

Finishing Well: Stunning Grandeur, Sobering Call

Paul sits lonely in a Roman prison anticipating an imminent execution at the hands of the brutal Emperor Nero. It is roughly 66 or 67 AD. He takes up his pen to write his last will and testament to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy. Paul is confident that he has finished his race (2 Timothy 4:6-8). However, many of Paul's comrades are turning away from the Lord due to the rising tide of persecution. He urgently calls upon his young protégé to take up the mantle of gospel ministry and follow the Lord faithfully no matter what the cost.

Paul encourages us with three primary resources for finishing well: The people of God (2 Timothy 1:1-6); the Spirit of God (vv. 7, 14); and the gospel of God (vv. 8-14). 2 Timothy 1:8-14 focuses on the third resource: the gospel of God. Our text sets forth two essentials for finishing well our Christian lives.

2 Timothy 1:8-14

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. 13 Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

I. Trust the God of the Gospel - The Stunning Grandeur of Grace (vv. 8-12)

- A. In these verses, you catch a sense of the sheer grandeur of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the security it gave Paul in the midst of intense hardship. In one of his characteristic digressions, Paul sets forth the gospel in all its fullness and his confidence in the God of the Gospel.
- B. 2 Timothy 1:12 – *I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what He have entrusted to me against that Day.*
- C. The Apostle Paul highlights four aspects of God's power in the gospel.
 1. First of all, he initially speaks of **God's sovereign grace and the origin of the gospel**. God "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace." This eliminates all pride and boasting and engenders humility.
 2. Secondly, he underscores **God's preexistent grace that is the source of the gospel**. "Which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began." How carefully Paul guards the doctrine of saving grace from dependence on anything external or creaturely.
 3. Thirdly, he stresses **God's visible grace that is the grounds of the gospel**. "And which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus."
 4. Lastly, he emphasizes **God liberating grace that features the outcome of the gospel**.
 - a. 1:10 – "...who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel..."
 - b. Before Christ's resurrection, death ruled as a cruel tyrant over men. It was a dreaded foe. The fear of death held people in bondage.
 - c. The resurrection of Jesus is a pledge that all who trust in Him will rise from the dead to live forever. He has annulled death. He has robbed it of its sting.

II. Guard the Gospel of God - The Sobering Call (vv.13-14)

- A. God is calling Timothy and us to demanding responsibility in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. His essential work and ours is to guard the gospel. Our work is so demanding that it is humanly impossible. It can only be done by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (see verse 14).
- B. Paul initially emphasizes the comfort of the gospel in vv.8-12. Now he turns to the call of the gospel in vv.13-14. Focusing exclusively on the comfort of the gospel can produce a tendency toward antinomianism, “cheap grace” without obligation. Emphasizing only the call of the gospel without the comfort can quickly produce legalism and discouragement. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes, one leads to false “security,” the other to “despair.”

C. What is so important about the gospel that it is worth living and dying for?

1. **1:13-14:** “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”
2. **The gospel is “sound words.”** Sound means healthy. Words that promote spiritual health and vitality in God’s people.
3. **The gospel is a “deposit entrusted.”** The gospel is God’s gospel that we have no right to tinker with, but only to guard it with our lives and words. The deposit was a legal term which was used of money or valuables deposited with somebody for safekeeping.
4. **The gospel is “good.”** Good means “precious.” Therefore, like anything that is precious to us, it needs careful protection.

D. We are to guard the gospel because the temptation to embellish and/or trim the gospel is

rampant. Tertullian said, “Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors.” Legalism and license serve as two thieves that steal the gospel’s power and joy.

E. How are we to guard the gospel according to 2 Timothy 1?

1. **Share the gospel boldly** (v.11)
 - a. 2 Timothy 2:2 Commend it to faithful men.
 - b. Paul says that something happens in us when we share the gospel with others. Philemon 6 - I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.
2. **Suffer for the gospel bravely** (v.12).
 - a. He stood tall because he intimately knew whom He believed and He remained unashamed because he knew that God would guard his life’s investment until the judgment.
 - b. Example of Polycarp, the pastor of Smyrna... Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?
 - c. What happened to Timothy? Timothy did in fact suffer imprisonment. See Hebrews 13:23.
3. **Model the gospel winsomely** (v.13). “... in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” Paul writes in Galatians 2:14 that we are to always live “in line with the truth of the gospel.”

Conclusion

There is an American war cemetery at Madingly near Cambridge, England. “Amid the beauty of groomed lawns, marbled walls, and the serried crosses of the multitudinous dead, lie the silent host who died for our liberty during W.W.II.” An inscription around the base of a great bronze hemisphere

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which holds the flagstaff reads: **‘To you from failing hands we throw the torch. Be yours to hold it high.’**

The Apostle Paul cries out to young Timothy, and all who aspire to leadership in the church of Jesus Christ, “my course is finished and I am now passing the torch to you. Be yours to hold it high.”

Let us never forget the wonderful privilege it is to carry the torch of the gospel and to fulfill the ministry that God has given us so that He is exalted and His church is built.

Discussion Questions

1. Elizabeth Elliot, a missionary who paid a steep price to ensure the gospel went forth to the Auca Indians in Ecuador, said this: “There is nothing worth living for, unless it is worth dying for.”
 - Opening Question: What do most people live for and do you believe what they live for is really worth dying for?

 - According to the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 1, what should followers of Jesus live for?

2. What strikes you the most about the aspects of the gospel that Paul emphasizes in 2 Timothy 1:9-10?

3. What has God done in the gospel that facilitates confident trust in Him in times of uncertainty, difficulty and disappointment?

4. How should recounting the power of God in the gospel help Paul, Timothy and us in times of persecution and opposition?

5. Using 2 Timothy 1:8-12 as a springboard, how would you counsel a friend who told you that he lived in fear of death? A corollary passage to consult: Hebrews 2:14-15.

6. Why is it important to emphasize the historical foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ, and not only subjective experience? See 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.

7. Of all the ways that the Apostle Paul tells us to guard the gospel, which one is most challenging for you?

8. What one thing are you going to do differently to guard the gospel more zealously?

Going Deeper

1. There is a bit of an interpretive challenge in 2 Timothy 1:12. The ESV reads: "I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." The NIV reads: "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day."
 - Think through the implications of both of these readings of the text. On the one hand, God is powerful enough and you can trust Him to guard and protect His gospel. On the other hand, God is powerful enough and we can trust Him to guard and protect our lives and our own life investment in and for the gospel.
 - I tend to prefer the NIV reading of the text, which seems to be a more natural reading. Thus, can you say with the Apostle Paul that you know the living God and that you are confident that He will guard your life and your life's investment in the gospel until that great day when Jesus Christ returns to judge and consummate His eternal kingdom?
2. Read and reflect upon what's below and then write out your own summary of the gospel to use to bolster your heart in times of spiritual conflict and discouragement.
 - A. How is it that we make spiritual progress as believers and finish well in life and ministry? "All progress in the Christian life depends upon a recapitulation (an act or instance of summarizing and restating the main points of something) of the original terms of one's acceptance with God" (John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 27).
 - B. "This delightful quote (by Stott) points us to the enduring remedy for all our ills... Every step we take in our Christianity, especially as we learn to war against inclinations to be self-critical, angry, anxious, bitter, hopeless, unbelieving, or fainthearted, depends upon an intentional revisiting of the Gospel. After all, what does a sad person need more than to be gently, yet continually, reminded of the good news? Over and over again, we've got to remember His suffering on our behalf: His incarnation, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, and ascension. In a nutshell, we have to intentionally consider Jesus, especially during those dark hours when we're tempted to think only of ourselves. And although every one of us needs a daily dose of Gospel-recapitulation, those of us who feel the blows of Giant Despair need it even more." (Elyse Fitzpatrick, "The Gospel Cure")
 - C. How have believers in the past proclaimed the gospel to their own hearts? Please read the examples below and then write out your own summary of the gospel:
 1. Besides 2 Timothy 1:9-10, the Apostle Paul recounts the stunning grandeur of the gospel throughout his life like this:
 - Romans 1:16 – For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
 - 1 Timothy 1:15 – The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.
 2. John Newton captures the simple beauty of the gospel like this as an 82-year-old man: "My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things; That I am a great sinner, and that Jesus Christ is a great Savior of sinners like me."
 3. Bono: "Grace, she takes the blame; She covers the shame; removes the stain; Grace makes beauty out of ugly things!"
 4. Jack Miller: "Cheer up and smile! You are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared imagine, yet at the same time you are more loved than you ever dared to dream because Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death for you."
 5. YOU: