

Continue in What You have Learned

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[0 : 00] Please do have a seat. As a young boy growing up in Glasgow, going to the Boys Brigade, that was our song, Will Your Anchor Hold? What a joy it was to sing it again tonight.

I haven't sung it in years. And it's a real joy just to know the truth of that song, day on day, singing it since I was six. Just brilliant to sing it again. I invite you, if you have your Bibles there, to turn to 2 Timothy chapter 3, and this is where we're going to be this evening.

You should also have received a sermon outline when you came in, and that's hopefully going to be helpful in steering us this evening as to where we are going. If you didn't have one of them, then I'm sure if you put up your hand, then someone somewhere will get one to you.

But why don't we pause this before we begin, and as we come to God's Word, let's still our hearts and let's pray together. This is an old Puritan prayer. Our Father in heaven, move now, we pray, on our disordered hearts.

Lift the mists of darkness and unbelief. Brighten our souls with the pure light of truth. Take the things of Christ and show them to our souls, that we may learn more of his love, his grace, compassion, faithfulness, and beauty.

[1 : 24] Our Father, would you hear our prayer now as we come to your Word, for we make this prayer in Jesus' precious name. Amen. So just to kick us off this evening, here's a pop quiz to make sure we're all on our toes.

Question, what do the Scouts and the United States Coast Guard have in common? Don't all jump at once. The Scouts and the United States Coast Guard. Anybody? Oh, oh, I thought nobody was getting that.

Their mottos. Their mottos, be prepared. Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Scouts, says this, Be prepared. It means that you are always in a state of readiness in your mind and body to do your duty.

So it means to be a scout. United States Coast Guard. We exist to protect the personal safety and security of our people. Be prepared. What do they both seek to promote in their members?

They seek to promote that sense of readiness. And since we're talking of mottos, let's put it into Latin. Latin for be prepared. Alistair?

[2 : 36] Oh. Paratus. He said it so much better than me. Paratus. That's the Latin word. Scouts' motto, paratus. United States Coast Guard's motto, semper paratus.

Always be prepared. Now, what on earth has that got to do with 2 Timothy chapter 3? Well, here's what I want us to understand this evening. Is that if you had to put a strapline motto to chapter 3 of 2 Timothy, it would be semper paratus.

Always be prepared. That is Paul's rallying cry and call here to Timothy. Now, we've met this man, this young man, over the past few weeks.

This man, Timothy, who has been left to lead this church in Ephesus. And how's it going? Well, if truth be told, it's really, really hard.

Really hard. What was it that Coldplay sang? Nobody said it was going to be easy. Nobody said it was going to be this hard. That's Timothy's song in Ephesus.

[3 : 39] Here's a gospel worker who's probably a little bit shaken. Here's a close companion of Paul's who's fatigued and he's perplexed.

Here is a beloved brother of Paul's who is most likely drifting and doubting the very gospel message that he is supposed to be teaching and proclaiming to this church.

And could it even be that Timothy is tempted even to give up on this church that he is supposed to be leading or certainly change the direction of where the church is going and what it believes in?

And why? Because things have got really, really tough in Ephesus evangelical church. Now, I was thinking on it this week. You're Paul.

You're Paul. You're writing to this guy, Timothy. What do you say to him to keep him in the game? What do you write to him, a young man that is considering giving up?

[4 : 42] How do you convince him to keep running for something that is unimpressive and seemingly very unrewarding? What do you say to him? Well, maybe you pitch up to Timothy and you say, Timothy, remember, it's a bit like two pairs of footprints in the sand going along the seashore.

Timothy, I know you don't see it and you don't feel it, but there's only one pair of footprints in the sand, but that doesn't mean God's left you. It just means God's carrying you. Do you feel better, Timothy?

No, not really. Maybe you could go for Timothy. What about God? We know the way he acts. He doesn't close a door without opening a window.

Does that make you feel better, Timothy? No, it doesn't. What do you say to Timothy to keep him going in this race? Do you see how Christian cliches will not do?

That's not going to keep him running. What does Paul say? He says it's going to be tough, Timothy, and don't let that surprise you. Semper paratus, Timothy.

[5 : 48] Semper paratus. Be prepared. Now, as we come to read chapter three now, be looking for those two aspects of preparation.

There's a defense and there's an offense. You can tell I love sports. There's a defense and there's an offense. Paul is telling Timothy what to expect and he's telling him how to equip himself.

What to expect and how to be equipped. So, if you've got it later, let's read now chapter three. And this is what Paul writes to Timothy. But mark this.

There will be terrible times in the last days. Having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Have nothing to do with such people. They are the kinds who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women. Who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires.

[7 : 11] Always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Just as Janice and Jambres oppose Moses. So, also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.

But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone. You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

What kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and 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 imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned.

And have become convinced of. Because you know those from whom you learned it. And how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures. Which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

[8 : 31] All scripture is God-breathed. And is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Amen. This is God's word to us this evening. Semper paratus, Timothy. Did you see it? Firstly, verses 1 to 9, Paul tells Timothy what he is to expect.

First words of chapter 3, verse 1. Mark this. Or understand this. I remember as a young lawyer straight out of university.

My first job I ever got when I used to read contracts. That's what I used to do. My zeal as I was reading these contracts through. I would come to a bit that was really, really important. And I would mark it.

I would underline it. I would highlight it. I would get a post-it note out. And I would flag it. Why? Because that was really important to understand and get. Paul says, Timothy, get your highlighters out.

[9 : 40] And get your red pen. Get your flags. Get whatever it is that you do, Timothy. And mark this. Get this impressed into your brain that it's going to be tough for the gospel worker and for any Christian.

And why? Because we live in the last days. See what he writes there? The last days. The days between the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and his return in glory.

And in this time, the gospel message of the risen Jesus is going forth to all nations and all peoples. God is saving people to himself and giving life to men and women the world over through this message of the risen Christ.

This is the age of the gospel. And these days are the last days. I think that's exactly what Paul means by that phrase. And in those last days, what can we expect?

What's the word he uses there? Difficulty. And difficult days call for clued up Christians. So be expectant, Timothy.

[10 : 45] This is going to be difficult. Now, how is he to be expectant? Well, firstly, verses 2 to 5, Timothy has to be prepared for the fake. And you'll notice there that Paul lists 19.

I think I counted 19 characteristics that will mark people in the last days. Just scan your eyes over them there from verses 2 to 5. First impressions? Quite strong, aren't they?

Very strong, in fact. Very ugly descriptions. I wouldn't want to be described as any of those things. Now, we don't have time to look at them in detail.

But let me just draw your attention just to one word that's repeated there again and again. And it's the word love. In the last days, Paul writes, people will love who themselves rather than God.

Misplaced and idolatrous loves. That's the thing that's going to mark people in the last days. But the really surprising thing to see in these verses is who Paul has got in mind.

[11 : 45] Who is he thinking about? Because this isn't the people in the world that Paul is thinking about. I don't think Paul would have to warn Timothy about people who are acting like this in the world. This is the people who are in the church that Paul is talking about here.

Do you see that? This isn't them out there. This is them in here. Now, where did I get that from? Well, look at verse 5. What is it about these people? They have a form of godliness.

They look like the real deal. But if you peel back the skin, Timothy, they're just like everyone else in the world. They value the same things. They love the same things.

They desire the same things. They chase the same things. They teach the same things. And how is Timothy to identify them? I'll tell you what. It would be really easy if somebody walked into church with a big medallion F around their neck, wouldn't it, for a false teacher?

It would be really easy to identify people who are spinning the gospel and making it something else. But that's not how it works. Timothy, you're not going to be able to point them out and recognize them by what they're wearing.

[12 : 53] But by thinking and listening, thinking about and listening to what they say about the gospel message that I've passed on to you. What are these fakes doing, says Paul, where they're denying its, that's the message, the gospel message.

They're denying its power. So what do you use this there? Isn't it power? Now, what is the logic there? Well, the logic all the way through this letter so far, we've seen this connection all the way through, is that a suffering servant and a free gospel go hand in hand all the way through this letter.

Suffering for the gospel and a free gospel. So you preach this message, Timothy, and if you do it faithfully, this will get you in trouble. And probably like me, you'll go to prison.

But the power will be out there because the gospel message, you haven't tainted it, you've passed it on and it's free. And the power is in the gospel message. But if you don't preach the gospel, and if you give people what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear, well, you can expect to be lauded and praised.

Even perhaps have your agent on the phone for a new book deal. But you'll have robbed the gospel message of all its power. It will be powerless to save.

[14 : 07] So what are these fakes doing? They're saying no to prison and suffering. And they're saying yes to book deal. So what they're doing? Saying no to Paul's message and saying yes to themselves.

They're denying the message of its power. And this will happen in the last days, Timothy, and it will happen in the church. It will happen from those who are supposedly meant to be on your team.

Semper paratus, Timothy. Semper paratus. And because of the existence of these fakes, secondly, see it verses 6 to 8. Timothy is to be primed for opposition. Look at verse 8.

Who does he mention there? Janus and Jambres. Now, who are they? Well, they're widely understood to be the names of two of Pharaoh's magicians in the Exodus story.

Exodus chapter 7, if you want to check it out later. Now, what happens in that story? Well, God tells Moses and Aaron to perform a miracle in front of Pharaoh. To demonstrate to Pharaoh the truth of the God who he is defying and denying.

[15 : 10] Now, what is the miracle? Well, Moses and Aaron go to him and they throw down their staff. What happens? Serpent. Turns into a snake.

Now, what do Pharaoh's magicians do? The magicians that he tells to do the same. What do they do? Exactly the same trick. Now, what does Pharaoh think to himself at that point?

Well, if my guys can do it as well, then your trick, Moses and Aaron, it really isn't that special after all. So, see what's going on there, Janus and Jambres? They oppose God's truth by pretending to be the same thing.

And in so doing, they lead people away from looking at God's truth. I think that's a comparison that Paul makes between them and these false teachers in Ephesus. But it's really interesting, isn't it?

If you know that story in Exodus, why does Paul pick Janus and Jambres there to make that point? Really interesting. Why, if you just went on a little bit further in that Exodus story, why wouldn't you pick Miriam and Aaron who oppose Moses a little bit further on in that story?

[16:17] Well, I think there's two reasons why he mentions them in connection with the false teachers in this church. There's Janus and Jambres. It's firstly, and quite simply, to help Timothy understand the side the false teachers are really on.

It's the same side as Janus and Jambres. They're not in your team, Timothy. They're in the other team. They're opposing God. But secondly, and I think this is where it is really encouraging for us, and it would have been really encouraging for Timothy, is in relation to what he says at verse 9, if you've got it there.

Ultimately, they will be exposed. What happens in the story? Moses throws down a snake. The magicians, Janus and Jambres, they throw down their snake.

Is that a draw? Is it a draw? No, it's not. Who eats who? Moses' snake eats up the magician's snake. God's truth eats up the truth that opposes him.

And God has the victory in the end. Timothy, it's the same for you. We don't know when the victory is going to come, but we know, and you can be guaranteed, that it will. And in the end, God's truth, the gospel truth, is going to swallow up the facade that these guys are trying to spin.

[17:34] Is that not a great comfort, brothers and sisters, when we live our lives in this world, and sometimes it doesn't feel like God's winning? Right? What a wonderful truth there, that his truth is going to ultimately prevail.

Timothy, don't you dare shift from this gospel message. Semper paratus, Timothy. Semper paratus. Now, let's take a step back and catch our breath for a few moments there, because we've rattled through that first section.

I wonder how it makes you feel, reading all that. Does it make you scared? Does it cause you to doubt? Does it even cause you to be a little bit worried? All this stuff.

How should we feel? Well, I remember when I was on paternity leave last August. Two weeks of my life where I was all over the place.

And my friend from down south is a good friend. He called me up and he said he was going to send me up two books to read during my paternity leave. And I thought, what a friend. What a guy. And so knowing him and knowing that he loves books and knowing that I love books, I'm a bit of a book geek.

[18:42] I relish the thought of this package coming. So the postman comes and I run out to get it. I actually did run out to get it. Run out to get it and I grabbed it off him and I ripped this open. And what did I find in the books?

One was a Christian book. Fantastic. The other one, and I meant to bring it this evening and I forgot it. The Diary of a Desperate Dad. One Man's Guide to Family Life from Zero to Five.

Diary of a Desperate Dad. And I thought, cheers mate. Thanks for that. Do you think that helped me at all? Absolutely it helped me. And do you know why it helped me?

Because he had a kid a year ago and he knew what it was like. What a comfort that book was when I was sitting there feeling exhausted in my house. When I found myself getting irritated.

When I found myself being grumpy with my wife because neither of us had slept at all. And in my head I'm thinking to myself, is this normal? Is this, is the problem with me?

[19:44] Dare I say, keep it quiet, is the problem with my wife? What is going on here? Is this normal? And I open this book and what does it say? Absolutely normal.

To be expected. So reassuring as a new parent who didn't have a clue about what I was doing. Is there not immense comfort to be told that when you're finding something really hard that it's normal?

I think that's Paul's aim in these verses here. Timothy, what you're experiencing and seeing right in front of your eyes, completely normal and to be expected. You know, I wonder whether some of us here need to be reminded that it is normal to find it tough to live for Jesus Christ.

Being laughed at when you speak up for him, your colleagues at work. Being laughed at, those puzzled expressions when you tell people what you did yesterday on your weekend.

The family members who won't speak to you because of what you believe in. All these things. This is not hard sometimes to follow Jesus Christ. And going with the flow of the immediate context here, the times when the people that we love in the church, when they walk away and when they deny the very message that we love.

[21 : 06] Really tough. But hear the reassurance of these verses here from Paul to Timothy. Timothy, it is really normal. Semper paratus, Timothy.

Semper paratus. Be prepared. Be expectant. Be prepared for the fakes and be primed for the opposition. Now that's the defense side of his preparation.

Let's turn to consider the offense. Secondly, verses 10 to 17. You can see Paul tell Timothy how he is to be equipped. Firstly, verses 10 to 13.

Timothy is to be clear on the pattern of ministry. The pattern of ministry. So Paul's already identified the false patterns of ministry that are out there. And he holds himself out as the one who Timothy has to follow.

And he reminds Timothy. Do you see this? Of the gospel trail that he himself has blazed. Now if you've got it in front of you there, notice the frequent use of the word my. Paul's drawing attention to the way that he did it.

[22 : 14] So he reminds Timothy of what he did. Look what he writes. My teaching. Do you see it? My teaching. My way of life. My purpose. And he reminds Timothy of what happened to him as a result of that.

The persecutions. Notice the plural there. That happened to him in Antioch, Lystra and Iconium. The things that I endured, Timothy, in those places. Now why does he mention places there?

Well could it be that Timothy knows exactly what happened to Paul in those places? Maybe he even saw what happened to Paul in those places. Now why does Paul remind Timothy of these things?

Because Timothy, this is the pattern that you need to follow. The fakes in this church, they're denying that suffering and the gospel go together. They're saying that doesn't work. That doesn't equate.

What does Paul say to Timothy? Don't be lured in by that. Follow me. Don't follow the fake. Timothy, you've got to be clear on the pattern of gospel ministry.

[23 : 13] It is cross-shaped. In fact, here's something you can be sure of. Here's something you can bet your bottom dollar on. Verse 12. That everyone who wants to live a God-honoring, gospel-loving, Jesus-preaching life will get it tough.

Semper paratis, Timothy. Be prepared. And secondly, see how Paul tells Timothy how he is to equip himself, verses 14 to 16.

How is Timothy to equip himself? Paul wants Timothy to be confident in the scriptures. Now, why might Paul be reminding Timothy of that?

It's not rocket science, is it? Timothy has lost probably his confidence in the scriptures. Now, how does that work? Well, picture the scene.

You're a farmer. Your dad was a farmer. His dad was a farmer. Now, you're the one carrying on the family farm and the family business. Now, what did those generations before leave you?

[24 : 21] They left you years of how to do farming. Suddenly, a co-worker of yours, he leaves and he crops up next door, pun very much intended.

With his newfound techniques, his newfound pesticides, his machinery. And he seems to be getting results a lot quicker than you are.

And he seems to be doing it with a fraction of the effort that you seem to be putting in. What would happen to you as a farmer before long? Well, you begin to look over the fence, wouldn't you?

At the grass that probably is greener on the other side. And you begin to think to yourself, is the way that I learned it, is that really it? The way that I've been told to equip myself, is that adequate still?

Maybe I'll ditch the ways that I've been taught all these years and I'll go with the thing that seems to be getting better results. You see, I think that's what Timothy is experiencing in Ephesus as he looks at the ways and the models of ministry that these false teachers are teaching in the church.

[25 : 30] But what we need to understand, and where that illustration probably breaks down, that this isn't just about getting a better result and doing the same things. This is a complete denial of the gospel message. What does Paul do?

He says, Timothy, you know the message that you learn. You know the message. And you know the character of those from whom you learned the message, which only goes to validate the truth of the message.

Really interesting aside there, isn't it? Do our actions and our words, do they match up? That's what Paul's appealing to there. Really interesting as we seek to pass on this message to others. But Timothy, you need to get your confidence back in the scriptures.

This is what he's saying. And I look at some of the words that Paul is using there. What does Timothy have in the scriptures? What does Paul write?

He says, you've got something that makes you wise for salvation. You've got something that tells you the truth about Jesus Christ. You've got something that is God-breathed, that is from the very mouth of God.

[26 : 34] You've got something that is useful. You've got something that is useful. Useful for what? Useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and training in righteousness.

Timothy, what you have is something that is going to thoroughly equip. Do you notice those words he uses at the end? Thoroughly equip you for a life of ministry. Timothy, what other book is there that is making these kind of claims?

The Bible isn't a tool you might find useful now and again. The Bible is the tool that you need as you live your life for God's glory in Ephesus.

Timothy, you need to arm yourself with the scriptures. You need to make yourself of the scriptures. You need to immerse yourselves in the scriptures.

You need to give yourself to the scriptures. Do that, Timothy, and you will be thoroughly equipped for the task ahead of you. How are you going to defend yourself and Ephesus evangelical church from false teaching?

[27 : 43] Well, by knowing what God has said and what he has not said. How are you going to be able to grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ?

Well, by knowing what he is like and what he is not like. Do you see what Paul is saying here? Timothy, you need to get your confidence back in the scriptures that are in your hands.

And the obvious application for us. Do some of us here this evening need to get our confidence back in the scriptures?

Do some of us need to get our confidence back in the origin of scriptures? Scripture, sorry, I keep putting the plural. Scripture. As C.S. Lewis once remarked, this is no ordinary book.

The author of this book is not Hans Christian Andersen. This is not fables and fairy tales. This is God's word. This is God breathed. That's its origin.

[28 : 45] Do some of us need to get our confidence back in the sufficiency of scripture? That this is all we need to tell us who God is and what he's about.

To tell us the true state of who we are and the true state of our hearts. And to tell us about Jesus, the Savior, what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do.

And about what is ahead, both for those who love the Lord Jesus Christ and for those who don't love him. And as God's people, his word tells us how we can live a life of worship to his glory.

Are we confident this evening in the scriptures? Maybe some of us here are thinking, I really want to have that confidence in the scriptures. But how do I get that confidence in the scriptures?

Well, read your Bible and pray every day. And you'll grow, grow, grow. Now that's not in scripture, okay? That's just decent advice that we learned when we were young.

[29 : 49] Wouldn't that be a great prayer for some of us to pray, for all of us to pray this week? Lord, help me love your word more.

Help me love it more. Help me to get it into my head more. Write it on my heart more so that I would breathe it more. Now that's not my original idea. That is Mr. Psalm 119.

What does the psalmist pray? He prays, open my eyes that I would behold wondrous things in your law. What's he praying? He's saying, Lord, help me love your word.

Help me love your word because I know I need your words. Because it's a lamp unto my feet. And it's a light unto my path. Because in this dark world, your word is the truth and the light.

Help me walk in it. That may be a great thing for some of us to do this week. Do we need to camp out in Psalm 119? Pray and read.

[30 : 52] And it's interesting, I just find that as I go on in the Christian life. I find that my love for God and my reading of his word, they kind of go hand in hand.

That as I read more of his word, as I immerse myself in it, my love for him grows. It's a wonderful circle. As my love for him grows, I want to read his word more. And as I read his word more, I seem to love him more.

It's a wonderful circle. And I need to be, this is what I want. I want to be filling my head and my heart with God's truth. Because that is going to equip me to live wisely in this world.

Because I'm surrounded with so many competing voices that are telling me what to believe. Timothy, get your confidence back in the scriptures. Theologian J.I.

Parker, he says this. If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk from reading the Bible. Famous evangelist Vance Havner said that a Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't.

[31 : 59] Timothy, you need to get your confidence back in the scriptures. Well, we started with the Boy Scouts. And I think for the sake of equality, we'll go Girl Guides to the end.

Put your hands up if you were in the Girl Guides. Go on, Lorna. Nice and high so we can all see. We're all friends here. There we go. Fiona. What was the motto of the Girl Guides? Well, let me tell you.

It was the same as the Boy Scouts. It was be prepared. Be prepared. When I was reading this week that they've recently changed the oath that the girls make when they join the Girl Guides.

Instead of the words to love my God being in the oath, they've switched it out and they've put in to be true to myself and develop my beliefs. And why have they done it?

Well, quite unashamedly, actually, if you go on the website, spiritual development is a far better tagline than Christian gospel for winning and attracting new members.

[33 : 02] Somewhat illustrative of what Paul is kind of saying here to Timothy, isn't it? Timothy, when others drift from this message, when others deny it and move on from this message, you must continue.

How are you going to do that? Well, by being expectant. By looking for fakes. And being primed for the opposition that's coming your way. And as well as being expectant, Timothy, you've got to be equipped.

Be clear on the pattern. And you've got to be confident in the scriptures. Semper paratus, Timothy. Semper paratus. Let me pray.

Amen. Our Father, we would thank you so much, Lord, for this evening. And Lord, our prayer as we leave this chapter of your words is that you would help us to be people who know and who love your gospel.

Help us to be people who will take our stand for the truth of the message of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, our loving and gracious Heavenly Father, would you continue by your spirit to shape us more and more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

[34 : 14] For we ask these things in his powerful and almighty name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.