

# Jesus Is Worth It

## Part #3 - "Fan Into Flame"

### Text | 2 Timothy 1:6-8

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on May 19, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

#### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to 2 Timothy 1. I could feel the awkward moment beginning. I was filling out some paperwork to do with finances. The woman in charge had just asked about my profession. Once she found out I was a pastor she started talking about how she thinks religion is a good thing because everyone needs a spiritual foundation to guide them.
  - She talked about some of her friends who have made really poor decisions because they did not have a spiritual basis. She said it does not matter what a person's spirituality or religion is as long as they have something to guide them. She then looks at me with a kind smile that said, **"Of all people, I know that you agree with me on this."**
- My mind was now going in a million different directions. On the one hand I wanted to affirm her and agree that all people need this foundation. I knew that if I said this and stopped there she would be happy and there wouldn't be any awkwardness.
  - At the same time, I know she needs to hear about how Jesus is not just another spiritual guide. I also know that if I start talking about Jesus like that it will make things awkward. Add to this that she is now done printing the papers and they are in front of me to sign. I've got maybe 60 seconds.
    - So I started talking but let's just say I bumbled my way through the next minute. I tried talking about how if Jesus really is who he says he is then he is one to follow but I did not even say it that well. It was not my finest hour.
- Do you know these kinds of moments? Times when you know that what you will say about Jesus will cause awkwardness? Times when you are tempted to avoid speaking because you can feel the rising heat of embarrassment?
  - Many times I speak as best I can but at other times I simply avoid it. The flame of my courage has gone out. Do you know what I am talking about? If you do then this message is for you. Today we will see Timothy's temptation to withdraw in embarrassment at being a Christian. But we will also see Paul calling Timothy to fan into flame his gift of unashamedly speaking for Christ even if it means he must suffer for doing so.
    - So let's develop verses 6-8 in three parts. First, let's speak about *the problem of the dwindling flame*. Second, we will hear *the call to kindle the flame*. And finally, we will look at *the fuel to ignite the flame*.

#### THE PROBLEM OF THE DWINDLING FLAME

- Let's start then with **(SHOW SLIDE 2) the problem of the dwindling flame.**
  - Paul's main point here is in verse 6. Look at it with me. Paul calls Timothy to **"fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."** So Timothy has a gift. This gift is compared to a fire. Just like a fire will dwindle and die if it is not tended to, so Timothy's gift will dwindle and fade if he shies away from using it. That is why Paul exhorts him not to let it dwindle but rather to fan his gift into flame.
    - So what is this gift? And why is it in danger of dwindling?
- We do not know exactly what the gift was but it must have something to do with speaking unashamedly for Jesus in his role as a church leader.
  - This makes sense because verse 6 says the gift came when the elders and Paul laid hands on him and commissioned him to be a pastor.
- What is clear though is that the flame of Timothy's gift is in danger of dwindling because Timothy is being tempted to back off from it. You will notice that in verse 7 that Timothy is exhorted not to be fearful in fanning

his gift into flame. This word “fear” refers to one who flees from battle because they lack courage. The same idea is in verse 8 where Paul calls him not to be ashamed.

- Putting it all together, we see that Timothy is facing opposition for speaking about Jesus. Paul knows that when this happens he will be tempted to back off and retreat.
  - But Paul does not want Timothy let his flame dwindle and so he exhorts him to fan it into flame his gift of unashamedly speaking about Jesus.
- Every Christian can relate to Timothy here. Think for a minute about what it means to feel ashamed. Shame is the negative feeling that you get about yourself when you do something that is considered unacceptable by society.
  - You feel shame in that recurring dream where you are suddenly standing naked in front of people you know. You feel it when you realize you just said something inappropriate. When you show up somewhere and are not wearing the right clothes for the occasion.
    - In these verses Paul describes two areas where we, like Timothy, are ashamed of Jesus.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 3) First, we are ashamed of Jesus when we avoid speaking about him.**
  - I see this in verse 8. **READ 8a – Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.** Paul does not mean that unless you are always speaking about Jesus you are ashamed of him. He means that when you avoid an obvious opportunity to speak about him because it will make you look bad in front of others then you are ashamed of him.
    - Shame shows itself in silence.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Second, we are ashamed of Jesus when we avoid being identified with his people.**
  - I see this in verse 8 as well. **READ 8 – Therefore 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.**
    - People love to associate themselves with the rich, famous, and powerful. Why? Because if you are associated with someone whom everyone respects then people will think more highly of you. On the opposite side, people avoid those who might make them look bad. Shame shows itself in silence but shame also shows itself in disassociating from those who we feel will make us look bad.
- Timothy is being tempted to disassociate from Paul. Paul is not a popular guy right now. Remember he is a prisoner in Rome and this is during the reign of the Emperor Nero. Nero falsely accused Christians of setting fire to Rome and sought to destroy them.
  - So you can see how Timothy might be tempted to say, **“Paul? No, I am not friends with him anymore.”** It would be so easy to avoid Paul because association with him will bring shame.
    - But to be ashamed of God’s people is to be ashamed of Christ for if we belong to Christ we belong to his people.
- We can easily do this. You are with a new group of people and they say, **“What did you do last weekend?”** You know you went to church but you also know these people will think less of you if they know you go to church. They might brand you as a religious nut. So you just avoid saying you went to church and say, **“I took my mom out for lunch and hung out with some friends.”**
  - If you avoid being known as a Christian or avoid being known as one who is part of a church because others will think less of you then you are ashamed of Christ.
- So you see Paul knows how Christians are often tempted to be ashamed of testifying to Christ and identifying with his people. He must have felt the temptation because in Romans 1:16 he emphatically states, **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”** Or think of Peter. He declares to Jesus that he is ready to die with him but that night he denies knowing him three times. He doesn’t even have enough courage to face the negative opinion of a slave girl.
  - Jesus clearly views it as a problem for us because he gives the solemn warning in Mark 8:38 that **“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”**

- Oh how grieved I am when I look back at my life to see how many times I cared more about the opinions of others than to be named with Christ and his people. How many times have I hid my Christianity so others would think well of me?
  - Like Peter and Paul my heart wants to say, **“I am not ashamed and will gladly bear any suffering and shame for Christ.”** But in reality I sometimes wimp out. If we are honest we are more sensitive to the opinions of others than we care to admit.
    - This is the problem of the dwindling flame.

## THE CALL TO KINDLE THE FLAME

- Having identified the problem let’s now come to the second part: **(SHOW SLIDE 5) the call to kindle the flame.**
  - There is really one call here but it has three parts. In a sentence, the call is to keep on kindling the flame of unashamedly speaking about Jesus by testifying to him, identifying with his people, and being willing to suffer.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 6) First, kindle the flame by unashamedly speaking about Jesus.**
  - Look again at verse 6. **READ 6a** – **“I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.”** Do not let your faith go cold. Do not chicken out of speaking for Jesus. Fan it into flame. Kindle it. Just like you get down and breathe on a fire that is dwindling, go about using your gifts for Christ. The verb “to fan” is in a continuous sense. Keep on fanning.
    - So how do you do that? I think the second point helps.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 7) Second, kindle the flame by gladly identifying with the people of God.**
  - The reason why most Christians are scared to talk about Jesus is that they feel like they have to have the perfect words and give a full gospel presentation. Don’t begin there. Begin with just two things.
    - First, in a natural way just let other people know you go to church. When someone asks what you did on the weekend just say you went to church. They may pick up on it and talk about it or they may not but identify yourself with Christ’s people.
    - Second, in a natural way just let other people know you are a Christian and that it means something to you. You can never testify to Christ if people have no idea you are a Christian. I am amazed how once people know you are a Christian they start to ask your opinion on different questions which then opens further doors to testify to Christ.
      - The easiest ways to start testifying to Christ is simply to self-identify as a Christian or one who goes to church.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 8) Finally, kindle the flame by suffering for Christ.**
  - **READ 8** – **Therefore 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.** Where did we ever get this ridiculous idea that becoming a Christian means having all your problems solved, getting rich, or making Jesus the key to a successful career?
    - Jesus himself said, **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”**
- Paul knows that when Timothy, and when we, face this kind of hardship we will be tempted to pull back and chicken out. That is why Paul writes this letter. The whole letter is a reality check that living for Jesus will mean hardship. Listen to these verses.
  - In 1:16 Paul gives the example of **(SHOW SLIDE 9) “Onesiphorus . . . often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.”**
  - 2:3 – **(SHOW SLIDE 10) “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”**
  - 2:9 – **(SHOW SLIDE 11) “I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.”**

- 2:10 – (SHOW SLIDE 12) *“I endure everything for the sake of the elect.”*
- 2:12 – (SHOW SLIDE 13) *“if we endure, we will also reign with him.”*
- 2:15 – (SHOW SLIDE 14) *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed.”*
- 3:1 – (SHOW SLIDE 15) *“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.”*
- 3:10-11 – (SHOW SLIDE 16) *“You, however, have followed . . . my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured.”*
- 3:12 – (SHOW SLIDE 17) *“all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*
- 4:5 – (SHOW SLIDE 18) *“endure suffering.”*
- 4:7 – (SHOW SLIDE 19) *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*
- 4:16 – (SHOW SLIDE 20) *“At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.”*
- So do you see it? Paul assumes that being a Christian will be hard. He assumes you will be tempted to be ashamed.
  - But he says, ***“Don’t let it happen. Don’t chicken out. Breathe on the fire. Stoke the coals of living for Christ. Testify about him. Identify yourself as a Christian and be willing to suffer.”***

### THE FUEL TO INGITE THE FLAME

- Now we may agree with all of that. We may agree that we often lack courage. We may agree that we need to speak of Jesus and be willing to suffer for him. But, when it comes to it, where do we get the courage to follow through? In the third and final place Paul talks about (SHOW SLIDE 21) **the fuel to ignite the flame.**
  - Paul talks about two things we are to remember that will fill us with courage to speak and be willing to suffer for Christ.
- (SHOW SLIDE 22) **First, remember the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.**
  - Look at verse 7 again. **READ 7** – *“for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”* The word “spirit” can refer to our inner attitude or to the Holy Spirit. The vast majority of commentators think this is a reference to the Holy Spirit.
    - So this verse is saying, ***“For when God gave us his Holy Spirit, it was not fear that we received, but power, love, and self-control.”***
- Christian, the Holy Spirit you have is not a cowardly Spirit. He is the Spirit who gives power. This word “power” refers to spiritual strength that enables us to speak and remain faithful. What good news for those of us who don’t feel like we are anyone special but who want to testify to Christ. As Oswald Sanders writes,
  - (SHOW SLIDE 23) ***“God can achieve his purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources.”***<sup>1</sup>
- Christian, you have the Spirit of power. You also have the Spirit of love who enables you to serve others, warn others, speak to others, and care for others no matter what they do in return. And you have the Spirit of self-control, which refers to level headedness and calm thinking. The Spirit enables you to think clearly despite the opposition.
  - Christians, we must stop this defeatist mentality. The Spirit of God who dwells in you is no coward. He is the Spirit who at creation turned chaos into order. He is the Spirit who empowered Jesus to battle the devil’s temptation in the desert. He is the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead.
    - So use your gifts, testify to Jesus, step out and serve knowing that the Spirit in you is not a Spirit of timidity but of power, love, and self-discipline. Remember the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

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<sup>1</sup> “Man’s Weakness—God’s Strength,” *Missionary Crusader* (December 1964), 7.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 24) Remember the grace given to you in Jesus Christ.**
  - Look at the end of verse 8. **READ 8** – ***“share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.”*** What is this power? It is the Holy Spirit. But Paul defines it another way in 2:1. **READ 1** – ***“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”***
    - How does God’s grace in Jesus strengthen us? Because we know that in Jesus we have God’s full approval. Jesus faced the ultimate shame of the cross in order that we might be accepted by God. So you strengthen yourself by continually remembering this. You have to get it down deep. The opinions of others and the shame we feel when we go against them is broken when we know that in Christ we are fully accepted by God.
- Jesus bore the shame of the cross in order that we would know full acceptance. Jesus’ death was not only brutal it was also shameful, disgraceful, and embarrassing. Cicero, who was a Roman philosopher, asked that Roman citizens not even speak about crucifixion because it was a disgraceful subject for the ears of decent people.<sup>2</sup> You see crucifixion was reserved only for the vilest of criminals. It was so disgraceful that even the worst Roman citizens were beheaded rather than crucified.
  - To add to the shame, the entire thing was done publicly. There was no suffering in dignified privacy. Jesus was displayed for all to see and mock. Sometimes men were crucified at eye level so that people could look them in the eye and make fun of them.
    - Isaiah reflects the shame of Jesus by saying, ***“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”***
- Why did Jesus do this? In the words of Isaiah 26, he did this so that ***“the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*** Do you see it then? Your great problem and mine is that we are far too concerned about gaining the approval of others. We are willing to avoid Christ to get this approval. We are approval junkies. But the good news of Christianity is that in Jesus we are fully approved of by God.
  - Knowing this grace changes everything. You are freed from the fear of being ridiculed or mocked because you have the full approval of God. It also makes us deeply humble. We don’t talk to others as if we are superior to them because as Paul says in verse 9 you are saved ***“not because of anything [you] have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”***
    - When this grace fills you it makes you courteous and kind to people. You don’t jam Jesus down their throat. You don’t coerce them. You trust that God’s grace is what opens their hearts not your great words.
- Ignite the flame by remembering the Spirit who dwells in you. Ignite the flame by remembering the grace that has been given to you in Christ Jesus.
  - This week pray for opportunities to testify to Jesus. And then step forward in courage.

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<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *Pro Rabirio*, 5.16.