

In a recent meeting, one of our pastors shared the story of Matt Emmons, an Olympic athlete who competes in the three position shooting event. The Olympics has been the setting for so many inspiring stories over the years. We have seen the thrill of victory but we have also witnessed the agony of defeat. One of the most heartbreaking moments of the 2004 Athens Olympics happened away from the cameras in a sport that few people watch. Emmons was practically assured of winning the gold medal. He was ahead of all competitors and just needed to hit the target somewhere near the bullseye. He took aim and fired. Bullseye! But he not only lost the gold, he didn't even medal. He shot the wrong target.

We have been listening in on the instructions from a wise messenger of the gospel to a younger man who is unsure of his target. Timothy was Jewish. He grew up with a devout Jewish mother and grandmother. He had been taught the scriptures since his childhood. And now his task is to communicate the gospel to people with a radically different background. Our task isn't much different. The cultural landscape has changed here in Dallas over the past 50 years. In the 1960's and 70's the church had a pretty good reputation and most people had some exposure to organized religion. In fact...see chart on Nones.

The "Nones" are spiritual but not religious. They are not atheists. They are represented by people like Marcus Mumford of Mumford and Sons. Marcus Mumford is the son of church leaders in the Vineyard Church movement. His songs are full of religious themes but he declines the Christian label. "I don't really like that word. It comes with so much baggage." Ditching content, ditching the church, ditching religion, but not ditching God. "Nones" are not "seekers." They are not even looking for a religion. It's like being a coffee lover but driving right past Starbucks after Starbucks because you don't really believe you can get coffee there. These are not atheists they are "apatheists." Old methods are inadequate. You can ask, "If you were to die tonight..." Who cares? You can ask, "How did we get here? What went wrong?" Who cares? Furthermore, their narrative paints the picture that the church is overly entangled in politics, judgmental and greedy.

In my lifetime, I have seen this country move from an Acts 2 context to an Acts 17 context. In Acts 2, Peter stands before God-fearing Jews and says, "You remember what Joel said. And you know what David said in the Psalms. What you need to know is that Jesus was that Messiah but you killed Him so now repent!" 3,000 responded. Paul took a much different approach before the philosophers of Athens. Truth is relative. Worldviews and gods littered the landscape. They didn't know Moses from Mumford and Sons. They were a pluralistic culture that believed the only thing you can know for sure is that you can't know anything for sure. So Paul starts at creation and talks about the divine nature. He refers their temple for the "unknown god." Then he says God has a name and He paid a visit to earth and was resurrected from the dead. 3,000 did not respond favorably. They sneered. But some said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." (Acts 17:32). We can't expect Pentecost numbers in an Athenian culture.

So how can we take this ancient message and impact a modern culture? The answer is, "by being fixed and flexible." A faithful ambassador for Christ has a fixed message and a flexible methodology. Our message is fixed. Our methods are flexible. Let's start with the three- word message of v. 8, "Remember Jesus Christ." 2 Tim. 2:8-13. What is it that Timothy is supposed to remember about Jesus?

Remember who Jesus is. Understand **the nature** of Jesus Christ...v. 8. He is fully God and fully man. That is why the Bible refers to Jesus as the "only-begotten from the Father." The emphasis is not that Jesus was an only child. Jesus was a "one of a kind" child. There never has been and never will be anyone like Jesus. He was fully God and fully man.

As God, He has the power to save us. The resurrection proves it. He triumphed over death. When Jesus rose from the dead He put an exclamation point on His claim, "I am the resurrection and the life." He holds the keys to life and death. He came from Heaven in the flesh, conquered death and then returned to Heaven as the divine Son of God. The resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith.

But Paul says Jesus was also a "descendant of David." In other words, He was not only fully God but He was fully man. As a man, He can be our representative, our substitute.

Remember what Jesus did. Proclaim **the message** of Jesus Christ...v. 9. Paul reminds Timothy that no matter the circumstances, the message will never be snuffed out. From the very beginning of Christianity there have been those who would try and stomp out the gospel, but no one has ever been able to do it. Governments can't do it - The Romans tried and it overtook their country. The Soviets tried and their government fell. The Chinese have tried and it won't be long before they wake up and find more Christians than communists in their country. History proves that governments cannot bind the gospel. The philosophies of men cannot bind the gospel. False religions cannot bind the gospel. Even today, in places where it is illegal to be a Christian the Gospel is spreading like wildfire. People are coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior around the world. Why? Because you cannot bind the gospel. It cannot be stopped.

Jesus spread the message about the Kingdom everywhere He went. When His disciples wanted Him to stay in Capernaum he said, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." (Mk. 1:38) Jesus believed Isaiah's testimony,

"The rain and snow come down from the heavens
and stay on the ground to water the earth.
They cause the grain to grow,
producing seed for the farmer
and bread for the hungry.
11 It is the same with my word.
I send it out, and it always produces fruit.
It will accomplish all I want it to,
and it will prosper everywhere I send it." Is. 55:10-11 (NLT)

Remember how Jesus did it. Accept **the method** of Jesus Christ...vv. 10-13. Jesus suffered and died. He gave up His life so that you and I could live. Now, Paul says, "It is a trustworthy statement..." (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Titus 3:8). Two positive couplets and two negative:

"If we died with Him..." We have to die in order to experience life. Jesus taught us that death precedes life. We will accomplish nothing with our life if we are not willing to die to self.
"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone;

but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal." John 12:24-25. "If we endure we will reign..." We have to endure suffering in order to be glorified. There is no crown without a cross. "If we deny Him, He will deny us." "If we are unfaithful, He will remain faithful." Aren't you grateful that Jesus is the God of the second chance. So remember Jesus Christ.

What are you willing to die to in order to save lives? How flexible are you? How flexible can we be in our methodology before we compromise the message? Jesus showed us how to be fixed and flexible. He never wavered on the truth but He presented it in different ways depending on His audience. He was kind and gentle with those who were clueless about life but He reserved His harshest words for the religious leaders who knew the scriptures. He was faithfully proclaiming the good news of the gospel in a way that was suitable to conditions.

In 1845 Royal Navy Rear Admiral Sir John Franklin and 128 specially chosen officers and men left England to find the Northwest Passage. They sailed off in two sailing ships each one equipped with an auxiliary steam engine and a twelve-day supply of coal in the event that steam power was needed. Twelve days of coal for a two to three-year voyage. They would have had room for more coal if not for the 1,200 volume library, an organ, and full, elegant place settings for all - china, cut-glass goblets, and sterling flatware. The officers' family crests and initials were engraved on the heavy handles. "The technology of the Franklin expedition," says Annie Dillard, "was adapted only to the conditions in the Royal Navy officer's clubs in England. The Franklin expedition stood on its dignity." The only clothing which these proud Englishmen took on the expedition were the uniforms and greatcoats of Her Majesty's Navy. The ships sailed off amidst Imperial pomp and glory.

For the next twenty years search parties recovered skeletons from the frozen waste above the Arctic Circle. When the bodies of the crew were found, the men were still dressed in their fine, buttoned blue uniforms, some with silk scarves in place. The plans of Sir John Franklin "were not suitable to conditions" nor to his calling.

The Franklin Expedition serves as a warning to all who want to serve Christ. The cross and the crown are inextricably linked. I wish it were not so. I wish I could successfully impact future generations while holding on to the past but it doesn't work that way. Sir John Franklin set out to explore a new world but would not let go of the trappings of the old one. These explorers wanted to accomplish great things but they also wanted to be quite comfortable in the process. Their commitment to their cultural trappings not only cost them their mission but also their lives. Conditions called for a different approach. Let's commit ourselves to make any change necessary to communicate God's unchanging truth to a constantly changing culture. People are heading for the exits of churches where Christians hang on desperately to forms and traditions that have outlived their usefulness. So let's talk about these things in our groups. Let's pursue a course that is "suitable to conditions." And let's never forget that the power of the message of Jesus Christ.

When you are rejected...
When you feel like a failure...
When you suffer for righteousness' sake...

Reminded
Remember Jesus Christ

2 Timothy 2:8-13

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When you are lonely...
When you don't have a place to lay your head...
When you have nothing of this world's goods...
When you are misunderstood...
When you are despised...

Remember Jesus Christ.