

A Call to Pass the Baton

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[0:00] Thank you very much, Derek. You may have noticed that we read a little bit more than we're touching on tonight, and really the reason for this is just to get a bit more of a feel for the letter.

So we're only going to look at the first seven verses of this chapter tonight. But thanks, Derek, for just giving us that extra context of the letter just as we start.

So as I said before, our theme tonight is passing on the baton of the gospel. Now, during the Olympics, you may love having that on the telly every four years.

But for me, my favorite part of the Olympics is athletics. And in athletics, the four by 100 meters is the most dramatic, the most high stakes, exciting event of them all.

Now, what are the ingredients of a four by 100 meter race? You take four exceptionally quick runners, and you get them to pass this stick of metal from the start line to the finish line.

[1:06] And they have to pass it between themselves while running as fast as possible in this short little gap on the track. And they need to make sure they don't drop it. Now, you might have spotted on that picture something not quite right going on in that changeover.

Now, many of the great four by 100 meter squads have failed spectacularly on the grand stage. The American men's team stands out, and I'm sorry, Stephen, for naming the Americans, but it's true. They are infamous in the four by 100 meters. They're the quickest on paper every time, but they have failed to medal in over 20 years of Olympic competitions.

And they've dropped the baton or been disqualified 11 times over the last 30 years in the Olympics and World Championships. That's a lot of DQs. That's a lot of drop battons.

Now, 2 Timothy speaks, also speaks of a relay race, but with even higher stakes. 2 Timothy is all about passing on the baton of the gospel to the next generation of believers.

[2:17] Now, by God's grace, we all find ourselves in this gospel relay race. We've been handed the baton from a previous Christian generation, and we must pass it on to the next generation so that the gospel may continue to go down the generations until Jesus returns.

Think about how far the baton's already come over these last 2,000 years. And actually, this letter of 2 Timothy is actually documenting the first handover of the baton from the Apostle Paul to one of the first church leaders, Timothy.

But just like in a 4x100m race, there are many examples where the gospel baton has been fumbled or it's not been passed at all.

There are at least two generations of young people and children in our land who know nothing about Jesus or the forgiveness he offers for sin.

There are countless congregations across the UK who have withered and died because none of the next generation have come in to fill the seats of those who came before.

[3:37] Congregations have shrunk and people have become disinterested in the gospel. Another example is that there are not enough young men training for ministry to even sustain the number of churches that we currently have in Scotland, let alone enough to grow and advance the church into future generations.

So that is the reality in our country. You might know that. But how has this happened? Well, I think too often we've been too fearful of holding out the gospel baton to the lost in the first place.

And so we've been too scared. And sometimes we've just botched the handover. We've just done a really bad job of passing the baton. Too often we have not taught our people what the Bible says.

Maybe because we've been fearful of a backlash because the content that we're teaching is sensitive. Our culture doesn't like it. Or maybe we've just been lazy.

We've failed to present the gospel of Jesus as a beautiful thing that people should treasure and hold above everything else in their life. And we fail to properly disciple and nourish our people so that their faith develops strong roots.

[4:57] Too many have received the gospel but had no root and they withered away. Think about the parable of the sower. Think about that seed that lands in the shallow soil and it grows up but it doesn't have a root.

So when the storms come along, it withers and it dies. Think about the seed that landed in the good soil and it began to grow up but it was choked by the weeds and the temptations of the world.

And it was led away because it wasn't convinced of the beauty and the treasure of the gospel which is so much greater than anything else. Now, I'm not pointing the finger at any particular church, congregation or any particular denomination.

I'm just saying how it is in our country. We know the decline. We've seen the decline. We've seen many varied examples but this can actually happen to any church congregation when passing down the message of the gospel has not been the priority.

So we need to wake up today. We need to see that the remedy to church decline, the remedy to the malnourishment of Christians in our nation, it's always been there in our hands.

[6:06] It's the message of the Bible. So the letter of 2 Timothy, it teaches that the key to gospel recovery and gospel advancement in this land and around the world, it lies in our commitment to firmly placing the baton into the hands of those who follow us.

So just to avoid confusion. Yeah, that's right, slide. What exactly do I mean by passing on the baton, the gospel?

So I've just put it up there on the screen. So I'm just going to read it. So first of all, this means evangelism. This means we need to pass the message of Jesus to lost people so that they might be saved and be swept up into his kingdom.

So it means evangelism. But it also means discipleship. It means we need to teach our people what the Bible says. We need to teach the message of the Bible so that people will mature in their faith, will develop those strong roots of faith that I was speaking about a minute ago.

And thirdly, it means what Paul's also explaining in this letter is that it's about training. It's about identifying that next generation of gospel leaders, preachers and teachers who are going to lead us into the next generation.

[7:27] So tonight when I talk about passing on the gospel, I'm talking about evangelism. I'm talking about discipleship. This is what we're doing tonight. This is discipleship. This is being equipped and growing in our understanding of the Bible.

And we're also talking about training. So just lock that away in the back of your minds. So a little bit of context for 2 Timothy.

What are we talking about? Where are we in the history of salvation? This is the second of two letters that the apostle Paul has written to his son in the faith, Timothy.

Now we think this letter was written around AD 66, AD 67, in the final days or weeks or months of Paul's earthly life.

Paul has been imprisoned for the second time now, but this time he won't be released. This time, this imprisonment will end in his execution. Paul knows this.

[8:26] He knows that he's at the end of this, of his life. And he says at the end of, sorry, at the end of the letter in chapter 4, and we'll get to this later on in the series. He says, This was a gospel hub in modern day Turkey.

And Paul had instructed Timothy to remain there in Ephesus in the letter of 1 Timothy. We read that at the beginning of 1 Timothy. Now Timothy is one of the first church leaders, and Timothy has been tasked with leading the flock into the next generation after the apostles have gone.

And Paul has told him to stick around in Ephesus to bring about good church order, but also to stamp out the false teaching, which is flaring up in the church.

And false teaching is another theme that we will see in the second letter to Timothy. So this epistle, 2 Timothy, is like Paul's dying breath. It's his final and most important instructions for his spiritual son.

And his message in a nutshell is this. Timothy, you know the gospel that I've spent my life teaching others. You have seen my pattern of ministry, which has often caused me to suffer.

[10:11] Now, follow in my footsteps. Make sure this gospel is preached. In the church, but also to the lost.

Pass on the baton of the gospel. So we've set the scene. Hopefully I've shown you why we should care about this letter. Why it's important to us today.

And we're going to just focus on those first seven verses of chapter 1. And we'll see that they contain a heartfelt greeting. They contain a family of faith.

And we also see a commission to serve. So let's get into the text. Let's look at the first four verses and think about and see the heartfelt greeting.

So we see in those first four verses, we see this greeting from Paul, a spiritual father to a spiritual son. And we see that Paul cares very much for him.

[11:10] We see in verse 2, Paul calls Timothy, my dear son. And then in verse 4, Paul tells Timothy that I long to see you.

How would it cheer Paul's heart if Timothy came and visited him in prison? Now, it's clear that Paul and Timothy, they have a strong relationship.

And I think that they did the maths. I looked at the history over the remainder of Paul's ministry. And I think they've known each other and worked together for about 15 years.

So safe to say they know each other really well. They've been through thick and thin together. Just for a bit of history, if we quickly rewind 15 years back to Acts chapter 14.

This is when Paul and Barnabas first rolled into the town of Lystra. Now, the story goes in Acts 14 that they healed a man who was lame.

[12:07] Then the Gentiles of that city, they overreacted. They thought, whoa, who are these guys? They must be gods. And they sought to worship them like gods.

But Paul says, no, no, no, we're just men. But we have a message about Jesus. And we want to tell you about him. He truly is God. Now, the Jews from the neighboring town of Iconium, they roll into town.

And they don't like this. And they whip up the crowd. They turn the crowd against Paul and Barnabas. And they persuade the crowd to stone Paul. So Paul is stoned.

They think he's been stoned to death. They drag him out of the city. They've left him for dead. But miraculously, God saves Paul, preserves his life. And he's able to go back into the city and keep carrying on his ministry.

So that's what happened the first time in Lystra when Paul was there. But Paul, amazingly, he goes back to that city. And amazingly, the gospel has flourished.

[13:09] And the next time he goes back in Acts chapter 16, he meets a man called Timothy. And we're told that Timothy's mother has become a Christian.

And we learn in the letter of 2 Timothy that also Timothy's grandmother has become a Christian. And these were some of the pagan people who sought to worship Paul and Barnabas way back when.

So Timothy was held in high regard in the Lystra church. And Paul sees some potential in Timothy. So he decides to take him along into the ministry so that he might be trained up and eventually carry this gospel baton into the future.

So that's the history. That's how Paul and Timothy met. But now, back in AD 67, they're separated. Paul's in prison. Timothy's in Ephesus.

But what else are we told in these first four verses? Well, we see at the very beginning, the first sentence, in verse 1, Paul reminds Timothy of his credentials.

[14:11] We see that there. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ, chosen by God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and to establish churches wherever he goes.

Paul is an apostle in keeping with the promise of life that's in Christ Jesus. What that means is that Paul is a minister of this life-giving gospel. This gospel message is a message of forgiveness. It's a message of eternal life. Which may only be found by believing in Jesus. Now, the thing about Paul being an apostle, what this tells us, this was a very special, time-limited role, this apostleship. This means that his message and his teachings, they carry significant weight. God has used Paul's apostolic writings all through history since to teach us about God and about his son. So, Paul's an apostle. His message carries weight. And he tells Timothy that he serves God with a clear conscience. We see that in verse 3. Paul knows that he has fulfilled all the duties of his ministry.

[15:25] He's left no stone unturned in sharing and teaching the gospel to the lost. Paul knows that he can safely go to be with his Lord, knowing that he's done everything that Jesus called him to do.

Okay, so that is a heartfelt greeting. The next thing we see is a family of faith. We're just looking at verse 5 now. This is a really remarkable verse.

Paul, first of all, he's thankful for Timothy's faith. He's really glad that Timothy's trusted in Jesus. But Paul also says that it was Timothy's grandmother, Lois.

He was the first one in the family to believe. Then it was Timothy's mother, Eunice, who believed next. And then it was Timothy who believed. So, what we see here is an example of the gospel being passed down through the generations of a family.

If it hadn't been for Lois receiving the gospel and passing it on to her family, then maybe her grandson Timothy may never have become the Christian leader that he did.

[16:34] So, that is really interesting. Now, up on the screen, this is a picture of a Northern Irishman called James McAllister.

James McAllister. And he was born in 1836. He was a farmer. And he spent his whole life in rural County Antrim in Northern Ireland.

Now, James was not a Christian. And the legend goes that on the way home from work every night, his horse was so used to him pulling into the pub at the side of the road on the way home from work that the horse would just pull the cart in automatically on the way home without James having to steer it in.

So, safe to say, he was a regular in the pub and he liked to drink. And he wasn't a Christian. But by God's miraculous grace, when James was in his 70s, he became a Christian.

And this was when a visiting preacher came to the area and shared the gospel with the folk in the area. And James was convinced about the truth of Jesus and gave his life to him.

[17:48] Now, I don't know much else about James' life. But what I do know is that James passed the gospel baton down to his children, who also became believers.

James' son, Daniel, passed the gospel baton down to his son, Robert. Robert passed the gospel baton down to his daughter, Doreen.

And Doreen, my mother, passed it on to me. James McAllister is my maternal great-great-grandfather. And I am so glad God reached into his life and changed his heart at such an old age.

So amazingly. But I'm also so glad that James had the conviction that his children needed to know about Jesus. And he faithfully passed the gospel baton down onto them and to his ancestors.

And there's some people in this room that could probably tell a very similar story of Christian family heritage. And maybe you don't know exactly when faith entered into your family, but you know that it did and it was passed down.

[18:57] And you, like me, you can be so thankful that God chose to intervene into your family and use their faithful witness to reach you. So, yeah, what we can learn from this Christian family in Lystra is how effective and how important it is to pass the gospel on to our children.

Now, the famous minister and theologian, John Wesley, he once said this, I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians in England.

It seems that John's mother was also faithful in passing the gospel baton on to our son. So our family homes should be our primary mission field as Christians.

Our parents, our siblings, our children, they should be the first people that we share the gospel with. They know our lives really well. And they've seen the difference that Jesus has made in our lives. Maybe you don't have children. Well, there are other families, other parents in our church with children, other parents who are trying to raise their children up in the faith and teach them about Jesus.

[20:19] We can be supporting those families. We can be praying for those children and helping these parents raise their children up to know Jesus. So all Christians have a duty to pass the gospel on to their children or to the children in their church family.

You've heard the phrase, it takes a village to raise a child. The same is true of the church. It takes a church to raise a child in faith.

Now, I also just want to acknowledge that it can be a terribly painful thing when our children choose not to follow Jesus, even when their parents and church family have done everything to teach them about him.

They've prayed tirelessly for them. Let's remember those families in our church and let's commit to praying and supporting those parents as they seek to keep praying and taking those gospel opportunities.

Let's remember it's Jesus' grace that saves our children. It's his grace. Now, the final couple of verses we're going to finish by looking at.

[21:31] Verses 6 and 7. And we see a commission to serve. So in verses 6 and 7, if you look at them with me again, we see the first of many instructions that Paul has for Timothy in this letter.

And we also see some of the things that God has given Timothy to equip him in order to serve and pass on the gospel baton.

So let's read verses 6 and 7 again. For this reason, I remind 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 God had given Timothy gifts of teaching and leading, and Paul commands Timothy to fan these gifts into flame.

In other words, to exercise these gifts so that he can use them more effectively. And on the screen there, I've got some old school bellows. So you might have seen these, but traditionally they would have used these to pump air into the embers and to fan it into flame to cause the fire to grow.

[22:56] And just in the same way, Paul is telling Timothy, these gifts that God has given you, he's given them to you for his service. Exercise them. Put them into practice.

Grow in these gifts so that you might more effectively serve him. But I think Paul has got this instruction for all of us too.

He speaks to all of us today as well. And God has given all Christians spiritual gifts for the upbuilding of his church and to serve him. God wants all of us to fan these gifts into flame so that we might serve him effectively and to build the church up.

Just from a personal example, I believe God has called me to preach and teach the gospel in this nation. And I believe in order to do that, he's given me some gifts in this area.

But the onus is on me to practice them. So I need to learn how to preach more effectively. I need to learn how to get the message of the Bible across faithfully, but also clearly.

[24:07] And I know I have a very long way to go. And I'm quite early on in using these things that God has given me. But even when I'm old, I know I'll still have a lot of room for improvement.

But I know that I need to fan into flame the gifts that God has given me today. And the same goes for all the gifts that God has given us. Maybe God has given you the gift of encouragement.

Then maybe you could be seeking ways to encourage and affirm your brothers and sisters and help them to go on in their faith. Maybe you've been given the gift of hospitality.

How do we fan that into flame? Well, it's by getting folks right into our home and learning how to love them and serve them and help them. Naturally, as we use our gifts, God is able to use them more effectively for building up the church.

Great. So let's finally look at verse 7. Then, the final thing that we see, God has given his followers the Holy Spirit. And what we see in this verse is that the Spirit helps us to be confident Christians. [25:22] God's Spirit comes and it indwells all those who put their faith and trust in Jesus. And God, through his Spirit, equips his followers with three things. And we see them in verse 7.

He equips his followers with power, with love, and with self-discipline. Why? So that we won't be terrified at the task of passing on the baton of the gospel.

We thought a bit earlier, maybe one of the reasons that we've, folk have struggled to pass on the gospel baton is because we've been scared. We've been scared of the consequences.

Now, we know in Ephesus, where Timothy was, it was probably a pretty tough place to be a Christian leader. There was pressure from the Roman Empire to conform.

There must have been pressure from the pagan leaders, those other faiths that were going on in the city. There must have been pressure from Jewish leaders. There must have been pressure from within the church as well, from members of the church who were tricky and who were questioning the things that Timothy was teaching them.

[26:33] But also there was this constant shadow of suffering looming over Timothy. But God, by his spirit, he gives Timothy three things.

He gives him power, he gives him love, and he gives him self-discipline. So that despite the clouds of persecution looming on Timothy's horizon, he can confidently press on in passing on the gospel. Now, why these three specific things? Why power, love, and self-discipline? Well, I think God gives us his power so that we can press on when we're facing adversity, so that we can endure persecution.

Even going to our deaths if need be, God gives us his power so that we can endure. God gives us his love, which banishes fear.

God gives us his own love, which is ready to risk all and laid in its life to save the flock. And God gives us his self-discipline so that we might use the power and the love that he's given us wisely.

[27:46] He gives us his wisdom. So the Spirit gives us these three things so that we can fiercely pass on the gospel. We need his power when we feel weak and scared.

We need his love when we struggle to love God's people. And let's be honest, we sometimes struggle to love God's people. We sometimes struggle to love the lost. But he gives us his love.

And he gives us his self-discipline so that we wouldn't waste the gospel opportunities that he presents us. So just going back to those relay races that we thought about at the start.

I don't know if you remember, just a few weeks ago we had an Easter Open Day. And I think it was Ian put together some helpful history on the church and the displays downstairs.

There's some on the wall there as well. It's really interesting. You should have a read of it. But one thing that struck me was this list, this cleaning rota from 1982.

[28:51] And you might see some of the names. I'm sorry. You can't see the names. I'm sorry. They're really small. But if you were to look at this list on the wall, you would see a number of names who were involved in this cleaning rota.

Some names that you might recognize. Some other names that you might not. And what we have here is an example of people involved in faithful and ordinary service in the church who were committed to serving the Lord Jesus in this church and to keep it going.

These people, whether they're still alive or not, they have passed us, sitting here in this room, they have passed us the gospel baton here in Bruntsfield.

We are here today, Christians at Bruntsfield, for two reasons. First, because God in his grace chose to save you and use somebody to share the gospel with you so that you might come to faith.

And secondly, because God was pleased to preserve this church as a place where the teaching of scriptures remained at the center. We sit here today in this church because the gospel has been written on our hearts and because the gospel is here in our hands in the word of the Bible.

[30:10] We have the baton, the gospel, in our hands. So I guess the question is, what are we going to do with it? What are we going to do with it?

Well, we've just seen that the Spirit has given us those three things, power, love, and self-discipline, not a spirit of fear. So I just want to ask us some questions just as we finish.

We've thought about those three things at the start. Will we commit to boldly taking the gospel out there and sharing it with the lost?

Will we commit ourselves to evangelism? Will we commit ourselves to discipleship? Will we commit ourselves to teaching the message of the Bible well to one another?

Will we teach what it says? Now, Graham and I and the elders, they have a specific responsibility in faithfully teaching the congregation what the Bible says.

[31:12] But we actually all have a part to play in this. And that passage that I read from Ephesians earlier, it talks about speaking the truth in love to one another. And what Paul is saying is that we all have a responsibility in speaking the truths of the Bible to one another.

So how can we do that? Well, maybe you could commit to reading the Bible with somebody else. Some of the folks in this church do that. They meet up regularly and they open up the word and they see what God has to say from his word.

So maybe you could do that over coffee. Or maybe you could meet up with somebody and chat over what you heard in the sermons. So we can do that every Sunday morning or every Sunday evening over coffee and that time after the service.

But growth groups are also another great place where we can chat over the things that we've heard in the sermons. And will we commit to supporting and praying for those who teach people in this church?

So there are a number of people who are committed to teaching folks in this church. So I've mentioned the preaching team. I've mentioned the elders. But then we've got our growth group leaders.

[32:25] We've got Keita, who leads the women's Bible studies in Grove. And we've got those who are committed to teaching our children in Sunday school and embassy. We need to pray for these people so that they will teach the word faithfully.

They'll teach what it says and they'll get it across clearly. So can we pray for those folks? And then finally, the third thing in our list. Will we commit to do our part in training?

Training the next generation of Timothys. Well, how can we do that? Well, we can give. We can give financially so that we can fund people for training and ministry.

But again, we can pray. We can pray to the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers to go out into the harvest fields so that a new generation of gospel preachers and teachers can teach the next generation.

And we can ask God to keep building his church in this nation, to stop the decline, to cause the tide to turn and cause this nation, and the church in this nation to grow again, seeing the baton being passed to the next generation.

[33:40] So are we up to the task? Let's pray. Let's pray. Our dear Heavenly Father, we just thank you for this chance to spend some time in 2 Timothy.

And Lord, I just pray that you take these verses and some things that I have said and encourage us to just look to the future.

Lord, we know that our earthly lives are short, and we know that the gospel can be lost within a couple of generations, and we've seen it through history, not just in our country, but in other parts of the world, Lord.

And we know there is a sense of urgency to make sure that Jesus, and the message of Jesus is passed on. So I just pray that as a church, we would be committed to passing on to our children, to be committed to passing on to the children of our church family.

And I pray that we would be committed to just really what the Bible truly says, Lord, to going in deep, and to really seeing what you have to say in your word.

[34:55] Give us a real hunger for your word. And I pray that you would give us opportunities to share it with one another, to share it one-to-one.

Would you give us boldness to go out into the world and to keep telling people about Jesus, to keep filling the pews with new believers who will replace us when we are gone.

And would you help us to just think about training that next generation of leaders as well, to be looking around and seeing who God is gifting with these sorts of things and encouraging them and spurring them on.

So, Lord, thank you for this. Starter up in 2 Timothy, I pray that you take away anything that I've said that's unhelpful, and would you just press upon us the things that you would have to say by your spirit, especially the power and the love and the self-discipline that you've given each one of us to serve you and to speak of Jesus clearly to the world.

So we pray all this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.