

# Afflicted, Faithful and Useful

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Preacher: Josh Johnston

[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 2, 2 Timothy chapter 2, and that can be found in the Church Bibles on page 995.

We're picking up after last week where Paul has been encouraging Timothy to keep going, looking to the future, seeing that the gospel will be protected to the end, and he finishes with two examples of people who've deserted him and one faithful man who's kept going unashamed with the gospel. So he picks up in 2.1. You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal, but the word of God is not bound.

Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy for, if we have died with him, we also will live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us.

[ 1 : 57 ] If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. Remind them of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no needs to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal. The Lord knows who are his, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

Now, in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

[ 3 : 21 ] So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies.

You know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will. God may perhaps grant them to do his will.

God may perhaps grant them to do his will. God may perhaps grant them to do his will. Please turn again in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 2. 2 Timothy chapter 2. If you have a choice between looking weak and looking strong, between looking like a winner and looking like a loser, between looking like someone suffering or looking pain-free, I wonder what you'd choose.

If you were to come up with a great strategy for attracting people to your team, which appearance would you pump for? If the future of your team depended upon how you put your message across,

would you go for the weak-looking sufferer that looks like he's going to lose?

[ 4 : 54 ] Or would you go for the strong, clever winner? 2 Timothy 2 gives us a glimpse at God's strategy for bringing people into his team and into his family.

It is the winning strategy, but to the world it does not look like the winning strategy. It looks weak. It looks like it's losing because it involves suffering.

The strategy is that the gospel grows and continues through the suffering of its ministers. The gospel grows and continues through the suffering of its ministers.

You might think that that's bad news if you're a minister of the gospel. And the reality of this suffering is that it brings real temptation for ministers to give up, to stop going with the real gospel. And a minister who's given up on the gospel is very bad news for their church. 2 Timothy 2 paints a picture of the very real pressure on a minister to give in, to take the easy way, to flee from Paul's suffering and his gospel.

[ 6 : 14 ] It can bring a real temptation to be ashamed of Paul's prison, Paul's gospel, and with it the suffering of the Lord Jesus. The thrust of this letter, its big message for the church today, could be said to be Paul saying, stick with me.

Keep going with me. The real temptation for any minister is to take the easier route, to go with the strong appearance, the one without pain, over Paul's weakness, Paul's prison, and Paul's suffering. So what does that say to a congregation? If it centers on the hardships that a pastor faces, what does it say to us? It says, do not take for granted that your preachers will easily stick to the truth and to real faithful ministry.

And to a church that wants to train ministers, it says, know that they will face very real temptations to desert the gospel. Ministers are men.

Ministers have the same broken hearts that any Christian has. But it's through these ministers not giving up that God builds his church.

[ 7 : 43 ] The gospel continues, protected until the end with these ministers. That's why verse 19, Paul says, God's firm foundation stands.

Last week in chapter one, we saw Paul encouraging Timothy, a normal pastor, to keep going in what he was doing, being unashamed and unafraid, knowing whom it is he believes in, and seeing how the future plays out.

And Paul finished chapter one with two illustrations. The deserters, all those in Asia, the abandoners, who were ashamed of Paul and his gospel and his prison cell.

And then Onesephorus, the unashamed gospel encourager. Those who fled and deserted and one who's an unashamed friend.

And from here, Paul moves on into chapter two, encouraging Timothy to be like Onesephorus. Don't abandon the work. Follow his example.

[ 8 : 51 ] He says, verses one to seven, keep going as a gospel messenger. Keep going as a gospel messenger. Paul says to Timothy, don't be like the deserters.

Be strengthened in Christ and keep doing gospel work. That's what we see in verses one to two. And that's what the three illustrations in verses three to six draw out.

But notice as Paul starts his instructions to Timothy that he's careful to say, verse one, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ. And then again, verse seven, he says, Christ will provide what he needs, strength and understanding.

After all, the tasks he faces as a gospel minister are to teach the truth, which needs understanding, are to teach the truth, which needs understanding, and to face suffering, which requires strength. Paul instructs his young apprentice further. He makes clear the large part of this ministry is also, verse two, training. Training men to do the same.

[ 10 : 00 ] Real messengers make more messengers. That's part of the work. Verse two can often be taken to sound like, find all the bright young men you can, teach them all the truth that you know, and then let them do the same.

And of course, the church needs young men to learn ministry, to learn to preach and teach. But Paul's emphasized something else in this letter so far.

Verse three, those who do that ought to be prepared to suffer. Entrust the gospel to faithful men who will be able to teach.

There's two parts to that. They must know the gospel and believe it. They must have abilities to teach it. But they must also have the steel and the backbone to keep going, to follow Paul and

follow Jesus in their suffering.

As a church, if we want to be part of training men up to be ministers who are faithful to the gospel, we can't think that sending them off for theological training is enough.

[ 11 : 12 ] Yes, they need to know truth. That's a priority. They need to be able to teach. And so we need to allow them to work amongst us, to learn. At times, I'll be putting up with my mistakes.

But we must train men who will follow Paul's pattern of ministry as well as his gospel. That's not learned in the classroom.

It's not just knowledge. They're to be soldiers. Their weapon is the gospel, but they're going to be shot at. Gospel ministry is war.

We have an enemy. And Paul is making it plain that this means any who are able to teach his gospel, who want to follow after Paul must follow in his ministry of suffering.

The same ministry that Paul's teaching, Timothy, verse 3. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. What is Glasgow's greatest need or Scotland's greatest need?

[ 12 : 20 ] Gospel ministers. Men who know the truth and have the still and confidence in Christ to suffer for it. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ.

It doesn't look strong. It doesn't look triumphant. But that is at the crux of God's plan to bring people to his team. Paul says a real minister is one who will teach the truth and then face the backlash and suffering that's brought forth for it.

In Christ's strength, he says to Timothy, keep going as a messenger who makes messengers. And he uses three simple illustrations to teach us the still required for gospel ministry.

He says, verse 4, no soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits. His aim is to please the one who enlisted him. maybe some of our older folks have done national service and as they headed off as soldiers, they didn't take some time out of fighting to set up a golf seal shop in the middle of a war zone.

They didn't try and sell Persian rugs. They were there to fight. Paul says, don't desert the front line for other duties. Don't cease performing your duty to sell carpets.

[ 13 : 45 ] Don't be accoured. Don't swerve from the task that you have. Keep working honorably. Keep fighting as a good soldier of Christ. He also says, verse 5, an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Chris Froome, as he tries to win the Tour de France this year, can't simply hop on a helicopter or a cable car and get all the way up to the top. He has to cycle.

He must compete according to the rules. And well, the Tour de France maybe has a ropey history of that, but actually, it's come back to bite them. They've been stripped. An athlete must compete according to the rules if they're to win the prize.

Paul says, don't cheat, don't take shortcuts, don't feel accountable for not doing what you're meant to do. Don't take your eyes off the prize.

Keep working honestly. Keep going at your task with integrity. Teach the truth. Don't take the easy route. Don't jump on the cable car.

[ 14 : 55 ] Verse six, it's the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. If old McDonald who has a farm didn't plant any crops, then at harvest time, he can't really expect to feed all his animals.

He can't expect to be out picking the crops for his wonderful fruit. He hasn't done the hard work, so he can't expect to be picking the fruit. Paul says, don't be lazy, don't neglect the hard work that this task involves, don't miss out on the fruit by failing to put in the work.

Keep working hard. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Three illustrations for the gospel worker, keep working honorably, keep working honestly, and keep working hard.

Paul is realistic about the difficulty of real ministry, the temptations to desert the truth, to desert the central task of teaching that truth. It's easier to not get your hands dirty in a fight.

It's easier to not stick at what you're meant to do. Paul says, don't desert your post as a soldier of Christ. It's tempting to not do the things that ought to be done.

[ 16 : 21 ] It's easier to teach what isn't true, or perhaps not teach the truth that needs to be taught. that leads to problems. You may have to deal with people. Bob File has often said that the mark of a false teacher is that he never tells his people they need to change.

Nobody wants to hear that they have to change after all. That's the easy way out. A preacher who competes by the rules must preach what may cause his people to not like him.

a real preacher will inevitably call people to conform their lives to Christ even if they hate him for it. It's tempting to avoid this hard work.

It's hard work to search the scriptures. It's easier to not submit to them. It's easier to not let them shape us and mold us. It's easier to avoid God's words and teach other things than to stick at the hard task of preaching faithfully and suffering for it.

Paul says to Timothy keep going as a gospel messenger. Keep going with the truth and keep going in the midst of trials. And Paul moves on to show Timothy why it's so important that he keeps going. [17:43] He says in verses 8 to 13 that the message is worth it. The message is worth it. The struggle of ministering for the message is worth it for two reasons, says Paul.

Because by it people obtain salvation. And secondly, because it's a matter of faithfulness to Christ. So first, verses 8 to 10, by it people obtain salvation.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. Paul's suffering goes to the very extent of being imprisoned and he's no longer in a comfortable house arrest, bound in chains, treated as a criminal, deserted by everyone in Asia.

Paul's suffering was real. Though look at what he says in verse 10, but the word of God is not bound. Paul's suffering and imprisonment did not cause the gospel to cease.

Quite the opposite. Verse 10, Paul says, therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

[19:07] The message is worth the suffering. The message is not bound even if the messenger is. In fact, Paul is saying that his own suffering serves to bring salvation to the church.

What is it that brings salvation to the Christians here? It's Paul's suffering. How is it that the message goes forth and achieves this? Through Paul being imprisoned.

It is Paul's willingness to endure everything that allows Christians to believe the gospel. The message is not bound just because the messenger is.

The message continues through the suffering of the messenger. Doesn't that ring true? The suffering of the messenger adds weight to their testimony of the truth.

The story is told of a tribal convert. This man's been converted to Christianity and rejoicing in his great news, he heads back to his village, to his tribe, to tell them about Jesus.

[20:16] He enters into the village and starts to tell them about what Jesus has done for him, starts to tell them the truth of the gospel, and their response is to beat him to within an inch of his life and kick him out of the village.

When his wounds have healed, he thinks he must have communicated it wrongly. They didn't respond, they didn't believe like he did, so he returns again and tries to tell them about Jesus.

Jesus, they do the same thing. He's beaten, he finally recovers, and again he heads back to his village because he loves them, and he wants to tell them the gospel.

And the third time as they begin to beat him, tears are streaming down their faces, and they stop. His suffering had proved the importance of the message he was sharing, and they listened.

suffering is not a sign to stop gospel work. It's a sign that gospel work is following the pattern of the apostle Paul, and that the worker is following the pattern of Jesus himself.

[21:22] It's taking up one's cross. It's in the face of suffering that the church has most often grown. The cost of being a messenger is worth it, because through the message, people obtain salvation.

The suffering messenger's message brings salvation to the elect. Paul's second reason to say that the message is worth it is that it's a matter of faithfulness to Christ, verses 11 to 13.

Two positive promises and two negative ones. Being faithful to God means he'll be faithful to us if we die with him. We will live with him.

If we endure with him, we will reign with him. If we are prepared to suffer for Christ, then he'll reward that. It will not be wasted.

It proves our faithfulness to him, and we know that that is never a wasted thing. But look at the two negative promises. For those who desert the suffering that accompanies the gospel, and for those who desert the gospel, they will be deserted by God.

[22:43] Do you see that? If we deny him, he'll deny us, verse 12. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

He will not change to suit us. He will remain faithful to his work in the world. He will remain faithful to the gospel spreading.

Chapter 1, verse 12 reminds us that the gospel is God's. He is the one protecting it to the end. His faithfulness to that gospel will not change depending on our faithfulness or our faithlessness.

it goes on. God is always faithful to his promises, and that is equally encouraging for the Christian who's faithful as it is frightening to the unfaithful person.

Continuing to be a gospel messenger is a matter of faithfulness to Christ. It will be rewarded.

Timothy needed to know that. But he wasn't the only person who needs to know that.

[ 23 : 50 ] Paul goes on to say that the message shapes the type of messenger, verses 14 to 19. The message shapes the type of messenger.

A preacher who keeps on preaching the truth will be prepared to suffer for it. A preacher who is unwilling to suffer for his message will be preaching a message that is not Paul's gospel.

Paul tells us the fruit of the false messengers. Verse 14, they ruin the hearers.

Verse 16, they lead people into more and more ungodliness. Verse 18, they're upsetting the faith of some. Their fruit is rotten, and it does not serve the church.

Paul's suffering gospel ministry is for the sake of Christians so that they can obtain salvation. Paul's ministry is for the sake of Christians.

[ 24 : 57 ] Those who desert Paul and his gospel, their fruit is ruin, ungodliness, and upset faith. Two very different kinds of messengers.

So what's the pattern of their ministry compared to Paul's? They have swerved from the truth. They quarrel over words and are engaged in a reverent babble.

I'm sure we all know somebody who likes to quarrel over words, pedantic precision in an argument. For all honest, we find it incredibly annoying. It's often really unhelpful, and it's usually someone trying to be smart to win an argument, splitting hairs to be clever.

When church leaders do this over theological things, it's even more unhelpful. In fact, Paul says it ruins hearers.

Don't focus on quarreling. Focus on the gospel of the risen Christ, the promised king, Paul's gospel. Remember that, verse 8.

[ 26 : 03 ] But what were the false messengers teaching? Verse 18 tells us their error. They have been saying that the resurrection has already happened.

All throughout to Timothy, Paul is encouraging Timothy to look to the future, to look to the end, to have the future in view. These guys are saying what's in the future has already happened.

And how disappointing. They're teaching that the resurrection has already happened. That's not the resurrection of Jesus. They're not taking issue with that.

They're talking about the future resurrection of Christians. They're teaching that the promise of life, the promise of the gospel, the immortality that the gospel has promised has already happened.

They're saying that the Christian's great future hope is a present reality. And if you don't have that hope in the future, why would you bother suffering now?

[ 27 : 06 ] If it's already happened, you don't want that. When you're living the normal Christian life, putting up with difficulty to be faithful to Jesus, is there anything more discouraging than to hear that the Christian life should not contain suffering?

Is there anything that will upset your faith more than that? when the normal Christian life is full of struggle and a preacher comes along and says, the resurrection's already happened, the kingdom's come, the real resurrected life is now, heaven has already come to us, all the blessings of it are here now, delight in them, delight in all that God has for you now.

Don't suffer, that's passed away. that's for the unresurrected person. Is there anything more helpful and unhelpful and discouraging?

When you hear a preacher teaching that heaven has already come, that it's here on earth now, and all the blessings of the kingdom have arrived, and you're struggling away, finding it difficult to go from week to week being faithful, is there anything that upsets your faith more?

When you hear a preacher teaching this, of course it will sound attractive over your difficult Christian life, the normal Christian life.

[ 28 : 34 ] Of course that looks strong and impressive, but it isn't. It's precisely the opposite pattern from what Paul's been teaching. It removes suffering from ministry.

Paul is in chains, Paul has been deserted, and Paul has suffered and is suffering, and he says this is the pattern of the good soldier. This is what he's been telling Timothy to be ready for.

This is the pattern that accompanies the real gospel. This is the pattern of the life of the Lord Jesus. It was Jesus' own suffering that made his ministry.

Similarly for Paul, his suffering proved his ministry was a real thing. And it will be the same for anyone who will follow after Paul in the same gospel.

Him and Aes and Philetus didn't like the idea of suffering. They've swerved from Paul's gospel, and they've embraced a lie that promises things that won't be ours until the last day.

[ 29 : 41 ] It promises them now. They're maybe assuming things like no more tears, no more sorrow, no more suffering, or ours now.

But of course, it's the last day that we long for those things. It's the future that is the hope of any real minister of Christ.

That's why they can suffer. They'll not keep going without the hope that's in the future. So if the resurrection's already happened, it's game over. Paul wants Timothy to know this in chapter one and to teach it.

And now he's telling Timothy that the error of others is to offer all the future now. A suffering free life. Paul offers suffering for the gospel with a real hope for the future.

Him and Aes and Philetus offer the blessed life now with no substance to it. a real leader with a weak looking message challenged by false leaders with a strong looking message that is a lie.

[ 30 : 53 ] That's what's going on. And Paul encourages Timothy from something that happened in Israel's history. Verse 19. In Numbers, there was a rebellion against Moses and Aaron's leadership.

Moses' response is that the Lord knows who are his. and that's what's quoted in verse 19. God will decide who leads Israel. So for Timothy, Paul is saying that whilst there seems uncertainty and murkiness about who is real and what is true, the Lord knows who are his.

for all the appearances of strength and being impressive and how difficult it is to differentiate the real from the false, Paul says the Lord knows who are his.

The Lord knows his leaders, his messengers, and he will preserve them. God's God's God's foundation is firm.

Verse 19, his gospel will continue protected until the last day, and God will preserve his messengers for that purpose. We see also in verse 19 that real followers of God in Timothy's church will be those who in what is false as exposed turn back to the truth.

[ 32 : 32 ] They will, verse 19, be those who depart from iniquity. Paul wants Timothy to know that the false messengers will be seen by their false message and in their unwillingness to suffer for it.

Their fruit only causes Christians' harm. Preachers of the real message will be seen best by their willingness to suffer for the good of the church, just like Paul.

God knows the real ones, and he'll preserve them. Their message is Paul's gospel, their pattern is Paul's ministry of suffering. They are the real messengers, and they need to know that it's a matter of faithfulness to God.

God, we're starting to see a bit of the landscape of the church that Timothy's in now. You can begin to see the pressures he faces, pressures faced by any real minister, even by the young men we wish to train here.

In Timothy's church, there are people who feel to do what is needed, and Paul says they're of little use. Paul wants Timothy to be a useful minister.

[ 33 : 47 ] What's ultimately the difference? Paul tells us in verses 20 to 26, he says, you can be useful for the gospel, you can be useful for the gospel, however, this involves cleansing.

Verses 20 to 21, Paul illustrates this by using a great house. He says, in any great house you'll find all sorts of gold and silver, some wood and some clay.

Some of it, he says, is for honorable use, some of it is not. Somebody very kindly gave my wife and I some furniture for a new home.

One piece arrived rather dusty. It had been stuck away in a garage gathering dust, stuff full of pens and scraps of paper, but we saw the potential in it.

It now sits pride of place in our bedroom as a dressing table. It's now proving most useful. It's a beautiful piece of furniture. Nobody wants to be useless.

[ 34 : 54 ] That's what dishonorable use is. Not useful for anything good. So Paul says, be cleansed to no longer be useless. It is possible.

It might not feel like it in a messy and difficult situation like Timothy's, but with God it is possible. Like an old piece of furniture can be dusted down and made useful.

It involves cleansing, cleansing, but it can be done. So what does Paul mean by cleansing? He tells us in verses 22 to 26. He says, Timothy, flee youthful passions, flee from the distorted truth that floats around, flee from quarreling, flee from irreverent babble, and be unashamed in being a workman of God's word.

He says, pursue what is good and holy, not what's easy and comfortable and looks impressive. Pursue what honors God. Teach the truth whilst you can.

Correct what's false. Be patient and gentle as you endure evil and as you correct your opponents. That's cleansing. That's being useful.

[ 36 : 13 ] And Paul says, through your usefulness, God may even grant repentance to your opponents. through your cleansing away what is dishonorable, Jesus may grant the false teachers repentance and a knowledge of the truth.

Timothy says, Paul, your faithfulness in the midst of all this mess may just help false messengers come to their senses, verse 26, and escape Satan's claws.

verses 25 to 26 remind the faithful minister that God controls these things. What makes Timothy differ from these messengers is that God knows who are his.

Timothy sticks to the real message, which includes suffering. the rest don't. But if they want to flee from that, it's God who has to grant repentance.

Timothy can't do that. The faithful may be tempted to give in, but they are the real ministers who are useful to God, who can cleanse a church from false teachers, from ungodliness, from people who don't want to suffer.

[ 37 : 36 ] For the suffering, pressurized minister, there is hope. They are being faithful, and God rewards that. Their faithfulness brings salvation to God's people.

Their ministries can even turn the dishonorable back to the truth. Keep going, says Paul. Keep going with the gospel. Is it hard?

Yes, it's very hard. Do you need to be strengthened? Yes, of course. That's your only hope. Will you suffer? Yes. Will people oppose the message?

Definitely. But Paul says, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Keep going, because the gospel is worth it. Look to the future.

See that God's foundation stands. He knows who are his, and he will preserve them. those who have turned from what is wrong and dishonorable can be made useful to the master.

[ 38 : 44 ] Do we appreciate the pressures that any minister faces? Do we appreciate the pressure that our ministers face for our benefit?

it? And perhaps have we come to terms with what faces them may also face us who follow them. If we want to be a church committed to training men for ministry, good soldiers of Jesus Christ, then we must do what we can to be encouraging them, to be supportive, to help young men like myself be prepared for the rigors that lie ahead.

We need to be trained because what is ahead is difficult. There is hope for Glasgow if we can raise up men like this with steel in their spines and the truth of the gospel in their hearts and minds.

God's gospel strategy has at its center what is weak-looking, a crucified savior, and suffering messengers. But it is a strategy, it is good news that will continue until the last day protected.

[ 40 : 04 ] God's firm foundation stands. The church and its ministry looks weak and unimpressive, but it is the suffering of God's messengers that allows people to obtain salvation.

Paul says, stick with me, stick with me, three small words, but no little task.

Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ. Look to the future, have your eyes on what is to come, and stick with me, says Paul.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that we can put our confidence in the gospel, which is guarded until the last day.

We thank you that the gospel is so good that even suffering for it is worth it. Help us to love it so much that when we're faced with a choice between the easy way that's unfaithful and the painful way that's faithful, that it may be our delight to be counted amongst the many faithful and suffering messengers.

[ 41 : 25 ] We thank you for Jesus and his suffering that achieved our salvation. We thank you for Paul and his suffering that brought us the gospel. And we thank you for the many other faithful

ministers who've suffered that we might obtain salvation.  
And we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.