

Unashamed

2 Timothy

By Dr. Liam Goligher

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 1

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Tenth Presbyterian Church

1701 Delancey Street

Philadelphia, PA 19103-6714

Website: www.tenth.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tenth

2 Timothy 1 where the apostle has just reminded Timothy that God has given us not a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control and then in verse 8 he says,

“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, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 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, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do.”

There are many times in life when whether it's in our ordinary life in the office or at home or in the life of the church, where we wait too long to take action or to say what needs to be said. It may happen in family life or work life that we see in another colleague or a family member, little inconsistencies or idiosyncrasies that are left unaddressed and when left unaddressed, develop into perhaps a major irritation that hurts the happiness of the home or the effectiveness of the working relationship. Sometimes we see a defect in character that shows itself to begin with in minor actions but which left unaddressed, in time, goes on to create a fissure that is obvious for all to see. Our hesitation often means that things which could be done or said to stop the deterioration are not said and, therefore, the deterioration continues and the game is lost.

Well, the game is not lost for Timothy, at least not yet, and the apostle is taking the initiative in writing to him because he sees fault-lines in the personality or the temperament or the character of this man, Timothy. He reaches out to him in language, we've already seen this as we've looked at the opening verses, as he reaches out lovingly to him to challenge him, to encourage him, in the work that he's doing. Now, in one sentence beginning in verse 8, one sentence that runs for 79 words, by the way, when you get to heaven, I would leave Paul to the end. Meet everybody else first and then meet Paul because he has very, very, very, very long sentences and you may be there for a while. This is one of them.

This long sentence is all about one theme: he's urging Timothy to be unashamed of the Lord, unashamed of Paul, himself, who is a prisoner, unashamed of the gospel. Let's unpack that together. First of all, he's saying to Timothy, this young man, "Don't be ashamed of the Lord." Actually, the expression he uses is this: "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord." The word "testimony," of course, is "the witness" and you think about the testimony that a person gives in court, for example, the content of what they say, but also the fact that they are saying it. So, the testimony about our Lord is both about the content, who he is, what he has done, but also our testifying to the Lord. That, I think, is clear on the surface but one of the things that I recall as I come to look at this study between this letter from Paul to Tim, is that in an earlier letter that Paul wrote, he reminds Tim that as he was being brought up, I'm getting to know him, by the way which is why I've abbreviated his name. That's what we do in America, we shorten people's names, isn't it? Don't do it in England. You get your full name there, but we shorten everything here and I'm just getting culturally adjusted.

So, Paul's letter to Tim. And in the earlier letter, he's mentioned the fact that from his earliest days, he has been thoroughly immersed in the sacred writings, that is, in the Scriptures and by the Scriptures he meant, of course, the only Bible that Timothy had which was the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, which was the foundation of our Christian understanding of God. Therefore, I asked myself the question: where does this expression "the testimony about the Lord," or "the testimony of the Lord" originate? Is there a beginning to this? And is there an antecedent to this expression that Paul has in mind? And we read about it, actually, earlier on in the service. That wasn't such a random reading. After all, we were reading about the tabernacle which is called "the tabernacle of testimony" or "the tent of testimony" which is often also described as "the tent of meeting" where people met with God. And in the tabernacle, in the tent of meeting, in the tent of testimony, there was the Holy of Holies and in the Holy of Holies there was the ark of the covenant which is also called "the ark of testimony." At the ark of testimony was the place where God met with people. So, for example, God says about the tent of meeting, "I shall meet with you there," at the tabernacle and then the ark of the covenant was the place where the high priest would go to offer sacrifices and sprinkle the blood of the animal on the mercy seat, on the lid of the ark, and there his wrath would be dispersed and a relationship established between Israel and God. Then, in the ark went the ten commandments which are called "the testimony." And as well as the ten commandments, there is the manna that they were fed with in the wilderness as a testimony to God's faithfulness to Israel. There is the rod of Aaron that budded and placed into the ark of testimony.

So, the ark of testimony in the tent of testimony was the witness of God in the midst of Israel to the whole world outside, of who God was and what God had done for his people. He had rescued them from Egypt, he had guided and protected them in their wilderness wanderings, providing for them and securing their safety. He had made a way for them when they failed and sinned, to come back into fellowship with himself and there God was pleased to meet with his redeemed people and all of that has found its fulfillment in the Lord, in the Lord Jesus. There we meet God in Christ, God in the flesh. There we

have access to God by the sacrifice Jesus offered. There we hear the word of God, the testimony about God. So, whenever Paul uses this expression it has this deeply rooted biblical foundation of what God had revealed through Moses to Israel: the testimony about the Lord now fulfilled because you can add in how all of that comes into being by the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf.

Now, why should Timothy be embarrassed or ashamed of that testimony? Well, of course, it is because the Lord that you are talking about whether you are talking to a Roman, for example, the Lord is the one who is taken by the judicial authorities of Rome and crucified. Romans would not allow fellow citizens to be crucified but here the Lord of Glory is crucified. It's a shameful way for a Roman to die and there is Jesus. Imagine telling that. Imagine telling that to a Roman, that the God you're talking about has suffered crucifixion. And if you're talking to a fellow Jew, imagine saying to them, "Look, here is your Messiah. Here is the Lord of Glory who has come into the world and he has been crucified," and they would look at you and they would say, "Do you mean he was hung on a tree? Do you mean that he was placed under the curse of God? He cannot be the Messiah. He is cursed."

Timothy is tempted to be ashamed. I asked the children earlier today, "What does it mean to be ashamed?" They gave me their definitions. One said, "Use the word 'disappointment.'" Yes, because we don't want people to be disappointed that we hold to this view of the Messiah Jesus. "Embarrassment" was another word that describes the effect of being able to speak about the Lord Jesus in the world. Being embarrassed about how people perceive us. Being ashamed. Paul says to Tim, "Don't be ashamed of the Lord."

And, "Don't be ashamed of me, his prisoner," secondly. Why would he be ashamed of the apostle Paul? Well, here is the apostle Paul and he's languishing in prison. I haven't interviewed you all personally, but I imagine somebody here might have a great Uncle Charlie, twice removed, and he is not someone you bring up in dinner conversation. You know, when you're out with your friends after work, you don't mention great Uncle Charlie because Uncle Charlie is in a federal penitentiary and you're embarrassed about his record, he has a record. And you're embarrassed by what he's done and you're embarrassed that he's in any way connected with you and you're probably terrified that you've got the same genes he has and that you might pass them on to your family if you ever have any, and so on and you're ashamed of him. Well, Tim is in the same position. Here's Paul, the apostle, and he's in jail; he's in prison. He's actually under sentence of death and there were already people in Rome, we know this, who have distanced themselves from the apostle because they don't want to be associated with him because by being associated with him, perhaps the authorities will start to lean on them and they will be in danger of arrest and imprisonment and death and they're tempted to be ashamed of the apostle.

John Chrysostom, the golden mouthed orator, spoke about this passage and he wrote this way back in the early days of the church. He wrote this: "For in themselves, death and imprisonment and chains are a matter of shame and reproach but when the cause is added

before us and the mystery is viewed aright, they will appear full of dignity.” Paul says to Timothy, “I am a prisoner but I’m a prisoner of the Lord Jesus.” Do you notice that? Yes, he’s in Rome’s prison but he says to this young man, “Tim, I am a prisoner of the Lord Jesus. I’m not in jail because I broke the law. I’m not in jail because I’m a bad person. I’m not in jail because I’ve done anything illegal. I’m in jail because I am an apostle and a preacher and a servant of the Lord Jesus, therefore, I’m not ashamed. I’m here because the Lord Jesus permitted me to be here. He wanted me here or I wouldn’t be here. Timothy, I’m urging you, don’t be ashamed. Don’t be ashamed of the Lord. Don’t be ashamed of me, his prisoner.”

Thirdly, most importantly, “Don’t be ashamed of the gospel.” Don’t be ashamed of the gospel. Now, you’ll see that that is implied rather than stated but it’s implied in this way, do you notice this? The prohibition is joined to the imperative in the text. Don’t be ashamed but “share in suffering for the gospel.” Don’t be ashamed of the gospel. Paul the apostle does here what he often does whenever he mentions the gospel. There are some kind of buzzwords which if you’re in conversation with the apostle Paul, you just mention the word and it launches him off onto some other theme.

I was over with a bunch of Brits and we were over in Jackson, Mississippi and we were doing some of our courses for our doctoral work and there was this one lecturer that we had there, I won’t identify him but he was really into the war of northern aggression; he was a Civil War buff and that was his perspective. He was always illustrating his talks with these stories and I said to the guys one morning, it was a Thursday morning, and I said, “Watch this.” So in the course of the morning as he’s giving his lecture, I asked him a question and I asked some point that he had made and I said, I used this language, I said to him, “How would you illustrate that from the war of northern aggression?” Now, you know, we don’t normally call the Civil War that but he did. My mentioning that, that was like a buzzword. Immediately, the lecture stopped right there. He went off on one. Not only that, he canceled the next day and said, “I’m going to take you to a battlefield,” and we had the whole day out. I was the hero of the moment.

There are buzzwords. You can use these with the apostle Paul. If you mention the gospel to Paul, he goes off on one, he does that here. He just launches into a kind of doxology. He can’t help himself. He has to talk about this and that’s what he does here and he goes on to say that this gospel, this good news for humanity, because that’s what “gospel” means, good news, is about salvation. I’ll unpack that in a moment. And you can parse the gospel from what he says here. He begins by talking about its source. Its source, he says in verse 9, is the grace of God. “Join me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God who has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”

What’s he saying about the gospel, this good news message? He’s saying it’s about God from first to last. It’s of God from beginning to end. It’s by God. God is in it all. It is all pervaded by his presence. It’s all superintended by his purposes. It’s all driven by his great divine energy. The gospel is the gospel of God. And where does the gospel begin?

Where does this good news message begin? It begins, he says, before the beginning of time. That is, before time began; before creation began; before there were people, it began in the mind of God himself. That's often the way it's described in the Bible. The Lord Jesus is called "the Lamb of God" and he is described like this: he was slain before the foundation of the world. Before there was a world made; before there were people in the world it was as good as done, it was as good as slain, right there the purpose was set. What he was going to do was established right there. God's elect. God's people are chosen before the foundation of the world. They are as good as in heaven. There are as good as saved. They are as good as glorified. They are as good as transformed right there, already before there's even a world made, before there were people in it.

You notice that this plan that took place before the beginning of time, this plan was involved grace that was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. Guess who was there when the plan was made? Christ Jesus was there before when the plan was made before the beginning of time. Here is a conspiracy, if you will, in its best sense within the Godhead, conspiring together this great plan of redemption for the world. The Father, the Son, the Spirit. You read John 13 and there you have the Son and the Father discussing together this great plan of redemption, what we call the pactum solutes, the great pact or plan of salvation, the covenant of the eternal covenant of redemption. He says that's where it all begins. It begins with God. It begins with God there before the beginning of time.

And what happened then? Well, he says, what happened then was a purpose was established, a plan was put together to bring salvation to the world. And he says two things about that salvation, do you notice that? He says, it's salvation that is posited on the principle of grace. That is, of a gift. Not a wage but a gift. And he says two things about that gift, he says: that grace precludes works. Grace precludes works not because of anything, look at it, not because of anything we have done. It is the default setting of the human heart that we want to earn brownie points. We want to earn merit. We want to be able to congratulate ourselves in being successful. We have done well. It's just the way we're wired; we want to do that.

And it comes as the most awful interruption to our way of thinking to discover that this work of God, this salvation that God provides, is not of works. The apostle Paul puts it like this somewhere else, "Now to the one who works his wages are not counted as a gift but as a due." That's true. You work for, you get paid for what you do. If somebody is doing something for us and they get paid for it, you don't thank them in the sense that you're not grateful that they've gone out of their way to do this for you, they're doing it because they're paid to do it. That's their job. So, you have certain expectations of them. But if somebody does something for you and they do it freely, they do it as a gift, they weren't obliged to do it, then that's different altogether. If somebody does it voluntarily, that's different altogether. The way you view them is different altogether.

This salvation is something that God does. He does it freely. Paul goes on to say in Romans, "We're justified," we're put right with God, "by his grace," that is, by his free gift, as a gift, "through the work that Jesus does for us." This is absolutely vital. Grace

has not to do with worthy achievers. Grace is not conditional favor shown to worthy achievers. Grace is unconditional love shown to unworthy sinners. It's absolutely the heart: grace precludes works. There is nothing we bring to the table when it comes to salvation.

Maybe you're not a Christian, you've stumbled into church this morning and you're under the impression as so many people are under the impression, that Christianity is another religion and that religion is a matter of work. You know, we all guilt each other, making each other feel bad, but we're not performing; we're not doing as well as we could; we're not achieving as much as we could. We're all failures; we're miserable sinners; we're this and that and we're all down on one another and the only way you can get right is to pull up, get better, pull your shoes by your bootstraps or whatever that expression is. I don't know what it is. I never got these things. Fill in the blanks yourselves. You're an intelligent congregation, at least I'm told that.

That's the idea you have: that religion is all about what you can do and achieve. We look at all the little things that we're doing and we're always policing one another to make sure that we're all meeting these requirements. Is that what your idea of Christianity is? I tell you, it's not that. This grace of God precludes works and do you know something? The grace of God precedes works. Do you notice this? Because of his own purpose and grace, this grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. What is that saying to you? This favor of God is given to unworthy sinners before there are any, before you were born, before the world was made. Before you'd done good or ill, God knew exactly what kind of person you would be. Don't you wish you knew exactly what kind of people your children were going to be if you've got any? Before you had them? You might change your mind. It's just as well that you don't. But God knew what we were going to be. He knew us thoroughly. Before we were even created he knew what we would be doing. God showed his grace to us before the beginning of time. What does that mean? That means I can't alter that. I can't add to that. I can't subtract from that. God has already decided that before the beginning of time. And what has he chosen to do? He's chosen to show us grace in the Messiah Jesus. In Messiah Jesus, Christ Jesus.

Paul elsewhere talks about God's grace being given to us through the one man, Jesus Christ. Everything God plans to do for you, he plans to do for you in Jesus. There is nowhere else you can go. There is nowhere else you can look. There is no one else you can turn to. Paul says, "It's in the Messiah, Jesus and it's source is the grace of God."

And it's content, here's the second thing, it's content is the work of Christ. This is verse 10 especially, but remember in verse 8 he's talked about not being ashamed of the Lord and the testimony of the Lord and that includes everything: the testimony itself and the testifying, the preaching and the content. The testimony is about the Lord; the focus of our Christian message is a person. But in verse 10 he talks about the fact, the focus of it is this: that in Christ Jesus, God has manifested this eternal purpose and plan in time and space and history in Christ who came into the world as a Savior. Look at this: the grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior. In other words, what distinguishes Christianity from,

say, the Gnostic religions of the second and third century, is that they were all about secret knowledge. For example, the gospel of Judas talks about a conversation between Jesus and Judas that only Judas knew of and the others didn't and in that conversation, Jesus tells Judas what he hasn't told everybody else. So, secret knowledge.

What you find in the Scripture, in the New Testament, is that this is all a matter of public record. It's done in the open; it's done publicly. Everything that's been done. Jesus is born at a certain time, there's a census. Jesus comes onto the scene and there's a character who's known as John the Baptizer, one of the prophets of Judah. Jesus is crucified, we said it in our Creed, under Pontius Pilate, historical person. Crucified, dead and buried. Everything has happened in the open. There are eyewitnesses, 500 of them seem him alive after his passion, alive from the dead. It's a matter of public interest. He appeared, he came in time and space and history and appeared in physical reality then. The same word "epiphanea" or "epiphany," the same word is used of another appearance that will happen at the end of history. He will appear again physically in person but he will appear this time not in obscurity, he will appear in great glory to end history and every eye shall see him. Every eye shall see him.

And he has appeared to be a Savior. To be a Savior. What does that mean? Everybody knows what salvation means. It means to be rescued. A few weeks or months ago, I can't remember, I gave an illustration, I told a story of a near-death experience I had. I was drowning in a swimming pool. Nobody was noticing me and somebody came up afterwards and they said, "By the way, did they ever rescue you?" Ha, ha, ha. Yeah, you've got a ghost here. Yes, they did but it's an embarrassing story because a guy with a big long pole came along and he put the pole in and caught a hold of my shorts and lifted me out of the water by the shorts. It was very embarrassing and I didn't want to tell you that because it's embarrassing. I don't want you to picture it in your mind because it's so scary and freaky but I was rescued. I was saved.

So we all understand what salvation means. Everybody understands what it means but what are we saved from? What is this rescue thing that Jesus does? The Bible uses it in various ways: it talks about this useless way of life that we're living, a life that is pointless, going nowhere, that has no real meaning. If we listen to the materialistic evolutionist, then life has no point. We're not going anywhere. We're just kind of here randomly, by chance, and there is no point, there is no direction, there is no future. It's a pointless way of life. We're rescued from that by Jesus.

We're rescued from the effects of the kind of people that we are. If we're existing, then we know that we're moving towards one great date we all have in our calendar that we don't know when it's going to be. It could be sooner or later and it doesn't matter what our age is, it's there in the calendar somewhere: one day we're going to die. We're all dying already; we're going to die finally. Unless Jesus comes back, everybody in this room is going to die and Jesus rescues us from the fear of death. How does he do that? We'll see in a moment because he rose from the dead. But above all, he rescues us from what happens immediately after death. We face God. We either face God as a judge or

we face God as a friend and what Jesus does is rescues us from judgment and gives us life.

So, he talks about the gospel's source: the grace of God. He talks about the gospel's content: the work of Christ. Then he goes on to describe the gospel's outcome which is the salvation of people. It's interesting the way he puts this here. Do you notice that he doesn't tell you all that there is to know about what the work of Christ is, he focuses rather on the one thing that will help Timothy: Tim is afraid of death. He's afraid of going public with his faith because at that period, it may lead to imprisonment and death. So he doesn't talk about what Jesus does on the cross, rather he goes immediately to that bit of the medicine, he goes to the medicine cabinet and he gets out of the gospel medicine cabinet the very medicine for his soul that he needs and he says this, "Christ has nullified death." He has nullified. Our Savior, Christ Jesus, has destroyed death.

Death is a comprehensive word. Let me parse it for you, the way it's used in the Scripture. It refers to physical death, the separation of the soul from the body. Physical death. We're afraid of it. We don't talk about it. We try to ignore it. Then there is spiritual death, the separation of the soul and the body from God so that that vertical dimension is missing from our lives. Then there is eternal death which is the separation of the soul and the body from God forever. Death is a terrible thing and what Christ does is, Christ comes into the world to nullify death. That's what the word means: to make it ineffective; to render it powerless. And he does it by his physical resurrection because by his physical resurrection, he makes it clear that his purpose is first of all, to give spiritual life to people. How many of you in this room are Christians? Some of you became a Christian later in life. You can remember what it was like before you became a Christian. You can remember that it didn't make sense to you, that it didn't mean anything to you, that the last thing you would want to do on a Sunday morning is to come and be in a place like this with these people. You may still feel like that. I hope not.

But that was the last thing you could think of but now you're here. Why are you here? Because it makes sense to you. That's a miracle. That doesn't happen to everybody. Your friends, your colleagues at work, perhaps people in your family, they don't see it the way you see it. This is a miracle and this miracle of spiritual life is meant to be a signal to you that there is life and this life is in Christ and this life that has begun spiritually in you is going to be completed one day as physically you are raised from the dead. Physically raised from the dead to live forever. To live forever.

That's why he goes on to say that Christ does not only nullify death, he has clarified life. He gives spiritual life right now and he gives eternal life hereafter. The second death does not touch those who are in Christ. It's physical this resurrection. This immortality is not spiritually flying around strumming a harp on a cloud somewhere in never-never-land. Whoever thought that was going to be attractive to anybody, I don't know. It is physical resurrection. You go to the epistles and you read in the gospels the story of Jesus in his resurrection body and what is he doing? He's barbecuing on the beach for his men who are out fishing. He is sitting down at a meal and drinking wine with them and eating

bread with them. He is walking with them along the road. It is physical and tangible and touchable. It's real this immortal life.

And when you get to the end of the Bible, you discover not only are we physical, the world is a physical world. It's this world: these trees, hills, valleys, mountains, rivers. This reality. This reality transformed with all of the stuff and the trash gone. It's physical. In fact, the spiritual merges with the physical and the gap between earth and heaven is gone. A new heavens and a new earth, that's what this salvation means.

And he puts it in terms of salvation. Do you notice the outcome, the salvation of sinners. He has saved us, he says, first by pardoning our offenses and reckoning us as righteous as Jesus is by imputing Jesus' record of righteousness to us in accepting us as being as righteous as he is. Progressively transforming us by his Spirit into the image of his Son and I remind you that Jesus is the image of God which means that when we are renewed into his image, we are actually being renewed back into the human image we were made with in the beginning and, therefore, the holier you get, the more human you get. Do you know that? No less human. Not more kind of here, very spiritual. Some people like that. They convey this idea that being spiritual is always using spiritual language and having a kind of atmospheric presence with them and they're scary. People who are really holy are not scary. People who are really holy are approachable and warm. They're like Everett Koop was. Totally approachable. It didn't matter how far up the tree he got, he was always approachable, warm, affectionate. Human. And called to a holy life. That's what it means to be called to a holy life. Called to be like Jesus.

This is the gospel, the good news. Paul says to Timothy, "Don't be ashamed of it. Don't be ashamed of the gospel. You and I are in the same boat." The seminary teacher, the church minister, they are tempted to be ashamed of the supernaturalism that you find in the Scripture. Ashamed, embarrassed, to take their stand with what the Scripture has revealed. You and me in our ordinary, everyday lives in the office or at the school where you teach, or the hospital where you minister, wherever you are in your ordinary life, you are tempted to be ashamed. There are aspects of the Christian message, maybe it's creation, maybe it's Jesus and the resurrection or whatever, things that embarrass you. And when you're embarrassed what are you tempted to do? You're tempted to be silent. Paul says to all of us: "Don't be ashamed."

Or maybe like Tim you got your faith from your mother and your grandmother and you think, you know, there's was such a simple faith, maybe it was all naiveté. Paul is saying to Timothy, "Don't be ashamed of the faith you got from your mother and your grandmother. They had a grip on reality. They had a grip on reality. Don't lose your grip on the gospel."

Tomorrow morning and at various points during this week, I know that anyone of us in this room is going to be put in a position where the easy way will be to keep silent when we should speak. I know that. And some of us will keep silent and God will have mercy on our souls but my exhortation to all of us, myself included is: brothers and sisters, don't be ashamed of Jesus or Jesus' suffering people or his glorious, glorious gospel.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you as a company of your people. We know our inadequacies; we openly confess them. We're trying not to be those who pretend to be something that we're not. We come to you just as we are and we come humbly casting ourselves on your mercy, thanking you for the grace that you showed us in Christ before the beginning of time, thanking you that that has been made real in many of us here because we've come to know you. We pray that you would help us not to be ashamed of Jesus. We pray that you would help us to be bold in witnessing for him and we pray for those who are strangers here today who don't know you, that they would not allow shame or embarrassment to keep them from casting their lot with us and with him whom we love, our lovely Lord Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.