

The Suffering of the Unashamed. 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Called to be unashamed – when so many are

I hope you can feel for Timothy.

Closely identified with Paul

Yet left to minister in Asia where he is all too aware that Paul is deeply unpopular, and his message that the crucified Jesus is Lord and style of ministry an embarrassment to many who identify as believers, reckoned controversial, disapproved

2 Tim. 1: ¹⁵ You know that all those in the province of Asia have deserted me,

Timothy knows

And perhaps you know the unpopularity of that gospel with your peers or your family, the suspicion of some that the Christian faith is not good for people, the embarrassment even of some who call themselves Christians with a message of repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord

But at the same time as Timothy is experiencing that unpopularity, he is being called to be different, to double down, as it were, on his commitment to Paul's gospel and to Paul – a man in prison, in chains, and facing death for that same gospel,

Called to be Unashamed of the Christian message about Jesus and to have a ministry like Paul's

*2 Timothy 1: ⁸ So **don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner.** Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God.*

*2 Tim. 1: ¹³ **Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.** ¹⁴ **Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.***

What will responding to that call, being committed to a ministry that is unashamed of the message that Jesus is Lord, look like for Timothy?

And what does it look like for us in our day to be unashamed of the gospel in the face of defection from gospel truth by some calling themselves Christians and in the midst of a wider suspicion of the goodness of the Christian gospel, Of trusting and following Jesus?

Paul tells us in our reading that to be unashamed of the gospel will mean three things

A reliance on grace

A focus on the gospel's trustworthy transmission

And sharing in suffering

2 Tim. 1: ¹⁵ You know that all those in the province of Asia have deserted me,

*2: ¹ You, therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.***

The source of an unashamed ministry – reliance on grace v. 1 [2 Corinthians 12:9-10]

To live unashamed of the gospel where many are ashamed

To have a ministry faithful to the gospel when others are departing from it by subtraction or addition

Needs strength

Strength to resist persuasive error and those who teach it

Strength to persevere when so many are abandoning the truth, to not be carried along with their defection

Strength to endure suspicion and misrepresentation

Strength to keep on confessing Christ if, like Paul, your ministry is subject to the punishment of the state

Strength to live with integrity as Jesus' follower

Strength, moral and spiritual, will be needed

But where can that strength be found?

In our Upbringing – family tradition, pride

Our confessional heritage

Our Training –

None of those

Paul points Timothy to the source of the strength believers need

It is Grace, the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus

This is not a special kind of grace

It is the grace every believer receives, the grace given us in Christ Jesus before time began

1:9 He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

Timothy's strength, our strength, is to be found in grace, in God's free, sovereign, generous kindness and favour towards us which we have come to know and receive through trusting the Lord Jesus, the grace that forgives and perseveres with us

This grace we have in Christ is not on again, off again

Romans 5: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Paul says, in Romans 5, that justified by faith in Jesus the atoning sacrifice for our sin we have peace with God and through faith 'have obtained access into this grace in which we stand'

We stand in grace, we live in grace, always located in God's sight amongst those He views with favour, those He has committed Himself to in steadfast love.

In Christ believers are always treated with grace

This grace is the source of the strength we need to live and minister unashamed of the gospel

And we most know its strength when we are most aware of our weaknesses

Paul, finding himself criticised for his seeming lack of style and success, and hampered by the affliction he called his thorn in the flesh, which must have been such a distraction and drain in his energy, his ability, wrote

in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, "I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weaknesses." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for when I am weak then I am strong."

My grace is sufficient for you – for my power is made perfect in weakness

To know that all the strength we need is found in grace

That the more we feel our need the more help is there

Is such a comfort

In committing ourselves to be unashamed of the gospel We don't have to pretend we are stronger than we are, or braver, or more insightful

And we don't have to minimise the challenge

For our hope of persevering faithfully is not in ourselves

We turn out to our Saviour and His grace, not in to our own resources

And that grace, the source of strength, is not far away, not difficult to obtain, not rationed, or only ours when we have tried our hardest

Grace is freely given, it is generous and inexhaustible

And in need we are encouraged to confidently seek more grace from the God whose throne, whose rule is characterised by grace, by His steadfast love.

Heb. 4: ¹⁶ Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

We bring our need, not our deserving, for Grace is gracious – it is kind and forgiving,

And grace is not some impersonal reservoir that we turn on and off as required, where it all depends on us,

Grace is God's active kindness that goes before us – from before time began, not just after our requests

And His grace is not just strength for a task, but love for a person

We receive in grace Care and kindness, the restoring and strengthening of our hearts in knowledge of God's love.

On whom are you relying for the strength to persevere in being faithful to, unashamed of, the Lord Jesus and His life giving message?

Yourself, or His kindness? On whom are you relying?

How we begin in the Christian life – saved by grace, is how we continue, strengthened by grace

So when you are facing opposition that threatens to overwhelm, or defections that shake your confidence

Or you feel discouraged by a lack of interest or response to the gospel you share

Or tempted to become angry and bitter with those who oppose you, or give way to self pity at how hard you are finding faithfulness

Call out to the Lord for grace, for forgiveness and strength to persevere

be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And ² What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

The Focus of an unashamed ministry – passing on the gospel v. 2

In this grace there is strength to persevere in a focused way on what is important, passing on to others the gospel.

What you heard from me. Paul is again reminding us that the gospel is a given, the message about Jesus entrusted by the Lord Jesus to his apostles.

The summary of that message is that He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again,

But what Timothy has heard from Paul is more than that summary. It includes all that Paul has taught in person or by letter – taught about righteousness by faith, about Jesus’ pre-existence [Phil. 1], about His reign, about the life of the age to come, about what it means to follow Jesus in a pagan world. It includes the gospels and all that Jesus has taught

The gospel is a message with a given content, the faith delivered once and for all to the saints

And it is a final and sufficient word for you can’t know more of God than you can in knowing Jesus and it brings what we need, life and immortality through repentance and faith in Jesus. You cannot be more saved than you are in believing the gospel’

And Paul reminds Timothy this apostolic witness is a public message, given in the presence of many witnesses.

A public message for all

It is not secret, esoteric – just for the inner circle – like the teaching of the false teachers

Not myths and secret codes as writers like Dan Brown suggest

It is light and it loves the light, Always a public message

This gospel received from the apostles is to be preserved and passed on. As it is for all, it must go to all, in all places and in all times and the means God has chosen to bring the message to all people is by one generation of believers passing the gospel on to the next generation of faithful believers

What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses,

commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Do you have a role in passing on the gospel you have received to others?

Or is it just ministers and elders, or theological colleges and on line courses?

Who are these faithful others?

The text says men, but women are not excluded

In Timothy’s case, considering the instruction Paul has already given about elders in the Ephesian church in 1 Timothy, and the need for this gospel to be taught publicly and with authority in the churches of Asia, Timothy is looking for faithful men.

Right translation, but restricting this to men would not be the right application

The principle for the transmission of the gospel here applies to both women and men – the gospel is to be entrusted to faithful people who can teach others.

Note those two characteristics

faithfulness, and an ability to teach.

Faithful has the sense of both believing and trustworthy.

These are people who are committed to the gospel’s truth, who believing it know for themselves its power to save,

And, able to teach, they are committed to passing it on accurately, without addition or subtraction, to being good stewards of the gospel and who know that the one thing required of a steward is faithfulness

This teaching is not less than the transmission of the content of the gospel. It must involve that, but it involves more than that.

Faithful transmission involves application and modelling, for it involves teaching to do all that the Lord Jesus has commanded [cf. 1 Cor. 4:16, 1 Tim. 4:12, 1 Cor. 4:16]

And like Paul's teaching this teaching can go on in many contexts– in the synagogue, in a rented hall, from house to house, even in prison, in person or by writing

We should all want to be known as faithful – every one of us should be believing and trustworthy, keen to be accurate in our transmission of the gospel, in relaying the message of Jesus

And all of us can find ourselves in contexts where we teach

Whether it is to our own Children around the dining room table

Sunday School, or Conversations where we teach and admonish one another [Col. 3:16]

Everyone of us should be seeking to be a faithful receiver and a faithful transmitter of the gospel, for this saving message brings life and immortality

And it is by teaching that disciples of Jesus are made

All of us have a role, but I want you to consider this morning whether you can have a bigger role in the transmission of the saving gospel.

In being growth group leaders, and men, in being elders, even offering yourself for training for the ministry.

I ask this because, like Timothy who was about to go to Rome and so had an urgent need to make provision for the continuation of the teaching of the apostolic gospel in Asia, our need for those who will devote themselves to the task of faithfully transmitting and teaching the gospel is pressing.

Growth groups are vital to our discipleship, to learning together to live and persevere as fruitful followers of Jesus, to our caring for one another.

But many of our growth groups are large, which can contribute to less regular attendance, which in turn can exhaust our leaders as they seek to follow up their members

And we are praying that the Lord would save many, and He is saving, bringing people to us He has called to Himself who will need the encouragement of brothers and sisters whom they can get to know and from whom they can learn to do all Jesus has taught,

We need growth group leaders, people who will love their brothers and sisters by faithfully transmitting the gospel, and modelling, maybe for younger people in the 5 o'clock congregation, the Christian life

And, praise the Lord, Helen is more than able to train you to lead a growth group

And we will need elders and ministers – both to sustain our present congregations and any new ones

Can you have a bigger role in this transmission of the saving gospel?

I know some of you know you are not gifted in teaching – you've worked that out, and you are serving with the gifts you have to the benefit of us all

But I also know that some of you have felt pressured in the past to be involved in leading, even back in university, and not feeling ready or able resented that, and may have concluded that if it was not right for you then, it will be not right forever – and so you haven't seriously considered it since.

And I know some of you have tried, but it became too difficult in your then life circumstances, but now you are moving into a different stage of life

And I know some of you have led in the past, but took a break and never came back

We don't want conscripts, but we are praying for volunteers

So think and pray about whether you can serve in this way, and if you are married think and pray with your husband or wife about serving, individually or together, in this way, for those unashamed of the gospel are committed to its transmission

And I ask knowing that making a commitment to serve your brothers and sisters in this way, by accepting responsibility to teach the gospel, to model and explain what it is to live by Jesus' teaching, may bring added difficulty to your life, require some costly decisions

For there is a cost in being faithful in passing on the message entrusted to the apostles, as Paul reminds Timothy

2 Timothy 3: ³Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer.

The Cost of an unashamed ministry - suffering vv. 3-6 [1:8]

Paul again calls Timothy to share in suffering for the sake of the gospel

And Paul introduces a picture that communicates the necessity and inevitability of suffering for those committed to transmitting the gospel.

Share in suffering as a good, a praiseworthy, soldier of Christ Jesus

What was involved in being a soldier in the Roman army?

The life of a soldier in the Roman legions had many hardships

you joined up for 25 years, and the Emperor Augustus had forbidden legionaries to marry during their service

You were often moved, unable to settle anywhere,

You lived under orders, Harsh discipline, hard training

Sometimes the living conditions were poor, out in the open or in isolated forts

With the ever present possibility of conflict, wounding or death

And in between, boredom

All of which a good soldier endured to share in his general's victory

Being a good soldier of Christ in sharing the gospel of Christ will mean hardship

And Paul uses three pictures to focus the suffering, the cost, involved, pictures that Timothy and we will have to think over to know how they apply to each of us individually

Three pictures of the suffering to be embraced

⁴No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer, or more literally, the one who enlisted him

The single-minded soldier

The first carries on the image of the soldier to emphasise that the unashamed gospel minister must be single-minded, seeking to please the Lord Jesus who has called the believer into service in everything.

That means he or she 'doesn't get entangled in the concerns of civilian life'

Entangled is getting caught up in something so that your movements are slowed or prevented entirely because you are held fast, stuck

A sheep caught in thorns, unable to move, was said to be entangled

What can entangle Christ's soldier?

There has been a lot of discussion about whether Paul was thinking about something specific when he spoke of the affairs of everyday life, like marriage or work.

Now marriage does compete for our attention, divide our interests as Paul observed in 1 Cor. 7 [1 Cor. 7:32-34].

But we know Paul expected elders to be married [1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6], encouraged younger widows to be married [1 Tim. 5:14], and observed without criticism that some of the apostles were accompanied in their work by believing wives [1 Cor. 9:5]

So the entangling affairs of everyday life is not marriage in itself. He is not commanding celibacy.

And while work does take time and attention we also know that Paul commanded the Thessalonians to work [2 Thess. 3] and himself worked with his hands [1 Cor. 9:6] to support himself in ministry, so Paul is unlikely to be talking about work in itself.

The emphasis is not so much on a specific activity of everyday life, but on the attitude to that activity.

Everyday life becomes an entanglement when it distracts us from pleasing our Lord, when we allow it to compete with our loyalty to Him, with taking direction from him.

So, for example, Christians can play sport – and some even do to share the gospel – but when sport starts to compete with Christ as the source of our identity, has the priority in how we spend our time, leads us away from Christian service, that is an entanglement

And Christians should work hard, as to the Lord – but when thinking about how we can pursue our career drives thoughts of how we can honour Jesus in our work from our minds, or when our work stops us from doing what the Lord commands like loving our family and or meeting with his people, we are entangled

Academic pursuits, retirement plans or home renovation. We can allow all those to become entanglements.

And yes, it can even be true of our marriages where pleasing our spouse has priority over pleasing the Lord

But like a good soldier we are to live to please Jesus, to devote ourselves to the gospel He has entrusted to us.

And that may well mean saying no to a whole range of opportunities.

When I was much younger I loved bushwalking and had a group of colleagues who would try and be walking or climbing every weekend.

But you can't be away every weekend camping in the bush and be teaching Sunday School, or leading youth group, or encouraging your brothers and sisters in church.

So bushwalking had to go

What threatens to entangle you?

Are you single minded in seeking to please the Lord who by His gracious call has enlisted you into his service?

A way to answer that is to think about how you decide how to spend your time.

Do you do things because you know they please Jesus, or do you do what pleases you and Jesus doesn't seem to forbid?

Have you even asked the question about whether your work, or your boyfriend or girlfriend, or your career goal, pleases Jesus?

Being a good soldier of Jesus means embracing the suffering of the single minded who will set aside all else, in Paul's case even life itself, to please Jesus.

But Paul now introduces a new image to illustrate the cost of being unashamed in gospel ministry – that of the athlete.

2 Timothy 2:⁵ *Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

The disciplined athlete

The society Paul lived in was keen on athletic competition. They had the Olympic games, the Isthmian games, and two pan-Hellenic games that all the Greek world could compete in. Athletics was big,

and everyone knew that there were rules that governed participation in athletic competition, just as today. An ancient commentator wrote of the Olympic games that

“... It is custom for athletes, their fathers and their brothers as well their trainers to swear an oath upon slices of boar’s flesh that in nothing will they sin against the Olympic Games. The athletes take this further oath also, that for ten successive months they have strictly followed the regulations for training. (Pausanias 5.24.9ff

If competitors were found breaking the rules – whether in preparation or in competition - they could be fined, excluded from the games or flogged, just as modern competitors guilty of doping can be excluded or stripped of their awards.

So when Paul said ⁵ *Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

They all agreed.

And the point? In the competition Christ calls us to, the unashamed ministry of the gospel, you can’t compete on your own terms, by your own rules. The cost of being unashamed of the gospel is a commitment to a disciplined life lived according to Jesus’ rules, living by Christ’s word in all things, of being dedicated and determined to do what He says.

And what He commands above all, is loving one another as HE has loved us, and if you have authority, using it in loving service, following the example of our Lord Jesus [Mark 10:42-45, John 13:1-17]

There are no short cuts to the prize.

And to the military and athletic images Paul adds a third, that of the farmer

The diligent farmer

⁶ *The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops.*

The cost of being unashamed of the gospel, the suffering of guarding the good deposit, is being diligent, committed to hard work and knowing the weariness of strenuous toil

There were no airconditioned tractor cabs for ancient farmers. It was all done by hand – from sowing to reaping, from planting to picking. And it had to be continued in all weathers, in all seasons. Farmwork is continuous and as one commentator has said it is ‘totally devoid of excitement, remote from all the glamour of peril and applause.’

And farmwork is work with what you might call delayed gratification. There are months between sowing and harvesting. You don’t see return straightaway.

But farmers keep going – watering, fertilizing, weeding, and planting some more.

Whatever it might look like for us, whatever responsibility we are entrusted with by our Lord for sharing and teaching the gospel, we should work hard at it for the gospel is the word of life.

John Chapman was a famous evangelist in Sydney. He told us that when he had just started teaching he wanted to find ways of having fruitful conversations with his colleagues that would allow him to talk about Jesus. He decided he would prepare himself by getting to the common room early, scan the paper, look for two or three interesting stories that he thought could lead to conversations about the gospel. And that is what he did – consistently. He had the desire to share the gospel, and he equipped himself to share the gospel by working at it. [Know and Tell the Gospel]

We have to know how to rest, we mustn't burden ourselves with the crushing thought that it all depends on us, but we should work hard in the ministry of the gospel and be willing to pay the cost of weariness – and it is wearying to stick at teaching in private and in public, day after day, year after year.

But it is the single minded, the disciplined, the hard working who gain the rewards Paul speaks of here.

Did you see them?

The reward of the focused, single minded soldier is pleasing the one who enlisted him.

The reward of the disciplined, dedicated athlete is the winner's crown

The reward of the hard working farmer is to have a certain share, the first share, in the fruit of his labours.

These may just be features of the pictures Paul uses but they bring to mind what is said elsewhere in Scripture of the diligent servant and the victorious athlete.

In the parable of the talents our Lord welcomes those who use well what has been entrusted to them with the words

Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master. Won't that be worth hearing.

And at the end of a life that has run the race and kept the faith Paul can say

2 timothy 4:⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.

That victors crown, which is being declared righteous in the judgement at the last day, of enjoying peace with God forever, is for all who persevere devoted to Jesus

There is a cost in teaching and sharing the gospel

It is a call to suffering

The suffering of the good soldier

Who says no to being wholly absorbed in ordinary life so that he can single mindedly serve His Lord

The suffering of the athlete who lives a disciplined life of determined devotion to the rules of competition

The suffering of the hardworking farmer, the weariness of the one who perseveres in all weathers and seasons in cultivating the gospel seed, in nurturing believers growth

But what responding to that call for suffering will look like in Timothy's life

What responding to that call for singlemindedness, discipline and diligence, will look like in your life

Will take thought.

2 Timothy 2:⁷ Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Engaging with application v. 7

God says the application of this part of His word to your life will require thinking about it.

To benefit you have to Reflect on what God's word is saying, and reflect on your life

To ask, for example, where am I being entangled?

Where am I not living up to what Jesus calls for from His followers?

Where am I slacking off in pursuing and using opportunities to share and teach the gospel?

Perhaps, even asking the foundational questions - am I convinced and grateful that the gospel Paul preaches has in the grace of our Lord brought life and immortality to me,

Am I Convinced I know the living God in the gospel of His Son and I can entrust my life to Him?

God calls us to think about what we hear

That is good for us – it is the way we mature, have a discipleship of our own, where we do what we do not because someone else has told us we should do it

But because we are convicted from His word that the Lord Jesus wants us to do it

Volunteers, not conscripts

You need that conviction to be a good soldier of Christ, because you won't suffer for someone else's good idea about how you should live your life, but you will for the Lord who has given you life and will raise you from the dead.

But thinking over what God says to us in His word takes time

So will you make time today, or this week, to go over the passage and ask yourself if you are the good soldier, the disciplined athlete, the hardworking farmer?

You should because Paul is confident that God will bless that thinking

*2 Timothy 2:7 Consider what I say, **for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.***

That is a promise to Timothy, and to us

Everything is all the things Paul has been talking about here, what Timothy and we need to know to live as a good soldier of Jesus, not a promise that Timothy or you will miraculously understand brain surgery or the workings of AI

But Paul is confident of the work of God's Spirit in Timothy's life

That through the Spirit Timothy will be led to understand and apply the truth of what Paul has just written

And we have the same Spirit, and the same patient Lord who wants us to grow in our service of Him

So think over what I say.

Today or tonight, open the word, and pray about what you read there, what you have heard.

Pray about your role in being those who, having received the gospel transmit it, teach it, to others, teach it, about whether the Lord wants you to have a bigger role in that – for we have need, and then come and talk, especially with Helen about growth groups

Will you, relying on the grace of our Lord to strengthen us, be that good soldier of Christ

Who is willing to pay the cost, to endure hardship, to faithfully pass the gospel on

The cost of being single minded in living to please Jesus

Of living a disciplined and determined life as a follower of Jesus until the end of our race

Of working hard in Jesus' service in sharing and teaching the gospel as you have opportunity

Think over what Paul has written, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.