

**19<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

## **2 Timothy 1-2**

‘Famous last words’ is more than a cliché. When notable men and women of influence are about to die, the world awaits to hear their final words of insight and wisdom. Then those quotes are repeated worldwide. This is also true with a dying loved one. Gathered at his or her side the family strains to hear every whispered syllable of blessing, encouragement and advice, knowing that this will be their final message.

One of the most knowledgeable, influential and important men of history is the apostle Paul who helped set up the early church of Jesus Christ and bring Christ’s message to Europe. And in the second letter to Timothy we have his famous last words.

Last Week Carole finished off looking at the first letter to Timothy and some of the pastoral issues it contained, grappling with the application of those for us in 21<sup>st</sup> century and trying to understand how we interpret the Bible for today. You can catch that sermon again on the website. As we move into the second letter to Timothy the tone of the letter becomes more personal and intimate.

Paul was facing death. Convicted as a follower of Jesus, Paul sat in a cold Roman prison, cut off from the world, with just a visitor or two and his writing materials. Writing about 66AD Paul wrote his final thoughts to his son in the faith, Timothy, passing to him the torch of leadership, reminding him of what was truly important and encouraging him in the faith. Imagine how Timothy must have read and reread every word; this was the last message from his beloved mentor, Paul.

Let us have a closer look at some of this advice and how it may apply to us. **I’m going to pick out two ‘triplets’ that Paul hopes for Timothy: that he may have ‘power, love and self-discipline’; and that he may communicate the gospel, suffer for the gospel and guard the gospel.**

But first of all, a word about Timothy. Timothy probably became a Christian after Paul’s first missionary journey to Lystra recorded in Acts 16. His mother and grandmother were originally Jewish and gave him a grounding in the scriptures and a belief in God.

Love them or hate them your parents are going to be the most influential people in your lives. They are ever present in your formative years and shape and mould your values and beliefs consciously and subconsciously.

I have seen my mother a number of times over the last couple of months, since she was put on end of life care. It has given me time to reflect and appreciate how she has shaped my life. I know at the age of 18 I was so keen to get out of the house and have some freedom and space to live my own life. I went off to University and never went back apart from to visit. Now thirty plus years later I can appreciate more the role of my parents in my life.

It can be a mixed legacy passing on faith to your children. Statistics suggest that if both parents are committed to their faith then there is a 50% chance their child will be. If only one parent is, it goes down to a one in three chance. Often children leave the faith of their parents because they want their own identity and so reject an identity that is not chosen but received. Often however that faith lies dormant and the child comes back to it later in life but of their own choosing.

Kahlil Gibran had some wise words to say about children and the influence of parents in his great work 'The Prophet':

*Your children are not your children.*

*They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.*

*They come through you but not from you,*

*And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts.*

*For they have their own thoughts.*

*You may house their bodies but not their souls,*

*For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*

*You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them  
like you.*

*For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.*

*You are the bows from which your children as living  
arrows are sent forth.*

*The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,  
and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go  
swift and far.*

*Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;*

*For even as He loves the arrow that flies,  
so He loves also the bow that is stable.*

Parents can give that stability and provide that initial direction for launching into the world – the rest is up to the child after that.

The friends you keep are important, especially in your youthful years. Timothy as a young man joined Paul in his missionary journeys and became a trusted friend. Paul was to influence him greatly in his faith. Maybe there is someone who acted as friend and example to us in our faith? The life of Timothy is a reminder to us to be there for others, to encourage others in their faith, to have that special precious role in influencing others in their lives for good and for God. Those who work with our children and young people get to do that. Those leading house groups share their understanding. But we can all be there for others in encouraging them on the journey of faith.

Our Christianity Explored Course starts in a couple of weeks please use it to either refresh your own understanding of the Christian faith or invite someone you know. 90% of people, come to faith because someone invited them. Someone found the courage to say are you interested in this? I'm going – do you fancy coming with me? Some of you have come to faith by coming on courses such as Christianity Explored. Please make the most of this opportunity to help someone find faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul in this letter is desperate to know that the faith is being passed on to generation after generation. Do we

have that same concern? Do you care that people come to a saving knowledge of God through Jesus Christ?

Timothy had developed in his faith and Paul had demonstrated his confidence in him by entrusting him with important responsibilities, and now was putting him in charge of the church in Ephesus. Timothy was not by any accounts a natural leader. He was timid and reserved in nature. He allowed others to look down on his youthfulness and was intimidated by older people. Paul had previously criticised him for not correcting some of the problems in the church at Ephesus. Hence Paul's comment to him in verse 6-7 of chapter one: *fan into flame the gift of God. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

We are not sure what spiritual gift Paul was referring to that Timothy should fan into flame again. The Bible tells us that the Spirit gives gifts to all the members of the church for the work of Christ and that it's important not to neglect our gifts but use them in service for the flourishing and work of the church. When you neglect your gifts, or refuse to use them in the service of Christ then we are all deprived. Jesus told many parables about being good stewards of the gifts that God has given us – using those gifts for God's glory, not our own advancement. It is a

serious charge from God – use the gifts I’ve given you to do my work.

Timothy though suffers from being a very shy and sensitive person, to whom responsibility was an onerous burden. So Paul not only tells him to stir up his gift but to stop being so timid. Cowardliness has nothing to do with Christ. When we allow people to intimidate us, we neutralise our effectiveness for God. The power of the Holy Spirit can help us to overcome our fear of what some might say or do to us so that we can continue to do God’s work.

Later in chapter one Paul mentions those who were ashamed of him because he was in prison and deserted him and Onesiphorus who was not ashamed and came to his help. It takes a lot of courage not to be influenced by public opinion, and what others may say about you – but Paul encourages us not to be timid and cowardly but to trust that God will empower us and give us strength.

Timothy was youthful and was intimidated by older people. I remember becoming a social worker in my early twenties and visiting older people some of whom I was young enough to be their grandson, even their great grandson. I felt a bit awkward. What did I know about life at that age? I remember growing a beard so that I looked

older and people would take me more seriously. I also grew a beard because some of the older ladies thought I was their toy boy so a beard would put them at arm’s length and stop them from kissing me!

**Paul prays that Timothy may know power, love and self-discipline.** Three essentials of anyone in leadership. People are suspicious of **power**, quite rightly. We’ve all heard the famous saying that ‘power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. Power can be bad for those who exercise it, as much, if not more, as for those over whom it is exercised. And yet power is inevitable and necessary within human relationships. Someone has to make decisions. Someone has to protect the weak and vulnerable. Someone has to regulate the common life of communities. Someone has to give other people a sense of direction. We are not solitary individuals living out our lives in detached isolation, staring at smartphones and tablets.

God gives gifts to some people to be used for the benefit of all. Among these is the power to make things happen within the life of the church. This power is mysterious. It isn’t simply the matter of holding a particular office – although at our forthcoming AGFM we will elect new elders and officers and we do need to be praying for

people to step forward for leadership in all aspects of the church's life.

Having a forceful personality can make you dangerous. Perhaps that's why Paul thought Timothy, with his more reserved and timid nature, was more ideal as a leader because his personality didn't get in the way or overwhelm others. But leaders need to show power: the ability to say and do things that change situations, that give a lead which others find they want to follow, to speak words of wisdom which prove compelling, to bring healing and hope where it's needed.

Timothy, in Paul's opinion, has this ability even though he doesn't naturally fit the bill of a leader. Maybe we rule ourselves out of leadership because we think – who me? A Leader? No I couldn't do that. I am not the right sort of person. Reluctant, timid, shy? The example of Timothy is that perhaps there isn't the obvious sort of person.

Timothy needs to use his gifts with **love**. Power divorced from love quickly becomes destructive, if not demonic. Love without power can degenerate into wishy washy sentimentality. But when the person who is exercising power is known and perceived to be someone whose whole direction of life is generous, self-giving, people are more inclined to follow their lead. The power of the gospel

flows from the fact that God gave his own son for our sake, he gave up his life on the cross for us, thereby establishing a claim on our love and loyalty.

Thirdly we need **self-discipline**. In chapter two Paul draws analogies with a soldier, an athlete and a farmer to show the need for discipline, practice, hard work and effort in leadership. Keep to the rules, be patient and be prudent. Leaders need to think clearly and shrewdly about what needs to be done and how best to do it. This must naturally begin with their own lives, where they learn moderation and self-discipline; but it will also apply to the ordering of life in the community. Every community is prone to jealousies, petty rivalries, conflicts and misunderstandings. Leaders at every level need that self-discipline as well as power and love so that they may be able to look back without regret at decisions taken and attitudes adopted in their personal life as well as in the leading of their church.

**Paul charges Timothy with communicating the gospel, suffering for the gospel and guarding the gospel in these opening chapters.** Paul was in chains because of the gospel he preached. The truth about Jesus is no more popular in our day than in Paul's but it still reaches receptive hearts. People can have all sorts of hang ups

about the Christian message – some well-founded, some not. Again Christianity Explored is a good opportunity for people to explore those hang-ups and questions. One of the stumbling blocks to faith is grace. That we can't earn our salvation out of our own efforts. There seems to be many false teachers in the church at Ephesus. Many were asserting that Jesus was divine but not human. Today we hear many say Jesus was just human and not divine. Other teachers at Ephesus were denying the resurrection, denying that those in Christ would be resurrected after death. Paul calls all this talk like gangrene – it rots faith and undermines people's faith.

There is a fine balance between questioning your faith in order to have a firmer grasp of it, and sceptically undermining it. Paul urges Timothy to communicate the true gospel, hold on to sound doctrine and guard the gospel and even be prepared to suffer for the gospel. Truth is at stake.

When I left my last church 16 years ago I encouraged the elders of the church to ask questions of prospective new ministers. What did they believe? What was the gospel they would preach? After a couple of years of unsuccessfully interviewing a few possible replacements for me they got desperate and stopped asking the questions and took a young man who was new into ministry. He was

a Christian humanist who didn't believe in the objective reality of God – didn't believe there was an actual God but that religion was all a language game, a construct to help us cope with the chaos of life. The verse 'God is love' is turned the other way round – so that 'love is God'. The church I left had about 150 members. It halved within a couple of years of his ministry. You could say a number of factors were at work in that decline, but I believe that the departure from sound doctrine was the key one. Doctrine and belief may not be sexy but they are essential. Belief affects behaviour – how seriously you take things, how important they are to you and the outworking of those beliefs. Paul urges Timothy to take care over the gospel he holds and preaches and the false teaching that seeks to distort and destroy it.

But he gives Timothy the reassurance he needs: he can only do this by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (1 verse 14). The same truth is taught in the previous verse: *'I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day'*.

There is great encouragement here. Ultimately it is God himself who is the guarantor of the gospel. It is his responsibility to preserve it. Like dropping your deposit in the bank – some banks are shaky and you are not sure if your money is safe – but the Government gives you the

reassurance that your funds up to a certain limit are guaranteed by the nation. How much more with God.

We may see the faith of the gospel spoken against and the apostolic message of the New Testament ridiculed. We may have to watch an increasing apostasy in the church, as our generation and younger generations abandon the faith of their parents and grandparents.

Do not be afraid! God will never allow the light of the gospel to be finally extinguished. Sure he has committed it to us, frail and fallible creatures. He has placed his treasure in brittle, timid, earthen ware vessels. And we are not exempt from playing our part in guarding and defending the truth of Christ. Nevertheless, in entrusting the deposit to our hands, God has not taken his own hands off it. God is its final guardian and God will preserve the truth which he has committed to the church. We know this because we know the one in whom we have trusted and continue to trust.

The gospel is good news of salvation, promised from eternity, secured by Christ in time and offered to faith.

Our first duty is to communicate this gospel, to use old ways and seek fresh ways of making it known.

If we do so, we shall undoubtedly suffer for it, for the authentic gospel has never been popular. It humbles the sinner too much. And when we are called to suffer for the gospel, we are tempted to trim it, to eliminate those elements which give offence and cause opposition, to mute the notes which jar on sensitive modern ears.

But we must resist the temptation. For above all else we are called to guard the gospel, keeping it pure whatever the cost and preserving it against every corruption.

This is our threefold duty regarding the gospel of Christ as Paul urges us in these opening chapters of 2 Timothy. Guard the gospel faithfully. Spread it actively. Suffer for it bravely. May the Spirit of God not make us timid but give us power, love and self-discipline in this task.

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