Not ashamed to suffer

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Preacher: Principal A.C. Boyd

[0:00] Our reading in the second epistle of Paul to Timothy, in the first chapter and reading at verse 8. 2 Timothy chapter 1 and at verse 8.

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me as prisoner, but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God, who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, whereunto I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles.
Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me as prisoner, but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God.
And these words that we have in verse 8, we recognise a note that is struck again and again by the New Testament.
A note that's struck again and again by the Apostle Paul, who regularly is exhorting folks not to be ashamed of the gospel. It's a note that re-echoes the word of Christ himself.
[1:35] And particularly in these two letters to Timothy, we find Paul again and again striking this same note.

In the first epistle he'd been encouraging Timothy to endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. We find exactly the same sort of appeal repeated in the second chapter, part of which we've read just now.
And if we were to go through this epistle, we would find again and again this same note being struck. And if Paul again and again writes in these terms to Timothy, if again and again we find him appealing to Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel, to be willing to suffer, to be ready to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.
If we find that Paul is reiterating this appeal again and again, we may ask ourselves, well, why? Why does he find it so necessary to renew the appeal?
Was it because he was beginning to lose confidence in Timothy? Was it because he was beginning to doubt Timothy? Was it because he didn't have the same confidence in Timothy's faithfulness that he once had?
[3:10] I think if we came to that conclusion as to the reason why Paul reiterates these appeals, we would be in the wrong lines.

There is nothing to suggest that Paul is losing confidence in Timothy. There is nothing to suggest that Paul was finding reason to doubt Timothy's faithfulness.
Rather, Paul reiterates these appeals because he is being very realistic. He is taking all the facts into consideration.
Paul is being realistic. And Paul writes this second letter to Timothy and this letter in which he renews again and again these appeals about not being ashamed but being willing to suffer.
When Paul writes this letter, he writes as himself a prisoner. We confidently believe that this letter was written during Paul's second period of imprisonment.
[4:21] An imprisonment that was even harser than his first period of imprisonment in Rome. During his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul was more or less under house arrest.

But the picture here is very different. Notice what he is saying about a Nesiphorus here who had come to him and who had sought him out.
Paul wasn't easy to find in Rome now. It was a different situation from what we read at the end of Acts when visitors were allowed to come to him and he was able to speak to them.

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And now Paul is in some obscure jail and Nesiphorus had to search him out and he oft refreshed him and was not ashamed of his shame.
Paul writes as one who is a prisoner and who as he views the future sees nothing ahead of him but death.
[5:17] In the fourth chapter he writes, for I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. Paul is writing about suffering from the gospel.

He's been very realistic. And he's writing as one who himself was already a prisoner for Jesus Christ. As he writes, he is remembering the situation in the world.
Remember, it's in this epistle that Paul gives this solemn warning, this know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.
Now, when Paul writes there about the last days, he is not there necessarily looking forward to the very last days of the world.
When he talks about the last days, he's talking about this gospel age and he's talking about things that Timothy himself would face and have to meet up with.
[6:17] Paul is not just predicting the future of the last days of the world in some sort of speculative way just to provide Timothy with some sort of interesting information.

But Paul is equipping and warning Timothy about the sort of things that he himself will face in the world in these last days and Timothy would know them.
there would be perilous times. Paul is taking into consideration the situation in the world when he appeals to Timothy to be willing to suffer, to be ready to endure hardness.
But he is also taking into consideration the situation in the church. Now, don't let us think for a minute that these early ages of the church, these early years of the church and of Jesus Christ in the world were some sort of idyllic period when everything was going well, when everything was lovely and beautiful in the church and there were no problems.
There were no false brethren. There were no inroads of Satan being made in the church. Far from it. Again and again in this very epistle we see Paul taking into consideration the situation in the church and reminding Timothy about it.
[7:42] Notice how he writes even in this first chapter, this thou knowest that all they which are in Asia are turned away from. Paul is not saying that every believer in Asia had turned their back on the gospel but he's talking about all those who possibly could have helped Paul had now turned their back on him.

All who were in a position to grant some help to Paul in his imprisonment in Rome had turned away from him. He was Asia. Asia that had been such a fruitful scene of ministry and now there were so many who were proving false and there are all sorts of verses in this epistle that we could look at that remind us of a serious situation growing up in the church.
In chapter 3 he talks about those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. In chapter 4 at verse 10 he reminds Timothy that Demas hath forsaken me having loved this present world and he talks about the harm that Alexander the coppersmith had done to him.
These were all false brethren in the church. Paul was remembering his own situation.
He was remembering the situation in the world around. He was remembering the problems that were arising in the church and he was remembering not in a critical way but in a sympathetic and understanding way he was remembering Timothy's own nature because Timothy by nature wasn't a bold sort of man.
[9:31] He was timid. He by nature was someone who didn't like being forced into the forefront of things.

So far from doubting Timothy Paul is writing with understanding. He's being very realistic. When he's saying to Timothy be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me as prisoner but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel he is writing as one who is being realistic.
He knows that Timothy needs to be appealed to like this because he knows that it wasn't easy to go on being faithful. Because of what he himself had experienced.
Because of what he recognises happening in the world. Because of problems that he sees in the church. And because he's got a very sympathetic understanding of Timothy's own nature.
He is being realistic and he's being very faithful to Christ himself. Who never sought to encourage people under any false pretenses.

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[10:47] Who wasn't saying to people well it'll be easy. But who was promising his own strength and grace. And when we listen to this appeal that Paul reiterates again and again to Timothy.

then let us apply it to ourselves. Let us remember what other faithful servants like Paul himself have had to suffer.
Let us remember that there are many, many believers in the world today who are in exactly the same position as Paul was. Who could write to us today if they were allowed to send out their letters.
Who could write to us from prisons. prisons. Where they're in prison just because of their faithfulness to Christ. Let us remember that we're still living in these last days.
These last days of the Gospel age when just because Christ has come. When just because Christ has manifested himself. When just because Christ has already won his victory.
[11:55] Satan is more determined. More active than ever. And who does everything he can to oppose because of the Gospel. There are perilous times.

They've arisen with more peril in one age than another. The intensity of the opposition has varied from one country to another. But the overall picture is always that somewhere at some time with some degree of intensity there are these perilous times.
Let us remember that even the Church itself even within the borders of the professing Christ the Church of Jesus Christ there will be difficulties that arise.
Let us take very seriously our own natures and our own readiness to be afraid our own timidity. and let us take all these things into consideration and then we'll recognise that we just like Timothy need to be addressed in these terms.
This sort of verse that we look at as our text this morning is not a verse that we can pass over and say well yes Paul had to say that to Timothy but well it's different for us.
[13:14] No let us recognise this word coming to us today from our own Lord and Master and being realistic let us recognise that we need to pay attention to it.

It comes to us not to criticise us but to challenge us and to direct us in the way of obedience. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me as prisoner but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.
This word comes to us today whoever we are. It comes to us as those who are already professing to be Christ. It comes to us as professing Christians and it's a challenge to us to be faithful whatever the cost to be ready to bear testimony to our Lord.
And of course it comes to us if we're not professing Christians. It comes to us reminding us that when Christ calls us to be his own in this world he does call us to take up our cross and follow him. He doesn't seek to hide the terms of discipleship. Christ doesn't want disciples under false pretenses.
[14:58] He says to us if he's calling us today that he's calling us into a situation in which we'll be tempted again and again to be ashamed of him. he's calling us to be partaker of the afflictions of the gospel.

But let us remember who calls and let us remember as we'll see in more detail in a moment that he calls us and he challenges us to respond not in our own power but according to the power his own power.
the cross that he asks us to take up is possible for us to take up because of the cross that he himself endured and because of the grace and the salvation that flows from that cross.
Surely Timothy wasn't offended when he heard Paul writing to him like that. Surely Timothy was grateful that he was someone who understood.
He was a counsellor who was sympathetic. He was a counsellor who wasn't blinkered as to the situation in the world or in the church. He was a counsellor who didn't underestimate Timothy's own weaknesses.
[16:21] He was a counsellor who spoke in wisdom and in love. Don't let us be ashamed and don't let us be offended when this sort of appeal comes to us.

But let us recognise it as addressed to us in wisdom and in love. What is it that Paul is saying here when he says be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of me as prisoner but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel.
When Paul says be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord these words in English in our English translation could be seen to suggest either Timothy stop being ashamed or

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suggesting Timothy don't start being ashamed.
Now our English doesn't make clear what it was that Paul was saying but in the language in which Paul wrote this letter there is no ambiguity at all. Paul is not saying to Timothy stop being ashamed. He is not writing critically to Timothy and saying you've been ashamed stop being ashamed but rather he is saying don't start being ashamed. You haven't been ashamed of the gospel up till now.
[17:52] You've been faithful you've been a faithful partner with me in the gospel don't start being ashamed now. Things may seem to be getting worse.

Every day you may be made more and more aware of your own weakness your own timidity. The problems in the church may seem to be magnifying but Timothy you've never had reason to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord before and don't start now.
But rather go on being a partaker with me of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.
There's really a two-fold appeal here. He's saying don't start being ashamed but go on being the word translated partaker there is the word that means a sharer a fellow sufferer with me in the afflictions of the gospel.
There's a two-fold appeal and these two appeals of course are so closely related. It's just because there was this constant experience of affliction for the gospel that there was the temptation to be ashamed.
[19:16] If there was no affliction for the gospel there wouldn't be any need to make the appeal don't start being ashamed. Of course Timothy had a special place and we mustn't underestimate that.

Timothy had a special place a special responsibility as a minister of the gospel in his own particular situation in Ephesus at this time and that's true and we mustn't forget it.
But these words really are words that the Lord speaks to every one of us. Don't begin to be ashamed. He says don't begin to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.
And you'll see that some of the modern translations translate that don't be ashamed to testify about our Lord. Our translation says don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.
But there's no contradiction there. if Paul is saying don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, of course he at the same time is saying don't be ashamed to bear testimony to our Lord.
[20:37] And the only testimony that we have to bear to our Lord is the testimony that we have in Scripture about our Lord.

It's the testimony of the gospel. It's the testimony of that message that Paul himself goes on to speak about here. It's the testimony about the grace of God in Christ Jesus.
The grace that has been in the eternal purpose of God. The grace of salvation which was the eternal purpose of God through his Son. The purpose of God that is now revealed, that's made open by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ who has abolished death and brought light and immortality to light through the gospel.
That's the testimony about our Lord that we've been willing, that we've to be willing to testify to not to be ashamed of. Now when we listen to what Paul says about this testimony about our Lord. when we listen to it in terms of Christ's abolishing death and bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel, we may say what a glorious message, what a wonderful message, who would be ashamed of it?
[22:00] But Paul knew and Timothy knew and every true believer down through the ages has known that this glorious message is not readily welcomed by the world.

It was opposed by Jew and it's opposed by Gentiles. It's not readily accepted by the world. It's a glorious message but the world doesn't like it. It doesn't like the implications of it.
It doesn't like to hear about sin, the way sin is portrayed in the death of Jesus Christ. It doesn't like to hear about our sin being portrayed as the awful ugly thing that puts the Son of God to death.
It doesn't like to hear sin portrayed as that awful thing that deserves nothing less than the awful judgment and curse that we see in the cross of Jesus Christ.
The world doesn't like this gospel's message about what we are as sinners. It doesn't like its challenge and its call to complete commitment to a holy God.
[23:08] Paul knew that there were all sorts of temptations to be ashamed of this gospel. Paul was remembering that it costs to receive this gospel.

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It costs us to respond to this gospel gospel. We've got to be brought low. We've got to be humbled. Our pride has got to be destroyed. We've got to be convicted of our own sinfulness.
It's costly to receive the gospel. Paul knew that it was costly to bear witness to the gospel. Therefore, he was saying to Timothy, don't be ashamed.
The message still is necessary for us today. Again, we're saying that it's necessary for those of us who know the gospel. Here was Paul and he was writing to Timothy and he's being very realistic. He's writing to Timothy. Timothy, who in his own life knew the power of the gospel. Timothy himself, through the witness of his own mother and his grandmother and then through the witness of Paul himself, was brought into a real personal experience of the blessedness of the gospel.
[24:28] And Timothy, who was a preacher of the gospel with Paul and in his own, had seen this gospel transform lives, bring men from darkness into light, from the awful corruption of paganism into the beauty of the children of God.

Timothy had seen that. And yet Paul doesn't say, well, Timothy, you know the power of the gospel in your own experience. Timothy, you've seen this gospel preached and bearing fruit.
Timothy, you'll never be tempted to be ashamed of it. No, Paul doesn't write like that. Paul has been very realistic. Paul knows that even those who have known the power of this gospel, those who have seen this gospel transform lives, the oppression, the opposition of Satan, the remaining unbelief in our own hearts is so powerful, there's ever the possibility of being ashamed of it, and we need to be warned against it.
For if Paul had to write to Timothy like this, surely this word is for us today. And of course, there's this side to it too.
If those who are already Christians, if those who are ready to say from their own experience, I've tasted and I've seen that God is here, if those who are already Christians and who know the peace of God in their own hearts, if those who have had the joy of seeing others brought to know Christ, if they need this warning, think of how this warning is necessary for any of you who haven't yet received Christ, if you haven't yet tasted for yourself the power of the gospel, surely this warning comes very forcibly to you.
[26:21] If even those who are Christians need to be warned like this, oh, those who haven't yet come to Christ, need to be warned, not to be ashamed. Because our Lord knew and Paul knew that oh, the fear of the world, the fear of man, is a very powerful force keeping sinners from their Savior.

So Paul is saying, he's saying to Timothy, he's saying to Christians today, he's warning those who are tempted not to come to Christ, don't be ashamed, don't be ashamed of this glorious gospel.
And the second appeal that goes hand in hand with it, but be a fellow sufferer, be a fellow sufferer with me. Paul, when he had been called to be an apostle, remember when he was met by Christ on the Damascus road, was sent to the house of Ananias and he was told that Ananias had been prepared to receive Saul and to tell him how much he would suffer for Christ's sake.
And Paul found it true in his own experience and he's saying to Timothy, well you've found it true already, go on, be willing to be a fellow sufferer, a fellow sufferer with me.
You see, he's saying be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, but the translation we have here doesn't really bring out the point that Paul is saying, be thou a fellow sufferer with me, with me.
[28:06] Who was Paul? What was Paul suffering? What had he already suffered when he wrote this? He's saying to Timothy, suffer with me, suffer along with me.

This is Paul, whom as we've already seen, was in his condemned cell. This is Paul who was not suffering just physically, who was not just facing death, but who was enduring all sorts of emotional, mental suffering.
Here is Paul who knew what it was to be rejected by his own fellow Jews because of the gospel. Here is Paul who knew what it was to struggle and to labour for the spiritual good of true believers. Here is Paul who knew what it was to be double-crossed by false bread. Here is Paul, and he knows how timid Timothy is by nature, and he is saying to Timothy, you Timothy, go on being a fellow sufferer with me, go on being willing to suffer even in the way I am suffering.
And how could Paul dare say that? How could Paul, in the light of the intensity of his own suffering, referred to this epistle, spelled out in detail in an amazing way in the second epistle to the Corinthians, how could Paul, who suffered to this extent, dare to write to somebody as timid as Timothy, and say, be willing to go on suffering, and expect Timothy to respond.
[29:45] Well, just because he is saying it in these terms, be thou a fellow sufferer with me in the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God who saved us.

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According to the power of God, not in your own strength, Timothy, but according to the power of God, what power of God? The power of God that saved us.
The power of God that saves us from our sin is the power of God that will enable us to be faithful to the gospel. God doesn't come and say, well, I've given my son to cleanse you from your sin, to bring you to forgiveness, and now I want you to go out in your own strength and be faithful to him as your Lord and bear testimony to him.
God doesn't say that, but God comes with a complete and a total salvation in Christ, a salvation that brings us cleansing and forgiveness, but a salvation that brings the promise of his own indwelling us by his Spirit and that in his own grace and in his own strength, we should bear testimony to him and serve him as our Lord.
Paul wasn't asking Timothy to do something that he hadn't himself endured. Paul wasn't asking Timothy to take up something in his own strength, but to experience with himself that the Lord who is calling us to be faithful is the Lord who is faithful to us.
[31:35] Endure afflictions, be a fellow sufferer according to the power of God who saved us and who has called us with a holy God.

He appeals again to Timothy in chapter two, be thou therefore strong, my son, strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead, according to my gospel.
When Paul says to Timothy there, remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, he's not just setting before him another point of doctrine, but he's saying remember, remember when you've been called to suffer, remember the fellowship of a risen, living Savior.
Paul here was a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He was a prisoner of Jesus Christ in the sense that he was put in prison because of his faithfulness to Jesus Christ, but he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ in the sense also that Christ owned him.
Christ kept him. Christ acknowledged him. Christ was faithful to him even as a prisoner. Remember what he testifies to again in this same epistle.
[33:05] He had been talking about the harm that Alexander had done him. He's testifying to the fact that when he was first called to appear before Caesar, no man stood with me, they all forsake me.

I pray God it not be led to their charge. He says they all forsook me, notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.
The Lord who was calling Paul, the Lord who through Paul was calling Timothy to be faithful, is the Lord who is faithful himself.
if he calls us to be faithful, it's according to his own saving power. And so Paul, being very realistic, taking the whole situation in the world and in his own experience and in the church, taking Timothy's own weakness into consideration, salvation, not soft peddling the appeal, addresses Timothy in this way.
And so the word comes to us again today, comes to us who are Christians. It asks us to be realistic, not to have any false notions of how costly it will be to go on being faithful, but it calls us to be faithful in the experience of the power of God who saved us and it comes as a challenge to those who have not yet closed in with Christ.
[34:49] Christ isn't telling us it will be easy to be his in the world, but he's promising us and he's promising us on the terms of faith and discipleship and in no other terms, his own power to save us for time and for eternity.

Amen. Let us pray. O God, our God, we remember again the reaction of this fallen world to thine own appearing in the Son of Thy Love.
We remember the cry that went up, crucify him, crucify him, and we would see there revealed the truth of the extent of our fallenness and our perversion and our alienation from thee a sinner.
But we thank thee, O Lord, God, I knew that the very scene, the scene of rejection of Christ, that is the testimony to our own fallenness and our own need to be saved, is the scene where thou were demonstrating thy love and thy power to save.
O Lord, our God, may our eyes be open to what we are and to the kind of world we live in, so may our eyes be open to him in whom alone there is salvation and may we know what it is to hide in him and go on being faithful to him who was called Jesus because he should save his people from their sin and who is the one to whom now has been given the name that is above every name and the one before whom yet every knee shall bow.

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[36:59] Amen.

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