

Stay on Target

Series: Fan the Flame (2 Timothy)

Brad Bailey – January 28, 2024

Intro

One of the most fascinating things in life... is that it seems that it is only at the end of life that we get a perspective on what really matters... on if our lives have meaning and purpose. If you want to understand what really matters... listen to someone who is facing their final stage... life is stripped and simplified...as to what really matters.

> And today we continue with the gift of hearing from such a life.

In the Biblical book we call 2 Timothy, we have the second letter which the Apostle Paul wrote to the younger Timothy.

Paul has been **arrested in Rome once more.**

He saw it coming....and this time it is different.

The Emperor is now Nero... infamous for his **brutal rule....and known for losing his sanity.**

And there was a prison... in the a new underground prison... which has been discovered near the Roman Colosseum and forum. [1]

> **Paul knows** these are **likely his last days,**

What we are reading are **the last words** of the **man who helped change the world.**

What we are reading are the last words **a man is writing to his dear spiritual son...about finishing well.**

And what we are reading are **words meant to be heard by us.** While this letter addresses Timothy... like Paul's other letters... **Paul clearly intended it to be shared with the whole community...** and even ends with the second-person plural "you all": **"Grace be with you all"** (1Tim 6:21; 2Tim 4:7; Titus 3:15). These words were read aloud with sacred respect to all the people.

Last week ... we **landed briefly** with 2:8-9 where we pick up today.

2 Timothy 2:8-10

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. ¹⁰ 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.

Remember... **Jesus Christ, raised from the dead,** descended from David.

In referring to Christ as **descended from David...**he was reminding Timothy and us... that **God had said he was going to send a savior...** a descendent of King David...

and **he would be a savior for all... .. who would bear our shame... taking the consequences of death upon himself ...but then be raised up and exalted.**
Jesus.... descended from David...and raised from the dead, Christ is the one in which **everything was pointing to.**

And **Christ rose and now lives....and has brought eternal salvation.**

This is **my gospel... which mean good news... ultimate news... the kind that interrupts everything else** because it **stands above everything else.**

That is why I can endure everything... because... I know what God has done... and it fills me.

What matters most... is not the circumstances you are standing in...but where you stand in relationship to the purpose of God...which has now been set in motion.

The word of God **cannot be chained.** It is **unchanging and unstoppable.**

Verses 11-13...Adds a piece of liturgy as an example

2 Timothy 2:11-13

¹¹ Here is a trustworthy saying:

**If we died with him,
we will also live with him;**

**¹² if we endure,
we will also reign with him.**

**If we disown him,
he will also disown us;**

**¹³ if we are faithless,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.**

Here is a trustworthy saying... and he draws upon what must have been a part of a **liturgy at the times... something akin to a hymn** that may have been sung.

Whenever you see such a reference to something like common hymn... it's helpful to realize that it is drawing from something long held before Paul.

Today some people will say that these accounts must have been developed later...not only are these accounts within the lifetime of Jesus... but whenever the NT writings... such as Pauls... refer to a hymn or creed of the time. An event has to have been experienced widely to find a communal expression... and then be given form... and then become widely familiar...and then shared across spaces... so that Paul could refer to it when writing to a wider audience.

In other words... it would have to be **rooted in a shared reality with early historic roots.**

These beliefs didn't grow out of the early church... the early church grew out of the beliefs... including the resurrection And here we hear what they first knew

What doesn't change? God...the life that exists with God.

*if we are faithless,... he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.*

God is God.

*If we disown him,
he will also disown us;*

Paul is simply saying... the **effect of disowning God... won't leave God out...it will leave us out.**

Humanity has a strange idea that if we don't believe in God... we get rid of him.

The reality is that it's we who end up lost... in the outer darkness...drifting.

The real question... does God believe in us... in you?

The answer is that **God made himself** known and **has provided a way to have life with him.**

As these words declare:

If we receive Christ... We can live with him...and reign with him.

That is the Gospel he has given himself to.

This is what is central.

There **may be a lot** of things **we don't understand**.... But we can know what is central.

Speaking to someone this week **at Alpha party**... good questions... sensed God was drawing him... but didn't know what to do with all the questions.

As finite creatures we won't understand the infinite.

What we need... is to understand is that human life was created with a purpose.

And the source of that purpose has made it known and revealed a plan that would both redeem and reveal the goodness of what exists outside the state of this world...that purpose **carries the unstoppable power** that **defies all the self-serving power** that we know.

Jesus was very clear... describing himself he said...

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. – Lk 19:10

He was explaining what he was fulfilling.

(The belief that we are "lost" is itself a part of the process.)

I don't know **if you wake up some days doubting your value.**

I don't know how valuable you **feel in your workplace, school, marriage, or family.**

But I can tell you this: **even if you aren't valuable to anyone else, you are incredibly valuable to God.**

If you were that **one lost sheep**, Jesus would be willing to leave the other ninety-nine sheep to find you.

Religious leaders' confronted Jesus because he received sinners and ate with them" (Luke 15:2). **Jesus responded by telling three stories about the joy of finding what was lost... of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son prodigal son** (Luke 15:3-32).
> That tells you **what matters to God...you do.**

Paul is telling Timothy and us... this is the news that stands above all.
I wake up ... knowing **this news transcends all other.**
I have come to know what really matters... to know the purpose my life is a part of.
That is powerful.
It's **the target that everything is moving towards.**
And so he is saying ... **STAY ON TARGET.**

And **Paul knows** that **other purposes can try to take over...** and Paul is stating how vital it is **to stay on target.** So he continues now...

2 Timothy 2:14-15

¹⁴ Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. ¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. ¹⁷ Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.

Keep reminding them of these things..."these things are what he had just described...the word and working of God that cannot be chained...that matters more than any temporary circumstances we face.

Warn them before God (or "charge them before God")... God is always here.... But bringing God's presence into focus brings forth the point... that what matters is what serves God's purpose.

What is he to warn them against?
"quarreling about words...that are of no value"

How do we distinguish what is in vain?

He provides an example... the idea that the resurrection had already taken place. They were likely those so bound to the idea that the material world itself was evil...that they taught that they had already been resurrected by having overcome all sin...and denied that there could be an actual resurrection. [2]

Such "teaching will spread like gangrene"... a disease that cuts off blood flow....causing flesh to die.

It was **these kinds of vain ideas** that led the earliest church to **develop the creeds** of faith... the core teachings of Christ... confirmed by the apostles.

So the first thing Paul raises...is the need to...

1. Guard against wandering off into vain ideas.

In contrast we are called to do what?

¹⁵ 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.

Don't focus on what might get **people's attention**...but by **being approved by God**. Be someone who doesn't have to be ashamed of how handled the word of truth.

When Paul speaks of correctly handling the word of truth... it can suggest intensive academic study of the Bible. And it would be valuable to expound upon how we should learn to read the Bible to understand that **original intent**... by valuing the **context**... the **genre**...and more.

> The emphasis here... is about **taking offramps from the purpose** that God is after. Avoid getting side tracked or stuck on an off ramp... becoming focused on non-important matters.

It's "useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers." [3]

This was a significant point Paul had spoken of in his precious letter to Timothy... when he concluded:

1 Timothy 1:5-7

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

If our instruction doesn't end in "a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith," then we missed the mark in our teaching. [4]

So... **Guard against wandering off into vain ideas.**

He continues...

2 Timothy 2:19-22

¹⁹ 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."

²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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.

²² 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.

Shifts from what distracts and diverts us...to what can control us...and is essentially warning us to...

2. Guard against what seeks to take control of you.

In this section Paul says we must “turn away from wickedness” and “Flee the evil desires of youth.”

That may sound like a slight on youth.

I don't think Paul wants Timothy or anyone to look down on youth. In fact, he had told Timothy in his previous letter

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. - 1 Timothy 4:12

What he is raising...is the propensity to sell ourselves out.
Don't sell your purpose for pleasure.

In both places his focus is **not simply on what to stop doing**... but on living out of the **higher calling that our lives were meant for.**

When we are young we are naturally navigating this thing called our lives... and there will be desires within us... that will be stirred...and we may simply chase whatever we think will fulfill them.

He is talking about what we often refer to as **the “lusts” in life**... and associate with **sexual pleasure... greed... control of others.**

Couple things...

- They are not limited to youth. This isn't about a particular age.
- Such lust is always the **gift being corrupted... consuming... controlling.**
- **We are not merely bodies...we are beings.**

Separated from God... human life may just seek power and pleasure... a consumption of others.

But Paul is saying...**you know God's purpose.**

So he says:

“ set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.”

And in this second letter...

2 Timothy 2:20-22

²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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. ²² 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.

If you want to keep your life on target... don't sell pleasure for purpose.
You were made for more.

Guard against what seeks to take control of you.

Finally he concludes this section writing...

2 Timothy 2:23-26

²³ Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ 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.

3. Guard yourself from harmful contempt towards those you may contend with.

²³ Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments,

**How do you know what are valuable ideas to engage...and what are not?
"because you know they produce quarrels."**

It may not always be clear initially... but at soon enough... you know when it's all about a quarrel.

I think Paul's point would be that when something becomes a more central and defining narrative than the gospel...the news of Christ coming to save.

Have my share through pandemic... hardest ever... like an earthquake struck.
Received a few emails...

> Paul... ***"the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful."***

John Wimber would often say – ***"You brother is not your enemy even when they act like it."***

Paul is charging us to become more constructive than contentious.

Illus – If you want to show that a stick is crooked ,,,you can hold up the stick and shout "crooked stick..".... or hold up a straight stick and lay it down next to it. Shouting about a crooked stick may be cathartic... but allowing a straight stick to reveal what is crooked...is **more compelling and constructive.** [5]

The point is not to lose focus contending for secondary issues.

CLOSING

In every way we are being charged to stay on target.
Remember Jesus Christ.

For some of us.... We need to recenter ourselves... to re-embrace the unchanging new about God's purposes. Maybe we realize we got diverted... that we have allowed other things to divert us..or control us.

For some... it's time to join God's unchanging purpose.

It's been said, ***"There are two great moments in a person's life: the moment you were born and the moment you realize why you were born."***

PRAY

Notes:

1. Just north of the Forum in Rome stands San Giuseppe dei Falegnami (St. Joseph's of the Carpenters), a Roman Catholic church dedicated to Jesus's foster father, Joseph of Nazareth. Beneath this structure are the remains of the traditional site of the imprisonments of the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter in Rome. This prison was simply known as "Carcer" ("prison") in Paul's day. The term "Mamertine" was attributed to the prison in the Medieval Period.

2. Many speculate that this denial of a future physical resurrection likely reflected the syncretism with Greek ideas, often referred to as Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a set of doctrines and teachings that emerged alongside early Christianity. Gnosticism takes its inspiration from both Christian Gospels as well as the work of the Greek philosopher Plato. The term "Gnosticism" stems from the Greek word, gnosis, meaning knowledge. This idea of knowledge referred to a mystical insight that would free one from the bounds of this world.

3. As one noted: "In some regard, a modern-day example of this is Harold Camping, founder of Family Radio, and self-proclaimed Bible expert. If you know anything about him, you know that he is big on numerology, taking the numbers of the Bible and assigning meaning to them. He often takes the Bible and looks at it like an engineering book, rather than a piece of literature. Anyway, in studying dates and times in the Scripture, with some intricate calculations, he came up with May 21, 2011 as the day when Christ would bring judgment upon the world.

Much of Family Radio's air time was spent talking about the May 21, 2011 date. Family Radio's web site was practically devoted to announcing this to the world. His followers spent much time and money propagating the end of the world message. But, in the end, his study did nothing to "further the administration of God which is by faith." Instead, he became the laughing stock of the world. His followers wasted much money and time propagating his message. Little was done regarding building the people of God.

4. And again in 1 Timothy 6, Paul wrote, ...

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited

and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth. - 1 Timothy 6:3-4

Ezra is a great example of one approved by God in how they handled truth. Ezra 7:10 tells us, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." Ezra 7:10

He first put the law in his mind. Then in his life. Then, and only then to others. This is the pattern for all good ministers of the word. That's why Paul told Timothy in his first epistle, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching" (1 Timothy 4:16). His interaction with the word of truth was far more than a mere transmission of it on a Sunday morning.

5. Similarly... it's been noted that Federal agents don't learn to spot counterfeit money by studying the counterfeits. They study genuine bills until they master the look of the real thing. Then when they see the bogus money they recognize it.