

**Core Seminar**

**New Testament**

**Session 16: 2 Timothy**

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**2 Timothy: The Continuation of the Kingdom**

Some of the most memorable words a leader speaks are those given in a farewell address. A lifetime or career of achievements, setbacks, joy, and pain can give us perspectives we didn’t have earlier in life. From farewell addresses we gain insight into the life of the person speaking. We sometimes learn interpretations of past events from their point of view. We learn what the person valued. And often we’re left with inspirational words for the future. Consider some of these memorable words from farewell addresses:

**General Douglas MacArthur,**

 **“Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.”**

Reagan,

“My friends: We did it. We weren't just marking time. We made a difference.”

Nathan Hale said,

“I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”

And of course, Oscar Wilde: “Either this wallpaper goes, or I do!”

**In 2 Timothy, what is thought to be the last letter written by the Apostle Paul, we have these words from Paul’s farewell address, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” These words by Paul are some of the most famous last words ever spoken, and along with the content of this final letter serve to tell us something not only about the man who spoke these words but about the Gospel purpose for which he lived. Through these last words of Paul we don’t just learn about him and what motivated him.** Paul has another purpose in writing this letter that is more than just talking about his personal hope in the Gospel. Like in a last will and testament, Paul is wanting to ensure that his stewardship of the gospel would be passed on well to the next generation. So . .. let’s get into 2 Timothy. First some background.

**Background:**

Paul seems to know these are his last written words. Thus there is a clarity of expression as Paul has perhaps his last communication with his son in the faith, Timothy. It seems that Paul was re-arrested at Ephesus, perhaps at the instigation of Alexander the Metalworker. He says to Timothy, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (4:13-18).

So, Paul’s trial in Rome has begun. His confidence has shifted from the confidence he had on his previous imprisonment. There he had famously written, when musing over whether it was better to stay here for the sake of the church or depart and be with Christ:

Phil 1:24-26

24But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

But now we see his hope is elsewhere:

2 Tim 4:6-8

 6For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Do you see where Paul’s own personal hope is? He is focused on his eternal rest in Christ, and this drives his final message to Timothy.

**Summary/Structure:**

Well, before going in any deeper, let’s take a look at an overview of that final message.

In chapter 1, we see Paul calling Timothy to protect the message which has been entrusted to him. The need to guard the Gospel message and ensure that its message was not altered or compromised was not something Paul assumed. Paul knew that the Gospel message, once assumed, was in danger of being quickly lost.

In chapters 2 and 3, we see Paul shifting his focus to the need to raise up faithful men who will continue to teach and preach the Gospel. Though this will not be without continued opposition from false teachers. Paul has already suffered for the sake of the Gospel and he continues to remind Timothy that faithfully preaching the Gospel message will invariably result in some form of suffering in this present age.

Towards the end of chapter 3 and into chapter 4, Paul gives his final charge to Timothy. He encourages him to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed” (3:14). The faithful minister, the faithful Christian, will continue on, enduring in the faith until his final days. As we have already seen, Paul offers himself as an example in this, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (4:7).

And so Paul finishes the letter with some final instructions, a few greetings, and a prayer. “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.” (4:22)

To Timothy and to us, Paul’s message can be summed up in three words, Protect, Preach, and Persevere. Protect the Message that has been entrusted to you, Preach the Word no matter the personal cost, and Persevere to the End. I’ll take those each in turn to give you a thematic run-through of the book. First, Protect the Message.

**Protect the Message:**

Paul begins his letter to Timothy by giving this exhortation, “7For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. 8Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. 13Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” (1:7-14).

*God* gave a spirit of power. We suffer for the gospel *by the power of God. God* appointed Paul as a herald of the gospel. And Timothy is now to guard that message *with the help of the Holy Spirit.* So the first thing we see is that the task of protecting the Gospel message doesn’t begin with us; it begins with the One who gave the message. Ultimately, the integrity of the message doesn’t rest in the amount of courage we possess, or the zeal and passion we have in proclaiming it. *God gives us the good news. God saves us and sustains us. God calls us. Man did not invent this religion as a way to approach God. God brought this gospel to man.* In the midst of the exhortation to protect the Gospel message, which is a serious stewardship, we must be reminded that the task isn’t ultimately contingent upon us. No, it is God who gives us the Gospel and it also God who gives us the ability to “guard the good deposit that was entrusted” to us.

But notice that God entrusts the Gospel to *us.* God’s children are the means God uses to guard the Good News. So how are we to guard it? In a sense, our call is to do nothing. And that is substantially more challenging than it might at first appear. *You and I are not called to give out another message; or to come up with something that has more surface appeal; or to craft a gospel better suited to modern needs, as we see them. We are called to give the gospel of Jesus Christ alone. If the gospel of Jesus Christ is altered, it is lost.*

What about at a personal level- have you ever been tempted to alter the Gospel? Perhaps it’s in the moment of sinning. Wanting to give in to our sin, we forget the costliness of grace and deny the Gospel call that once we become God’s children Jesus is our Savior *and* our Lord. Remember Paul’s words in Romans 6:

“Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound? 2By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:1-4)

Or maybe we’re tempted to alter the Gospel in the moments after we sin. Overcome with guilt, we feel we have to *do* something to make us right with God- fast, go to church, read a book of the Bible. All good things, but none of which can justify us before God. Remember, Christ’s work on the cross is accomplished- all our sins are wiped away. So repent of your sin and trust in what Christ has done for us.

Finally, perhaps we’re tempted when we evangelize. How sharp the corners of the Gospel are when we share with an unbeliever. The thought of Hell seems so harsh to their ears- “would God really do this to me?” And so, in an effort to be winsome, we round out the corners of the Gospel, downplaying man’s utter depravity and God’s righteous judgment. The consequence of course is that our message becomes so watered down that it becomes simply one of many nice things to believe in. There is no immediacy to it and there is no more need of a Savior. Be careful to stay true to the Gospel when we share with others.

Timothy would have faced many temptations to alter the Gospel in the face of false teachers. After all, the Christian Gospel was not exactly the fast track to popularity in ancient Ephesus. Both Jewish and Roman leaders had it out for these early church pioneers, Paul knew that the Gospel is never more than a generation from being altered or denied. Paul’s sure defense of the Gospel message did not guarantee that each of these churches would remain faithful for generations to come. While the Gospel will remain and continue to spread throughout the world, individual churches may become compromised if they do not guard this message.

*There are two particular aspects of the gospel message we must take special care in guarding today, because they are so often challenged or changed.* ***First****, we must carefully guard how we present human need…Most fundamentally, our need is a spiritual need caused by the fact that we have all sinned against God. And those sins deserve his condemnation. Meeting people’s physical needs, of course, is not bad thing. In fact, it is very important- but our physical needs are ephemeral- gone in a breath from the perspective of eternity. Christians care about suffering, but according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, humanity’s main need is to be saved from eternal suffering.*

***Second****, we must also guard how we present God’s provision for our need. Christianity does not present Jesus as a moral teacher—someone who has garnered respect from people around the world because of his great teaching. Rather, Christianity presents Jesus as the rejected Messiah of Israel who died as an outlaw on the cross. And by dying on the cross, he bore the sins of everyone who would ever turn and trust in him.*

At many points in the history of the church the gospel has undergone attacks from outsiders, those who believe the message to be harmful or offensive. However, some of the most insidious attacks upon the gospel have come from those who claim to be preachers and teachers of this message. When men entrusted with this gospel message begin changing or altering the message to make it more “user friendly” or more positive or more culturally-appropriate or less exclusive, they quickly begin traveling down a path that invariably leads to a denial of the true essence of this message.

An additional danger to avoid in the protection of this message--beyond denying or altering the message--is assuming the message. The plunge of many churches into theological liberalism in the early and mid-20th century didn’t happen overnight; many churches that had once stood strongly for the gospel message, began *assuming* the gospel and stopped focusing exclusively on the implications of the gospel, figuring that there were additional things they should focus on. While we should be interested and concerned about the implications of the gospel, we must never confuse or substitute the implications for the message itself.

The call to protect the message is not an easy call. Paul knew that calling Timothy, and all those who would follow, to guard this message would invariably lead to suffering for the sake of this message. *Would you want such a “gift” from God? The gift of power to suffer for the gospel? What message are you keeping? Is there any message for which you would be willing to suffer?I wonder, do we think of guarding the Gospel enough? Maybe we’re not suffering because we’re not sharing it. Are you willing to suffer for the Gospel?*

Of course, protecting the Gospel will often lead to suffering for the Gospel, which brings us to the next reason Paul writes this letter to Timothy.

**Preach the Word, No Matter the Cost:**

Timothy is not only called to protect the Gospel himself, he is called to preach the Word to others. Part of this calling includes entrusting this message to other faithful men. Paul says to Timothy, “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2:1-2).

It is not enough to merely teach others what the gospel is. It is the responsibility of those who have preaching/teaching ministries within the local church also to be raising up, training and qualifying others to have such teaching ministries for the next generation.

That is why it is a good thing that CHBC is willing to spend a vast amount of time and resources in equipping men who will not necessarily pastor in this local church, but who will be able to proclaim the gospel to the next generation, and geographically to new locations.

And part of what we must communicate to that next generation of those who preach the gospel is that sometimes that will involve suffering.

We already saw in 1:8 that Paul has called Timothy to join him in suffering for the Gospel; in chapter 2 he continues this encouragement saying, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2:3). Paul goes on to speak from experience, “as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!” (2:8b-9).

*We Christians must be willing to endure suffering and opposition to the truth. When opposition to the gospel comes, we have a choice: we can endure it, or we can avoid it by disowning the gospel. Often in life, we can hold the gospel with one hand and our comfort with the other…Circumstances permit us to carry both, so who’s to question our sincerity? But comfort has a slow, creeping way of taking over our hearts. It starts with genuinely and earnestly seeking to provide for our families, then turns into buying into what everyone else says is normal, and ends up on the throne of our hearts. Suppose, then, a difficult trial hits you…You then have a choice. You can be faithful to the gospel or you can hold on to your comfort. Which one are you going to hold on to? Are you going to let go of the gospel in order to keep comfort? Or are you going to let go of your comfort in order to keep the gospel? Paul tells Timothy he may need to make this choice one day. He tells us the same thing. Remember, Christians are characterized by inconvenient love.*

Whether Timothy was called to face suffering sooner or later, Paul encourages him to remain steadfast in preaching the Word. Paul gives very direct guidance to Timothy on what this looks like, “Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2:14-15). The preaching that Paul is calling Timothy to do should act as a corrective and counterweight to the false teachers. Paul goes on to describe the nature of this preacher and his preaching saying, “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” (2:24-26). *This is a daunting list for anyone who wants to be a public teacher of Scripture. Consider what it requires: tenacity without meanness; firmness without harshness; and the ability to both articulately speak and wisely remain silent. This is what a teacher should be like. Actually, this is what all Christians should be like—utterly resolved to sacrifice themselves for the good of others and the glory of God.*

As we saw last week in Titus, a pastor must be able to refute error as well as teach the truth. Paul knows that false teaching can spread like a cancer throughout the church. So he goes on to warn Timothy, “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” (3:1-5)

Similar to first century Ephesus, we live today in a pluralistic world. People can hold to several contradictory things at once. So a pastor must be able to say what the gospel *denies* as well as what it affirms. This means that a pastor will need to be someone who is capable of rebuking and correcting as well as training in righteousness. And often his greatest suffering will come at the hands of those *inside* the church. Pray that the Lord will continue to raise up such men for His church. Pray that we would support such men as they lead. Pray that we would be such Christians.

**Persevere to the End:**

After encouraging Timothy to be faithful in preaching the word, entrusting the Gospel to faithful men, resisting falser teachers, and doing all this regardless of the cost, we get to a final theme of this letter. Paul has remained faithful to Christ through joy and difficulty and now he concludes his exhortation to Timothy by encouraging him to also persevere to the end. Maybe Paul felt the need to tell Timothy, “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed” (3:14), because he had witnessed others not continue on in the faith. He tells Timothy, “Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.” (4:9-10). Not all who claim to be followers of Christ, persevere in following Christ. Do you remember Demas? He was with Paul when he wrote the letters of Colossians and Philemon. Paul sent his greetings to the church at Colosse. And yet in the end he deserted Paul. Never assume based on your prominence in the church or the company you keep that you are somehow immune from such action. Not all who claim the name of Christ will persevere to the end.

But Paul’s hope *is* that Timothy will persevere. And it’s interesting how Paul suggested he do that. In his encouragement to that end, he tells Timothy: “and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (3:15-17). *If you wish to continue to the end, you cannot neglect the Scriptures. This is one of the main ways God has given us to endure to the end. As Thomas Cranmer said, we should read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God’s Word. Our Bible reading should be regular. Our study should be diligent. Our meditation should be thoughtful. Our references to the Bible should be frequent. If we are Christians, this is what we are called to do—feed upon God’s Word.* Do you feed on God’s Word? It would be speculative to guess why Demas fell away; all we know is that Paul says he loved this present world. I wonder what Demas was doing to cultivate a love for the Word in the weeks and months leading up to his falling away. Scripture is authoritative, it is true, it is without error, it is instructive, it is sufficient for telling us everything we need to know about living in this world in such a way that we are prepared for the next!

So perseverance involves God’s word. But it also involves *how* Timothy teaches, Paul says, “Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (4:2). *Great patience is required by the very nature of teaching. If you have ever taught Sunday school or your own children, you know what it is like to repeat yourself. You have to be willing to explain something a second time, a third time, a fourth time without remonstrating the students or making them feel bad for needing to ask questions. This is how God is patient with us…A teacher of the Word must instruct carefully and with great patience.* But perseverance is not just about me as an individual. We persevere together. And so teaching with patience—from the pulpit or over lunch—is a key way in which we can do this together.

And in that vein, we see that for Paul, persevering to the end involves more than just any of our fates individually. In Paul’s final charge, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.” (4:6ff), we see an additional reason Timothy must persevere to the end. Paul was soon going to be off the scene. It is not enough for one generation of Christians to persevere; as the Gospel is passed from one generation of believers to the next it is imperative that men and women continue on, persevering in that Gospel that was once for all delivered to the saints! Being able to persevere means equipping the next generation to persevere, so they can do so with the one that follows, and so forth—all the way to Jesus.

Did you see how Paul’s calls to perseverance go so far beyond what we normally think of? When we think of a call to persevere, we so often think of the need to grit our teeth, hunker down, and wait for the storm to blow over. But in Paul’s mind, this isn’t about our own staying power at all. It’s about God’s word. That’s how we persevere. And beyond that, we don’t just think of this as individuals. No: persevering as an individual is tied up with the ability of the Christian community around me to persevere. So as I patiently teach and instruct others, I am not only doing them a great service but myself as well. And then, beyond that, the goal isn’t ever about just one generation. We are to persevere in the gospel so that the next generation may do the same. And so persevering also means protecting. And preaching. All for the glory of Christ in this world.

**Conclusion:**

Paul serves as an example of one who Protected the Message, Preached the Word regardless of the Cost, and Persevered to the End. So, how did that turn out for him? How do we expect that to turn out for us? I’d like to close our time with a section from a biography of Paul, based on the New Testament, that was written by John Pollock.

The ancient tradition of Paul’s execution site is almost certainly authentic but the details cannot be fixed. Whereas Christ’s Via Dolorosa may be followed step by step, Paul’s remains vague. He would have it so. And because Christ had walked that earlier road, Paul’s was no Via Dolorosa, for they were walking it together: “Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph.” “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

They marched him out through the walls past the pyramid of Cestius which still stands, on to the Ostian Way toward the sea. Crowds journeying to or from Ostia would recognize an execution squad by the lectors with their fasces of rods and ax, and the executioner carrying a sword, which in Nero’s reign had replaced the ax; by the escort, and by the manacled criminal, walking stiffly and bandy-legged, ragged and filthy from his prison: but not ashamed or degraded. He was going to a feast, to a triumph, to the crowning day to which he had pressed forward. He who had talked often of God’s promise of eternal life in Jesus could not fear; he believed as he had spoken: “All God’s promises find their ‘yes’ in Him.” No executioner was going to lose him the conscious presence of Jesus; he was not changing his company, only the place where he enjoyed it. Better still, he would see Jesus. Those glimpses – on the Damascus Road, in Jerusalem, at Corinth, on that sinking ship; now he was going to see Him face to face, to know even as he had been known.

They marched Paul to the third milestone on the Ostian Way, to a little pinewood in a glade, probably a place of tombs, known then as Aquae Salviae or Healing Waters, and now as Tre Fontane where an abbey stands in his honor. He is believed to have been put overnight in a tiny cell, for this was a common place of execution. If Luke was allowed to stay by his window, if Timothy or Mark had reached Rome in time, the sounds of the night vigil would not be of weeping but singing: “as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as dying and, behold, we live.”

At first light, the soldiers took Paul to the pillar. The executioner stood ready, stark naked. Soldiers stripped Paul to the waist and tied him, kneeling upright, to the low pillar which left his neck free. Some accounts say the lectors beat him with rods; a beating had been the usual prelude to beheading but in recent years not always inflicted.

If they must administer this last, senseless dose of pain to a body so soon to die, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation . . . or sword?

“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with” – the flash of a sword – “the glory.”