

Guard God's Gift of the Gospel!

A sermon on 2 Timothy 1:8-14

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

He was heart-broken. He had just witnessed his best friend violently murdered, and there was nothing he could have done about it. They were saying justice had been served, but there was no justice in the death of this innocent man. But, despite the overwhelming grief and pain that flooded his soul, he had to move on. He had made a promise to his dying friend, to care for his dear mother, and he intended to keep it. And the Bible tells us that the disciple whom Jesus loved, John, "from that time on, [he] took her (Mary) into his home.

You might say that was Jesus' dying request of John right before he died on the cross, definitely something we really wouldn't find that unusual. You hear stories all the time about people making those dying requests, to take care of a loved one or to guard a special possession and to keep anything from happening to them.

What we have here in 2 Timothy is the apostle Paul's last will and testament. He's not on his death bed, at least his literal death bed. You see, if you remember the list of the sufferings and hardships Paul endured as a missionary for Christ, one of those hardships was being imprisoned. That happened a couple times to Paul, but this time was different. Paul was chained in prison in Rome, and he knew the end was near. He knew he was almost home, to heaven.

If you read all the book of 2 Timothy, you can tell. It's an intensely personal letter, filled with raw emotion and heartfelt urging and gentle encouragement. It's a dying man's last request to his son, to Timothy.

Well, ok, Timothy wasn't actually Paul's biological son. In the earlier verses we read this morning, you see Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. His dad isn't mentioned here, but he was a Greek who was likely an unbeliever. So, Timothy's Christian examples growing up were his mom and his grandma. But just as much now was Paul, who was Timothy's spiritual father, the one who had taken Timothy under his wing, under his spiritual guidance, and had trained him to be a spiritual leader himself...to be a pastor.

Timothy was like the son Paul never had. They shared a close, intimate relationship. And so, as Paul writes his last words, he writes them for Timothy, words that would impress upon Timothy the beauty of the gospel and salvation, words that would encourage him to continue to be a faithful proclaimer of what they both treasured most, the message of God's grace.

And here's the crux, the root, of Paul's encouragement. Guard God's gift of the gospel. Hear that again. Guard God's gift of the gospel.

As a young pastor, as a believer in Jesus, there was no better advice for Timothy than that. He had been entrusted by Paul, and more importantly, by God, with a deposit, which was the gospel, the sound

teaching of God's grace, and now Paul was making it absolutely certain what his duty with that precious, priceless deposit was. Proclaim it. Guard it.

Now, do you know what it means to guard the deposit of the gospel? Think of what happens with deposits you make. You deposit your money into a bank because you trust that institution to protect it, to guard it, so it can be returned to you in full when you want it.

How much more valuable is the deposit of the gospel, the most precious treasure not only in our lives, but also the one thing every person needs, absolutely needs in this life to get to heaven.

But the call to guard it? Does that really mean what you usually think of with the concept of guarding? Like the Secret Service guarding the President, where you form this protective barrier around your package so nothing can penetrate to it or harm it? Or where you put the egg in the basket and cover it up and sit on it so it won't be exposed to anything? Is that what guarding the gospel is?

Well, to an extent. We definitely want to guard God's Word from being infected with the lies and false teachings of this world. But I don't think Paul's encouragement to Timothy is stopping there. Guarding it does not mean keeping it to yourself. Something as precious as the gospel is not a candle you hide under a basket so no one can see it. No, to guard something as valuable as the gospel could only mean to proclaim it, to share this treasure with everyone.

Now, I know Paul is talking primarily to young Pastor Timothy here. And, I guess we could say, in a broader sense, he's talking to every pastor here. After all, pastors are usually the ones leading the charge in proclaiming the gospel. But is Paul really stopping there?

I don't think so, and here's why. Because of the Great Commission, because of Jesus' command to every believer, of every age, to "go and make disciples of all nations..." to "go into all the world and preach the good news (that is, the gospel) to every nation." Paul's encouragement to guard the gospel lines right up with Jesus' command to go and preach the good news. It's for all. The gospel and its proclamation is a deposit entrusted by God to you and you and you and...me.

So for you today, guard that deposit. Proclaim the gospel.

How well have you done in that capacity? I'm guessing your personal evangelism is not up to par with what maybe even you expect of yourself. I'll be honest with you. It's difficult to guard that trust of the gospel by faithfully proclaiming it.

Why do you think Paul was giving encouragement to Timothy here? Because even for this young pastor, there were temptations to be lax in guarding the gospel. And even for this young pastor, there are temptations to be lax in guarding the gospel. And for you, there are temptations to be lax in guarding the deposit of the gospel.

Temptations like a "spirit of timidity," as Paul mentions here. You know what it is to be timid, don't you? Where your heart is in the right place, and you know everyone needs to hear it, but you lack the confidence in sharing it. Where there're times, the perfect opportunities to share Jesus, with a friend

who lost their parent to cancer, or to a sister who doesn't go to church and you're worried you won't see her in heaven, or the co-worker who just looks lost in life and is looking for answers and you have THE answer. But the words won't come out. You get nervous about their reaction or about screwing up the message so you say nothing. How Satan loves to just latch on to that timid heart and tug and pull you away from proclaiming the gospel.

Or does your temptation lie with, what Paul calls here, being "ashamed to testify about our Lord" or "suffering for the gospel," because those two go hand in hand. Where, oddly enough, when I'm with my friends or in the company of acquaintances, I'm ashamed to be a Christian. I get the sense the majority of people aren't believers, don't really care for Jesus, so I find it hard to share my faith in Jesus, let alone act like a believer because it's so much easier to just fit in. I would call that be ashamed of the gospel.

And suffering for it. I don't know that in our day and age, we have to be constantly worried about having to take a bullet or die for being a follower of Jesus like in Paul's day, although there are times when that has been the case. But if a hurt or even strained relationship might come out of me pointing out someone else's sins, someone whom I care about, so that I can soothe their hurting souls with the good news that Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose for them, I'm not willing to go to that extent because I love them too much to hurt our relationship. But what's not loving is how I let them continue down a path that, if it's not changed, will almost certainly lead them to hell.

Whatever the temptation is for you, Satan tries to get us to be lax in guarding God's gift of the gospel. He tries to get us to be lax in proclaiming that precious treasure. And often, his ploys work. And for those times, shame on me. Shame on you. Shame on us for not guarding this awesome deposit entrusted to our care. And I think you would all join me in saying, "Forgive me, Lord, for my unfaithfulness in proclaiming your gift of the gospel."

And here's the good news, courtesies of the apostle Paul, "I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." You see, God calls for us to guard his deposit, his gift of the gospel. But there's also a deposit entrusted to Jesus' care, to his guarding...our salvation.

And thankfully, Jesus has been perfectly faithful in keeping it.

Our verses this morning have a beautiful way of conveying to us our salvation. "God, who 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, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

Wow, there's really nothing more to add to that message, to that work Jesus has done for us, to save us! It starts with grace, God's eternal love for us undeserving sinners. A love based not on what we've done, but because of what Christ has done – his perfect life, his death on the cross, his glorious resurrection from the dead.

It's a grace that we had before the beginning of time. Before you were born, before even the creation of the world, God had you salvation all mapped out. He knew he would save you. He knew he would make you his own. And then in time, Jesus, our Savior, made God's plan a reality when he destroyed death and wiped our sins away by his own death on Calvary's cross, a death that has brought us life and immortality...a death that has won us eternal life in heaven.

And it's that salvation Jesus promises to guard until that day when the deposit is finally returned to us forever with the gift of heaven.

It's all grace. That's the heart and core of the gospel. That's the gift, the deposit, of which God has made you a herald, his messenger. That's the gift, the deposit, God has entrusted to our care.

So, how can you guard it? Better yet, how will you guard it? The answer's simple. Proclaim it. There are souls out there who are dying without hearing the gospel. There are souls out there who are dying to hear the gospel. You probably have some right in your own mission field...friends, family, co-workers.

The message is simple. We sin. We deserve hell. God loves us. God sent Jesus. Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus rose. Our sins are forgiven. Heaven is ours.

And you know, you might be timid. You might be scared. But you're not alone. Yes, the deposit of the gospel has been entrusted to your care, but the Holy Spirit lives in you, and he's there to help. He's there to give you the confidence. He's there to speak the gospel through you.

Our God is not dead. He's alive, reigning in heaven. But he still has an urgent request for you. He's given you the gift of his grace. He's made you a guard for his gift of the gospel. He's provides opportunities to share Jesus. So now, by God's grace and with the Holy Spirit, we go. We proclaim. Amen.