

2 Timothy 2

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to spend a little time this evening looking back at the passage that we read first in 2nd Timothy chapter 2 and verses 1 to 7 and some of the parting words that Paul from his prison cell left to Timothy.

Today, advice for his leadership of the church, but also advice for all of us as Christians. Because sooner or later, but ultimately it's soon for all of us, we will meet Jesus Christ.

I'm not exactly sure of the mechanics of that, exactly sure of what it will mean for us to meet Jesus Christ when we die. But we will either do so as those who will be ushered into eternal life with him or ushered from his presence.

The words we want to hear are, Well done, good and faithful servant. Not because of anything that we have done of ourselves or that we've earned that particular spiritual pat on the back, but because God says that's what he will say to us.

If we have followed him and served him and lived by grace and relied on him, great assurance and a great longing for us. If we recognize what Jesus has done for us, we want to please him.

[1 : 29] We really want to live the way he wants us to live. That is what our Christian walk is about. How can we do that? How can we live in such a way to please God as Christians?

I'm not talking about pleasing God in order to earn anything from him, but simply as Christians to please the great lover of our soul, the one who already has redeemed us and brought us back to himself.

What else really matters other than living in a way that pleases him, by his strength and with his grace? Nothing really. What kind of insight can God's word give us that will enable us to focus more on living our life that Jesus Christ would be happy with and that would bring us blessing and contentment and a sense of purpose?

Well, there's four words that I would like us to reflect on this evening from this passage that will hopefully encourage us in our Christian walk, encourage us as to the emphasis that we should think about for being Christian and for living as Christians, the kind of things that Jesus Christ wants us to think about.

And these words which I think would be worth memorising, would be worth remembering and bearing in mind in our prayer lives, in our meditation as we think about Jesus Christ, as we think about our Christian walk.

[3 : 07] Strength, truth, effort and reflection. These are four truths that we'll unpack from this passage, a short passage from 2 Timothy.

The advice that Paul gives to us by the Holy Spirit, you then, and he speaks specifically to Timothy, in the first instance, you then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Strength. Strength. It's a tremendously important thing that we need as Christians. We need spiritual strength.

It's true for Timothy as a leader. He's going to need strength. He was reputed to be a bit weak, anyway, physically, and maybe prone to illness, and maybe he wasn't that strong.

He was known also to be a bit timid. And that's something that maybe many of us suffer from in our spiritual lives. And we know, we often will ask ourselves, I wish I had more strength.

[4 : 18] I wish I was a stronger Christian. I wish I had a better grasp of things so that I could be strong in living out the gospel. Jesus wants us to be strong Christians in his strength.

He doesn't want us to be weak. He doesn't want us to be lukewarm. He wants us to be committed. Committed to him and strong.

Not in ourselves. Not in our character. Not just in our specific gifts. But in him. He wants us to be strong.

You know, no matter what other people around us think of Christianity, what opposition we face in our college class, or among our colleagues at work, or even in our family, the Bible encourages us to rely on Jesus Christ and his grace to give us strength.

Because you need to be strong to live as a Christian and rely on the strength that God empowers us with. It's not a stoic request that God's making.

[5 : 28] He's not saying, Come on! Chin up! Keep it going! It's not that kind of stoic piece of advice. He's not encouraging us to talk to ourselves and shivvy ourselves up and say, Carry on, old chap.

Keep it going. It's not that kind of self-improvement and self-persuasion to live our lives as stupid as asking a snail to be quick.

It's not self-help that Jesus is encouraging here just to, you know, feel good and keep it up and keep it going. It is the strength that comes from grace.

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. It's a reminder that for us our spiritual strength is a gift that comes from staying close to Jesus Christ in our lives.

There's not strength spiritually for us anywhere else. It's not in our natural abilities or our intellect or our human wisdom or in anything else apart from Jesus Christ.

[6 : 42] Our resources are given. It's brilliant. The Christian life is brilliant because it's resourced. It's backed up. There's a promise that goes with it that we're not on our own.

That we don't just decide to believe and believe, Oh, come what may. I'm just going to believe. Like Winnie the Pooh looking for honey in the pot. It is genuine, real strength that we receive from God not just in order to be saved but in order to serve Him.

We are to ask for that strength. The strength from the living God. In a previous verse in the chapter before, Paul speaks to Timothy about the characteristic of the Holy Spirit.

In these most marvellous terms he says that we don't have a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. Really great description of a charismatic Christian.

Of a Christian filled with the Spirit. Of a Christian that is Spirit dependent. There's power, there's love and there's self-control.

[7 : 52] Self-discipline. You see, we need strength, don't we, to live our Christian life. Strength to say no to the lusts of the flesh. Strength to say no to temptation. Nothing flash, nothing dramatic but the everyday temptations and trials we face.

We need strength to live out our Christian life. And the power of the Spirit of God, the power of the charisma, the power of the Holy Spirit, is a power that gives us self-discipline.

We think of charisma and a charismatic Christian as someone who's kind of free and moves about and responds to the Spirit's leading. Absolutely. That is what we are.

In Christ, we follow the disciplined life of being Spirit filled. There is a strength that comes from Him. That enables us to persevere.

That enables us to remember that soon we meet with Jesus Christ and the most important thing to hear is, well done, good and faithful servant. How? By relying on Him for strength.

[8 : 59] It's very easy to feel weak. It's very easy to be weak. Christians, it's very easy. As we rely on ourselves, we will become weaker and weaker.

Let us rely on the Spirit of God and know His strength. So strength is the first thing, the first word that you might want to try and memorize as you think about your Christian life and as I think about mine.

The second is truth. In verse 2, it says, And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will be qualified to teach others.

Paul spends a great deal of time with Timothy talking about the truth, the truth. It's the revealed truth. It's the truth of God's Word as it's being exposed and revealed through his letters and through the Old Testament, through the Gospels which are being compiled.

It is something very important to Paul. He speaks in several verses previously in the second letter about the truth that is being entrusted to Timothy.

[10 : 05] In verse 12, he says, I'm convinced, sorry, in verse 14, Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

And he speaks again and again about the truth, this deposit, something that was left with Timothy that he is to pass on and that he is to develop good leadership within the church who will be qualified to teach the truth of Jesus Christ throughout the centuries.

And that is very important again for ourselves. If we are to live the Christian life, we must have a grasp, a really solemn and serious grasp of the truth.

The truth isn't throw away. The truth isn't debatable. It isn't up for auction. It is what has been passed down to us. It's the deposit that has come through the centuries.

God's word that we regard with such value has been by the Holy Spirit of God passed down to us. We are merely conduits of the truth.

[11 : 16] We are those who pass the truth on. We live it and we pass it on and we learn it and we soak our lives in it. In many ways we are part of that great apostolic succession as we take the truth that is deposited to us and as we guard it and as we live it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

You know, we don't sit down in small groups and corners and decide, wow, I wonder what the truth should be for this century or for this particular. People will get rid of some of the truth because it's politically incorrect and we'll leave that other truth because we're too sensitive to it and we're too modern and scientific and we'll just take what we like and what is easy and we'll just muddle it all up together and we'll throw it up in the air now and again.

But for us as Christians, however difficult it is, however counter-cultural, however problematic it makes our lives, we are to guard the truth. We are to guard it.

We're not to change it. We're not to adapt it. We're not to modify it. We're not to modernize it. It's the truth. It's God's revealed word. It's God's revealed way.

It never goes out of date. It never changes. It is the truth. The truth remains fantastically important to us because the moment we start to move from the truth, we move from the rock.

[12 : 48] We move from the foundation. We move from the person of Jesus himself who is truth in the flesh. We see here that Paul entrusts Timothy and the church to guarding the truth as well.

That deposit, the message of the cross, the message of Christ as the Redeemer, the message of free and full grace, we teach it, we pass it on, we share it, we tell people the truth of Jesus Christ.

We qualify our leaders in the church to know that truth and to teach that truth and we seek to live that truth ourselves. I think maybe one of the dangers of modern evangelicalism is that we have kind of relegated the truth to second place to just experience.

I think experience is extremely important, absolutely vital so we're filled with the Spirit. But it can't be experience simply based on experience and experience based on our feelings.

It must be based on the truth. It must be based on Jesus Christ. Christ. The testimony of our Christian lives isn't that, well, I just think Jesus is right.

[14 : 14] I feel him in my heart. He gives me that warm, gushy feeling. It's just like eating porridge in the morning and it gives me a glow as I go out to work. It's not that kind of fluffy, post-modern sort of experientialism.

It's more than that. It is based on the reality of God's passed down, deposited truth to us. That Christ was real. That Christ came for a purpose.

That Christ left his word with us. And that we are to live by that word, by grace. And so for us, if we are to be Christ-like Christians, what does it mean?

It means that we're incarnation, incarnational Christians. We incarnate the truth. We live it. We're flesh and blood truth. We show people what it is like to live out Christ in our lives.

Because we trust the truth, we value the truth, we believe the truth, and we pass that truth on. We guard it by our lifestyle. We guard it by saying no.

[15 : 21] We guard it by saying yes. We guard it by obeying Christ. If you love me. We all want to love Jesus. If you love me, he says, you will obey my commands.

Why? Because they're good. Because he is gracious. Because he has given us a way to live that sets us free. That allows us to soar on wings like eagles.

To run and not be weary. To walk and not faint. It's his word and the revelation of that. Truth is tremendously important. I think it's that sharing of the experience of Christ in our lives.

I'm not talking about formulaic truth that doesn't mean anything to us, that is not incarnational, that isn't important to us, that isn't sacrificial. I'm not talking about a set of rules and regulations that we feel we ought to live by.

but the reality of knowing Christ in our hearts and his character in our soul. That tremendously important one thing. Paul goes back to it again and again.

[16 : 32] One thing. One thing that you should do. One thing that you should live. One thing that you should guard is the truth. God's word. So many young people here.

It's such a great encouragement. I really hope that the foundation of your young lives is on something concrete. The word of God and more than that the character of God as is revealed in his word.

That you love the truth. That you hunger and thirst as Christ wants us to know blessing. Hunger and thirst after righteousness. That we have an appetite for the word.

That we are spiritually healthy. Not just for fellowship and gathering together and good times and all the good stuff that goes around being part of a church.

But also that we're serious students of God's word. That it matters to us. That we follow it and that we're diligent because of what it means.

[17 : 34] One thing. I did have I did have a quote that I was going to read to you tonight. Press in my jacket pocket. My jacket pocket's in the car.

So I'll just have to try and remember it. Some of the young people anyone over 50 might not know the quote but the young trendies among you will know the film Walk the Line with Johnny Cash in it.

And there's a brilliant there's a brilliant line in that film which I'm going to get wrong because I normally do get wrong quotes when I don't have the words in front of me. But it's a great part right at the beginning of Johnny Cash's musical life when he's going into Sam Phillips' studio Sun Records and he wants to play a song that doesn't really have much meaning but it's one that's sung on the radio all the time and he starts singing it and it's kind of lifeless and a bit soulless and Sam Phillips talks to him and he's saying look don't want to hear any of that jazz don't want to hear any of that junk he says I can go to a hundred different artists and they'll sing that kind of song any day of the week but he says if you had one song if you had one song to sing before going out into that street and being knocked down by a lorry well he wouldn't have said a lorry by a truck one song one song that summed up your life one song that you wanted to leave with people one song that came from your heart what would it be sing that not some kind of half beat song that everyone else sings and that is twenty to the dozen what song would you sing what would it be that you would leave as your your legacy

I think I think that quote should go to every single divinity student in the free church what sermon would you last leave with people if you had one word to say to people if you had one message to bring if you had something that exposed your soul and what mattered to you most what would it be would it just be going through a formulaic exegetical message that's neat and correct and tight and proper but lacks your soul that doesn't come from your heart that doesn't reveal that it means everything to you we're not lecturing from the pulpit we're not teachers in simple terms we are preachers of the gospel what we have is everything and without it we are nothing and the gospel and the truth matters to us is that how you live your Christian life is that how I live mine as if it's the one thing it's the one thing that matters it's the one thing that's important or is it just a kind of one among many fifteen twenty other really important things in our lives or is it just the one thing that we bring out wheel out on a Sunday or is it the one thing that we were brought up to believe is important but we don't really for ourselves and the decisions we make and the places we go and the company we keep and the words that we speak and the decisions we make we reveal that it's not the one thing that well done good and faithful servant doesn't really matter to us but ambition and materialism and money and wealth and success and happiness and pleasure they're all the one things that are important to us one thing where is our soul how important is our soul to us is the truth the truth of God's word and living by that truth and living or dying by that truth in everything not just in company but in private when we're on our own one thing one thing the truth so there's truth and strength the third thing is effort and I'll just speak about this briefly but there's three different pictures here which reminds us and which is a very clear

New Testament picture of the Christian life for us that there's effort involved tremendous amount of effort involved in the Christian life we have the picture here of a soldier of an athlete and of a farmer endure hardship in verse 3 with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ no one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs he wants to please his commanding officer and you know the life of a soldier is not an easy life you know we've seen a lot of that's very again maybe among the liberal arts students the life of a soldier isn't a desired or a popular one it's maybe looked down on a little bit by educated classes unless we manage to get into eating or somewhere like that but you know a soldier's life is very real a very hard life whether we agree or not with where they're fighting or what they're doing a great deal of suffering a great deal of concentration you know they say that hanging clarifies the mind well so does being a soldier on the front line it clarifies the mind you can't really slack about when you're on the front line in Iraq or Afghanistan or wherever else soldiers happen to be fighting there's a great deal of hardship involved it's not easy the difference with soldiers as opposed to the Christian life of course is that soldiers in the British Army aren't resourced as they should be but we have all the resources we need but nonetheless there is hardship and we must be honest in sharing that truth with people when we're sharing the gospel we don't say you know come to Jesus Christ and everything will be easy and good and happy we must be honest in saying that coming to Jesus Christ involves effort and involves hardship it's a warfare because Satan is alerted to your name and to your character and to your person and will do everything in his power as long as you live to bring you down to make you deny

[23 : 28] Jesus Christ to destroy your witness and your blessing and your joy there's external battles there's internal battles there's opposition there's concerns there's difficulties there's struggles there's cynicism in the world and sadly in the church it's difficult it's hardship that's why I think it's important when we come to church when we come to worship that a lot of time is spent in encouragement that we encourage one another and build each other up and that we're encouraged by the word not brow beaten and opposed but encouraged by Jesus Christ pointing to Jesus Christ and remembering the strength and the promises and the grace that he gives hardship involved as a soldier and also concentration you know no one gets involved in civilian affairs serve Jesus Christ well ok

I'll serve Jesus Christ but I've got an awful lot of other things to do first you know I've got a family to raise I've got a career to follow I've got to do the hours you know it's expected of me it's demanded of me I'll give Jesus Christ somewhere further down the line and I'm too young to know about what happened in the second world war but I think what used to be said a lot by people was you know to excuse or justify the struggles and the difficulties people said look well there's a war on I think a little bit of the mentality would be good again you know for us spiritually there's a war on we're in a spiritual battle you know let's not get distracted away from Christ in the pursuit of what is un-Christ like whatever that may be I'm not saying that we can't and don't pursue our careers and our families but in a

Christ centered way so they have the picture of the soldier and then they also have the picture of the athlete similarly if anyone competes as an athlete he doesn't receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules and there's different pictures in the New Testament of the athlete but here's the picture of an honest athlete who receives the victor's crown because they've been honest in their pursuit of fitness and in their performance of the race you know we hear a lot today about drug abuse and bungs and all kinds of dealings and cheating and scraping the cricket ball and all kinds of things that are cheating not competing according to the rules and Christ is simply reminding us that there isn't really any shortcuts in Christian service there is hardship there's a daily discipline of recognizing our own hearts and our own need for Christ of fellowship with Christ of getting rid of sin of running the race

Christ's way or no way at all you know we don't sit one morning and say listen Jesus I want to run the Christian life but I would like to run it according to my rules I like to do it my way the Christian way is hard and I don't think that's the way I'll go I would like to be involved in the church and I'd like to sing songs now and again and I'd like to know the peace of salvation but please don't ask me to endure hardship as a Christian or obey you it's too difficult it's simply too hard it's not open for us to bargain with God on these terms the athlete and then he gives a third example of the farmer the hard working farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops again you know I don't know of any farmer who if he's to enjoy a harvest hasn't first worked hard including ploughing in spring time and removing stones from the field and sowing and every farmer I seem to know is working every waking hour and again the hard working farmer the picture is of the effort that the quality of the harvest depends on the effort and the hard work that is put in which is not absolutely and exclusively but the picture that's given is of hard work and again we see from other parts of scripture that we read that personal holiness harvest of obedience to

Christ depends on what we're sowing if we're sowing to please the sinful nature that's exactly what we'll reap we can't live hypocritically it's one of the greatest sins isn't it that God exposes in the word it's hypocrisy it's living one way and expecting some other kind of fruit but the recognition is that we sow we reap what we sow and if we sow to please the sinful nature ourselves and our greed and our pride and our lust and our everything else that is sinful then that's exactly the kind of harvest we will reveal be revealed to have in our character and in our lives pleasing the spirit doing good in Christ's name and with Christ's grace spiritual sweat unpopular

[29 : 39] I know to talk about spiritual effort and sweat we like generally 21st century western Europe to be rubbed on the back and told how good we are and how hard it is for us but we need to also to know what Christ demands of us and there's a common theme in these three pictures of the soldier the athlete and the farmer it is very much a picture of hard work it's a hard work that Paul speaks about in one of the best passages one of my favourite passages in the whole bible Romans 16 when he goes through that list of people and he speaks about them and he gives greetings to them and he thanks them for what they're doing and so often he talks about the hard work they've done those who laboured in the lord you know in talking about the the core workers of the church in Rome those who laboured for Christ those who worked hard I know we've got to beware of being stressed out and burnt out we're always talking about being stressed out and burnt out in the kingdom of God but there is also hard work spiritual hard work dependent on the spirit of God we can't ignore the fact that he wants effort from us in his strength because in so doing there's harvest it's not worthless talks about pleasing God talks about the crown of the athlete talks about the harvest of the farmer so we've got that kind of paradoxical ironic difficulty in our lives we're not earning our salvation are we we're not trying to please

God so that he'll open the doors when we die and say come on in but because he has died for us because he's saved us because we are covered in his righteousness what a motive for hard work what a motive for service salvation is his gift service is our reward is our blessing is our privilege we moan and grump and complain about serving about obedience he wants us to rejoice in it he wants us to serve him because he is worth it he's not a two-bit saviour he is worthy that we all fall on our knees at this instant and adore him for eternity he is worth giving up everything that we are to serve he is worth utter and complete dedication nobody comes near him nobody stands beside him especially not ourselves he is worthy and lastly and very briefly the fourth characteristic that is good to engage in or to memorise we talked about strength and effort and truth the last thing is reflection verse 7 he finishes that paragraph by saying reflect on what I am saying for the

Lord will give you insight into all this and it's a great way with which to end a sermon especially in this passage and the reminder is for us to reflect on what we learn from the truth of God not just in preaching but each time we go to God's word that we have this responsibility for personal reflection taking God's word and personally reflecting on it and applying it in our own lives and in our own situations to meditate on it to be serious students of it to take his word seriously and reflect on it for ourselves you know the one hour we're together in worship or whatever I don't think we'll ever really survive on that it's a nice kind of icing on the cake we must be people who use our minds ourselves in an ongoing way not just in here you must in here don't want people to be passive and thoughtless there's nothing ever more discouraging for the minister to have glazed eyes not that there's any here tonight of course but you know that we're thoughtfully thinking Christians that we're reflective Christians that we're using our minds nothing worse than being a mindless Christian he's given his minds not speaking about intelligence speaking about using our minds it's our duty to take the truth of God's word and apply it to our lives to reflect on what he is saying it's important that we're thinking Christians not blindly living lives that are maybe godless or displeasing to him or grieving the spirit or quenching the spirit that we are reflecting on his challenges yes as well through the preaching of the word when we come to God's house that we do reflect on what the holy spirit may be saying to you and to me in our own lives that we don't just switch off the moment the last psalm has been sung and forget it all until we come back next time but the living God with his living words speaks to us in our lives for a reason reflect on that and the great thing is that the Lord as we do so as we depend on him the Lord will give you insight into all this God gives us insight it's no mere reflection on some philosophical way of living on some kind of nice way of going about our daily lives it's a spiritual activity no mere intellectualism it is a dependence like we spoke about this morning on God that we recognize that the insight we need to reflect on his word is from God have we read God's word and said well I have no idea what that means and just closed the Bible and walked away you know we need to think about what God's saying reflect on it learn from others but ultimately prayerfully depend on the insight the holy spirit will give us you do not have again because you do not ask says God his wisdom his insight his knowledge his understanding his liberating truth we believe so much that it's the truth that sets us free and that you and I have access to that truth access to the mind of God insight that comes from him as we depend

on him in our lives so I hope that by God's spirit that we will all consider the importance of strength and truth and effort and reflection as we go into this working week in our Christian lives and if you're not a Christian again that you will consider the claims of Jesus in your life tonight let's bow our heads in prayer prayer