



## Sermon

### ***Be Strong; Be Diligent!***

**2 Timothy 2:1-15**

13<sup>th</sup> October 2019

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Last week as we looked at the first chapter of Paul's Second Letter to Timothy we heard Paul say to him:

- Don't be afraid;
- Don't be ashamed;
- Be prepared to suffer;
- Guard the deposit of teaching.

And Paul said these were all to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today, Paul says again that Timothy should pass on what he had learnt from Paul (the good deposit) to reliable people who can teach others. To meet these challenges he is to "Be strong!" Don't be afraid or ashamed, be ready to suffer and guard the good deposit. And again it is not in his own strength but in the grace that is Jesus Christ. Again, Timothy and we are to rely on Jesus for the strength to meet our calling: Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Then Paul gives three pictures of people applying themselves to their work: the dedication of a soldier, the discipline of an athlete and the diligence of a farmer.

The soldier puts up with hardship in his role – it is not about comfort, but obedience and faithful service. He is not to get involved in civilian entanglements which prevent him from following the orders of his C.O. He has to be dedicated to press through the discomfort and focus on his orders. Paul implies that the soldier has a reward in pleasing his Commanding Officer. Are we, are you, prepared to serve Jesus with dedication, avoiding distractions and enduring hardship? Do you value his pleasure?

Athletes must exercise discipline - discipline to train for many hours and discipline to give every bit of strength and skill in the event. But these are contained within the discipline of the rules of the contest.

A while ago, I was reading about Liam Malone the NZ athlete who won 3 gold medals at the 2016 Paralympics. Medallists did not compete casually. He posted on Instagram:

*It's been a long road, three years is a long time to train six days a week, two times a day and the rest of my time I am just studying. This was not a fun journey it was a tough journey. It took a whole lot of guts and heart to get here...*

In Greek games, the prize was not a gold medal but the honour of a laurel wreath or crown. And Paul likens the awarding of the wreaths to the winners of the games, to the rewards which the Lord will in the judgement.

We need to live life by God's rules – it takes a certain discipline – and we want to receive the rewards Jesus promised.

Thirdly, a Christian must have the diligence of a farmer. The farmer has to plan ahead, plough and sow crops, then harvest them. If you are a dairy farmer, the cows need to be milked twice every day. Shepherds need to care for their flocks at all hours rescuing lost sheep, lambing in the middle of a cold, late-winter's night. It takes diligence to be a farmer and to be a Christian or Christian leader.

Dedication, discipline, diligence – these are facets of being strong. Are we showing these strengths in the grace which is in Jesus?

So in verse 8, Paul comes back to his theme encouraging Timothy to be strong in faithful service. He tells Timothy and he tells us to remember Jesus Christ – don't be deviated from him. Don't let side issues draw you away – it is all about Jesus!

Remember him in two ways: as raised from the dead and descended from David. Here we have the deity and humanity of Jesus: Raised from the dead emphasises his divinity; descended from David points to his humanity. Raised from the dead reminds us that he is Saviour; descended from David tells us his is King. Do you know Jesus as truly God yet truly man; as King and as Saviour? This was what Paul preached and this was why he was in prison – even chained up in the cell.

But even if Paul is chained and captive, he says the Word of God is not chained – and is still being read, spoken forth and proclaimed. David Pawson tells of a German Pastor, Martin Niemöller, a German pastor who defied Hitler and was held in solitary confinement as Hitler's personal prisoner. He was allowed to keep his Bible. He had communion every Sunday morning with a little crust of dry bread and a tin mug of water, but he did not see anyone for many months. Up above his bunk was a little grating and outside was the exercise yard. When the other prisoners were exercised they walked around the yard 5 yards apart. As each man passed the grating, Niemöller would whisper a Bible text to him. Martin Niemöller was bound but the Word of God was not bound.

Yes, Paul was prepared to endure everything for the sake of the elect - God's chosen people – so we may obtain the salvation which is in Jesus Christ and with it, eternal glory.

Do you see how important this message of the gospel is? We should know that from personal experience but if it has escaped us – Paul is saying it is worth suffering for, it is worth being executed for. This gospel accepted grants us eternal life and glory. That is worth everything in this world.

He emphasises that by quoting what is thought to be an early Christian song which speaks of remaining true and enduring:

If we died with him, we will also live with him;  
if we endure, we will also reign with him. <sup>1</sup>

In what sense does he mean that we die for Jesus - physically?, dying to sin?, dying to self? Well if it is poetic parallelism, to die is paralleled with to endure. So dying to self is a good fit. We die to ourselves when we serve others or deny ourselves some pleasure for the sake of someone else. As we do that we have the promise of living with Christ. As we endure, we are promised that we will reign with him.

The poetry continues with:

If we disown him, he will also disown us;  
if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.<sup>2</sup>

This pair of statements imagines the dreadful possibility of our denying Christ and proving faithless. Should that happen, Jesus himself warned in (Matthew 10:32ff):

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<sup>1</sup> Verses 11-12a

<sup>2</sup> Verses 12b-13

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."

God must remain faithful to his own word – he cannot deny himself. He who is eternal truth cannot lie. The fact that he is omnipotent does not mean he is unlimited. Omnipotence is the freedom and power to do anything he chooses to do. But he is consistent and chooses only to act in agreement with his character and integrity. God can do everything consistent with being himself.

Finally, for our section Timothy is told to warn people against quarrelling about words instead of holding to the Word of Truth – such quarrelling is valueless and literally brings a catastrophe upon those who listen.

Rather he is to conduct himself so a good workman who correctly handles the word of truth: Correctly handles is literally 'cuts straight.' How might we understand this metaphor? A range of possibilities has been suggested from cutting a loaf, dividing an allotment, cutting ribbon into strips, cutting stone; however, Stott and the NEB take it as ploughing straight or possibly making a straight road. Timothy as a good workman will be true to scripture and will not distort it. Of such a worker God can approve and the workman will not need to be ashamed when he gives account for the discharge of his duties.

Through the Epistle so far we have heard Paul's concern that Timothy and we are aware that there is discipline and suffering as part of Christian discipleship. The soldier has to obey orders, the athlete obeys the rules, the farmer must be diligent to produce food from the soil. Christ is risen (but we know he suffered and died first). Paul was suffering when he wrote the letter. Jesus gave us promises to encourage us in the place of sacrifice and suffering.

He has said, Don't be afraid! Don't be ashamed! Be ready to suffer! Guard the deposit! Be strong! – all in the power of Holy Spirit and the grace of God.