

## “Courage”

### II Timothy 1:8-12

~ Delivered at DHBC on May 25, 2014 (Soli Deo Gloria)

#### INTRODUCTION

- (SHOW SLIDE) Please open your Bibles to II Timothy 1.
  - **READ 8-12** – *“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”*
- The explosive rise of Christianity is a phenomenon of history. It started with just Jesus and his 12 friends but by the year 250 A.D. 50% of the Roman Empire claimed to be Christian. This included the emperor himself.
  - How did this happen? Historians give many reasons. One major reason was the astounding courage of Christians. All they had to do was deny Jesus and yet they refused and faced torture and death.
- The historian Eusebius tells of a harmless elderly woman named Apolonia. They smashed out all of her remaining teeth and burned her alive. But she would not deny Jesus.<sup>1</sup> A man named Peter was a member of the imperial household. When the emperor Diocletian discovered he was a believer he had him **“stripped, raised high, and scourged all over.”** Then salt and vinegar were poured on his wounds and he was **“slowly roasted”** alive.<sup>2</sup> Yet he would not deny Christ.
  - We have a phrase to describe such courage. We say such people have “spines of steel.” Steel is strong. Steel cannot be broken. We build skyscrapers with it. To have a spine of steel means a person keeps going and is not broken by conflict.
    - The opposite is to be spineless. A spineless person is a coward who gives in to opposition.
- We need to know what gave these early Christians such spines of steel because we are often embarrassed to speak about Jesus. We often avoid being known as Christians so we will look good to others. As our culture becomes increasingly hostile toward Christianity we will face increasing pressure to turn from Christ to the opinions and ways of the world.
  - So how can we get this courage to live unashamedly for Jesus even if it means we must suffer?

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<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 6.41.7.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 24.

- Paul answers that question in our passage today. Timothy is facing opposition for being a Christian and for speaking about Jesus. He is in danger of wimping out. So Paul seeks to put some steel into Timothy's spine.
  - Paul says that what Timothy needed, and what we need, to live unashamedly for Christ (even if it means suffering) is two things:
    - First, we need to be strengthened with the unbreakable truths of the gospel. Second, we need to be strengthened with the unbending examples of the gospel.

## **STRENGTHEND BY THE UNBREAKABLE TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL**

- Let's come to look at the first point then. I put it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE)** Put steel in your spine to live unashamedly for Christ (even if it means suffering) by strengthening yourself in the unbreakable truths of the gospel.
  - We have seen that Timothy is just like us. When faced with opposition we are tempted to be ashamed of Jesus and his people. Shame is that feeling of embarrassment that makes you want to run and hide like when you dream you are naked in front of others. Shame shows itself when we avoid being identified as Christians or avoid speaking about Jesus because it will make us look bad in front of others.
    - But in verse 8 Paul calls Timothy and us not to be ashamed.
      - READ 8 – “So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”**
- Paul now gives four truths about this gospel that will put steel in our spine. These four truths are all about God's grace. **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, strengthen yourself with the unbreakable truth of God's sovereign grace. Look at verse 9. **READ 9 – “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”**
  - By “sovereign grace” I mean it was God alone who rescued us. Notice this verse. It is God who rescued us. It is God who called us to this new life. And then Paul takes great pains to say he did not do this because we had earned it. He rescued us because of his own purpose and grace. We had nothing to do with our salvation. He did it all.
- Right here we see why Christianity is so difficult to accept and why it is the easiest thing in the world to accept. It is so difficult to accept because it requires you to admit that you are guilty of sin, that you are a sinner, that you are lost, and that you need someone to save you. This is very hard for people.
  - Although we have a hard time admitting our sins other people can see them clearly. There is a cartoon that shows a husband and wife standing in a long line before the gates of heaven. They are waiting to face judgement. The woman leans toward the man and whispers to him, **“Now Harold, whatever you do, please don't demand that you get what's coming to you.”**
    - Our wives know we have not earned heaven. Our kids know it. But it is very hard for us to admit that we need a Saviour.

- But once we admit it, once we humble ourselves, we do not find a God who says, ***“You are such a failure and I won’t have anything to do with failures.”*** No, we find a God who is full of grace.
  - People often quote the Bible verse that says, ***“God helps those who help themselves.”*** There is just one little problem with that statement. It is not a Bible verse. Actually, there is a second problem with it. It is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches. The message of the Bible is that God helps those who *cannot* help themselves. The good news of Christianity is that through Jesus Christ God did for us what we could not do for ourselves.
    - The message of Christianity is not, ***“Obey and God will rescue you.”*** The message of Christianity is, ***“Christ obeyed on your behalf and so those who believe are rescued.”*** That is why it is a message of grace.
- One year ago we adopted our son Josh. While awaiting Josh’s immigration papers and passport we spent a week in Beijing. Every night we would wake up to Josh screaming in fear. One night, around 3:00am, I picked him up and he stopped screaming. He immediately started blowing me kisses and clapping his hands. He knew that these things impressed me and made me happy. But the way that he expressed himself in that moment felt to me like he was saying, ***“Please be impressed with me. Look at what I can do for you. Please love me because I am a good boy.”***
  - I don’t remember my exact words but they were something like this: ***“Josh, you don’t need to try and prove yourself out of a fear that I will leave you. I chose you. I did everything that had to be done to rescue you. You are my son now and I will always love you.”*** Sovereign grace.
    - Do you see how this puts steel in your spine? The reason you and I are often embarrassed about Jesus and avoid speaking about him is because we are still trying to find approval. We are trying to find it in the opinions of others. But when the message of God’s sovereign grace strengthens your heart you know that because of what Christ has done you are fully approved of by God.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, strengthen yourself with the unbreakable truth of God’s pre-existent grace.
  - Look again at verse 9 again. **READ 9** – ***“This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”*** Oh let the steel of this truth strengthen your soul. The grace that God purposed to give you was not an afterthought. If you are a Christian this grace was not given to you just before you became a Christian, not just before you were born, not even a few hundred years ago. It was given ***“before the beginning of time.”***
    - Before God created anything he gave a gift. Before God made galaxies and stick bugs, tomatoes and black holes, he gave a gift. Paul describes this gift in Ephesians 1: ***“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the***

*praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”*

- If you are a Christian here today let this truth put steel in your spine. He chose you not just before you were born but before he created the world. He set his love upon you. He gave you the gift of his grace before anything existed. How can you be more loved than that?
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Third, strengthen yourself with the unbreakable truth of God’s visible grace.
  - Look at verse 10. **READ 10** – *“but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus.”* So God’s grace is not some concept or idea that we have to grasp. His grace is a person. The grace that was given to us before time was revealed when Jesus came.
    - God’s grace is a person. Christ lived the life that we should have lived and died the death we should have died. He did everything for us in order that we might be rescued.
  - Oh what steel for our spines! This grace shows us that we were loved from eternity past, that in time Jesus did everything we could not do, and that he rescued us. This is sovereign grace, pre-existent grace, and visible grace.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Finally, strengthen yourself with the unbreakable truth of God’s victorious grace.
  - This is where it all hits real life. Look at verse 10 again. **READ 10** – *“but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*
- Notice that Jesus’ work was destructive and constructive. First, he destroyed death. Through his death and resurrection he took away death’s power. But it was also constructive. The gospel brought things to light that were previously shrouded in darkness. The coming of Jesus illuminated what life looks like. Jesus shows us how to live and gave us life. But his coming also shone light on what happens when we die – on this issue of immortality.
  - Human beings have always been obsessed with what happens to us when we die. We are obsessed with finding out if we can live forever. Before Jesus came all our searching was like staring into a dark room. We could only see a few lines and shapes. If you read the Old Testament it is the same. But when Jesus came it was like the blinds were pulled aside and the blazing light of the sun lit up the room of eternity.
    - Jesus taught about what happens when we die. And then he came back from the dead showing us a future bodily resurrection. This is victorious grace.
- Do you see how all of these truths can give you that spine of steel that makes you unbelievably confident? Think about the martyrs. What made them so courageous was the fact that they strengthened themselves on these unbreakable truths. They knew deep inside that God had set his love upon them, that he had

- rescued them in Jesus, that he had defeated death, and that immortality awaited them.
- How can you stop someone who is not afraid of death? How do you defeat someone who laughs in the face of death and says, ***“Do you worst death because you will only give me what I want most which is to be with my Saviour”?***
  - In A.D. 168 a man named Polycarp was an 86-year-old man. He was captured and was required to sacrifice to the Emperor and name him as God. Like the other Christians Polycarp refused. He was led into the amphitheater amongst the roars of the crowd. He stood before the proconsul who had compassion on the old man and said, ***“Polycarp, deny Christ and swear that the Emperor is God.”***
    - But this is what he said: ***“I have now served my Lord Jesus 86 years and he has done me no harm. How can I deny my King, who has saved my soul?”***
  - The proconsul threatened, ***“I have wild beasts ready who will tear your body limb from limb if you do not curse Christ.” “Let them come for my purpose will not be changed.”*** The proconsul answered, ***“If the wild beasts do not scare you, I will have you burnt in the fire.”***
    - ***“You threaten me with a fire which will burn for an hour and then will go out, but you are ignorant of the fire of the future judgement of God reserved for the everlasting torment of the ungodly. But why do you delay? Bring on the beasts, or the fire, or whatever you choose; you shall not move me to deny Christ, my King, Lord, and Saviour.”***
      - And Polycarp took off his robe and laid down on the pile of wood where he was burned and eventually run through with a sword.<sup>3</sup>
  - What courage! What a spine of steel. But do you see where it all came from? You can hear it in his words. He knew the grace of Jesus toward him over 86 years. He knew that Jesus had defeated death. He knew that immortality awaited him. Friends, what made him so strong, what gave him a spine of steel, was that he had strengthened himself in the unbreakable truths of the gospel.
    - This is what will give you the courage as well. Strengthen yourself daily in the word. Learn of his grace. Learn of his love for you. Learn of what Jesus has done. Learn of how he defeated death. Learn of the riches that await you in the afterlife.
      - Strengthen yourself in the unbreakable truths of the gospel.

## **STRENGTHENED BY THE UNBENDING EXAMPLES OF THE GOSPEL**

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Put steel in your spine to live unashamedly for Christ (even if it means suffering) by strengthening yourself in the unbending examples of the gospel.
  - Paul has focused Timothy’s mind on God’s grace in Jesus. He now follows it up by giving himself as an example of one who has not bent to the pressure, as one who is not ashamed of the gospel.

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<sup>3</sup> Thielman J. van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror – The story of 15 centuries of Christian Martyrdom from the time of Christ to AD 1660*, 113.

- Look at verse 11. **READ 11-12a** – *“And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed.”*
  - Paul knows that as he speaks about being appointed to be a herald, apostle, and teacher, Timothy will remember his appointment to leadership. Paul has called Timothy to not be ashamed and now he gives himself as example of one who is not ashamed.
    - Again we see such confidence. Paul has a spine of steel. He is rotting in prison and everyone has abandoned him. But look at that little word, “yet.” Yet, he is not ashamed. Despite all this he is not ashamed. Nevertheless, he is not ashamed but is filled with confidence.
- And then he states *how* he gets such courage and steel in his spine. Look at verse 12. **READ 12** – *“Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”*
  - Now notice, that it is not that he know *what* he believes though that is important. Obviously Paul knows what he believes. After all, he did write thirteen letters in the New Testament. But it is not *what* he believes. It is *whom* he has believed.
    - Paul has placed all his faith in the living Christ and he knows that Jesus will never let him down. He has entrusted his life and all his efforts to Jesus and he states that Jesus is able to protect it all for the day he returns. He knows that God is actively at work.
- You probably know the name Martin Luther. He was of course the great reformer who took on the Catholic Church. He faced tremendous opposition. There is a great little story about an exchange between Martin and his wife Katharina.
  - One day Martin was very depressed. Kate tried to counsel him but nothing would change his mood. Kate went upstairs and put on a black dress. When she came down Martin asked, *“Are you going to a funeral?”* “No,” Kate replied, *“but since you act like God is dead, I wanted to join you in your mourning.”*<sup>4</sup> Luther got the message.
    - We can have confidence because God is at work. We can trust him to guard all that we are and all that we do.
- So you have to imagine Timothy reading this. He is being opposed. He is tempted to turn and run because it is hard. But Paul seeks to strengthen him in the unbreakable truths of the gospel. And then Paul gives himself as real life example of person who is serving Christ, suffering for Christ, and yet is filled with confidence and courage.
  - You see this is one of the things I love about Christianity. It is not a philosophy that only smart people can understand. It is not a book that just ponders the mysteries of the universe. It is drenched in reality. I mean that it is so practical. It is so down to earth. Paul does not write this

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<sup>4</sup> Rudolf K. Markwald and Marilynn Morris Markwald, *Katharina Von Bora: A Reformation Life*, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 139-140.

- in a library. He writes it in a prison. It is about how to follow Christ in the real world, how to have courage to face any degree of suffering.
- Example is powerful for us. We first of all need the great truths but we also need to see them lived out by others. What inspiration we get from Polycarp. What inspiration for Kate Luther.
    - How do you unashamedly live for Christ in real life, even if it means suffering? Look to how others follow Christ. A few weeks ago my two brothers and I planned a retirement party for my parents. My dad was a pastor for about 30 years and my mom was a faithful wife who also served Christ's church. Each of us decided to share about what we admired about our parents.
      - The single theme was their love for Christ and their service of him. Sometimes I find being a pastor difficult. Sometimes I think about how nice it would be not to be a leader and to face all the pressure that comes with it. The temptation is to run. But then I look at my parents. They endured. They persevered. And trust me they often suffered especially the overly harsh criticism of their own people. My dad is funny because he never misses an opportunity to preach to his sons. So once we were done talking he gave a good 15 minute talk to us. He pointed again and again to Christ to how he is the only one who can give the strength to do it.
  - How about you? Who are your Christian examples? You need to find them. You need to ask them how they have served for so many years. I bet every time they will point you away from themselves and to Christ for they know whom they have believed.
    - I would recommend reading biographies. If you don't like whole books here is an easier way. A pastor named John Piper each year gives a biography on a Christian from days of old. He then publishes them in books. So you can read this one book that has three different biographies all about suffering in the lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd. Or you can read about God's grace in the lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. Read biographies.

## **CONCLUSION**

- Friends, I am convinced that it is going to become increasingly difficult to follow Christ in our culture. We are going to be tempted to be ashamed of Christ and his people the church. We need courage. We need steel in our spines.
  - You get his steel by strengthening yourself with the unbreakable truths of the gospel and with unbending examples of the gospel.

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