

# Jesus Is Worth It

## Part #4 - "Courage"

### Text | 2 Timothy 1:6-12

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on June 2, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

#### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** The explosive rise of Christianity is a phenomenon of history. It started with just Jesus and his 12 friends but by the year 250 A.D. 50% of the Roman Empire claimed to be Christian. This included the emperor himself.
  - How did this happen? Historians give many reasons. One major reason was the astounding courage of the early Christians. They were often required to deny Jesus and yet most refused and so were tortured and killed.
- The historian Eusebius tells of a harmless elderly woman named Apolonia. They smashed out all of her remaining teeth but she would not deny Jesus and so they burned her alive.<sup>1</sup> A man named Peter was a member of the imperial household. When the emperor Diocletian discovered he was a believer he had him **"stripped, raised high, and scourged all over."** Then salt and vinegar were poured on his wounds and he was **"slowly roasted"** alive.<sup>2</sup> Yet he would not deny Christ.
  - We have an English phrase to describe such courage. We say such people have "spines of steel." Steel is strong. Steel cannot be broken. We build skyscrapers with it. To have a spine of steel means a person keeps going and is not broken by conflict.
    - The opposite is to be spineless. A spineless person is a coward who easily gives in to opposition.
- Where did these early Christians get such spines of steel? We need to know because we are often embarrassed to speak about Jesus. We often avoid being known as Christians so we will look good to others. As our culture becomes increasingly hostile toward Christianity we will face increasing pressure to turn away from Christ.
  - So how can we get this courage to live for Jesus even if it means we must suffer?
- Paul answers that question in our passage today. Timothy is facing opposition for being a Christian and for speaking about Jesus. He is in danger of wimping out. So, Paul seeks to put some steel into Timothy's spine.
  - Paul says that what Timothy needed, and what we need, to live for Jesus (even if it means suffering) is two things:
    - First, we need to be strengthened with the unbreakable truths of the gospel. Second, we need to be strengthened with unbending examples of the gospel.

#### STRENGTHEN BY THE UNBREAKABLE TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL

- Let's come to look at the first point then. I put it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE 2) Put steel in your spine to live for Jesus (even if it means suffering) by strengthening yourself in the unbreakable truths of the gospel.**
  - We have seen that Timothy is just like us. When faced with opposition we are tempted to be ashamed of Jesus and his people—to avoid speaking about Jesus and to avoid being identified with his people because it will make us look bad in front of others.
    - But in verse 8 Paul calls Timothy and us not to be ashamed. **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**
- Okay, so how does Paul seek to strengthen us? To put steel into our spines? He focuses our minds and hearts on the grace of God toward us. When God's grace goes deep into you, when you see all that it means, you are strengthened. So let's strengthen ourselves as we see numerous angles of God's grace. **(SHOW SLIDE 3)**

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<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 6.41.7.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 24.

**First, strengthen yourself with the unbreakable truth of God's sovereign grace.** By "sovereign grace" I mean it was God alone who rescued us. Look at verse 9. **READ 9 – who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace.**

- It is God who rescued us. It is God who called us to this new life. And then Paul takes great pains to say he did not do this because we had earned it. God rescued us because of his own purpose and grace. We had nothing to do with our salvation. He did it all.
- Right here we see why Christianity is so difficult to accept and why it is the easiest thing in the world to accept. It is so difficult to accept because it requires you to admit that you are guilty of sin, that you are a sinner, that you are lost, and that you need someone to save you. This is very hard for our pride to accept.
  - Although we have a hard time admitting our sins other people can see them clearly. There is a cartoon that shows a husband and wife standing in a long line before the gates of heaven. They are waiting to face judgement. The woman leans toward the man and whispers to him, **"Now Harold, whatever you do, please don't demand that you get what's coming to you."**
    - Our wives know we have not earned heaven. Our kids know it. Our friends know it. Our colleagues know it. But it is very hard for us to admit that we need a Saviour.
- But once we admit it, once we humble ourselves, we do not find a God who says, **"You are such a failure and I won't have anything to do with failures."** No, we find a God who is full of grace.
  - People often quote the Bible verse that says, **"God helps those who help themselves."** There is just one little problem with that statement. It is not a Bible verse. But there is a bigger problem with it here is a second problem with it. It is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches. The message of the Bible is that God helps those who *cannot* help themselves. The good news of Christianity is that through Jesus Christ God did for us what we could not do for ourselves.
    - The message of Christianity is not, **"Obey and God will rescue you."** The message of Christianity is, **"Christ obeyed on your behalf and so those who believe are rescued."** That is why it is a message of grace.
  - Do you see how this puts steel in your spine? The reason you and I are often embarrassed about Jesus and avoid speaking about him is because we are still trying to find approval. We are trying to find it in the opinions of others. But when the message of God's sovereign grace strengthens your heart you know that because of what Christ has done you are fully approved of by God.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Second, strengthen yourself with the unbreakable truth of God's pre-existent grace.**
  - Look again at verse 9 again. **READ 9 – which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.** Oh let the steel of this truth strengthen your soul. The grace that God purposed to give you was not an afterthought. If you are a Christian this grace was not given to you just before you became a Christian, not just before you were born, not even a few hundred years ago. It was given **"before the ages began."**
    - Before God created anything he gave a gift. Before God made galaxies and stick bugs, tomatoes and black holes, he gave a gift. Paul describes this gift in Ephesians 1: **"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."**
      - If you are a Christian here today let this truth put steel in your spine. He chose you not just before you were born but before he created the world. He set his love upon you. He gave you the gift of his grace before anything existed. How can you be more loved than that?
- **(SHOW SLIDE 5) Third, strengthen yourself with the unbreakable truth of God's visible grace.**
  - Look at verse 10. **READ 10 – and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.** So God's grace is not some concept or idea that we have to grasp. His grace is a person. The grace that was given to us before time was revealed when Jesus came.

- God’s grace is a person. Christ lived the life that we should have lived and died the death we should have died. He did everything for us in order that we might be rescued.
  - Oh what steel for our spines! This grace shows us that we were loved from eternity past, that in time Jesus did everything we could not do, and that he rescued us. This is sovereign grace, pre-existent grace, and visible grace.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 6) Finally, strengthen yourself with the unbreakable truth of God’s victorious grace.**
  - This is where it all hits real life. Look at verse 10 again. **READ 10 – and 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.**
- Notice that Jesus’ work was about destroying something and about giving something positive to us. First, he destroyed death. Through his death and resurrection he took away death’s power. But he also gave us something. He brought things to light that were previously shrouded in darkness. The coming of Jesus illuminated what life looks like. Jesus shows us how to live and gave us life. But his coming also shone light on what happens when we die – on this issue of immortality.
  - Human beings have always been obsessed with what happens to us when we die. We are obsessed with finding out if we can live forever. Before Jesus came, all our searching was like staring into a dark room. We could only see a few lines and shapes. If you read the Old Testament it is the same. But when Jesus came it was like the blinds were pulled aside and the blazing light of the sun lit up the room of eternity.
    - Jesus taught about what happens when we die. And then he came back from the dead showing us a future bodily resurrection. This is victorious grace.
- Do you see how all of these truths can give you that spine of steel that makes you unbelievably confident? Think about the martyrs. What made them so courageous was the fact that they strengthened themselves on these unbreakable truths. They knew deep inside that God had set his love upon them, that he had rescued them in Jesus, that he had defeated death, and that immortality awaited them.
  - How can you stop someone who is not afraid of death? How do you defeat someone who laughs in the face of death and says, **“Do you worst death because you will only give me what I want most which is to be with my Saviour?”**
- When North Korea became Communist in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the government killed Christians, especially pastors. Dr. David Yonggi Cho tells about a family that was arrested during this time. The Communists dug a large hole, putting the pastor, his wife, and several of his children in it. The leader then spoke and said, **“Mister, all these years you have misled the people with the superstition of the Bible. Now if you will publicly deny your beliefs before these people, and turn away from your wrong actions, then you, your wife, and your children will be freed. But if you persist in your superstitions, all of your family is going to be buried alive. Make a decision!”** His children blurted out, **“Oh daddy. Think of us! Daddy!”**
  - The father was very shaken. He lifted his hand and said, **“Yes, yes, I’ll do it.”** But before he could say anything his wife nudged him and said, **“Say no!”** She then turned to her children and said, **“Quiet children. Tonight we are going to have supper with the King of kings, the Lord of lords!”** She then led the family in singing the hymn “In the sweet by and by.”
    - **There’s a land that is fairer than day,  
And by faith we can see it afar;  
For the Father waits over the way  
To prepare us a dwelling place there.**
- The Communists began filling in the hole with dirt as many people watched. The dirt was up to their necks but the whole family—husband, the wife, and the children—kept singing.
  - **In the sweet by and by,  
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;  
In the sweet by and by,  
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.**

- Dr. Cho finished telling this story by saying that **“almost all the people who watched this execution became Christians, many now members of my church.”**<sup>3</sup>
- What courage! What a spine of steel. But do you see where it all came from? You can hear it in the woman’s words and in the song they sang. They knew the grace of Jesus. They knew he had defeated death. They knew that immortality awaited them. Friends, what made them so strong, what gave them spines of steel, was that he had strengthened himself in the unbreakable truths of the gospel.
  - This is what will give you the courage as well. Strengthen yourself daily in the word. Learn of his grace. Learn of his love for you. Learn of what Jesus has done. Learn of how he defeated death. Learn of the riches that await you in the afterlife.
    - Strengthen yourself in the unbreakable truths of the gospel and you will be able to live for him.

## STRENGTHENED BY THE UNBENDING EXAMPLES OF THE GOSPEL

- **(SHOW SLIDE 7) Put steel in your spine to live for Jesus (even if it means suffering) by strengthening yourself with unbending examples of the gospel.**
  - Paul has focused Timothy’s mind on God’s grace in Jesus. He now follows it up by giving himself as an example of one who has not bent to the pressure—as one who is not ashamed of the gospel.
- Look at verse 11. **READ 11-12a – Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,<sup>11</sup> for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher,<sup>12</sup> which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed.**
  - Paul knows that as he speaks about being appointed to be a herald, apostle, and teacher, Timothy will remember his own appointment to leadership. Paul has called Timothy to not be ashamed and now he gives himself as example of one who is not ashamed.
    - Again, we see such confidence. Paul has a spine of steel. He is rotting in prison and everyone has abandoned him. But look at that little word, “but”: “But, I am not ashamed.” Despite all this he is not ashamed. In fact, he is filled with confidence.
- And then he states *how* he gets such courage and steel in his spine. Look at verse 12. **READ 12 – 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.**
  - Now notice, that it is not that he knows *what* he believes though that is important. Obviously Paul knows *what* he believes. Notice also that it is not that he knows *why* he believes, though he does have reasons *why* he believes the gospel. But it is not *what* he believes or *why* he believes it that gives him such strength. It is *whom* he has believed.
    - Paul has placed all his faith in the living Christ and he knows that Jesus will never let him down. He is confident that his life and all his work is in Jesus’ hand.
- You probably know the name Martin Luther. He was of course the great reformer who took on the Catholic Church. He faced tremendous opposition. There is a great little story about an exchange between Martin and his wife Katharina.
  - One day Martin was very depressed. Kate tried to counsel him but nothing would change his mood. Kate went upstairs and put on a black dress. When she came down Martin asked, **“Are you going to a funeral?”** **“No,”** Kate replied, **“but since you act like God is dead, I wanted to join you in your mourning.”**<sup>4</sup> Luther got the message.
    - Jesus lives. Jesus is powerful. We can have absolute confidence in him to guard all that we are and all that we do.
- So you have to imagine Timothy reading this. He is being opposed. He is tempted to turn and run because it is hard. But Paul seeks to strengthen him in the unbreakable truths of the gospel. And then Paul gives himself

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Bruce Milne, *Acts*, 135-136.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf K. Markwald and Marilyn Morris Markwald, *Katharina Von Bora: A Reformation Life*, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 139-140.

as real-life example of person who is serving Christ, suffering for Christ, and yet is filled with confidence and courage.

- You see this is one of the things I love about Christianity. It is not a philosophy that only smart people can understand. It is not a book that just ponders the mysteries of the universe. It is drenched in reality. I mean that it is so practical. It is so down to earth.
  - Paul does not write this in a library. He writes it in a prison. It is about how to follow Christ in the real world, how to have courage to face any degree of suffering.
- Example is powerful for us. We first of all need the great truths but we also need to see them lived out by others. What inspiration we get from this Korean family. What inspiration for Kate Luther. What inspiration from the many seniors in our church family.
  - A few years ago my two brothers and I planned a retirement party for my parents. My dad was a pastor for about 30 years and my mom was a faithful wife who also served Christ's church. Each of us decided to share about what we admired about our parents.
    - The single theme was their love for Christ and their service of him. I'll be honest with you: sometimes I find being a pastor difficult. Sometimes I think about how nice it would be not to be a leader and to face all the pressure that comes with it. The temptation is to run. But then I look at my parents. They endured. They persevered. And trust me, they often suffered, especially from the criticism of their own people.
      - My dad never misses an opportunity to preach to his sons. So once we were done talking he gave a 15 minute talk to us. He pointed again and again to Christ to how he is the only one who can give the strength to do it.
- How about you? Who are your Christian examples? You need to find them. You need to ask them how they have served for so many years. I bet every time they will point you away from themselves and to Christ for they know whom they have believed.
  - I would recommend reading biographies. If you don't like whole books here is an easier way. A pastor named John Piper has a series of books with short biographies of famous Christians. So you can read this one book that has three different biographies all about suffering in the lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd. Or you can read about God's grace in the lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. Read biographies.

## **CONCLUSION**

- Friends, I am convinced that it is going to become increasingly difficult to follow Christ in our culture. We are going to be tempted to be ashamed of Christ and his people the church. We need courage. We need steel in our spines.
  - You get his steel by strengthening yourself with the unbreakable truths of the gospel and with unbending examples of the gospel.