

2 Timothy - Guard the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from the book of 2nd Timothy chapter 1 verses 1 to 14 and if you have your blue Bibles with you kindly open it to page 1195.

! Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. I thank God whom I serve as my ancestors did. With a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers, recalling your tears. I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

I am reminded of your sincere faith which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and I am persuaded now lives in you also.

For this reason, I remember you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel. By the power of God, he saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace.

[1 : 44] This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but this is now revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

And of this gospel, I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I'm suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and I'm convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you so much, Mary Chu, for reading for us. We are starting this morning, as I mentioned, a series in the book of 2 Timothy. And my plan this morning, as far as I am able and as far as it's possible, is to do an overview of the whole book.

So let's pray and ask for the Lord's help. Let me pray. Father, we do thank you that we come now to your word and not anyone else's. We do thank you that we get to listen to what you say and not just the good ideas of one another in the room.

[3 : 21] And we pray that you might speak to us and that you might give us those kind of tender hearts which listen carefully and respond in obedience and faith. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. In a book I was reading recently, it presented the following dilemma. Bev and Ruth, you're told, were good friends.

They lived near each other. They had grown up together. They were serving in church alongside one another. But then one day, Bev discovered that Ruth had spoken about her behind her back, gossiped about her.

The book didn't say exactly what the gossip was. But you were told that Bev was greatly upset that Ruth had spoken in such a way about her. Upset enough to confront Ruth about it.

So she did. But it didn't go well. Ruth told Bev that she was being oversensitive. She said she had nothing to apologize for. And as you might imagine, that made things much, much worse.

[4 : 28] Bev was now not only offended by the fact that she considered Ruth to have gossiped against her, but also was now offended by Ruth's response to being challenged about gossiping about her.

So it escalated. Bev then asked the elders of the church to speak to Ruth, which they did. But having done so, they came back to Bev and told her that she was indeed being oversensitive.

And that while Ruth shouldn't have spoken in the way she did, still the best thing would be just to drop it all. Just forget it. Don't make a fuss. Don't jeopardize the peace of the church or a lifelong friendship for what essentially is just a misunderstanding.

And the book tells that story. It's a mythical story, I think, but it's probably true in loads of different ways and loads of different scenarios, isn't it? But the book tells you that story because then it asks you this question.

What do you think Bev should do? What do you think she should do? What do you think her relationship with Ruth should look like? Do you think they should continue to serve alongside one another in the life of the church?

[5 : 31] Do you think Bev should raise the matter again and demand an apology? Or do you think she should just drop it, go around to her friend's house and make up? I wonder what you think. In the end, the story turns out to be a sort of clever trick that the author's playing on you.

Because having asked the reader to think about that carefully, the chapter then gives you a twist in the story. It tells you this. Again, it's a mythical story, but this is trying to get you to think.

It says, some weeks later, Ruth's 10-year-old daughter, a daughter who Bev had loved and cared for and who'd been at every birthday party of, Ruth's daughter was killed in a road traffic accident. And then it says, how does that change your advice? What do you say now? Do you now say that Bev should still raise the matter of the gossip? Or do you think now she should drop everything, get over it, go around to her friend's house, show her the love and the care that she needs, and drop the whole thing?

And the point that the author's making is obvious, isn't it? Of course, Bev should drop it, shouldn't she? The death of Ruth's daughter brings a kind of clarity to the story that was lacking before.

[6 : 44] Death, if you like, is a good teacher about what life is for and about what is important and what is not. That lesson is taught often in the Bible.

It's why the Bible says things like, teach me to number my days aright. Or you're like the grass that withers and the flowers that fall. Because death and remembering death is what teaches us what life is all about and what really matters.

It's the perspective that we need. Now I start there because that essentially is what 2 Timothy is doing. 2 Timothy is like the shock of finding out that Ruth's daughter died in a church way, right? It's the sit up, think hard and consider carefully, have you really thought what matters in church life? And it's like that because Paul, who writes to Timothy, is dying as he writes it.

Listen to how it's put in chapter 4, verses 6 and 7. Paul writes, For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

[7 : 57] Now don't imagine Paul here kind of lying in a hospital bed in his old age, surrounded by his friends and his family. That's not the scenario, right?

Paul is in prison. You're told that in chapter 1, verse 8. And he's not in the prison of house arrest, which is his previous experience in Rome. Instead, now he is in some sort of obscure dungeon hidden away somewhere in the city.

So that chapter 1, verses 16 and 17 tell you that a guy called Onesiphorus really struggled and had to work hard to find Paul. It's a dungeon which is cold and damp, so that Paul is asking for a cloak in chapter 4, verse 13.

And Paul is there. And with the exception of Onesiphorus and Luke, he is abandoned by his friends who didn't even show up to defend him. And so 2 Timothy is Paul's last New Testament letter.

It's his last recorded words. And with death as his teacher, he is telling his friend Timothy, who's working in the church in Ephesus, listen, I'm a dying man. Let me tell you what really matters.

[9 : 01] Let me tell you what's really important. Now, it won't surprise you that staring death in the face, Paul does not write to Timothy about how to set the chairs out at church.

He doesn't tell him what songs they should sing. He doesn't tell you who should play them. He doesn't mention church rotas. He doesn't even tell you what to have for a church lunch. Not because those things don't matter, but rather because with the urgency and clarity of impending execution, Paul cares about something else.

He cares about passing on the message of the gospel. Just scan through this with me. Start in chapter 1, verse 1. Look down at that verse with me. Paul says he is an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

In other words, Paul considers himself to be a sent one. That's what the word apostle means. It's someone who is sent. And he is sent from Christ Jesus through the will of the Father, in keeping with what he calls the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.

Just read the verse backwards, essentially, and I think the meaning then pops out. There is a promise of life, says Paul, in Christ Jesus. It's a promise that God has made, and he sent Paul to tell people about that promise of life.

[10:19] Now, what that promise of life is gets expanded in verse 9 of chapter 1, as being something that was planned from eternity, grace given before the beginning of time, it says.

But then in verse 10, it's worked out in history. Christ on the cross, destroying death, and through his resurrection, bringing life and immortality to light. This message then is from, if you like, eternity past, as God plans it in eternity, to eternity future, with eternal life through Jesus' death, defeating death.

Now, that's the message of the gospel that gets referred to throughout the letter. In the letter, it's variously called the pattern of sound teaching.

It's called the good deposit, as we were looking at with the children. It's called the things you have heard me say, in chapter 2, verse 2. It's called these things, in chapter 2, verse 14.

It's just called the truth, in chapter 2, verse 25. According to chapter 3, verses 15 to 16, it's the message of the Holy Scriptures, the New Testament written by the apostles, sent by Jesus, and the Old Testament written by the prophets.

[11:33] In chapter 4, verse 17, it's just simply called the message, literally the proclamation. So perhaps you could imagine 2 Timothy like this.

Here is Timothy's spiritual father, Paul. He's on his deathbed. He is handing over to him what is most precious to him.

And it's not a piece of fine jewelry. It's not the location of buried treasure. Instead, he says, listen, this is it. This is what matters. It's the message, which, if you click the next slide, will come up.

Yeah, go on. There you go. Yeah, brilliant. See, in the corner. The message. This is what's most important. This is the treasure. This is what you need to guard and keep. And Paul says, I've preached it.

I've taught it. I've kept it. I've suffered for it. And now, Timothy, it's your job. You do the same. He says. This is what's worth living and dying for. This is the purpose of our church life together and of the ministry of the church.

[12:37] Our purpose is not so much to pass on a building. It's not so much to pass on a way of doing things. It's not to pass on a tradition or a polity or a logo or a style. It's to pass on a message.

It's to pass on a message. The message of the gospel. The eternal promise of a loving father worked out in history in the person of the son who brings to life immortality in him.

This is treasure. When I was talking to the leaders in February, suggesting that we looked at 2 Timothy together this term, this was my pitch to them.

I said, listen, I think right at the outset of our church life together as a merged church, I think we need to just kind of lay these foundations about what church and ministry is all about. Let's get it right, right at the beginning.

It's so easy in church life to get kind of lost in the fog of all the other things that go on and lose the center. That at its heart, church life, Christian life, ministry is about holding on to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and passing it along to the next generation.

[13:43] That's the whole game, right? If we don't do that, it matters nothing what else we do because we've lost. You'll kill the church.

But if we do that, then with Paul and years to come, we'll be able to say, we fought the fight. We have finished the race. We have kept the faith.

So I just want to point out four things that the letter of 2 Timothy tells us about how we're to go about that task of passing on the message of the gospel. So there are four headlines, really.

The first one is guard the gospel, guard the gospel. It's the instruction that we were looking at earlier in chapter 1, verse 14. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

It's the same idea in chapter 2, verse 2, where he says about handing it over to reliable people. It's not simply that the gospel can be broken or can theoretically be twisted or distorted or changed.

[14 : 44] It can. But it's not a technicality. It's not a theory. It's not a possibility. Rather, the point is, says Paul, that there are people who want to twist the gospel, who desire to distort the gospel, who will want to infiltrate the church, twist the gospel, and ruin the message.

In chapter 2, verse 17, Hymenes and Philetus get name-checked for departing from the truth. If you look over at chapter 3, verse 1, you're told this.

But mark this, says Paul, there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful and holy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power, have nothing to do with such people.

And the gospel needs to be preserved, guarded against those who would twist it. Let me speak to you if you're a church member here this morning. I hope you are conscious of this job that we have together.

To guard the gospel. That although the gospel is a powerful message that has the ability to save all who would believe, still that message is in a sense fragile and precious and needs to be protected from being twisted and distorted.

[16 : 10] And that protection starts with you and me, doesn't it? That each of us, starting with the leaders but working its way into every church member, all of us need to be clear on our understanding of the gospel.

We need to be thorough in our study. We need to be careful in our speech. And that matters because if we fail to guard the gospel, then we lose the treasure that is at the center of church life that we're meant to be handing on.

You know, if we are flippant about who we let preach, if we are thoughtless about the words that we are going to sing together, if we are half-hearted in our study of the scriptures, it's like the equivalent of melting the crown jewels to hell.

Why would you do that? Or using the family pottery as frisbees, selling the family business just for a quid. You wouldn't do it, would you? And you shouldn't do it.

There's something else here that's going on as well, and it's a little bit more complicated to explain. But let me have a go if I can, and if I fail, you can come and find me over lunch. There are essentially, I think, two reasons why you might need to guard something.

[17 : 14] One is because it might be small and really precious. So think of something like a diamond. A diamond is very valuable, but it's also very small, isn't it? You could swallow it, or you could lose it, or drop it, or flush it down the toilet, or something like that.

So you need to guard it and watch over it, because you could easily lose it. But there's also another way that you need to guard something. Big things sometimes need guarding.

Think about the environment. The environment is precious, but not in the same way that a diamond is precious. It's not small, you can't flush it down the toilet or swallow it. But it is still in need of guarding and protecting, because it's the arena in which everything happens.

It's the umbrella under which all of our lives happen. If you destroy the environment, if you burn your home down, if you pollute your city, if you poison the water coming out of your tap, you will die.

You need to guard the environment in which you live. Now, I want to suggest to you that Christians have tended to treat the gospel like it's a small diamond that needs protecting, and not like the environment that needs looking after it.

[18 : 24] And I want to suggest to you that, although it's a bit of both, really it's like the environment. Christians have tended to sort of summarize the gospel very simply in a very small way, to say the message of the gospel really is just about Jesus, it's about the things you've done wrong, and it's about getting forgiveness.

And what we're going to do is we're going to get it out on a Sunday, and we're going to look at it, and then we're going to put it away, and we're going to ignore it the rest of the week, because it doesn't really matter. But what really matters is that we don't lose it. But that's not Paul's image here.

The gospel that Paul is teaching is way bigger than that, right? The gospel here encompasses the eternal plans of God. The gospel is what God was thinking about even before the world began.

The gospel has its end in our eternal life. The gospel has its heart in the work of Christ on the cross, the death of God in the person of the Son in human flesh.

That's what the gospel is about. It's not a small little thing. It's a ginormous thing. It encompasses all things. And it's precious because then it's the explanation of who God is.

[19 : 31] It's the explanation of what the world is about. It's the explanation of who I am. It tells me what my life is for, what's happening in the world. It's the news that God is at work.

It tells us that all of history is working towards a day. Chapter 4, verse 8. That day, he says, when all people, everyone in this room, everyone in history and geography will stand before their maker.

That's not a small message. That's a ginormous message. If I can put it this way for the nerds in the room, it's the operating system of the universe.

It's the way everything is working. It's the big idea. It's the fact at the heart of the universe. And that means that guarding the gospel is not so much getting it out on a Sunday and making sure that we explain this simple message very clearly.

I mean, we must do that. But actually, guarding the gospel is much bigger than that. It invades every corner of your life. Guarding the gospel shapes not what we do here together, but also shapes what you do in the week.

[20 : 40] It shapes how you build relationships with your colleagues at work, what you dream about your future, how you face the difficulties in life. You know, as you pick up 2 Timothy and work through it, and I hope maybe in weeks to come you're reading through it in your own devotions as well.

You see these kind of ideas. You guard the gospel by not being in love with the world. You guard the gospel by fighting self-love, by fighting pride, the love of money, disobedience to our parents, slander.

We guard the gospel by not being timid or ashamed of it, because the gospel has something to say in each area of our lives. Here, I think, then, is the big threat to our faithful passing on of the gospel to the next generation.

I don't think, maybe this is naive, but I think it's unlikely that we're going to have a members meeting in the next 10, 20, 30 years, where we say, hey, let's scrap our statement of faith and write a different one.

I know that could happen, and we need to guard against that, but I think that's unlikely. Secondly, I think it is more likely that we will fail to guard the gospel by not letting it invade every corner of our lives, that we don't let the gospel drive us and shape us, that we fail to guard the gospel because it doesn't mold our ambitions or our desires.

[22 : 01] But the dying Paul says to Timothy and says to all of us, guard the gospel, guard the gospel. Secondly, he says, suffer for the gospel. Look back at chapter 1, verse 8. There are a few of these coming, so stay with me.

Chapter 1, verse 8. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

Verse 11. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Chapter 2, verse 8.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

Chapter 3, verse 10. You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and sufferings.

[23 : 00] What kind of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra? The persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

I don't have time to go into the detail of all this, so you'll have to stay with us in weeks to come, and we'll draw it out as it comes. But Paul is saying here that guarding the gospel involves suffering for the gospel.

The cost of staying true is suffering. Timothy will suffer. I will suffer. You will suffer. In fact, everyone will suffer for the gospel if they want to live for Jesus, speak for Jesus to those around them.

The big idea here seems to be that the gospel is God's message, his operating system of the universe, if you like, but it is into a hostile world. God is merciful and gracious, but the world is rebellious to its maker.

So much so that for reasons that can't really be explained, the world hates those who live and speak for Jesus, in the same way that it hated Jesus himself. Now, we have to take this seriously, don't we?

[24 : 15] It is true that we live at a privileged time and in a privileged place where we're able to meet freely. We're unlikely to be shut down by the authorities for preaching the gospel, at least for the moment. But still, the point is that staying true and faithful to the gospel is not the key to an easy life, or even an apparently successful church.

Instead, faithfulness is the road marked with suffering. The road to glory, says Paul, is the road down into suffering. And it stands to reason, doesn't it, if you like, this grand message of the universe, this one that goes to eternity past, to eternity future, right at its center is the violent death of Jesus on the cross at the hands of wicked men.

And if that's at the center of the message, then why should you and I expect that guarding that message, passing it on to others, would be done through our ease and our success, rather than through our suffering and our weakness?

Now, think about what that means for us in this room. It means that if you're a Christian this morning, if you believe this message about Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection for you, then it doesn't matter who you are, how old you are, or where you're from, you will suffer for it.

I think we can say more than that. I think we can say you must suffer for it. So you must live, mustn't you, with the reality that trusting in Christ will not make you popular at school.

[25 : 39] There will be a point at which you have to choose the way of your friends or the way of the gospel. Living for Jesus will mean suffering rejection, misunderstanding, false accusations.

Living for Jesus means you won't be able to take every promotion at work because your priorities will be different. It means you won't be able to marry anybody that you fancy. It means that you won't be able to live wherever you want.

You won't be able to spend all your time and all your money on yourself and your free time just on your own pleasure. And that's not because God is trying to rob you of fun, but rather because this, says Paul, is the road to glory.

It's marked with suffering. This is truly remarkable if you think about it. Just imagine where Paul is, right? Imagine that you are where Paul is, right? He's in a dark, cold dungeon somewhere in Rome in a back alley that no one can find.

Now, if you were writing a letter to one of your dearest friends from that place, what would you write? Do everything that you can to avoid coming where I am, right? Do whatever you do.

[26 : 45] Don't end up here. It's terrible. It's miserable. I've lost everything. But Paul doesn't say that, does he? From his dungeon, he says, come join me.

Come find me. Come join me in my suffering for the gospel. Why does he say that? Does he hate Timothy? Is he trying to ruin his life? No, not at all. Paul knows, doesn't he, that life, real life, is found in suffering now and glory later.

The message of salvation for all who would believe holds an eternal promise of life for Paul that even the dungeon cannot rob him off. And he wants Timothy to know the same.

And he wants you to know the same. Thirdly, continue in the gospel. I wonder if perhaps the biggest temptation to Christians guarding the gospel and suffering for it is they just give up, right?

It's not so much that we find the gospel to be untrue. Rather, we find life to be distracting and hard. So we compromise, we wander away, and we just stop running the Christian race. And Paul's instruction to Timothy, it's there in chapter 3, verse 14.

[27 : 50] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you've known the scriptures, the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The letter itself is full of examples of those who have not done that. Perhaps the most devastating one is in chapter 4, verse 10, when you're told about a guy called Demas, who deserts Paul because he's in love with the world, he says.

I think if I could try and encapsulate the warning here, it's something like this. Starting well is really easy. Keeping going is a lot more difficult.

So keep going. Continue, says Paul. It's funny, isn't it, when you read it, it's not very impressive. It's not even particularly very motivational. You'd imagine it's a pitch at work.

We're just carrying on, guys. It's what we're doing. It's not a message, really, that you hear anywhere else, is it? This is not, let's build bigger, dream bigger. It's not, let's do great things. [28 : 58] It's not even, let's be a church planting church that plants other churches. Let's start movements. Let's expect revivals. Let's not, let's do great things. There's not anything wrong with any of those things. But his message is, continue.

Keep going. Don't give up. I wonder if there's a lesson for us. You see, I think it's the temptation of younger Christians to look at older saints and think they don't know what they're talking about. I know that because I have been that younger Christian. Still am at times. I think we can look at people and think, oh, they don't really understand the times that we live in. They don't understand the culture. They don't understand the gospel opportunity that we have. They just need to get with it. And if they did that, we would be a more successful church. Now, that might be true.

We do need to make sure as a church that we stay contemporary in the right way. But I think the danger for the young is that we undervalue the grace of keeping going, carrying on, and that we fail to honor those who have kept going.

[30 : 05] I was reflecting with a friend of mine. We've both been in Christian ministry together alongside one another for a number of years. We were childhood friends. And we've studied and taught through 2 Timothy in different contexts.

And we were talking about the letter. And I said, you know what? I think I thought when I was a young Christian that 2 Timothy was all about fighting. All about fighting for the truth. Now I read it as an older Christian and think it's all about just keeping going.

And we should honor those who have kept going. So let me say to our senior saints in the room this morning, we honor you for keeping going.

Praise God that he has enabled you to do that. And can I say to you, don't give up. Not now. You're almost home. Keep persevering.

Your faithfulness will be rewarded. And let me encourage you, if you're a younger church member, why not over lunch today, make a bean line for someone who is older and ask them, please tell me, how has it been carrying on?

[31 : 12] Keeping going. How have you done that? Will you pray for me? Would you pray that when I'm your age, I, like you, would be found in a gospel preaching church, telling people about Jesus, singing God's praises and living for him?

Would you pray that for me? They would love to do that. Finally, preach the gospel. Preach the gospel. I think there's something counterintuitive in this that I just want to show you as we finish. I think we tend to think that guarding and protecting things is by keeping them a secret. We hide precious things away in safe places. We put our money in the bank or under the mattress. We keep our pin number to ourselves, our passwords in a vault.

But the gospel is not like that, is it? It's the opposite. We guard the gospel. We protect the gospel. We keep the gospel at the center of our church life by exposing it, preaching it.

Look at chapter four, verse two. Paul tells Timothy, preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke, encourage with great patience and careful instruction. It's amazing, really.

[32 : 16] Timothy is to keep preaching, whether it's easy or whether it's difficult. Whether people are loving it or whether people are saying, please stop, Timothy. We don't want to hear any more about it. Keep going, says Paul. Keep preaching.

And the point here is not, I don't think so much that the gospel must be preached. It's like a, you know, Timothy needs to do something to the gospel to make it worth preaching. Rather, it is that the preaching of the gospel is something the gospel itself demands, right?

I mentioned this in passing. You probably won't have even noticed, but look at chapter four, verse 17. We're told that, but the Lord stood at my side, says Paul, and gave me strength so that through me, it says, the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles hear it.

Now, what's interesting, if you look at that verse, is that in the Greek, there is no word for message in that sentence. It is just the word proclamation. Because Paul's point is that the gospel itself is a proclamation, right?

Preaching is to the gospel what drinking is to water or what eating is to food. It's sort of a necessary consequence of his existence. Preaching the gospel is what you have to do with the gospel.

[33 : 24] If you've understood the gospel, you will preach it because the gospel is a message. It's to be taught. It's to be explained. It's to be exposed. The same idea in chapter two, verse nine.

This is my gospel for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. You can tie up the person who's preaching it, but you can't tie up the gospel itself because it is a proclamation, a message.

God's church, God's unchained, free proclamation. It can't be silenced. So a Christian that doesn't share the gospel or a church that doesn't preach the gospel is like a restaurant that doesn't serve food and you don't go to eat there.

It's like a hotel that has no beds or a car that has no wheels. It's pointless because the gospel and believing it demands that we preach it because it is God's message to a lost and broken world.

So let me say to you this morning, perhaps you're sitting here this morning. You're not a Christian. It's the first time you've been in church. It's really brilliant. You're here. Welcome. It's so good to have you. Let me tell you, and I can say this on the authority of Paul and the Bible itself.

[34 : 38] God has something to say to you this morning. He has a message for you. And the message is about Jesus Christ. It's a message that extends from eternity past to eternity future.

It finds its center in the work of Christ on the cross. And it is for you. And you must listen to it and come and find the good news of Christ, the crucified Savior, who died for your sins so that you might find glory, life and hope in him.

A hope that won't leave you, even if you find yourself in a cold, damp dungeon in Rome. It's a hope that makes everything make sense, even when you're dying.

Let me pray for us. Let me pray. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you have spoken this brilliant message of the gospel.

This message that extends from eternity past into eternity future, centered on the work of Christ on the cross, a message of forgiveness and grace and mercy and hope. And we pray that as a church, we would guard the gospel, suffer for the gospel, continue in the gospel and preach the gospel.

[36 : 02] Please, we pray, would none of us here abandon our hope in Christ, but would we keep going with our hope and trust in him. In his name, in his name, amen.

Amen.