

A Ministry Marked by Suffering and the Scriptures

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn in our Bibles to the New Testament and to 2 Timothy chapter 3. If you have one of the church Bibles, I think that's page 996.

And Josh Johnson, one of our ministers in training, is going to be bringing God's Word to us this morning from this chapter. And we're going to read the whole chapter together. Some very familiar words here, but of course the chapter begins with some very sobering words indeed about the days in which we live.

And as we read these words, just think about what you've been looking at on your television screens and what you've been reading in your newspapers over recent weeks and see just how contemporary this Word is for us all.

2 Timothy chapter 3 at verse 1. But understand this, says the Apostle of Christ, That in the last days there will come times of difficulty, or terrible times as one translation has it.

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.

[1 : 38] Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Just as Janus and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. They will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured.

Yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[3 : 10] All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Please do turn again in your Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 3.

2 Timothy chapter 3. Boilers. Boilers. I'm sure most of us have had an up and down relationship with them. Well, the Henrywood Hall boiler is in a dingy room.

It looks awful. It looks old. It looks unattractive. And it's been going for 25 years. It works. And it keeps on working. At home, we have a boiler.

It's shiny, relatively new. It's got a wireless remote. You can use it anywhere in the flat. It's one of the fanciest ones we've ever seen. It took us four months to work out how to use it. And then once we worked out how to use it, we realized it leaks.

[4 : 56] Some things are not as they seem. In this morning's passage, we have something that must look attractive, but the reality is that it's ugly.

Something that looks like ministry, but it's actually in opposition to it. We see imposters who oppose real ministry. And then we have the opposite. We have a pattern that is marked by difficulty, that is real and genuine, a pattern that is rooted in something substantial, a pattern that will achieve all that there is to achieve as far as ministry goes.

Paul's message to Timothy is clear. Avoid the imposters and stick with Paul. When we look at the first two chapters of this letter, we can get a better picture of just what the church in Ephesus was like.

There was immense pressure on Timothy to give up on the real gospel by people who are not prepared to suffer, by people who wanted an easier life. Paul has already had to encourage Timothy in 1.13 to keep to the pattern of sound words that he'd heard from Paul.

And in 1.6, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of Paul who's imprisoned for him. Do not be ashamed of the gospel.

[6 : 16] Keep going with preaching what is true. And to do this, you're going to need to keep looking to the wonderful promises of the gospel at the last day. Chapter 2 helps us shed some more light on this.

Timothy is to train others who will have steel in their spines as they stick to the gospel. People who minister the gospel must be prepared to suffer for it. Timothy is in the midst of a church that seemingly had people who were easily compromising the truth because they didn't want to suffer. In fact, if we look at 2.18, there are those who will even go so far as to preach that the resurrection has already happened. That's not the resurrection of Jesus. That's the promised future resurrection for Christians.

They want to dodge things that are difficult. They might say things like this, Oh, Jesus doesn't want you to suffer because his kingdom's already fully arrived. We are resurrected Christians.

We only live a victorious life without suffering. There's no need to have difficulties or pain. They are over-realized people, people who claim blessings for now that are promised for the future.

[7 : 32] There seems to be a contingent of people in Timothy's church that want to avoid suffering. And the cruel thing about that teaching is that Paul has already said the only way a gospel minister keeps going is by looking forward to those things, waiting for them patiently.

That's why a gospel church keeps going with gospel ministry. That's why gospel people keep going with all the difficulties and with all the persecutions that will come their way.

They do it by looking forward and waiting for the promises. There is great trouble in Timothy's church. The trouble is a message that will ultimately rob people of the means of keeping going with the gospel.

They try to claim for now what is waiting for us in the future. Whereas Paul is in prison and suffering so that the elect might gain salvation.

It's quite a contrast. Timothy's encouraged to stick with Paul, to stick with his Lord. And where he could, he was to correct his opponents in 2.25.

[8 : 44] But as we move on to chapter 3, we meet a growing evil. Not everything is as it seems, verses 1 to 9. Not everyone who looks like a minister is on Paul's side.

Not everyone who looks like a faithful Christian serving away at the gospel is a lover of God. Some people who claim to be ministering the gospel are opponents of God.

Look at verses 1 to 4. Paul tells Timothy that there is more difficulty coming and then describes to Timothy in really stark, sharp language a group of people.

Lovers of self, lovers of money, arrogant, abusive, unholy, brutal, heartless, treacherous, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

This is a list of really ugly traits. This is a list that you do not want your name anywhere near. This is a list that belongs nowhere near Christians or nowhere near a church.

[9 : 48] And so we think that Paul might be writing about the world here. But indeed, these people are outside the church. That they've got nothing to do with it. And it would be understandable if we thought this.

But Paul continues in verse 5. He says, this group of people have the appearance of godliness but deny its power. Avoid such people.

These are people who appear godly. But it is only an appearance. These are people inside the church. If you take that one line out about appearing godly and denying its power, then we may be a bit more comfortable with what Paul says.

But that's not his point. He's saying, avoid people like that in your church. Paul is telling Timothy that there's a poisonous root. That there are people who profess to believe. People who profess to be getting on with ministry that are actually not godly at all. Paul isn't simply describing in list form every way they act.

[10:57] The awful behavior of one to four is not going to be obvious. Because they have the appearance of godliness. But what Paul is doing is stating in loud, clear terms exactly what they are like deep down.

He's warning Timothy about a group of people who are working away, doing their own type of ministry around Timothy's ministry. Their own type of ministry that is wicked. Verses six to seven would have helped Timothy to hone in exactly who this was in his church.

There are two ways to identify them. First, verse six, there are people who go after particular people in Timothy's church the weak to capture them.

They go after those burdened with sins and led astray by various passions. The first step of their ministry is to target the vulnerable. those who seem to need the real gospel most.

They target them. People who would surely be crying out to know the forgiveness that Jesus offers, the salvation from sin and its powers. But instead, these vulnerable people burdened by their sins get imposters.

[12:15] People who deny the life-giving power of God. And the second step of their ministry, verse seven, is to run teaching or training programs.

Imagine something like Release the Word, small group Bible studies. But imagine that all of these studies that there's learning going on all the time over a course of years and years, always looking to learn something new, always trying to advance, but at the end, verse seven, never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Imagine introducing some of our Iranian brothers to weekly Bible studies over the course of a few years, but at the end of them, none of them could tell you what the gospel is about.

Not knowing anything really about who God is and what he does. Not knowing anything about the Lord Jesus. Imagine a group of vulnerable or weak people burdened and weighed down who need the gospel, but all they get is a course after course of studies that don't teach them anything about the truth of the gospel.

Be like going to see a doctor who keeps giving you the wrong medicine intentionally, so you keep coming back, but you never get better. How cruel.

[13:38] Timothy says, Paul, avoid people like this. Do not permit them to be in your church and damaging it. Do not permit them to carry on affecting people like this.

They are everything that Paul's been urging Timothy to resist. Look closely at verses two to four. The list is bookended with lovers of self and money, verse two, and lovers of pleasure rather than God, verse four.

Their problem is a problem of misplaced love. They do not love God. Fundamentally, they love themselves more than God. And so we see in verse eight, they oppose God's truth and God himself because they love themselves over God, because they love pleasure, they love being comfortable, they love not suffering more than they love honoring God.

God, because of this, they're prone to be everything else in the list of two to four. They appear godly, but not everything is as it seems.

They deny its power. And if we look back to chapter one, verse eight, the power is the ability to suffer for the gospel to keep going with the truth about Jesus.

[14:59] It is the power to stick with Paul even though his prison cell may be coming for you. This group of ministers, this group of imposter Christians will not be prepared to suffer in the way that Paul does.

That's what Timothy must resist. That desire not to suffer because they love themselves and pleasure more than God.

That's why they do this. Indeed, this group are the group that caused Timothy most of the suffering that he faces. Look at verse eight. These imposters are like two characters traditionally thought to be the magicians who opposed Moses all the way back in Exodus called Janus and Jambres.

When Moses and Aaron threw down a staff and witnessed it become a serpent as a sign to Pharaoh that they spoke from God, Janus and Jambres were there and by their own secret arts, they did the same thing.

They conjured up snakes as well only to see they're swallowed by Moses. The point Paul is making here is it is possible for people to look like they're doing the same ministry as Paul but they're actually opponents of it.

[16:22] They're opponents who cause people's hearts to be hardened. That's what happened to Pharaoh in Exodus. After he witnessed this his heart was hard. Janus and Jambres looked like they were doing the same thing as Moses but they were opponents.

This is Paul's sharpest poke in the imposter's eyes yet. They are God's opponents and are disqualified from the faith. Paul uses very strong language about them.

Avoid them. There are people in Timothy's church that look like real ministers real Christians who are serving the church but they are wicked opponents of all that Timothy is doing.

Not everything is as it seems. Imagine if you received a Christmas card through your letter box inviting you to various events for the Christmas season.

It's beautifully made. Looks good. There's Christmas wonderlands available with real reindeer. There's Santa is coming to visit. Mulled wine, Carl's, mince pies, the whole deal, Carl's services, even Christmas services, Christmas Eve by candlelight.

[17:37] All of these are going to have engaging and vibrant environments for young people at them. And the big wish from the senders of this Christmas card was that their events would be welcoming environments for friends and family to have a happy Christmas together.

It seems to be a church that sent this card. It turns out that that is who it's from, but nowhere on it does it mention Jesus.

Nowhere on it does it say it's a church. Nowhere on it does it have anything remotely about the real Christmas message. In many ways it looks like it could be a genuine ministry, but it's lacking something.

It's attraction is reindeer, Santa, mulled wine, with no mention of anything to do with the gospel.

Paul says that is cruel and wicked.

That is in opposition to real ministry. It's playing on something that looks good, but has nothing to do with the gospel. Timothy says, Paul, be aware that not everyone who claims to be on your team is on your team.

[18:47] Some of the biggest opponents to your ministry will be those who claim to be doing the same thing as you, but they're not doing it. Those with the appearance of godliness, but those who deny its power.

That is the potential to be quite a scary thing for a church like Timothy's, but verse nine says, in the end they will not get very far.

Their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. Paul says, understand that they will be present, verse one. He says, avoid them, verse five.

They're dangerous and wicked. Their work is against the gospel, but he says, verse nine, ultimately, they won't get very far. They're on the losing side.

The gates of hell will not prevail against God's church. church. These instructions to Timothy seem to be about particular people in his church.

[19:46] So what do we do with them? We're not members of the Tron church Ephesus. So as we head into this new year with plenty of ministry opportunities, as we look to take the gospel further into Glasgow, we must be aware that there are two types of ministry, a real one and a fake one.

our city needs the gospel. It needs the real gospel. And there are going to be ministries around us that look godly, but have given up on the gospel.

They ought to serve as a warning for us. Those ministries may look impressive for a time, but in the end, verse nine, they won't get very far. They ought to serve as a reminder that we need to stick with Paul and his gospel, and as a warning to us, not to be tempted down the same path as the impostors.

What we see in the second part of this passage is the path we should follow. Verses 10 to 17, Paul's way consists of suffering and the scriptures.

It is the only way. Paul's way consists of suffering and the scriptures, and it is the only way. We've seen in the opening verses the new shiny boiler, the deceptive one that looks good but leaks and it's very complicated to work out.

[21:12] No doubt it will soon pack in, but there is the old unattractive boiler to consider still, and it is the way that is marked by suffering in the scriptures. That's what we have here in verses 10 to 17.

Paul says to Timothy, you, however, unlike these other ministers, you have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions. There are two ways of ministry, one real, one fake. Paul doesn't want Timothy to go the imposter's way, so he reminds him that he has learned ministry from Paul.

Timothy's followed Paul and that is the real pattern of ministry. My teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my, my, my, my, my. Paul's way is the only way, and Paul's way is the way of suffering and the scriptures. He says that's what makes people wise for salvation.

[22 : 30] Paul's way, as we see throughout this letter, is those two things. They go hand in hand. Look at chapter 2, verses 8 and 9. His way is to suffer as he preaches the gospel so that the elect might be saved.

Turn back again to chapter 1, verses 10 to 12. We see Paul suffers as a preacher and apostle in order to proclaim the life and immortality that there is in the gospel.

The imposters leave the old gospel behind, but the true teachers stick with it, no matter the cost. That is what Paul has been calling Timothy to stick to.

There will always come pressure on a minister, on a Christian, on a church, to give up struggling through the Christian life, to give up on the truth of God's words. But Paul says we must keep going with it.

Suffering for the gospel is normal, he says. Keep going with the true gospel through God's power. And we turn back to chapter 3, looking at verses 11 and 12.

[23 : 38] Paul is saying to Timothy that he has followed Paul's path, starting with his teaching all the way through to persecution and suffering. And verse 12, indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

It doesn't say may, it says will, will be persecuted. What ultimately marked out the imposters? What was it that showed them to be opponents of God?

It was merely the appearance of godliness, looking like they could be Christians, looking like they might be godly, but they weren't.

A real godly life, says Paul, will bring persecution at some point. So he's saying be encouraged when people at work mock you, when you get teased at school, even when you feel the pinch of being overlooked because of the gospel.

It proves you're with Paul. He was not ashamed of his chains, they were his boast. He was following in the footsteps of his savior, and so are you. This is the godly way.

[24 : 55] It's not just the appearance of godliness, it's real godliness. Verse 13, the imposters, they go from bad to worse. They're not only deceived themselves, but they deceive others.

Their so-called ministry is completely opposed to Paul's. Paul's clear with Timothy, avoid it, stick with me, stick with the gospel.

Verse 14, but you, Timothy, continue in what you've learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from your childhood you've been acquainted with the scriptures. These are what make you wise for salvation. Paul is saying, do not go for what is new, don't go for what seems contemporary and in, go the way of suffering and the scriptures.

Don't fall for what we see in verse 7, the continuing pursuit of learning, going after what is new and cutting edge, but ultimately doesn't lead you to knowledge of God.

[26 : 05] Paul says, stick with what you know, stick with the gospel you've always known. It may be old, but it's what makes you wise for salvation. Timothy has learned the gospel from Paul, but he's also been familiar with it all his life, thanks to Lewis and Eunice, his mother and grandmother in verses 1 to 5.

He's known it all his life. Remember the boilers, the trusty, old, unattractive one, the one that's still going 25 years in.

That's what the gospel is like. It's old, thousands of years old. It doesn't change. It seems unattractive, boring even to some people, but it is verse 15 what makes people wise for salvation through Jesus.

Isn't that what ministry is all about? Isn't that why we're planting the gospel at Kelvin Grove and to other parts of the city? Because our desire is to make known salvation through Jesus, to make people wise to it.

We do not want to add misery to people who are already struggling and weighed down by sin. We do not want to deceive. We want more people to come to know the Lord Jesus.

[27 : 25] that's the heart of ministry. Is that not what we want to be the heart of our mission? Paul's telling Timothy that he already has everything he needs to keep going, to keep being faithful, to keep doing real ministry, and it's the old thing that he's always known.

It's the faith grounded in the scriptures. And that's why Paul closes his chapter. He tells Timothy that scripture is sufficient for all of his ministry.

The breathed out, God-inspired word is all he needs to be getting on with real ministry. That's what verses 16 to 17 tell us.

All scripture is God-breathed and profitable for all aspects of the ministry that Paul has been calling Timothy to keep doing. It's profitable for teaching the gospel, for correcting opponents, and even for training people in righteousness.

for training those who will faithfully keep on with the Christian life. So that verse 17, the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[28 : 37] Notice the man of God, the real man of God, not just with the appearance of godliness. What does real ministry look like? well, it's a ministry based, founded on, driven by the scriptures, and it looks like normal Christians being prepared to accept all manner of trouble, persecution, and being uncomfortable in themselves so that people will be wise for salvation.

That's what ministry looks like. 2016 is an exciting year of ministry for our church, and we're all needed to be involved. We know what's at stake.

We want people to know and love the gospel. Paul tells us simply, do not love the wrong things. Do not love yourselves first. Don't prioritize pleasure and comfort.

Don't go for the new trendy thing. Don't be an opponent of real gospel workers. Don't make it harder for them. Don't hinder them. Paul says avoid these things.

Avoid these people. Don't be like them. Don't give them a foothold. And he says, you know my way. You know the scriptures. You know that they are all that is needed for ministry.

[29 : 59] Hold on to them and hold them out. And he says in contrast to those who love pleasure more than God, be prepared to suffer for him.

because if you're prepared to do that, it proves that your priority is the Lord Jesus. Back to the boiler. The new shiny one with a wireless remote is probably not going to last.

Just like the ministry of the imposters. But the old and unattractive one, it still ticks along, still heats a big building, still does its job. It's still reliable and does what it's meant to do.

Real gospel ministry doesn't look attractive. It's trusting the same thing. It's keeping going with what we're doing. Real gospel ministry marked out by suffering and the scriptures makes people wise for salvation in Christ.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would guard us by your power from being tempted towards a ministry that's not real, that burdens people down and ultimately is opposed to you.

[31 : 21] Help us to always have in sight those wonderful gospel promises that await for us in the future, that we'd wait patiently for them, living lives now, that honor you with our service.

we long that many people here in Glasgow would be made wise for salvation in your son. Help us to pray and to minister to this end, trusting that you are the Lord of salvation.

For we ask this in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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