

A Christ-Centered Leader is Courageous in Christ

2 Timothy 1:8-18

Introduction

Hey everyone and welcome to episode 13 of the Group Leader Podcast.

Hope you enjoyed celebrating the church's 25th anniversary last weekend. I know I enjoyed the wings and fried green tomatoes from the Cam Newton truck.

You should be receiving several copies of the Thru the Bible in 7 Weeks Group Study in the coming days. I'm hoping you'll have them by early next week so you can start going through it with your groups. If you told me your group wasn't going through it for some reason then you won't be receiving them. But if I didn't hear from you then I'll be sending you some, and you can either go through it as we do the series, or you can keep them to use at a later date.

I don't know about you, but I missed digging into 2 Timothy last week. Let's go ahead and dive into today's episode called A Christ-Centered Leader is Courageous in Christ, based on 2 Timothy 1:8-18.

Refresher

Last time I walked through the opening of 2 Timothy, ending at verse 7. What we saw in those verses is that a Christ-centered leader is called by God and formed by family.

Paul ends that section by reminding Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God, because God did not give us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-control. The idea there is that if we have the Spirit of God inside us, then we're not powerless to change; we don't have to be slaves to sin; we're not hopeless when it comes to changing.

The opening of this next section builds off this concept, so what I'm going to do is read verses 6-7, then continue on to read verses 8-14.

The text

Here we go:

⁶ For this reason I remind you into fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

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.

2 Timothy 1:6-14 ESV

A Christ-centered leader is courageous in Christ

There are several things to talk about there, but what Paul is really telling Timothy is that he should be courageous in Christ. And that's our lesson as group leaders for this section, that a Christ-centered leader is courageous in Christ.

But what does that mean?

Well, Paul starts off in verse eight with the word “therefore.” Any time you see that word in the Bible, you know you need to back up and see what the author is referring to.

When you do that here, you find that Paul’s referring to verses six and seven where he reminded Timothy of the gift he was given, and the spirit of power, love, and self-control inside of him. Based on those two premises, Paul goes on in verse eight to exhort Timothy not to be discouraged, saying, “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” (2 Timothy 1:8).

Don’t be ashamed

Paul is saying to Timothy, “Look, I reminded you about the gifts you have and about the spirit inside of you, now based on that, I exhort (or I encourage) you not to be ashamed of the gospel, or of me—a prisoner of the gospel. Instead, share in my suffering and the suffering of Christ for the gospel through God’s power.”

I’ll come back to that second part later, but right now I want to camp out on not being ashamed.

Remember back to our introduction to this book from episode ten where I told you about Timothy. He was known to be a reluctant leader, sometimes timid and fearful. He was sick a lot, and young for his position of influence. You get the sense that he was in over his head and unsure of himself.

And this is the guy that Paul was telling to guard the gospel, to call out false teachers, and not to let people stray from the truth. Timothy was being sent into the marketplace, into the town square, and into people’s homes to tell that Jesus was crucified, risen on the third day, and that this is good news for them, who were sinners by nature and separated from God.

He was being asked to take the gospel of Jesus into a culture that didn’t want to hear about it. The people of Ephesus were living in one of the wealthiest places in the Roman empire and in the world at the time. Many of them would have been living comfortable lives as they went to work and made a living. Many of them would have thought they were just fine as they went

about their idol sacrifices, trying to appease the gods so they could continue their pursuit of pleasure and happiness.

Things were going pretty well for the Ephesians, so who needs God? Who wants to hear about a suffering God that was killed on a cross but then raised from the dead, and who is now calling us to lay our lives down and follow him?

No wonder Timothy was timid and tempted to be ashamed of that gospel.

And no wonder you're timid and tempted to be ashamed. Surely you see the parallels in Timothy's task and ours? You and I are called to take the gospel into work, into the public, and into people's homes. And many of those people believe they're doing just fine. After all, they've got a roof over their head, a job that pays, and food in the fridge. Why add God to the mix when things seem to be going okay? Why can't they just keep pursuing the American Dream?

These forces and pressures make it seem so difficult to share Jesus with our neighbors and friends and family, even though we believe it to be good news for them. Why is that? Why is it so hard?

Well, there are the obvious things I just mentioned, like cultural pressures and fear of what others will think of us. But Paul doesn't really address those things here.

What he does instead is retell the gospel. He reminds Timothy of the good news.

In verses eight through ten Paul tells Timothy:

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.

He says not to be ashamed of the gospel because God saved you and called you to a holy calling. He has set you apart. God did that not because of your own merits, but because of his own purposes and grace which he gave us in Christ, which was his plan all along. Now that plan has manifested itself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah who conquered death and brought us life and immortality.

It is in remembering the gospel we believe that we receive the power to proclaim it. As we preach the gospel to ourselves, we are reminded of its powers and his grace, and it gives us strength to preach it to our friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors.

Paul knew this from experience. He faced angry mobs and academic elites. He faced people from his own culture and background. Oh, and most of these people wanted to kill him. And he still stood strong and shared the gospel with all of them anyways.

How? Later in this passage Paul tells Timothy exactly where he gets his boldness from when he says, “...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” (2 Timothy 1:12).

Paul isn't ashamed of the gospel because he knows the power and majesty of the One he believed in. Paul's faith in that One convinced him that God is able to guard what has been entrusted to him, which was the transmission of the gospel to the Gentiles, or to the nations.

Paul knew Jesus. He didn't feel like he was on his own when he shared the gospel. And he knew that God was ultimately in charge of the gospel he had been entrusted with, and this God cannot fail. Even before time began, God had one plan for all of humanity—to rescue and redeem them by the blood of Jesus so that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation would bow down before him and scream out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.”

God has the whole thing rigged! Just read Revelation 20–22 if you want to see how it all ends. Spoiler alert: God wins. Which means the gospel wins.

Paul knew he was a chosen instrument. He knew he was important and loved by God. But he also knew that God could take the gospel to the nations with or without him, and that it was simply an honor to participate in its spread in the short time he had.

Are you ashamed of the gospel? Are you afraid to tell people about Jesus? Then remind yourself of the God who saved you. Remind yourself of the grace and mercy he poured out on you, then turn around and pour it out for someone else. Don't worry about what happens next—God will take care of that.

The courage to share Christ comes from Christ. That's what Paul means when he says to “share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8). God gives us the gospel, saves us by the gospel, then gives us the power to share the gospel.

But the gospel also gives us the power for something else—to endure the suffering that sharing the gospel inevitably brings.

Suffer for the gospel by the power of God

Paul knew that Timothy would be reluctant to share the gospel if he was afraid of the suffering it would bring. That's why he invites Timothy into his suffering and the suffering of Christ, but as he does so he's careful to explain that the power to endure that suffering comes from God.

Paul's boldness in sharing the gospel is not in his own power, but in the power of God. Paul's courage to share his faith and to lead others to do the same is rooted in the power of the God who saved him and called him.

But Paul also knew something else that many of us have a hard time with. He knew that his suffering was a result of being obedient to what God called him to do. His suffering was a result of his obedience.

That's a hard concept for many of us to swallow, because we tend to equate comfort with blessing, so we can't conceive that God would call us to something that might actually result in suffering.

We'll get into that much more when we get to chapter three, but for now the important thing to notice is that God gives the power to share the gospel, and he gives the power to suffer for the gospel.

The words Paul uses are important to notice. He tells Timothy to “share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.” Where does the suffering come from? What brings it about?

Sharing the gospel.

Don't miss that. Paul is saying that God gives us power to endure suffering that results from sharing the gospel, which means verbally speaking it to someone or making it possible for someone else to do so.

This is one area we get suffering wrong. We tend to think anything bad that happens to us is “suffering.” So if our dog is sick, we're suffering. If our coworkers are mean to us or don't invite us to lunch, we're suffering. If we didn't get the job we wanted, we're suffering.

And in one sense, these kinds of things are suffering. But they're not suffering for the name of Christ and the cause of the gospel, which is what Paul is talking about here.

You not getting a job you wanted is not suffering for the gospel, but you not getting that job because you're a Christian or because you tried to share Jesus with the hiring manager *is* suffering for the gospel.

Being excluded by your coworkers is not suffering for the gospel, but being excluded by your coworkers because you keep trying to tell them about Jesus of Nazareth *is* suffering for the gospel.

You see the difference?

Examples of endurance

Paul closes this section by giving examples of people who endured suffering well, and people who weren't able to handle it. And it was important enough to him that he named names.

Paul writes,

¹⁵ You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶ May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, ¹⁷ but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— ¹⁸ may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

2 Timothy 1:15–18 ESV

He says, “If you want to see examples of what it looks like to be ashamed of the gospel then look at Phygelus and Hermogenes. They turned back when things got tough. But not Onesiphorus—he stuck it out til the end, and he’s still faithful today.”

Paul has no problem calling out those who deserted the gospel, and he has no problem lifting high those who aren’t ashamed of the gospel.

If Timothy wanted an example of what it looks like to be a Christ-centered leader who’s courageous in Christ, Paul said look no further than Onesiphorus. And surely Timothy knew by now that Paul was another example he could look to.

Conclusion

So as we’ve seen so far in this series of episodes on 2 Timothy, a Christ-centered leader is called by God and formed by family, and is courageous in Christ.

As you go forward this week into work, your neighborhood, your groups, remember that the Jesus you’re called to proclaim is the Jesus who conquered death and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. No matter what happens as you share Christ with people, you can expect that God will give you the power to endure it.

Reflection questions

1. Do you ever feel ashamed of Jesus? Are you usually nervous to share your faith?
2. What stops you from sharing Jesus with people? Think back through what Paul said to Timothy and see if anything comes to mind. Pray for God to give you the strength to overcome whatever fears you have.
3. Where does your courage come from? Does it come from your ability to accomplish things by your own abilities, or does it come from Jesus? What is it important for courage to be rooted in Christ?
4. Do your group members know what it looks like to be ashamed of Christ? Do they know what it looks like NOT to be ashamed of Christ? What examples can you give them?