

Sermon Notes, 2 Timothy 1:6-12, Sunday 19th April 2026

Britain is increasingly not an easy country to be a Christian. (There are far tougher countries.) In parts of the world you're almost expected to go to church. Here, it used to be the respectable thing to do. Now, it's weird, eccentric. Some people see it as suspicious, dangerous. Christians are a safeguarding risk.

How do you navigate a world like that? For many, the strategy is to keep your head down. Play it cool. Be keen when you're here. Friends and colleagues, may know you go to church, but you don't make a big deal about it. Certainly don't talk about what you believe – that could scare people.

This is nothing new. Paul's second letter to Timothy. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus. A tough place. Hostile to the gospel. False teachers taking root in the church. Paul is now in prison in Rome, so people are rejecting him and what he taught. Timothy's job is to keep the church on track.

Timothy was a Christian leader. Many in this church lead in one way or another. Maybe you're thinking about some kind of pastoral ministry in the future. This paragraph will tell you what ministry is like in a hostile world. Even if you're not in leadership, this will tell you how to pray for those who are.

Actually every Christian faces the pressures Timothy faced. So this passage is for all of us.

If you're not yet a Christian you'll hear what God calls us to, and also what God promises. It's not easy following someone they crucified, but it's more than worthwhile.

Paul has two instructions for us as we live in a hostile culture, and then a bunch of reasons to live this way.

Instructions

Not Cowardice but Fire

Read verses 6-7.

"Fan into flame the gift of God". For Timothy, this gift came when Paul laid hands on him to set him aside for pastoral ministry. God gave him responsibility to care for the church, and equipped him to do that.

It doesn't need fanning into flame because his fire was going out. This is a reminder. It's constant. We need to constantly keep the fire going. God equips us for the ministry he gives us, but we need to keep feeding the flames.

The alternative is cowardice. Read verse 7. "Timid" is a very weak translation. It's used in the Old Testament of an army being so terrified of the army they face that the soldiers just run away.

God gives us his Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not make us into people who run away from the demands of Christian ministry, or run away from God's call to all of us to speak for Jesus. Instead God's Spirit gives us power (to keep going in the Christian life and in ministry), love (for others, so that we want to speak to them

about Jesus), and self-discipline (so that we can keep going at what matters even when it's tough and we want to stop).

Imagine a town in a war zone, cut off, under attack. A group of soldiers is sent in to take out the attackers and liberate the town. You don't want them to take one look at their opponents, and run away because they look scary. Instead you want them to be strong and well-equipped, to love the people they're trying to rescue, and a disciplined army. So they press on.

Life and ministry are like that. Frequently God takes us to some scary places. There can be real opposition. But we don't run away; we're equipped by God, we love those around us, and so we keep on at what we know matters.

How do we fan the flames? He doesn't say. Presumably it includes praying for God's Spirit to make us like Jesus (who showed power to endure, love, and self-discipline), and includes using the gifts God has given us so that they don't shrink through disuse.

Not Shame but Suffering

Read verse 8.

Don't be too embarrassed to speak about Jesus. Don't be embarrassed of your association with the apostle Paul, in that most shameful of places – a Roman prison. Instead, be willing to suffer, not just for Jesus, but for his gospel.

Paul is Timothy's example here. Read verses 11-12a. Paul is suffering for the gospel. And Paul is not ashamed of that fact.

But notice *why* Paul suffers. *Why* is Paul in prison? Verse 11 ... "*that is why* I am suffering." He suffers because he speaks. If you don't speak the gospel, you won't suffer for it.

Timothy is not just told not to be ashamed of *Jesus*. Don't be ashamed of *Paul*.

In a hostile world, the easiest thing to do is to stay silent. A bit harder: tell your friends that you belong to a church. Harder still: tell them about Jesus. Hardest of all is to get into specifics, the kinds of things you find in Paul's letters. What does Jesus stand for? Why are we powerless to save ourselves? How does he tell us to live? Don't be ashamed of Paul.

Do that, you're on collision course with today's secular culture. You'll be in the dog-house. Put to shame.

Very young children cling to their parents. About age 10 / 11, parents become embarrassing. Don't walk me into school, stop just around the corner and I'll walk in by myself. It's really hard, but Paul is saying: Don't be a Year 6 child when it comes to Jesus. Be proud to be associated with him, whatever that does to your street cred, vibe, reputation.

Paul's message is radical today, and really uncomfortable in a world that's all about comfort: Don't be ashamed of Jesus, of the message about Jesus, of Paul. Instead, join Paul on the road of suffering for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Reasons

Why on earth would someone knowingly do something they know will be painful? (We do it all the time. People run marathons knowing it will hurt, but they decide it's worth it. People get tattoos, which I'm told hurt.)

Why would a Christian choose to speak unashamedly about Jesus, whatever the cost? Why would a Christian choose to give up a promising career to enter full time pastoral ministry? Why would someone become a Christian? These things hurt!

You'd have to be convinced it was worthwhile, and Paul gives 4 really solid reasons.

God's Power

Read verses 8b-9a.

People often want to see God powerfully at work. There are hundreds of Christians in this church still following Jesus. Lee and I are still in pastoral ministry; we haven't given up to do something else. Many of you have found ways speak to friends or colleagues about Jesus, even if it's a bit faltering. These are miracles. This is the power of God at work.

But here's Paul's point. Verses 8b-9a, "*who saved us*". The God who saved you is the same God whose power enables you to keep going with Jesus through seasons of suffering.

Delegation. You know that there are different ways to be given a task to do. There's desperate delegation, as someone dumps a task on your lap in a panic. There's impossible delegation, where something is utterly realistic and you're only ever going to fail. They're both demoralising. Then there's empowering delegation. Someone gets alongside you, and gives you all you need to do the job – the skills, the time, they walk with you.

When God calls us to suffer for the gospel, he empowers us. This is the same God who saved us by his love, the same God who is deeply committed to us and on our side.

God's Eternal Plan

Read verses 9b-10a.

God saved us by grace, but when did he give you that grace? Before the beginning of time. Before God had created time to make "before" mean anything. He gave it to you then, but you could see it in the person of Jesus.

Some Christians puzzle over the idea that God chooses those who are his. Let's not get stuck on that today. Ask me later if you want to talk that one through. Here, it's not a puzzle, it's a delight.

How will I keep living faithfully and publicly for Jesus when it makes my life tough? By remembering that this is not just some path through life you've chosen. God chose you to be a Christian before he made the world. Even more wonderfully, he actually gave you his grace before you even existed, before the world was made.

When we lived in Africa, some of the roads we took our little 2WD car over were extraordinary. Your heart goes in your mouth every time: This was not what this car was designed for. God looked after us. But if you've got a modern, rugged, 4WD, with high clearance, you take it with confidence. It was built for this.

The truth God gave us his grace before the dawn of time is breath-taking. It means you're not on some whim that you can just give up. You are part of something God planned before you were even born. "Why am I suffering for following Jesus?" God made you with this this ministry in mind, this moment in mind. It's all according to plan.

God's Gift of Immortality

Nothing excites Paul more than God's grace. Mention God's grace and he's off. Here's what God has done for us. Read verse 10.

But Paul is not just on his favourite hobby-horse. Press play and there's no stopping him on this subject. The blessings he chooses to talk are exactly the ones he needs here. He "destroyed death, and has brought life and immortality to light".

Don't get this wrong. Unless you're still alive when Jesus comes back, all Christians will die. But the power of death is destroyed. In 1 Corinthians he says it's like a bee that no longer has a sting. Death can kill you, but it can't harm you.

Jesus brought life to light because he rose again. But he also brought immortality to light. Jesus raised a number of other people to life (Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, and a widow's son in a town called Nain). They all died again, but Jesus was different. When he was raised to life, he was immortal.

I told some of you that I listened to a podcast about the history of the land of Israel and Palestine. Each episode has a standard spiel to introduce it, and the presenter wants to tell us how much that land means to so many. But oh dear this bit: "On the shores of the Mediterranean, there is a land of sparkling beauty, bathed in sunshine, bounded by a shimmering sea. Here are lush fields, the gentle hills and plunging valleys of the Bible, the place names of antiquity. Here is Jerusalem, what remains of the Jewish temple, the place where Mohammed is said to have ascended to heaven, the last resting place of Jesus." It really isn't! Jesus never died again. He's alive today.

Life and immortality came *light* when Jesus rose, you can see them. But *what* you're seeing is what he gives to all who follow him. Here's what Jesus said to Martha, the brother of dead Lazarus: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." If you know Jesus, one day he will raise you to life, and you are immortal. You have a relationship with God not even death can end.

Where we lived 20 years ago, there was an all-you-can-eat restaurant with food from all over the world. Get another plate, try something different. Imagine they had a sign, "anyone caught holding their fork in the wrong hand will have their plate of food taken away". So what? I can get another one. Their punishment is not a problem.

Paul is in prison. What's the worst that could happen to him? He could be executed. Because he preaches a gospel that Jesus destroyed death and gives his people immortality. Suffering for the gospel takes on a whole new light. The worst someone can do to you for following Jesus is accelerate your promotion to glory.

God's Faithful Guarding

Read verse 12.

God has entrusted the gospel to Paul, and God wants Paul to guard the gospel. He'll say that in verse 14 (read verse 14a). He might be saying the same thing here (the grammar here is ambiguous), but it looks like it's the other way around: God is able to guard what Paul has entrusted to him.

He doesn't tell us what he's left to God to keep safe. Maybe his life. Maybe the outcome of his ministry. Maybe the churches he's ministered too. Maybe more than one of those. Whatever it is, the point is that God is faithful. Paul knows God won't fail him. God will keep him safe. God will look after these churches. God is in control of how people respond to his message. He can leave it with God, and know that's the safest place.

And because of this, he can suffer. Read verse 12: "That is why ... yet I this is no cause for shame, ... *because* ... I am convinced he is able to guard."

God will guard all these things until that day, that day when Jesus returns.

We hate spoilers. A football match you haven't watched yet, "don't tell me the score". A sequel to a novel comes out, and the publicity ruins the storyline of the first book that you haven't read yet. But the characters in the story would love a spoiler.

If you're reading The Lord of the Rings, you can read the last chapter first, if you really want to. But just imagine Gandalf appears on Frodo Baggins' door-step with a copy of the last chapter. "Before you start this journey, let me tell you how the story ends". What a difference that would make! "Fight orcs, you say? They may kill me." But so what? You know how the story ends. The outcome is secure, so you can do your bit whatever it costs.

The outcome of history does not hang on Paul. Paul may be guarded by the Roman jailers, but God is guarding what really matters. Those who cause your suffering will not have the last word. The gospel will survive, the church will survive, and God will win in the end.

Conclusion

The world we live in may not think it's a good thing you're a Christian. Let's get our expectations right. If we speak for Christ, we will suffer for it. This is normal. Jesus was crucified. Paul was imprisoned. Timothy joined Paul in suffering for the gospel.

So what to do? Keep your head down, and hope nobody notices you're a Christian? Certainly not! By God's power, resist the temptation to be a coward, and keep on fanning the flames of God's calling to speak for him. Don't be ashamed of Jesus, or his message, but be willing to suffer for the gospel. God is

powerful, his plan stretches back into eternity past, he's given us immortality through his risen Son, and he will guard everything faithfully until he wins in the end.

And please pray for your pastors, and for everyone in leadership roles in the church. We're as tempted as everyone else to give up, or simply to stay out of trouble. The pressures are immense, but God's grace is stronger.

And if you're not yet a Christian, come and join us. You'll be following the Jesus who suffered and died, brought to you by ministers who suffered to pass on these precious truths. But you'd be following the one who saves his people, gives them his Holy Spirit, has a plan since before time, has solved the problem of death, and will win in the end. What's to lose? There's everything to gain!