

Sermon – October 9, 2022
“The Word of God is Not Chained”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: 2 Timothy 2:8-15

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill our open hearts anew and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that transforms us into Christ's image and guides us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord to you on this Sabbath Day. Did anyone try out this new greeting we talked about last week? Anyone want to share your experience? The times I have remembered to use this greeting did not bring about any notable responses this week. Let me encourage us to use this greeting that Paul shared with us and be prepared to respond to the conversation its use may foster.

How many of us remember the first time we heard a verse or verses from the Bible shared? How about a whole chapter? How about a book of the Bible? I remember the first, and maybe the only time, that I heard the book of 2 Timothy shared. Our little family was at a conference in Richmond sponsored by Focus on the Family on the ice rink there (there were pads over the ice, but it was cold). At one point in the conference, a man who had been sitting in a chair on stage got up, came forward to center stage, put chains on his wrists and then proceeded to recite the second letter to Timothy from memory. I still remember hearing Paul's letter to Timothy that day. Part of Joe White's demonstration was to help us grasp that we can memorize scripture and that doing so should be part of our lives. I will share that I did try to memorize this letter and at one point did pretty well with the first three chapters, but I always seemed to get

stuck in the fourth chapter of the letter. Today those memorized verses are faded and at best familiar. I hope that in our own life experience there are times when we can remember hearing God's word shared and that we are seeking to get God's word into our hearts

Paul writes to Timothy, telling him to "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David."¹ Remembering is one of many themes found in this second letter to Timothy. Paul is reminding Timothy to remember important aspects of Paul's teaching. Timothy is to recall what was shared with him as Paul worked with him. Timothy is being encouraged to remember what is needed to be successful in his ministry to the church in Ephesus. There is much we as workers for Christ also need to be reminded of and to have ready to share as we seek to work here in this place where we are to be workers for Christ in his church.

Paul's primary item for Timothy is to remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead. Paul is not as concerned about a complete picture of all that applies to Jesus, but is focused on Timothy's recalling that Jesus not only shed his blood and died on the cross, but also was raised from the dead. In part, Paul's focus on this aspect of Jesus could be a response to claims being made by false teachers in Ephesus that Jesus did not rise from the dead. Timothy would need to be reminded of the resurrection if he was struggling with others who held that Jesus had not risen from the dead, to remind him of the truth about Jesus. Paul's intent seems to include reminding Timothy that this descendent of David died and has been resurrected. The lineage to David identifies Jesus as the Messiah. Paul himself, in his encounter on the Damascus Road, is a witness to Jesus being raised from the dead and is assuring Timothy that he can have faith in a risen Lord as he shares the Gospel in Ephesus. We have the same assurance for our own belief in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Jesus is risen. We have the written accounts of the resurrection in our Bibles, and we should also remember those accounts as we also share the Gospel in the places where we are working for the in breaking kingdom of God. As Christ followers, we are to take this same sure teaching and pass it on to others. We are to be out in our part of the world seeking to share the Good News with others, helping them to grow in Christ and in turn, to go and share the good news with another. We are to be a link in the chain that allows the Good News to go forth. We are to be those who are sharing Jesus and the sure true teaching about him that we have received from others. It is in this manner that even if some of us are chained like criminals, the Good News is not chained, its spread is not stopped, and it goes forth across our neighborhoods, changing the lives of those who will receive the Gospel and then grow and go to

share with another. The kingdom of God is breaking in and we are to be those through whom the Gospel goes forth. As Paul has done with Timothy, we are to be especially attentive to spreading the Good News to the next generation that they also might hear and come to believe in Jesus. Sharing the Gospel is not just providing information. Sharing the Gospel is being willing to walk with another, while living as Jesus taught us to live, until those we walk with come to encounter the love of God that sent his only Son to die for our sins. Jesus depends on us to carry on and complete his mission to all the world. Spreading the Gospel is hard work, work that demands our all. This is work that will require us to endure until those we are led to by Holy Spirit become open to the Good News and accept Jesus as their savior. We are not judged by our accomplishments; we are judged by our faithfulness.ⁱⁱ

Don't miss Paul's next words written to Timothy. Paul reminds Timothy that he is now suffering hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. We don't typically focus on suffering when we speak about the Good News. Let's face it, suffering is just not good news. Yet, Jesus and Paul are both those who suffered for the Gospel. Jesus suffered on the cross and Paul suffered many things as he went out into the world to share the Gospel. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we find this summary of Paul's experiences: "with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked."ⁱⁱⁱ We don't typically include such a list of the consequences when we encourage each other to go out into the world and share the Good News about Jesus. We might experience rejection from people we speak with about Jesus who don't believe he was raised from the dead, but typically in the U.S. we don't yet have these concerns associated with sharing the Good News. Our brothers and sisters across the globe are not as fortunate. They face this list of suffering, yet the Good News of Jesus Christ is so important to them that they continue to share the Gospel in spite of the consequences. Paul has this view as well, telling us that even though he is chained, "God's word is not chained." Just as those around the world continue to share the Good News and it goes forth even in the midst of great suffering, Paul

continues to find ways to share the Good News where he is even if he is chained. Paul seeks to endure as Jesus endured the cross for the sake of all who will come to believe in Jesus. Paul is speaking to his willingness to endure anything so that he might be able to share the Gospel as a means to encourage Timothy and us to endure as we share the Gospel.

In the midst of Paul's letter to Timothy, we find guidance that speaks to the outcome for those who will share the Gospel. Paul reminds Timothy that if he will also endure in his struggle with false teachers in Ephesus, that through his endurance of whatever obstacles he encounters, the outcome will, in the future, bring a time of reigning with Jesus. We also are to anticipate that as we engage others in our community with the Gospel, even though we may face resistance, we need to endure the negative response from those with whom we seek to share the love of Christ. We also have this same promise that if we will endure, we will reign with Jesus.

Notice the caution Paul tells Timothy to remember as well. If we deny Jesus, he will deny us. If we decide that we don't believe in Jesus and that Jesus will not keep the promises he made, then we are denying Jesus and there are consequences for our decisions and associated actions. We do not want to be those who are found before a holy God without Jesus Christ as our mediator. We need a mediator and we want those we love, those we care for, to also have Jesus greet them before the Father as one of his own. Jesus is faithful to his promises. Jesus endured the cross and we can put our complete trust in him that he will be faithful to all of the promises he has made. Jesus remains faithful even if we are not.

Let me close this morning with the next reminder Paul shares with Timothy, another reminder that we should hear today. Paul tells Timothy that he is to be "a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth."^{iv} We, like Timothy, are to be workers in God's harvest where the fields are full and ready for those who will go and gather the harvest. Our goal is not to be known only as someone who makes time on Sunday to worship God, but to be those who are open to the call of God through Holy Spirit and will go at every opportunity and be found as workers. We are to diligently work to be those who can rightly explain the word of truth, the good news of Jesus Christ, in a manner that Holy Spirit can work through us to reach those who do not yet believe in this community and in all the places we are led. Such a worker who has learned the word of God, who can explain it rightly, and who is willing to endure all, even being chained like a criminal, to be used by God to share the Good News is a worker who has no need to be ashamed. We are to be those who joyfully go into the ripe harvest of our

neighbors, friends, family, and strangers and walk with them in the love of Christ until they come to faith and are led by Holy Spirit into the world to move forward that which cannot be chained. Do we need to memorize a book of the Bible to be such a worker? Probably not, but we need to always be ready to testify to the hope within our hearts. We are to be those who will share the miracle of the transforming love that Jesus worked in our hearts with those we are led to by Holy Spirit right here, right now.

Pray with me: Father God, we are those who have received the word of truth and stand ready to endure all so that we might be found by you as workers in your harvest who are unashamed and can rightly explain that word to others. Jesus, guide our open hearts to those you would have us walk with in the days, weeks, months, and years to come and strengthen us so that we will endure all for the Gospel. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Go forth into Jesus’ mission.

ⁱ NRSV

ⁱⁱ Liefeld, Walter L.. 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus: The Niv Application Commentary from Biblical Text--to Contemporary Life (p. 251). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 3429). Zondervan. Kindle Edition

^{iv} NRSV