

MBC – 1/17/2021 – Pastor Doug Thompson

2 TIMOTHY – THE LAST WORDS OF PAUL

“Not Ashamed of the Gospel”

1 Timothy 1:8-18

We’re looking at the last recorded words of Paul before he was executed by the emperor Nero. He’s writing to Timothy, his child in the faith to remain *faithful* to the Gospel. The times were hard and they were going to get harder. Timothy *must* guard the Gospel message that has been entrusted to him. And he must *not be ashamed of the Gospel*.

- 2 Timothy 1:8–18 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. ¹⁵You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, ¹⁷but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— ¹⁸may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

I. Don’t be ashamed of the Gospel.

- 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,

Therefore points us back to v.7, we *have* the Holy Spirit in us who gives us power, love, and self-control in place of our weakness, cold hearts, and lack of discipline – “*Therefore, Timothy – Don’t be ashamed of the Gospel.*”

Why in the world would Timothy be ashamed of the Gospel? Why might we

Well it’s not a sophisticated message by worldly standards, now is it? “Trust in a crucified carpenter and all your sins will be forgiven.” “Say what? You mean I’m a “sinner” and I need to be “saved?” And Jesus is the ‘only way?’ Are you kidding me?” You know people who would say that, right? There are many messages out there. Many causes and movements. To the world, the Christian Gospel preached in humble churches each Sunday, doesn’t exactly rate as a powerhouse.

Paul wrote this to the philosophy-loving Corinthians—

- 1 Corinthians 1:18 ¹⁸For the word of the cross is folly (lit. moronic) to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
- 1 Corinthians 1:21–24 ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom (human wisdom), it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who

believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 ¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

This is stunning. As deliberate as so many are to make the message of Christ “cool”—i.e., nothing to be ashamed of—God is even more deliberate that it remain *foolish*. If our evangelistic message and methods are applauded by the unsaved, then we aren’t doing it God’s way. His way is to deliberately pull the rug out from under human ingenuity and cleverness so that when salvation comes simply through believing this foolish message, the only explanation is—God.

- But it’s not just foolish to the lost, it is *offensive*: Jesus claims that, all other religions are false and idolatrous? That’s offensive. It’s intolerant.
- Jesus said that He came to bring a sword, that following Him would divide families, marriages? That you can’t be His follower unless you love Him above your earthly family, your country, your own life? That’s offensive.

Why would anyone hear a message like this and run to Jesus to love Him and follow Him? *It’s counterintuitive, and that’s the point*: people do—and the only explanation is supernatural: it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes—that’s why Paul wasn’t ashamed of the Gospel, and it’s why you and I should never be ashamed of this message.

- *But when Christians put *more* confidence in *anything* else to change people, or this world—that’s being ashamed of the Gospel. I.e., the Gospel has its place: in church, on Sundays—it’s okay in that little “religious” place in our lives, but when push comes to shove, the real power lies in politics, in a person, or some ideology, philosophy, or even some health fad—*that’s where we need to invest our energy and money—maybe even lay down our lives for that. If that’s what you feel—you’re ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*
- I remember when I was in Communist Romania, many years ago. I asked my translator why the Communists hated Christians so much. He said, “They claim that Communism can make the new man—but only Jesus can make a man new!”

It’s as simple as this: This world will only change as individuals change and the only thing that can radically change an individual is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the greatest force in this universe. So why would we devote ourselves to anything else?

The Gospel is nothing to be ashamed of! And Paul went on to say to Timothy—

- Nor of me, His prisoner.

This is Timothy’s mentor, his spiritual father. Arrested and thrown into a Roman dungeon—nothing to boast about. All of the press about Paul was bad: he was an enemy of the state; a leader of that sect of

crazy losers, the Christians, who were being blamed for the recent fire in Rome – that Nero himself set because he wanted to re-build a new city named Neropolis, after himself.

But notice that Paul says: he isn't Nero's prisoner, he is the Lord's prisoner! He's not in that dungeon by the order of the Emperor, but by the will of Jesus. "Don't be ashamed Timothy, *but rather*"—

II. Do be willing to suffer for the Gospel.

- "Even be willing to suffer together with me (that's what the word means), for the Gospel, by the power of God." I.e., God's power will always be greater than the suffering He calls us to.

When we get the Gospel right, and keep it foolish, it will offend, it will divide, it will even enrage people at times. I remember witnessing on a college campus down in L.A., and this guy got so mad, I really thought he was going to hit me. But God gave me great speed that day. . .

For years I've preached about suffering for Christ and it was someplace else – maybe one day, in the future. Not any more. It's here, amen? But don't fear it. See it as a badge of honor for bearing the name of Christ. Later in this letter Paul says—

- 2 Timothy 3:12 ¹²Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (You will be attacked, verbally, perhaps, physically.)
- Matthew 5:11–12 And our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount: ¹¹"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you *falsely* on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Don't be ashamed of the Gospel, but rather, be all the more willing to suffer to be identified with this soul-saving message—

- Luke 9:26 ²⁶For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

And then, Paul unpacks this great, glorious Gospel that Timothy is not to be ashamed of—

III. God's Gospel.

A. *The character of our salvation—*

- ⁹[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling,

Salvation is more than being forgiven of our sins. Salvation is all that God does to rescue, sanctify and ultimately glorify His people. First He rescues us from His own wrath. If someone asks you the question: "Saved from what?" The answer is: *God!*

- Nahum 1:6 ⁶Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.
- Revelation 6:17 ¹⁷for the great day of their (the Father's and the Lamb's) wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The story of the Bible is the story of God *rescuing* His people from His own judgment – through His own Son, Jesus – Jehovah saves.

Second, God saves us for a life of holiness. You know that the idea behind holiness is consecration, setting apart, separation. When God saved you, He separated you *from* sin, and *for* Himself. He marked you, “*Holy to the Lord,*” and then through the indwelling Holy Spirit, He is progressively transforming you to that holy calling.

He loves you too much to leave you in your sins! The cross removed the *penalty* of your sins, but it also broke the *power* of your sins. Now it’s your job to cooperate with the HS in killing off what remains of sin in you. Paul said it this way—

- Romans 8:13–14 ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God (in killing sin) are sons of God.

And one day God will complete this sanctifying work when we see Jesus and become like Him – without sin for the rest of eternity! The character of salvation is that it rescues people and it changes people. It makes them new!

B. The source of our salvation—

Where does this great salvation come from? V.9 “. . . not because of our works “

Don’t look for the source of your salvation in the mirror! Paul told Titus (3:3) “*He saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness,*” i.e., not even your very best, selfless, acts of kindness had *anything* to do with God saving you. He did not look at anything you would do – He only looked at what His Son would do.

Isn’t this another reason the Gospel is foolish to the world? Unbelievers would say that if there is a heaven, of course, it’s the good people who go there! Of course it’s the reward for human virtue. But if that’s true then there is no grace involved. Grace is a free gift – but if we deserve what we get – that’s not a gift, that’s a paycheck you’ve worked for. That’s Paul analogy in—

- Romans 4:4–5 ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work (for justification) but *believes* in him who justifies the *ungodly*, his faith is counted as righteousness,

What a powerful passage! If salvation is based on good works, then it’s fair – but it’s not grace. In salvation we get what is not fair: it’s not fair that we escape eternal punishment for our sins because Jesus, who had no sin, took the punishment we deserve. That’s not fair. It’s grace.

So if we want to trace this river of salvation back to its source, we have to go clear back before the beginning of time—

C. The ground of our salvation—

- . . . (it’s not due to 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,

The entire plan to save lost sinners came from God Himself, and flowed out of His own eternal purpose, meaning *His* will, and *His* grace. And it was planned “before time began.”—

- Ephesians 1:4–6 ⁴even as he chose (selected) us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.
- Ephesians 1:11 ¹¹In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

Before time began, God saw this mass of sinful mankind headed for judgment, and out of love and mercy He decided to save some of them – some who were just as sinful and undeserving as the rest. You say, “That’s not fair!” You’re right – fair would have been allowing all to perish.

- Ephesians 2:4–5 ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Beloved, salvation is all of grace and all of God, and if you are an unbeliever and this doesn’t sound fair, I say this: “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved!” And if you do, it will be “*because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.*”

And then, in the fullness of time – at just the right time, God brought Jesus into the world to redeem those God chose to save, by going to the cross to die for their sins—

- Timothy 1:10 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,

What did Jesus do when He appeared at His first coming?

1.) He “abolished death.”

“Death” summarizes what sin did to mankind. The wages of sin is – death. Scripture speaks of death in three ways—

- 1.) Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body,
- 2.) Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God, and
- 3.) The “second death” is eternal *spiritual* death. Separated from God, body/soul for eternity.

What does it mean that Jesus *abolished* death? It’s still here, isn’t it? We still die. The word for *abolished* means to *nullify*, to make *powerless* – not to make disappear. Heb.2:14 it says that Jesus came to *destroy* the devil – he’s still here, he still prowls around like a roaring lion, but he is defanged and declawed. He is a defeated foe.

Death is still very much here, but death was defeated by Jesus’ death on the cross. Think about what death now means for the Christian—

- Physical death is called *“falling asleep,”* Paul said, for me, *“to die is gain,”* because *“to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”* Our soul is separated from our body – but that’s just temporary – at the resurrection, they will be re-joined. Spiritual death is replaced by eternal life, and we don’t experience *any* separation from God when we die. Jesus said in Jn.11.26: *“everyone who lives and believes in Me, shall never die!”* What? He meant that as our body is separated from our soul, our souls are not separated from God for even a second – we have already passed out of death, into life!

“O grave, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” I can’t tell you how many times Christians tell me they long to be out this body, and with the Lord, especially those who are suffering. That’s insanity to the world. But it’s the hope of the Gospel for us. And this is because Jesus—

2. He “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”

What was always in the shadows in the OT, has finally been revealed: Real life, eternal life, abundant life are found in Jesus Christ. We can walk with God again, just like Adam did in the Garden. And nothing will ever, ever separate us—

Beloved, what we offer people in the Gospel is *Life!* Life the way God meant it to be! This world is full of the dead and dying – Christ offers life for everyone who believes in Him. What Good News we have!

IV. Our duty in relation to God’s Gospel.

So Paul says to Timothy, “Timothy, the Gospel explains my life and my life calling—

- 2 Timothy 1:11–12 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.

A. Communicate it.

- ¹¹for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher,

He uses the very same words in 1Tim.2.7 – a preacher, and an apostle and a teacher. As an Apostle, he received the Gospel through direct revelation from Jesus. As a preacher, he proclaimed it, and as a teacher, he explained it.

There are no Apostles today, and not every Christian is called and gifted to be a preacher or a teacher, but communicating the Gospel is the overarching purpose for everything the church does until Jesus comes back. Jesus said if *“I be lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself”* – we do that when the Gospel goes out. So whatever we do, it *must* help to fulfill that Gospel purpose—

- Someone told me this week, they want to set up a table in front of their house and give out free Bibles! We have Bibles and tracts available for you folks to give to your friends. We support all those missionaries on the back wall with our money, but also, encouragement – that’s the direct route to communicate the Gospel.

But *indirectly*, when you send an encouraging note to another believer, when you pray, when you meet a need in the body, help out with MCS, all of those strengthen the body to be ready to share the Gospel.

*Give this thought: how can you communicate the Gospel? You say, "I'm not a good communicator!" Okay, then how can you pass along the Gospel message from someone who is?

B. Suffer for it.

- 2 Timothy 1:12 ¹²which is why I suffer as I do.

Faithful Gospel ministry will always be bittersweet. Some will believe, but others will turn on you. The Gospel is a stumbling block to man's pride! And a stumbling block to his sin! So those who think they're bad don't like it, and those who think they're good don't like it – and you will get the heat for it. You might even get thrown in jail for it like Paul.

And the Gospel brings suffering in the sacrifices we make to get it out: financial sacrifices, sacrificing our time, getting out of our own comfort zone. I'm not saying it's not worth it! But Jesus was clear that most of the payback for the sacrifices we make for the Gospel, won't be in this life – it will be in the next life. So communicate it, be willing to suffer for it, and—

C. Guard it.

Skip the rest of v.12 – we will come back to it. Look at—

- 2 Timothy 1:13 ¹³Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

The word for pattern means the standard or system of doctrinally sound words that Paul preached. He is saying, "Timothy, don't wander off into some different message – stay with the Word of God which produces godliness."

- Don't fall into fads, don't drift off. Don't pick and choose, don't go topical: preach and teach it the way God gave it to us: book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. If you do that, you avoid being sidetracked by every current event, and the flip side is that you will cover all that God wants His people to hear in His Word.

And notice that how Timothy does this is so important: "*in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*" He can't just crank this out in his flesh: he needs to be a sincere, godly, loving shepherd.

And I said last week that v.14 is the theme of this entire letter from Paul to Timothy—

- 2 Timothy 1:14 ¹⁴By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard – watch – protect – the good deposit entrusted to you.

The Gospel message is a precious stewardship entrusted to Timothy by God. He will give account to God for how he handles it. It's like the parable of the talents, right? Timothy can't sit on this message, he must get it out. But he must also *guard* it. What did Paul mean?

Timothy needed to guard the Gospel from corruption and distortion. The Gospel is always, always under assault by false teachers and those who would water it down. We have to hold the line and expose false teaching and false teachers.

But there is another way that Timothy must guard the Gospel, and that is by his own life and purity. How often is the Gospel mocked and dismissed because of the hypocrisy of its messengers? Some high-profile preacher's immorality is exposed and people mock the message he preached. I think of that awful passage in—

- Romans 2:24 Paul says to the Jews: ²⁴For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Every one of us needs to hear this: people will judge your gospel, and your God by your behavior and by your character - wow. We guard the Gospel by guarding our own lives, because people don't separate the two. That's why Paul said in—

- 1 Timothy 4:16 ¹⁶Keep a close watch on *yourself* and on the teaching.
- Just a few days ago I read the story of John Kennedy, while he was President, and married – he had one of his many mistresses over, and she brought some joints with her. He smoked three, but when she offered him a 4th he said, “No I'd better not – what if the Russians tried something right now?”

Yeah, what if? The enemy is always watching for an opportunity to take you down, and the Gospel along with you – so be on guard. Don't jeopardize this precious message by letting your guard down.

Then Paul closes by getting very personal about people. He's saying “Timothy be careful who you partner with in ministry. And have a thick skin, because some will be ashamed of the Gospel—

- 2 Timothy 1:15 ¹⁵You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

We read back in—

- Acts 19:10 . . . all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

But after Paul's second imprisonment, he says “*All in Asia turned away from me.*” I.e., Many who had professed Christ, were now ashamed of Paul, and ashamed of the Gospel – can you imagine how that hurt Paul? I know how it hurts me when I hear that someone I thought was a brother or sister in Christ has fallen away. It hurts to the bone. Timothy needs to take off his rose-colored glasses and be a realist about people, or he will end up being really hurt.

- We don't know anything else about Phygelus and Hermogenes. Except that they were ashamed of the Gospel, and the HS decided to record it in the Scriptures!

But some were not ashamed of the Gospel, and that kept Paul going—

- 2 Timothy 1:16–18 ¹⁶May the Lord grant mercy to the *household* of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, (he did this during Paul's first house arrest) ¹⁷but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—

When Paul was imprisoned the second time, Onesiphorus literally looked all over Rome before he found him in his underground dungeon – that's a faithful friend. But it's interesting that Paul says in v.16, “the

household of Onesiphorus,” and at the end of his letter in 4:19, “Greet the *household* of Onesiphorus,” I think that sometime after he found Paul, he went to be with the Lord—

- ¹⁸may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

Paul was saying, “Timothy, take heart, not all will be ashamed of the Gospel, many will finish the course – be encouraged by men like Onesiphorus.” But now, let’s go back to the rest of what Paul said in—

- 2 Timothy 1:12 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.

After all is said and done, with all the suffering he has endured, all the attacks, all the desertions and defections – why is Paul not ashamed of the Gospel? Because God Himself will guard what He has entrusted to Paul, and Timothy, and us – *the Gospel* – until He brings us all home.

When you look around and think, this world can’t go on the way it’s going! People have never been so rebellious and godless, and the church has never been so compromised and weak – all that might be true, but God will not let the light of the Gospel be extinguished until it has brought in the last of His elect! Beloved, you are on the winning side. Don’t lose heart. Re-commit yourself to the Gospel: Be ready to communicate it, suffer for it, and above all, guard it, with all you’ve got – until that day.

* * *

I’ve shared about our old friends, Lloyd and Ronna Johnson – I married them over 40 years ago. Ronna came from a Jewish family and her parents wouldn’t go inside the church for her wedding because she was marrying a Gentile Christian. It was a big wedding, and Ronna walked down the aisle by herself. When I asked, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” She said, “My heavenly Father does!” She wasn’t ashamed of the Gospel.

Lloyd was the president of his class at TMS, and took a pastorate in St. Paul, Minnesota and has been at his church for 30 years. A couple years ago he got cancer. He fought it off, but it came back. He fought it off again, and it came back for a third time. He’s had surgeries, and gone through radiation and chemo several times. He’s been in excruciating pain, but through it all, he’s been in his pulpit on as many Sundays as humanly possible. In just the last few months God answered his prayers and he was able to perform the weddings for two of their kids.

Ronna called this week and said that Lloyd’s last scan showed extensive inoperable cancer in his lungs. They had already decided, no more chemo – no more fighting this thing. But when Lloyd got this latest news, he said, “I’ll one more round, just to have a little more time to preach Christ and to train up men to take my place!”

On Thursday, I texted to Lloyd—

- 2 Timothy 1:11–12 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.