

GUARD THE GOSPEL

Craig Tucker's user-friendly guide to preaching 2 Timothy

Theme

Paul's second letter to Timothy is full of bad news. Paul drops two bombshells on Timothy, who is presumably still in Ephesus. The first is Paul's imminent death. The second: many other Christian leaders, associates of Paul and Timothy have given up on the gospel completely. (In fact, Paul is possibly concerned that Timothy too is going cold on the gospel.)

Because of this a lot now rests on Timothy's shoulders. In an atmosphere of apostasy, he must take up where Paul left off. The key idea running through 2 Timothy is the need to stand up for the gospel, whatever the cost. Paul gives Timothy good reasons to stick by the gospel, without hiding the dangers and difficulties of the task. He highlights the perils of false teaching, and how to stand against it.

There is a clear difference between 2 Timothy and the other "pastorals". Titus 5. 1 Timothy focus on local issues in the specific congregations of Crete and Ephesus, like the role of the pastor in the on going life of the congregation (eg. instructions about elders, what is to be taught to various groups.) They have a "business as usual" feel about them. 2 Timothy, however, has an air of crisis from start to finish. Paul's concerns for Timothy's role are wider than the local congregation at Ephesus. In fact, he instructs Timothy to leave Ephesus and come to him (at Rome?).



Structure

2 Timothy 1:1-18

Paul outlines his concerns (his own situation and the general apostasy) and delivers his charge to Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel. He gives good reason not to be ashamed of the gospel...the gospel Timothy is to guard will also guard him!

2 Timothy 2:1-13

"*You then my son*"...Timothy's method: Paul turns to the task of discipling involved in guarding the gospel and the importance of hard-slogging persistence.

2 Timothy 2:14-26

"*Keep reminding them of these things.*" Timothy is to stick to the truth. (False teaching will lead to ungodliness and shipwrecks peoples faith. True teaching leads to repentance and a knowledge of the truth.)

2 Timothy 3:1-4:8

A side-by-side comparison between the character and methods of Timothy and the false teachers

"But mark this..."

The character of False Teachers (3: 1-5)
The methodology of False Teachers 3:6-9)

"You however..."

Timothy character q3:10-13)
Timothy's method - sticking with Scripture. (4:5)

2 Timothy 4:9-22

Paul's final greetings (4: 19-22).

The **Sermon Series** basically followed this outline, with the last section being covered in the first talk as background:

II Timothy 1	Guarded by the Gospel
II Timothy 2:1-13	Guarding the Gospel
II Timothy 2: 14-26	Being Useful for the Gospel
II Timothy 3	Standing Out for the Gospel
II Timothy 4	Proclaiming the Gospel (really a sermon on vv1-8)

Issues in Preaching

Church Manual, or Specific Situation?

Even recent commentators such as John Stott treat 2 Timothy as some kind of pastoral manual. As a static, timeless text-book for how to be a pastor in any age or situation. (Even Gordon Fee in his verse by verse commentary seems to do this, despite the fact he promises in his Introduction that he's not going to.)

But if you approach 2 Timothy as addressed to a specific situation, it opens up into a letter full of tension and urgency. We see much more of the colour of the relationship between Paul and Timothy. A young man who seems to be going (has gone?) cold on the gospel (1:6). An air of loneliness and emotion as Paul facing death, and as he writes of his affection for Timothy. That in the light of so many giving up on the gospel, and Paul's imminent death, so much now rests on Timothy's fragile shoulders. There is a real sense of drama...an urgency and desperation in much of the letter.

At first I thought that abandoning the "church life textbook" approach might make it harder work to apply 2 Timothy to my 20th century congregation. But rather than detracting from its transferability, focusing on the specific situation added a dramatic dimension that was a real bonus in preaching.

Pastor Specificity

Something that gave me much thought as I worked through 2 Timothy was how a letter written to a pastor can be legitimately applied to all Christians. At first glance commands such as "Preach the Word" sound fairly pastor-specific. Here are a few reflections:

Many of the things that Timothy is urged to do, are things all Christians are to do. The call to "not be ashamed of the gospel" is relevant for anyone who's ever been bagged at work or school or home for being a Christian, and felt the pressure to just shut up and fit in. Even the command "Preach the Word" is better translated "Proclaim the Word" and does not necessarily contain the idea of being stuck up in a pulpit.

I tried wherever possible to see 2 Timothy, not as "one pastor writing to another pastor about how to be a pastor", but "one Christian writing to another Christian about how to be a Christian" I suspect this would be harder to do with the other pastorals.

Paul as a model discipler. Paul's affection and concern for Timothy, not to mention his straight-

talking, is a great model of the kind of mentoring one-to-one ministry Christians in our congregations can have with each other. (The whole letter is an example of the model of discipling that he maps out in 2 Tim 2:2.) These ended up being more of the "passing comment" kind of application rather than the focus of any particular sermon.

The pastor is not the only one who pastors and teaches. Lots of stuff applies to all in the church community who "teach": Sunday School teachers, Bible Study leaders, parents, etc.

But even where things are fairly pastor-specific: when the pastor is called to do things it always tells us something about the nature of the Christian life and what church should be like. For example: the fact that the pastor is to teach the truth, because heresy destroys peoples faith (2: 14-19), can be applied in terms of:

- ◆ heresy is not something harmless to play around with, false teaching will shipwreck your Christian life.
- ◆ be careful who you get as a pastor and who gets to preach in church, in Sunday School, in your Bible Study group, etc.
- ◆ check what you are being told against what the Bible is actually saying.
- ◆ pray for those who teach you the Bible, that they won't be tempted to be loose with the truth.

But having said all that, I think the person who benefited most at WBPC from this book being preached was the pastor. It forced me to think through my preaching and discipling of others, and encouraged me to adopt an urgency and ruthlessness in my work because of the importance of the gospel. And of course, I've got a swag of sermons for when I get roped in to preaching at Inductions and Licensings.

For what its worth: One other thing that surprised me about 2 Timothy was its lack of attention to prayer. At least in theory, we all think prayer should be an important part of pastoring. (In fact, 1:3 is the only reference to prayer, and even there it's Paul describing his own praying rather than directly something he is urging Timothy to do.). I reckon this is more evidence of the specific crisis that is the reason for Paul writing. If Paul was writing a manual for pastors, prayer would get a whole chapter. (However, this wasn't an observation I passed on to my congregation.)

Commentaries

- ◆ John Stott's commentary (Bible Speaks Today) "Guard the Gospel" is probably the best, though I think at times he fudges the structure of passages in the interest of alliteration and cute divisions. He also tends to apply the passage to leaders. See also above comments on "church manual". Overall it was stimulating and reliable.
- ◆ Fee's commentary (NIBC) is worth a look, and a good second opinion to Stott. Unlike Stott he doesn't have the annoying habit of saying a lot about the obvious passages and very little on difficult ones. Overall I found it a bit too brief, atomistic, and fairly uninspiring.
- ◆ I had Guthrie (Tyndale) on my shelves but did not use it much.

Talk 1 - Guarded by the Gospel

2 Timothy 1:1-17

Key Idea: Paul calls Timothy and us to stand up for the gospel and gives us 3 good reasons why the gospel is worth standing up for:

Paul, Timothy & the Gospel (A brief setting of the scene) I got people to skim through the letter for clues to questions like: what's Paul's situation.

Paul and Timothy long standing friends...co-workers in the gospel right across the Empire...been through a lot together.

It's not really surprising that Paul is in prison. In the NT, Paul seems to be constantly being beaten up, and jailed for the gospel. But this time its different.

Toward the end of the letter, we learn: Paul isn't in prison, to cool his heels for a while - he's awaiting death. He doesn't expect to get out alive. In other letters, when hes in jail, Paul is always confident of being released. But this time there's none of that.

This time, there's not even a glimmer of hope, that that'll happen.

....If Timothy's eyes had filled with tears, last time they parted (for a short while, expecting to see each other soon). Imagine, as he opens this letter, ...as, in a much more significant way, Paul is saying goodbye.

But Paul's letter to Timothy, is more than a farewell it's an urgent request. Full of concern and apprehension. In v15, we start to get an inkling of why:

Paul says: "All those in the province of Asia have deserted me". And it seems that Paul's concerned Timothy will do the same thing. In fact if you look at v6...it appears that Timothy might already be going cool on the gospel.

Guard the Gospel

This is not an attractive invitation. Paul urges Timothy to do the very thing that's landed him in prison, with his head, quite literally, on the chopping block. To guard the gospel means not just hold on to what we believe - (believing that the resurrection is true, even though "so called experts on the M" want to deny it.). It means living a life of commitment to the gospel. Not concerned for the cost, but being single minded, to obey Jesus, and make him known to others.

Guarded by the Gospel.

The rest of Paul's letter, will spell out the "how to" of guarding the gospel. But here in Chapter 1, Paul spells out why guarding the gospel is such an urgent priority. Why do it? ..What's so important about it, that its worth suffering for, worth risking your life for? ...Paul gives us 3 good reasons, for: "What's so important about the gospel that its worth living for, and dying for" the gospel saves us. vv8-9

the gospel changes us v9

the gospel is about eternity

Not only can we be forgiven, and enter into friendship with God. The gospel is about eternity.

Paul actually says, in v10, Jesus has "destroyed death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel".

That's the take-home-value, in the resurrection. If all there is, is this life, what Paul's doing, his suffering is foolish. Being a Christian is stupid. If the resurrection is not true: its an utter waste of a life. But if the resurrection is true, then nothing could be more important than to spend our lives, living for the gospel, telling others about it.

As he sits on death row, Paul knows its not him who's in real trouble, but all those without the gospel. That's why he can say: "*I'm convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day*" He knows

I finished with two illustrations:

The first was a Christian woman at Lalor Park, who's dying of cancer. Her confidence in the face of death...the gospel is about to make an eternity of difference. And the way its made her

see the importance of evangelising her non-Christian relatives when they come to see her. She knows they are the ones in real trouble not her!

The Movie: China Syndrome.

There's a movie called the China Syndrome. About a nuclear reactor in America about to malfunction. And when it does, the reactor will melt down, and burn a, . hole, all the way, through the core of the earth to China.

The two people who star in the movie, ...They find out what's about to happen. But the whole thing is being covered up, the authorities want to keep it quiet. And as they attempt to warn people, the authorities try to suppress them and kill them, and at the same time other people they tell, don't believe them *R* laugh. But they risk their lives, they go to great lengths, because people must be warned. To know something like that, and not do all you could, is unthinkable.

The reality is, the people all around us, face a peril far worse. God's judgement on all who do not trust in the gospel, the good news about Jesus.

Talk 2 - Guarding the Gospel

2 Timothy 2:1-13

The team speed skating at the winter Olympics...Christianity is a bit like a relay race. We saw last week how Paul, is writing to Timothy because his race is almost run. The time has come to pass the baton to Timothy, the next runner. The good news about Jesus must not die with Paul. But continue to be taken to a world that desperately needs to hear it. Timothy, must pick up where Paul left off, a new generation must take on the task of guarding the gospel. And we have to understand, that same baton, that same gospel, has now been placed in our hands.

You and I are at the end of a long line, of disciplers. The ball's been passed along an enormous backline to get to us. And if the movement is not break down, if the chain is not to be broken, our task, (as Paul explains to Timothy) the task of Christians in every generation, is to pass the gospel on.

Passing on the Gospel

v1 reminds us its something we do in God's grace.

v2 Paul gives us a model for passing on the baton. Guarding the gospel, means discipling others. Timothy is to multiply himself, training others to train others. (There are 4 generations on view in this verse: Paul, Timothy, reliable men, others..)

Timothy isn't just to disciple anyone he finds, or who's willing. Hes to spend his time, with those who are reliable. And to explain what kind of person Timothy is to look for, Paul paints three pictures of reliable, persistent, faithfulness.

Three Pictures of Gospel Commitment

But not only is Timothy to look for persevering people, reliable people. But also, to be a discipler, takes great perseverance: always involves disappointment, and personal hurt. On both sides of the process: Discipleship and perseverance go together.

- ◆ Soldier v4 - singleminded
- ◆ The Athlete v5 The commitment of the athlete, dedicated to winning: I remember seeing Haley Lewis interviewed, ...as young as primary school, are down at the pool, swimming kms before school. Then back again, when school's out...how right through her crucial teenager years, she never really had a life outside swimming.
- ◆ The Farmer v6 This one is all about the hard slog of persevering. Sticking it out to the end.

Paul is going to great lengths, to make it clear: its hard work. He labours the point. soldier, athlete, farmer. Illustration on top of illustration.

Two Promises

In fact, sticking at it till the end, is so important. Paul has another go at in vv8-13. If the 3 pictures, don't get the point across. From v8: Paul says the same thing, in a different way. 2 promises, about perseverance:

The first, is an encouragement. "*Those who die with him will live with him... Those who endure, ..will reign.* Its what the 3 pictures are all about. The athlete who wins the prize. The farmer who reaps the harvest.

The second promise a warning that should put a shiver down our spines "*But if we disown him...* (I took the line that "he will remain faithful" does not mean God will stand by us even if we are unfaithful to the gospel (Stott's view), but that to be faithful to himself he will disown those who disown the gospel. This is the only way of making sense of vv11-12. This is not saying that if you sin once you're out, but that denying the gospel, in a much more final and definite way, means you're out.

Do you remember the name Ben Johnson? He was the runner, who at the Olympics, beat

Carl Lewis, to claim the 100m men's gold medal. For a brief while, he was the world's hero. Until they discovered, he was on performance enhancing drugs. He went from celebrity to outcast, (*) like that. He stripped of his medals. Banned from competition. He was condemned in the media, and by sporting officials. And no one was more savage than the Canadian press...His home country completely disowned him.

I can still remember a photo in one of the papers at the time. On one side of the page was the photo that had flashed round the world when Ben Johnson had won...crossing the line in the race, his fist in the air, huge grin all over his face. The other side of the page, was a photo taken the day he arrived back in Toronto after being stripped of his medals. All alone, ashamed to look into the camera....the face of someone without a friend in the world....that's what happens to athletes who don't compete according to the rules.

And they're the 2 alternatives Paul puts before Timothy, and before us this morning. Disgrace or Victory. Disowned by God or Reigning with X. Ashamed of the gospel, or prepared for any cost.

Paul leaves Timothy (and us) with no room to manoeuvre. To have a bet both ways. To be a bit for Jesus and a bit for our own comfort. He says decide. Will you stand for Jesus, will you guard the gospel, will you live for God's kingdom no matter what the price.

Talk 3 - Being Useful for the Gospel

2 Timothy 2:14-26

Key Idea: False teaching is harmful: it leads to ungodly living and will destroy your relationship with God. Paul urges Timothy, and you and I to faithfully handle the truth. Then we'll be useful to God and able to stand unashamedly before him.

If anything is worth something, you can bet that sooner or later, it will be counterfeited. If someone slips me a fake 20 cent coin, when they give me my change at McDonalds, it might be annoying for a moment. But if I discover the \$100 bill in my wallet is a phoney, my reaction is going to be different. ..Nothing could be more valuable, than the gospel. And nothing could be more disastrous, than getting stuck with a phoney gospel.

Honest Workers or Dodgy Operators?

If you watch shows like the Investigators, Current Affair. They're forever exposing shoddy tradesman. The best ones, are the hidden camera ones. (I'm not sure why I enjoy watching them), but the ones where they put a hidden camera in the kitchen, they disconnect age wire on the back of the fridge, and then they film the repairman, while he thinks no-one's watching. Some repairmen (to their credit) came in, quickly found the fault, fixed it, told the owner exactly what was wrong and billed them just for that. But others, they'd find the fault in a few seconds, fix it. But then pull another part out of the back of the fridge. Call the owner in, and tell them this expensive part needs to be replaced, and it will cost a packet. One bloke went out to his truck, polished the old part up with a rag, brought it back in, and charged for a new one.

But the best part is when they confront these dodgy operators, and play back the video exposing what they've done. Some got aggressive (wanted to punch the reporter out). Some when it dawns on them what's happening, they just ran, looked for anywhere to hide. All (in different ways) were ashamed.

...Paul says to Timothy, don't do a bodgie job, when you handle God's word. That's what false teachers do. Be a workman who when he stands before God will be unashamed.

False Teaching and Festering

Now, a crook fridge repairer, could rip you off for a couple of hundred dollars. But someone who's crooked with God's word, is going to do much more damage. v16, "godless talk" (In the context, I take it Paul means not gossip but false teaching J. Its not a harmless thing. False teaching always produces ungodly living.

Paul compares false teaching to the highly contagious, extremely nasty disease gangrene (v17). A nasty picture! Paul's describes the false teachers as not just infected themselves, but they're deliberately going round infecting others. Like someone with the HIV virus, deliberately giving it to as many people as they can.

In v17, Paul actually name names. Hymenaeus and Philetus who claim the general resurrection has already happened. That if you're still here, you've missed out. And what Paul says next shows just how wrong these two guys are:

"Gods solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who're his'". Hes He knows who belongs to him, and he won't leave anyone behind when the time comes. *"everyone who confesses the name of the Lord, must turn away from wickedness"*. Their teaching left no incentive for godly living.

Being Mugs for God.

A final and hard to follow picture of the faithful servant (v20-21).

Paul doesn't have in mind, the idea of the good china, only bring out for special occasions. Hes making a distinction b/n what's useful and useless. ..(Illustration: there are two kinds of coffee cup at my place. My favourite coffee mug that I love using Vs the small but impractical coffee cups that just gather dust at the back of the cupboard.)

We make ourselves useful to the Master, prepared for any good work, by turning away from

ungodliness, and the wrong teaching that leads us into it. (If we understand this passage properly, we can never say: "I'm no use to God. He could never do much with someone like me". We can only say: I'm not prepared to be useful. I'm not prepared, to turn away from sin, and be available for Jesus. If anyone, cleanses himself, he will be useful to God. Its also a humbling picture: The NT often urges us to think of ourselves, as God's servants, (like a butler or a maid), but this is one rung below that!

Paul ends the passage, with some final words about dealing with those who don't believe the truth (vv23-25). We're not to get frustrated (quarrel, be resentful, get angry), but gentle, because its God who brings them to repentance.

Concluding illustration: A story in the paper that week about a bushwalker who almost died from a funnel web bite, because his buddy had been told the wrong information and applied a tourniquet....It doesn't matter how sincere you are, the wrong information can be fatal.

Talk 4 - Standing Out for the Gospel

2 Timothy 3

Key Idea: Paul wants Timothy to be useful for the Kingdom. He Timothy is to not just proclaim the truth but in contrast to his opponents, live the truth as well.

On Sesame Street, when they want to get a new concept across, by doing comparisons. (Tall, Short, Noisy, Quiet). Opposites are a helpful way to define the thing we're trying to understand.

To help us understand, being useful for the Kingdom, Paul uses the Sesame Street method. He not only talks about how we can make ourselves useful for the kingdom. But he puts the picture of the useful person, beside a picture of the opposite.

The Negative Picture

This is what being useful to God does not look like. The key verse, is v5. "having the form of godliness, but denying its power" They appear godly, but it's deceptive. Paul stresses the things they love, and don't love - their godliness is simply an exterior.

Paul warns Timothy:

Don't be fooled by an appearance of knowledge (v7). Don't be fooled: you can do genuine miracles and be opposing God (v8)!

The Positive Picture...

This is what being useful to God does look like.

Paul's Example

The power of modelling. Godliness and being prepared to suffer.

The Scriptures - will be indispensable in Timothy's teaching and also his godliness.

Our Bibles aren't to be antiques, but are practical and useful: for teaching, correcting, rebuking...

"Correction" is like making a small adjustment when you're drifting out of your lane. A rebuke is when you see the big red sign on the freeway that says: GO- BACK..WRONG WAY.

We had done a 5 min spot that morning on "What the NT says about giving?" I referred back to this to apply the ideas in v16.

- ◆ For some the teaching has what you're doing. It might have fleshed things out, helped you to see what the Bible is saying, and has encouraged you to keep doing what you're doing.
- ◆ For others it may have been correction. You've been reminded of things you've started to forget. You've started drifting off course, and now see the changes you have to make.
- ◆ But for others...its medicine that was hard to swallow. What we did this morning was a rebuke. Big red letters saying do a U-turn now. Something fundamental has to change.

Movie stars have personal trainers to get them into shape. Likewise by the hard sweat of correcting, rebuking and teaching the Scriptures will "train us in righteousness.

Talk 5 -Proclaiming the Gospel

2 Timothy 4

(Paul Beringer preached on this passage in this series.)

Key Idea: Proclaiming the gospel is hard and unpopular, requiring great patience. But there is nothing more important. (Really a sermon on 4:1-8)

Opening illustration from a war movie:

a pilot has been shot and his dying words to his co-pilot is to take over the controls and make sure the bombing mission gets through.

Proclaiming the Gospel is a Serious Business (v1)

Paul's charge to Timothy is in God's presence. It is to him that Timothy will give an account of how he has discharged the task Paul is giving him.

But this is not simply "pulpiterring" but involves "correcting, rebuking, encouraging" which can also be one-to-one ministries.

One of Paul B's main applications was for people to pray and encourage their pastor. And to make sure he had plenty of time for sermon preparation.

Which was nice.

Proclaiming the Gospel is Hard Work (v2)

In season and out of season: something to be persisted at, when it suits us and when its not.

We're not just to open our mouths when its "safe" to do so.

Proclaiming the unpopular Gospel (v3)

People listen to what they like to hear. We must not give in to the temptation to change the gospel to make it more appealing. (Christians who deny the resurrection, etc).

It is so unpopular, Paul is about to die. Likewise Timothy (and us) must be prepared to suffer for the gospel.

A good sermon for recapping the key ideas of the letter, and fittingly ends with the emotion and drama of Paul's farewell.