

Title: “The Value of the Gospel”

Chris Ryan

2 Tim 1:14

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Service Readings: Hab. 1:1-4; 2:1-4, 2 Tim 1:1-14, Luke 17:1-10

Is there anything more powerful, more valuable than the Gospel message? Paul didn't believe so and gave his life defending and sharing it.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

This message comes from the Epistle reading this morning.

He stands in the threshold of the small building that his congregation uses as their church. He is exhausted just reflecting back on the past couple of years. Paul really threw him into the deep end of the pool, so to speak, when he put him in charge of this flock here in Ephesus. Even though it was only a few short years ago, he can't help but reflect on how young he was, how young he felt as he accepted his first call to lead them. But now, after dealing with the Gnostics, and after pushing back against the false teachers, it feels like he has aged many more years than he would have thought possible. Sure, the problems have not been resolved, they are still here, and there seem to be new ones every day, but he feels much older now, much more capable of handling whatever comes his way. At least that's what he thought until he read this letter from Paul. He just finished it and has to take a moment to let it all sink in.

There is a lot to unpack in this letter but one thing seems very clear. Paul is nearing the end of his life. He knows it, the Roman soldiers that have imprisoned him know it, and Paul's friends know it as well. And now, even Timothy knows it. The end of his letter makes this very clear when he says that he is already being poured out as a drink offering and that the time of his departure is at hand. He has fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. If only Timothy could go visit him, just one last time. He knows he probably can't and that's what makes this all the more painful. This may be the last time he hears from this father figure of his.

He glances back at the letter, looking for something, anything that might help process his emotions but all he finds are the emotions of Paul dripping from these pages. A previous letter from Paul spoke of church organizations and instructions that were so useful for him as he led this church but this letter.... This letter is much different. There is still instruction but it is wrapped with the embrace of Paul's love – for him and especially for Jesus. His words are words of mourning, but not for what he is to face. He mourns because he will soon no longer have a chance to reach the world with this gospel message he clings to with all his faith. He mourns because it seems his race is nearing its end. Where does that leave the world? Where does that leave Timothy?

He glances back at the letter, tears welling up in his eyes. He begins to read it again:

⁸Therefore 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, ⁹who 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, ¹⁰and 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, ¹¹for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹²which 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. ¹³Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

Protect the gospel.... This *still* continues to be a problem in his church. How often has he confronted false teaching? How often has he had to oppose those who claimed something other than Jesus, or something *plus* Jesus? Protect the gospel, Paul reminds him. "Oh, Paul. If only you knew... I do every day."

Timothy smiles as a thought enters his head. He sees Paul, bound in chains in a prison and surrounded by guards that are anxious to kill him. That's is not what makes him laugh, of course, but that in that environment, through his pain and recognition that he would soon be put to death, he was probably still preaching the gospel – even to those who would soon kill him. Paul didn't just defend the gospel, he suffered for the gospel, in a very real way. To Paul, the gospel message was everything – there was nothing more valuable, nothing worth protecting more than that.

Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. This is what Paul would die for. This is what Paul always clung to. This is what Paul attached all his faith to. Jesus Christ. There was nothing greater, nothing more important than this, and no news more urgent to deliver to the world. This is how Paul saw it. What about him? What about Timothy?

The smile on his face quickly vanished as this question weighed heavy on him. What was most important to *him*? Was it the same? His life is dedicated to the service of the Word but how many times does he get distracted with life itself? How often has his glaze been distracted from the cross, if only for a moment? That never seemed to happen for Paul but it seems to happen for him all too often. What does that mean about his faith? And just as this begins to add wight to his heavy emotions, another thought enters into his head, but this one seems to release the burden that he's feeling. Paul's not giving him more instruction! And Paul's not measuring Timothy against himself! Quite the opposite! Paul's reminding him of the prize that has already been won! "We have to keep our eyes on the prize—being rewarded in heaven by Jesus Christ." That's what he says at the end of his letter. The prize has been won and has been handed to Timothy. Take hold of it and do not be ashamed. For who can be ashamed of possessing something of unmeasurable value? How could that even *enter* into someone's imagination? The salvation won on the cross by Jesus is of such value it is worth... everything!

He is *not* ashamed of the gospel! He has protected it before and will continue to do so. His sorrow turns to joy for he knows what he must do. He may never see his dear friend Paul in this life but he

knows that he will join with him in heaven. But for now, right now, his focus must remain on the race, on the prize. His focus must remain on the message of everlasting life.

He carefully rolls up the letter and walks into his small office. There at his desk a candle still burns – the only visible light in the room. But as he sits down and pulls a quill from the ink his mind relocates him from his office and into the sanctuary, where he sees himself stand before his congregation. He has a message for them; a message that they must hear.

“My people, my flock,” he starts out, “What is so valuable, so precious that we must guard it with our very own lives? But, also, not only guard it, but give it away freely? What can be so priceless that we claim as our very own while at the same time offer it to the world? Can anything manmade be stake this claim for itself? Of course not. For nothing formed by human hands, or thought by human mind, can come close. And yet we protect those things with such passion. We expend such energy to accumulate those things. And when we acquire them we place our trust in them, our security, and even our faith. No longer! Let them go! Release them for they are but obstacles that hinder us from receiving the real prize – the one worth more than all of these things, combined! Be not ashamed for the gift that Jesus offers us! For it is *he* that should be ashamed of us, but yet he calls us his brothers and sisters. So if he is not ashamed, how much less should we be ashamed of him! Let it go! Cling to the salvation he offers. Cling to the message his life, death, and resurrection has created! Cling to it for it is the only thing worth holding on to! Cling to it, protect it, and give it out! This is the message of Jesus. This is what Paul taught me. And this is what I am teaching you. My congregation of Ephesus, remember always the value of the gospel. For the value of nothing else will ever matter.”

And with that he set his pen down, blew out the candle, and began his walk home.

Please pray with me.

Lord,

Paul encouraged Timothy to protect and spread the gospel. May you give us the same encouragement. And may you help us protect this message with everything we have. May it not become perverted in our homes and in our lives and we spend our lives pursuing others that they might come to know and follow you.

In Jesus name.

Amen.