

Guard the good deposit

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome again to our newcomers. If you are new this morning, we're actually just starting a series in the book of 2 Timothy. Today's our second sermon, hence why we're in the second half of 2 Timothy chapter 1.

There's an outline in your bulletin that you can use to follow along. But most importantly, please keep your Bibles open. We believe that when the Bible is explained and proclaimed, God is speaking.

And so that's why we encourage you to always have your Bibles open. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray that this morning you would indeed fan the flame so that your word proclaimed will lead to the praise of your name.

For the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ and for his glory. Amen. Now it used to be fun and easy to be a Manchester United fan. I'm one, and back in the golden age of the 1990s and 2000s, under our great manager Sir Alex Ferguson, we won multiple Premier League titles.

We enjoyed a famous comeback win in 1999 in the Champions League final when Manchester United scored two goals in the last two minutes to overcome a one-goal deficit. We could boast some of the world's greatest players like Cristiano Ronaldo, who has won the award for Best Footballer of the Year multiple times.

[1 : 23] But right now, it feels pretty shameful to be won. Just a few weeks ago, we were playing a side that is third in the Kazakhstan Football League, and Kazakhstan is hardly a football powerhouse.

But we found it difficult to beat them, just managing a one-nil win. We're closer right now to the bottom of the league than to the top. And the quality of the team right now is frankly a little embarrassing.

Liverpool fans are having a good time mocking us. After all, we're associated with a club that always seems to be on the losing side nowadays. And none of us like to be associated with the losing side.

It's shameful to align ourselves with a team whose bosses seem more interested in sponsorship deals with cup noodle makers than with actual football.

Now, many of us today probably aren't Manchester United fans, but most of us are Christians. And if you're a Christian this morning, that means you have chosen to associate yourself intimately with the gospel.

[2 : 37] You're on Jesus' team. But do you ever feel like you're associating yourselves with the losing side? Sometimes you can feel like it. For instance, if you simply wanted to play the numbers game, it's estimated that if current population trends hold, by 2050, 72% of Malaysians will be Muslims, up from the current 63%, according to the Pew Center respected poster.

Christians, on the other hand, won't see an increase percentage-wise. And of course, like it or not, the perception is that in Malaysian society, certain advantages can only be unlocked by becoming a Muslim.

So, it can seem like we're on the losing side. Or, from a different angle, perhaps we're on the losing side of history.

Many who hold what's sometimes called socially progressive views on matters of gender and sexuality are convinced that their views are right, that they're on the right side of history.

And that Christians, who hold that marriage is only between a man and a woman, who believe that gender isn't just a social construct that we can define however we like, will eventually be shown to be wrong, perhaps even immoral.

[4 : 09] And maybe those of us who are older, perhaps even if we're on the right side of history.

Well, if that's you.

And essentially, he makes two pleas to us this morning. Don't be ashamed of the gospel, but do have confidence in the gospel.

Don't be ashamed of the gospel, but do have confidence in the gospel. Well, let's look at each in turn. Firstly, don't be ashamed of the gospel.

Three times in today's passage, in verses 8, 12, and 16, Paul speaks about not being ashamed. That's his main plea.

[5 : 47] Just look at verse 8. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. Now, remember where Paul is? He's in prison.

In fact, he's on death row. Now, why might that be the case? After all, Paul isn't a terrorist. He's not a traitor seeking to overthrow Nero, the Roman emperor of that time.

But then again, neither was Jesus a terrorist or an anarchist. And yet, both ended up being executed by insecure tyrants.

Why might that be the case? The answer is simple. It's the gospel itself that has left him in such dire conditions.

Clearly, the gospel was seen as something highly undesirable by those on the seats of power. After all, what does the gospel communicate in a nutshell?

[6 : 52] The gospel declares Jesus is Lord. The gospel proclaims that he reigns over the entire earth. That even Caesar has to bow the knee to him.

For God himself has come to earth. Now, that's not a message you want to hear if you're the one in power. Ruling however you like.

But what's even more ridiculous is that this gospel declares that Jesus is Lord by wearing a crown of thorns and being crucified on the cross?

What kind of stupidity is this? We don't want this kind of message infecting our highly sophisticated, highly educated society.

We don't want this kind of testimony to go viral. Do we want to become the laughingstock? No. So prison it is for you, Paul.

[7 : 50] And so from a worldly perspective, the very nature of the gospel is shameful. It's inbuilt into the message.

It suggests that a convicted criminal is to be highly exalted. What can be more shameful than that? And as with the message, so it is with the messenger.

Paul himself is also a potential source of shame. Why associate yourself with someone who says such stupid things?

Don't forget, Paul and Timothy are operating in an honor-shame culture. In such cultures, people often conducted themselves on the basis of what brings them honor and what brings them shame. Not just individually, but also on their families and their communities as well. This outlook, of course, is found in many Asian cultures, including those in Malaysia, although we might not be conscious of it.

[9 : 05] So, if your son is a doctor, then that's something we are happy to broadcast because that brings honor in our society's way of thinking.

But, if your son is training to be a pastor, then we might lie about that fact to others, as my friend's father did.

Because that's not something his father wanted to be associated with. That's honor-shame at work. And so, in such a culture, Timothy would be tempted to distance himself from Paul.

But Paul says, verse 8, Don't be ashamed of the gospel, and don't be ashamed of me, his prisoner. Instead, embrace it.

That's part of what it means to be a Christian. To stick with this apparently shameful message, even calling it good news, and to stick with those who bring that message.

[10 : 20] For as he says elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18 on the screen, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

In other words, let God, not our culture, define for you what is shameful and what isn't. You don't have to be ashamed of the gospel.

Because despite the world's perception, in reality, it's not an object of shame. Instead, it's a message of honor, of a God who is willing to go to greater lengths than we could ever dare believe,

to rescue sinful people such as ourselves, by humbling himself to the status of a convicted criminal in the eyes of the Romans, and the status of a cursed covenant breaker in the eyes of the Jews. And when you stick with such a message, and with such a messenger, you are actually testifying to the true nature of the gospel.

You are saying, yes, I believe this message is true. More than that, I believe this message is glorious.

[11:48] I believe, I believe, in the words of 1 Corinthians 1, verse 25, again on the screen, that what seems like the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

I believe. And so heed the call. Don't be ashamed of the gospel, or those who bring it.

When I was in secondary school, a schoolmate of mine was converted. And in his fresh zeal, he began to do things like scribble notes about how great Jesus is, and how much he loved him, and leave them in classrooms.

If I remember correctly, sometimes he even left graffiti. So you'll go into the science lab, you sit on those long tables, and you look down, and hey, something about Jesus on the table. And to be honest, I was a bit embarrassed.

Couldn't he, you know, be a bit more sensitive with this public display of affection? Now, you could say that maybe there are more effective ways to proclaim the gospel.

[13:00] But looking back, it probably wasn't just the method that I was ashamed of. I was ashamed of the messenger, that he looked so silly, and made other Christians like me look silly too.

And maybe secretly I thought he was a bit too Jesus-centric. But Paul would say to me, brother, that is just his sincere faith at work.

Own him as one who belongs to your team. Don't be ashamed. Because Jesus isn't.

That's what grace is all about. Remember? And so when the preacher dares to talk about sin and judgment, and deliverance from that judgment to your non-Christian friends, well, embrace it.

When your colleague jumps into your car and notices both a Bible and a book entitled Knowing God in your passenger seat and makes jokes about it, well, embrace it.

[14:08] When you decide, as a doctor, to relocate your family from Australia to Papua New Guinea to care for the underprivileged and to be a living testimony to the gospel that way, and everyone thinks you're weird, well, embrace it as the brother of another friend of mine did.

It's inbuilt into your life as a Christian. It's part of your call. Well, I've just mentioned some general ways it looks like, what it looks like not to be ashamed.

But what does Paul himself think is involved in not being ashamed? Well, he fleshes it a little bit more in this section. And I think there are two ways we can see what it involves.

The first is in the second half of verse 8. He says, rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel.

Now, notice how Paul frames verse 8. He says, don't be ashamed, so we might expect him then to say the opposite. Be unashamed instead.

[15:23] But that's not quite what he says. Instead, the stress is on the suffering. You see, Paul is saying, as you choose not to be ashamed of the gospel, expect suffering to come.

Perhaps it comes in the form of ridicule and mockery. Eh, I thought you said your God was very great, mighty to save and all that. How come I don't see much improvement in your finances and career?

How come you've got so much problem? Your God's not very powerful. Perhaps it comes in the form of anger. How dare you say that you must believe in Jesus as the only way?

Don't you know that Sarawak is a tolerant society? We don't welcome extremist views. Perhaps it comes in the form of abandonment.

I don't really want to be part of a church that doesn't seem to meet my needs. And all that, of course, was what Paul experienced.

[16:33] So if we are not ashamed of the gospel, we must be prepared to suffer. That's true, of course, for the pastor and those engaged in ministry of the word.

Remember, that is who we should first apply to Timothy to. But that's also true for every Christian. Notice how Paul puts it here.

Join with me in suffering. He doesn't see his suffering as a solitary experience, something only he must endure.

As he would say later on in 2 Timothy 3, every Christian will suffer, pastor or not. But, if we are suffering as a Christian, we know that we are not alone.

We suffer along with fellow Christians. We suffer along with our faithful Christian leaders. We suffer along with Paul and the apostles.

[17 : 38] and we suffer along with Jesus. That makes sense if we are his disciples. For as Jesus himself puts it in Mark 8, 34, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

But do you remember last week that Paul also reminded us who is with us? In verse 7, he reminded us that the spirit of power and love and discipline is with us.

And that is the reason we can suffer. The first word of verse 8 is very important. So, we have this Holy Spirit, verse 7, so we cannot be ashamed but suffer for the gospel.

Verse 8, the Holy Spirit empowers us not to perform miracles or anything like that, but to suffer for Christ.

That's what it means. That's the logic of verses 7 to 8. The second way we show that we are not ashamed of the gospel is found in verse 14.

[19 : 07] Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. You see, one of the ways we might be ashamed of the gospel, that's the good deposit, is by changing it or by substituting it.

You see, the gospel confronts us with the reality about ourselves, that we are rebels who will be held accountable to a holy God. The gospel confronts us with the reality that we are creatures with limits, who are under authority.

We don't get to live selfishly for ourselves without reference to the God of this universe. You see, if we hear and share the full gospel, those are some of the implications of the message.

And that is not necessarily a message that people want to hear. And so it's tempting for instance to change or just downplay a few of these things and maybe simply say, okay, God loves you, and then we leave it at that.

is God loves you the gospel? Well, if you were to look at the book of Acts and look at every single instance the apostles proclaim the gospel, they never say that a single time, not even once.

[20 : 42] On its own, God loves you might be a true statement, but it is not the gospel. that statement makes no mention of Jesus or what Jesus has done here on earth, which is what the apostles concentrate on.

But we might like to think that such vague statements are the way that we can proclaim the gospel. After all, it won't cost us very much. No one is going to object to you telling them that God loves them.

They might object, however, if you told them that Jesus died for your sin because, wait a minute, are you calling me a sinner? And so we need to guard the good deposit by saying it as it is.

The gospel has been entrusted to us. We are not free to change it. And that's why Paul says in verse 13, we need to keep the pattern of sound teaching.

we cannot modify its shape. Now, that phrase sound teaching can be literally translated as healthy words.

[21 : 59] And that tells us why sound teaching is so important. It's critical to our spiritual health. Imagine if you have a teenager who is full of energy and zest and liveliness.

And you keep feeding him junk, just coke and chips every day. Now, nothing might change for a while. He seems to be still very full of energy. But over time, his body begins to be malnourished, his mental faculties begin to weaken, his emotional life becomes more unstable, and eventually he is in full decline.

And sadly, that's what happens to many Christians. When they first start out, they are full of life and energy. But because they are consistently fed spiritual junk food, their spiritual health eventually fails.

Although we might not see the symptoms until years later. And so that's one reason why people might suddenly disappear from church. It's actually not certain.

It's because of what they've been consuming. And so that's why a consistent pattern of sound teaching is essential. We need a constant diet of biblical teaching that consistently proclaims the gospel and shows how Jesus wants us to follow him in every area of life.

[23 : 31] And we should never pit mind against heart or teaching against devotion. word against spirit as some Christians occasionally do.

Look again at verse 14 and notice how we are to guard the good deposit. It is with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Or look at verse 13 and notice how we are to keep the pattern of sound teaching. It's with faith and love in Christ Jesus. And so a Christian who has the Holy Spirit dwelling in them would care passionately about doctrine.

A Christian who loves Jesus desires very much to keep the pattern of sound teaching. Sometimes you might hear people say, don't be such a Pharisee.

We should just love Jesus. Don't worry so much about doctrine. in. My dear friends, that is a false dichotomy that we should reject. It is never lover of Jesus versus lover of sound doctrine.

[24 : 45] Those who love Jesus will guard the good deposit. Those who guard the good deposit should do it out of a love for Jesus.

And so what does that mean for us today? It means, first of all, the pastor and those in church leadership need to ensure that biblical truth is guarded even when it's not popular.

But the best way to guard this good deposit isn't by locking it away in some underground vault somewhere. It's not by becoming defensive and simply choosing to withdraw from the world, worried that somehow the world would corrupt the message.

No. The best way to guard the good deposit is by constantly proclaiming it. It's by teaching and giving away the truth as much as possible so that as many people as possible would come to a knowledge of the truth.

It's by discipling people to apply that truth in every circumstance. And it's sometimes done by having the leaders warn against false teaching or not promote certain things.

[26 : 14] It's not because we are being mean-spirited or anything like that or being divisive. It's because we want to guard the good deposit. That way it won't be lost.

And that should be what I'm aiming to do. And for the congregation it means that we should ensure that our leaders are well-grounded in the faith.

It means that we ourselves should have a desire to better understand doctrine, to be receptive to sound Bible teaching, so that we can support the work of guarding this good deposit.

We need to learn and increase in our discernment so that whenever someone passes you the latest book from the latest hot teacher or sends you a link to some YouTube video, you're able to tell whether that is of benefit or not.

So do everything you can to grow in this area, make full use of our church library, ask me for recommendations. Next year, I'm hoping that we are able to offer some classes.

[27 : 28] If that happens, sign up for that. It's why we have been having seminars. Two years ago, we had that seminar on thinking Christianly about technology in our church camp.

This year, at our TNT nights, we've been thinking about work, about singleness, about marriage from a Christian perspective. all those things are there to help us to guard the good deposit.

So don't be ashamed of the gospel. Be ready to suffer for it. Guard the good deposit. But how can we keep doing that year after year?

It's a difficult task. And so Paul now gives us his answer in his second plea. Secondly, do have confidence in this gospel.

Do have confidence in this gospel. Let me read verse 8 again. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me, his prisoner.

[28 : 35] Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God. Paul knows that we need power to do all this.

But where is that power to be found? Now, part of that answer is the Holy Spirit back in verse 7. But that's not the whole picture. Because notice what Paul says next, verses 9 and 10.

He 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 Saviour Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Now, that's a lovely summary of the gospel. But why is Paul rehearsing the gospel for Timothy here? It cannot simply be because Timothy doesn't know the basics.

Oh, you need to suffer, Timothy, and oh yeah, I don't think I ever told you about Jesus and salvation, right? So I better tell you now. No, of course not. Rather, Paul rehearses the gospel here to remind Timothy, Ennis, to have confidence in the gospel.

[30 : 11] He tells the gospel in such a way so as to put the stress on the power of God. He wants to show Timothy that God's work in saving his people is a demonstration of his power so that Timothy will have confidence that this same God will see him through in his time of suffering.

So let's have a closer look at the way Paul presents this gospel of salvation by noticing the timing, the means, and the effects.

So number one, the timing. In verse nine, Paul shows Timothy that salvation goes beyond just that moment when we say, I believe.

Timothy is invited to look up beyond his circumstances to the horizons of eternity. For this grace, Paul says, in verse nine, was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

Now, we are creatures of time, so it's beyond our imagination to know what it is like to be outside of time. But there is one being, and one being only, who is capable of being outside time, and that is God.

[31 : 48] He's the only one without limitations, because he can transcend even the limitations of time. That's how powerful he is.

He is so unlike us human beings who are limited, and constrained, and restrained. But what was this powerful being planning before the beginning of time?

He was planning to save us. He was planning to show grace to us. He was planning, in the language of Ephesians 1, to choose and adopt us as his children in love.

And so what are a few temporary trials when viewed from eternity's perspective? If this God is for us, who can be against us?

But how can we be confident this is true? Well, we move on to number two, the means of salvation. You see, how did this grace come to us?

[32 : 59] In verse nine, it can only come about one way. It comes in the person of Christ Jesus. In verse ten, the mystery of this immense grace is revealed to us when Jesus comes.

We don't experience this grace in the abstract. Instead, we encounter this grace when our saviour steps into time and space and history from outside of time.

And so we can see him. And as we see him, he becomes a man who suffers. But unlike every other man, he never sins.

And yet he takes the lonely road to Calvary to go die on the cross to take our place. We deserve punishment for our sin, but he bore them instead.

Well, that doesn't sound very powerful at all. But Paul isn't finished. For look at number three, the effects of salvation. You see, we know that Jesus didn't stay dead, but he rose again.

[34 : 13] And what did all that accomplish? Well, let me read verse 10 again. But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Jesus rose again from the dead, and by that he defeated death. Now, that doesn't mean that physical death is completely abolished in this world, obviously not.

But it means that the power of death has been completely overturned. It simply now becomes the entry door to life. Some of you will know who Dietrich Bonheifer is.

He's the German pastor who courageously resisted the Nazis before he was finally hung in 1945, when he was arrested at the end of a church service.

He knew he was going to be executed. But as he turned to his friends to say his final goodbye, he whispered to them, for me, this is the beginning of life.

[35 : 30] That is the power of God. Death has been destroyed. God. It now only becomes an entrance door to a better life in a renewed world with God.

That is the gospel. If you're not a Christian here this morning, well, that's the good news, we believe. And so it's possible not to be ashamed.

It's possible to suffer in the present. And that's why Paul presents the gospel in this manner to Timothy, choosing in this case not to mention other significant aspects of the gospel like forgiveness.

He wants to showcase the power of God. And Christians, Paul says, immerse yourself in this gospel.

Meditate on it. This gospel is such a wondrous message that it's worth giving up everything for it. That's what Paul did. Verse 11 of this gospel, I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.

[36 : 45] This is why I am suffering as I am. I can do no other. As I proclaim the gospel, Paul says, I suffer.

And as I suffer for the gospel, I proclaim its value. But more than that, have confidence in the gospel not just because of its value, but because of its enabling power.

If it is true that God can sustain me even through death, then God can sustain me through the hardships of ministry.

Amen. And so Paul exhorts Timothy and us to place our confidence in this very same gospel because we know the God behind this gospel.

I know whom I have believed, Paul declares in verse 12. I know he is an absolutely trustworthy God. I know he will help me guard the gospel.

[37 : 51] I know my life is safe in his hands, for I am taken out of death's hands. What's his evidence? Well, he'll point to it explicitly later on in chapter 2, verse 8.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel. And to hammer home this point, Paul ends this section by pointing out two contrasting examples, one of whom had confidence in the gospel, and two who did not.

Look at Phygilus and Hermogenous, he says in verse 15. They have deserted me. They were ashamed of me being in prison. They have decided that the gospel is something to be ashamed of. But not all is lost, for there is one bright spot, Onesiphorus, verse 16. May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day. You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

[39 : 22] Here was a man who was not ashamed to be associated with the losing side. He asked around for Paul. He entered the prison Paul was in and encouraged him where possible.

He did all this publicly. people people would have known that he was hunting around for this shameful prisoner. The prison guards would have stood on silently as they watched this man come in close proximity to Paul.

But he didn't care about his reputation. So the question Paul leaves us with this morning is, who do we identify with?

Do you want to be named amongst the group who suffer for the gospel courageously, who pay the price, and who will know that life and immortality treat the gospel?

Or do you want to be named amongst the group who chose to be ashamed for the gospel, who abandoned the Lord's apostle, and who are now in danger of ultimately losing everything?

[40 : 45] Serving Jesus is not going to be easy. Courage is going to be needed. A clear commitment to stick with the pattern of sound teaching is going to be needed.

that's going to be difficult because there will be alternative teaching going around that never talks about suffering or only talks about what God can do for you.

■■■■■■ value for the best Sharon phone stand upon Jesus Christ and his gospel, he will be faithful and see us through until that day.

For it's risen from the dead. He holds that promise of life. And so guard the good deposit and you will have the best return of investment you will ever receive.

Let's pray.