we'd see energy being devoted to taking the things that Paul and the apostles said in the scriptures and entrusting them to others who can in turn teach others. And we'd see energy being poured into training up and equipping people to open the Bible and teach it faithfully and clearly. And we'd see in the church a culture of training people in the scriptures. And we'd see people, reliable people, emerging, stepping forward, maybe even stepping away from professional careers to train for full-time teaching ministry with other people willing to pay for them. And the church committed to providing pathways for those people to be trained and step into training others and teaching the word. So let me ask, what would it look like for you to be a partner in establishing that in this church, if this is your church?

As Paul says to Timothy, pass the baton. Now the second call on Timothy that needs him to be strong in the grace that's in Christ Jesus is devote yourself to the work of the gospel. So let's pick

things up in verse 3. He says, join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. So Timothy is learning that when you hold to Paul's gospel in the church, you suffer. And later in chapter 2, we hear about a river of false teaching that was flowing through the church. In verse 17, Paul says that it spreads like gangrene. Horrible image, isn't it? There being false teaching spreading like gangrene in the church. And he says in verse 18 what it was like then, the nature of it. People who say the resurrection has already taken place and destroy the faith of some.

[18:59] So what's going on there? Well, the shape of Jesus' ministry was that for the joy set before him in eternity, he endured the cross. We see in Jesus' life a pattern of suffering for the sake of others, to serve them, to save them, for glory later. It's a J curve. As Jesus, the eternal son, became man, Jesus, and served and suffered and died, man of sorrows, atoning death on the cross, shame, and then risen, vindicated, exalted, greater than ever before, glory and triumph. That is the pattern of Jesus' life.

How attractive then is a message to us that says that in the Christian life, we can keep our distance from the suffering, shame, serving side of Jesus' life, and we can already benefit from the glory triumph that Jesus earned for us at the cross. They say the Christian life today is about glory and not suffering. It's about vindication and not service. It's about triumph.

triumph. That's a kind of hot tub religion, isn't it, for a hot tub culture. Come to Jesus and enjoy victory with what he has earned. Paul, on the other hand, says to Timothy, join with me in suffering like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. In other words, with him as our commanding officer and seeing the pattern of his life, see it in my life, says Paul in prison, and join with me that we would be like him.

And then he gives us three pictures of Christian ministry. And here we're not just thinking about the ordained minister, about the kind of the church leader. We talk in our church about every member ministry, that each of us, when you come to put your trust in Christ, we're all called to live in view of his mercy and live a life framed by his grace, responding to his grace, a life of ministry, a life of serving Christ as the people we are with the gifts that he's given to us. And he gives us these pictures of what that might look like. And in verse 7, at the end of the three pictures, he says, reflect on what I'm saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all these things. I remember a minister speaking at the Keswick Convention, actually, David Cook, and saying that when he drove his son to university, he said, there's one thing I ask of you at university, read your Bible every day. And if you've only got five minutes, if you'll only give five minutes, read it for one minute, reflect on it for four minutes. Because if we want to hear God speak to us, it's as we reflect on God's word that he gives us insight. And here in chapter 2, verse 7, Paul says that to Timothy, reflect on what I'm saying, reflect on these pictures, and the Lord will give you insight. So what are the pictures? Well, we've got the soldier, the devoted soldier. Have a look at verse 4. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. I don't know much about being a soldier. I work with a former soldier, James. I met someone here, a visitor, a couple of weeks ago, and I said, I'm Martin. Have we met? And he said, no, we haven't met, but you're the other guy, aren't you? You're the other guy. I've met the guy who was a soldier. Okay, so I'm the other guy who wasn't a soldier. But there is a single-mindedness, isn't there, to being a soldier. I know that much.

They are devoted. And the picture here is that Jesus is the commanding officer. He sent us on a mission onto a spiritual battlefield to share the gospel. And Paul's saying, don't get distracted. Could we reflect on how we might get distracted from that mission? I was thinking how we might get distracted when the mission doesn't seem to be working, when people don't seem to be willing to receive Christ.

[23:07] And so we think, well, let's use our energy for things that just seem a bit more productive and fruitful. The next picture is the discipline of an athlete, verse 5. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.

And in the ancient Olympic Games, you had to swear an oath that you'd been in strict training for the last 10 months so that as you competed, you wouldn't kind of lower the standards of the Olympics. And just think of, you know, when it's the Olympics and you see Olympians and they speak, don't they, often after they've won a medal about what it's cost them in their lives, what was required for them to be willing to win the competition. And Paul is saying, reflect on that call to discipline discipline in your Christian life and service of Christ. Discipline that you might do things God's way in your life and grow Jesus' church in Jesus' ways. And then the farmer, verse 6, the

next picture, the hard-working farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

It's always struck me on farms how there's just so little whinging on a farm by the people who are working on the farm. Have you ever noticed that? You know, in a normal workplace, when it's busy, everyone starts whinging and say, oh, it shouldn't be like this, should it? I'm being asked too much. But on a farm, you know, you never hear farmers say that. If the bales of hay need moving across the farm, they just get on and do it. If they've got to get up early to work, they just work. Incredible hard work on a farm. So what do these pictures reinforce for us together?

It's a big picture, isn't it? That if we want there to be a living church meeting here in this building in a generation's time, instead of this building being used as a theater or a bar or luxury flats. And if we want more than that, to see in our time, in our generation, people in other communities in Glasgow hearing about Christ and having their lives turned around by following him.

[25 : 29] And if we want the people in our local areas who we meet day by day in our workplaces and hospitals and universities to know Christ, I take it Paul is saying it will be impossible to achieve those things without significant suffering on the part of the messengers.

The three D's of devotion, the soldier, discipline, the athlete, and diligence, the farmer.

And as we perhaps re-examine our lives coming out from the pandemic when lots of things had to stop and lots of us were saying, you know, I'm not going to go back to how things were in my life, the pattern of life I had. Could we take on board these pictures of what Paul calls Timothy to for healthy Christian ministry for all of us?

And I think we get afraid of putting these costs at the heart of Christian discipleship. I feel daunted to be sharing this chapter with you this morning.

But sometimes, sometimes people reject Christianity not because they find the message too stretching, but because we find it not stretching enough.

[26 : 42] Maybe there's something stirring in being told the bar is higher than we'd realized. We're called to something more than hot tub religion.

Paul says, be devoted, be disciplined, be diligent for the greatest goal. That the real Jesus of the scriptures, who has destroyed death to offer us immortality, might be proclaimed and known and worshipped in the church today.

And that message taken to Scotland and on to the nations. And they would be one for him. And with those pictures that Paul gives us, he then assures us it is worth it.

It's worth it. And that's our third point this morning. Pass the baton. Strive for the gospel. Thirdly, look to the future. We see already that he's pointing us to the future in those pictures, don't we?

Just reflect on how it feels for the athlete in the Olympic Games when they stand at the top of the podium and their flag is raised of their country and the anthem is played and a wreath is put round their heads.

[27 : 54] Reflect on how it feels for the farmer when after a year of toil, the harvest comes in and it's a bumper crop and the work is done and they can share the spoils.

Paul then moves us to look at God's promises for his people for the future. So first he says, look at the king. Look at the king. Verse 8. Remember.

Remember Jesus Christ. Raised from the dead. Descended from David. This is my gospel.

Remember him who suffered to die that unique death for us.

Now raised. The one who was descended from David. So those promises that are in 2 Samuel chapter 7, the promises that were given to David that someone would come in his royal line and reign forever on God's throne.

Jesus is that man. He's God's forever king and he rose and he reigns and one day every knee will bow to him. Remember him as you join with me in suffering. Next we're to remember that whatever God's people, whatever the world does to us, God's word is unstoppable.

[29 : 05] So Paul says he's bound but the word is not bound. Verse 9. I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal but God's word is not chained.

And then he gives us this trustworthy saying. Verses 11 to 13. He says it's a trustworthy saying as though some things he says are not trustworthy. But he has four trustworthy sayings, Paul, in his letters and they are these, they're for particular emphasis that he describes them as trustworthy. He says verse 11. If we died with him, we'll also live with him. If we endure, we'll also reign with him. That's the first part of the picture.

There are two pathways in the trustworthy saying and the first one is for those who are willing to face the daily cost of standing with Jesus, of following him, of doing his will.

Faced with pressure from the world, faced with pressure in the church of people walking away from Jesus' teaching. If we are willing to lay down our lives for Jesus, the promise is we will live with him.

[30 : 16] If we can endure, we will reign with him in his kingdom. And then the trustworthy saying turns to the other path from halfway through verse 12.

We've got these, another matching pair. So if we disown him, he will also disown us. And then in verse 13, hearing there's something that God can't do.

We're often used to saying there's nothing God can't do. God is omnipotent. But there is something God can't do. God can't act outside of his own character. And so verse 13, it says, if we are faithless to him, he remains faithful for he cannot disown himself.

In other words, God will honor the commitments that he has made. He has set forth for the world his king, Jesus, risen from the dead.

And he sends this message of invitation to the world, lay down your arms, stop your life in rebellion against my king, turn to him, and he will grant you freely life forever, reigning with him.

[31 : 24] And if we receive that message and we endure, God saves us for glory because he's faithful. And if we turn from that message and we take up arms again against Jesus, then God won't save us because he's faithful.

He can't disown himself. And in verse 14, Paul says there, keep reminding God's people of these things. Why? Because when we take this trustworthy saying and we view the world through the lenses of those two pathways, is it really worth guarding the gospel message?

Is it really worth devoting ourselves to gospel work? Of course it is, isn't it? And so Paul says in verse 10, just back over the page there, 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.

There was a Scottish pastor in the 17th century, Samuel Rutherford. He spent nine years as a minister just not far from here in Galloway in the Solway Firth, a little village called Anwath.

And it was incredibly difficult. While he was there, he endured terrible suffering. There was a lot of personal tragedy in his own family that he had to endure and keep trusting the Lord in.

[32 : 49] He faced personal ill health and he kept getting arrested because the authorities were clamping down on authentic gospel preaching. And he endured because he was longing that the people of Solway, the Solway Firth, would obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

And there's a hymn that was written about Rutherford just capturing how he felt for the people of that remote village, Anwath. It says, Fair Anwath by the Solway, to me thou still art dear.

Even from the verge of heaven I drop for thee a tear. Oh, if one soul from Anwath meet me at God's right hand, my heaven will be two heavens in Emmanuel's land.

So we hear God's call to action, be strong, pass the baton on, be diligent, be devoted, be disciplined, leave everything on the gospel pitch.

But it's framed by God's free grace that he says, Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead in the line of David, my forever king. Be strong in the grace that is freely available in him.

[34 : 09] the grace that's guaranteed for all of us to keep going and keep trusting. And remember, when we endure, he cannot deny himself and he offers us and everyone who accepts our message eternal glory.

So let's pray together. Let's just have a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word. Amen. Reflect on what I am saying for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you that you have revealed your grace through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, that he has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

would you help us in view of your grace as the people we are with the gifts you've given us to be strong in the grace that's in Christ Jesus, that we would be a church devoted to your gospel, that among us you will raise up reliable people to teach and to train, that they in turn can pass on your gospel faithfully to others and would you help us to keep looking to the future for Jesus' name's sake.

[36 : 08] Amen.