

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021

2 Timothy 3:1-17 (Equip yourself)

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Hazel Willson

Good morning and welcome to our service. My name is Ian and today we will be thinking about how we should equip ourselves for God's service.

A prayer: Father God, we ask your Holy Spirit to be with us as we hear your word and celebrate your love for us. Amen.

Now Hazel is going to lead us in our prayers and then I will read from the bible and talk about that chapter.

### **Prayers**

Let us pray.

In Ephesians Ch 6, Paul gives a list of God's equipment for us as Christians – the belt of truth; breastplate of righteousness; sandals of peace; shield of faith; helmet of salvation; and above all the sword of the Spirit, God's Word – and he also says we should pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, all the time, for all the saints.

Heavenly Father, we are so aware of the times we fail to put on and use the armour You provide – the times this past week when we have been powerless against the godlessness around us, and have let You and others down. We ask Your forgiveness for our faults and failures, and ask that we may serve You in newness of strength and purpose.

So we come into our Father's presence now, aware of the strength of the enemy, but knowing that our Lord Jesus has already won the final victory, and trusting in Your Word to guide and direct our prayers.

Almighty Father, Creator of all, once again we pray for the peace which You alone can give. So many are in despair because of various conflicts and attacks, with the consequent pain, bereavement, loss and poverty. We pray for peacemakers – for people willing to risk their safety to bring the turmoil to an end; and for leaders of nations and factions to realise the futility of fighting, and to turn their swords into ploughshares. True peace can only come from You – make Your church, Your people, bold to speak Your word in these situations, and equip them with Your promises.

Creator and Sustainer, thank you for this beautiful planet. Give us courage to be good stewards for You, of its variety and potential. Bring the people of the world together to plan and determine to preserve it – and we pray for all suffering from catastrophic climate events in so many different countries.

God of Justice and Wisdom, we pray for relief, and an end to this pandemic. Whilst we are fortunate in this country to have adequate supplies of vaccines, we pray for a fairer and faster distribution throughout the world, and pray too that so many inequalities and cracks in societies

that have been exposed this last year may be addressed with Your wisdom and grace. We pray for patience, and that You will equip Your people to be in the forefront of caring for others in Your name. Thank you for CAP, Living Well, and so many other organisations working tirelessly to advance Your kingdom.

Father of Mercies, You place the solitary in families, and we thank you for our church family, and for our new friends at Holy Trinity. May we, as Your chosen people, show that unity of purpose and love, that will be a powerful witness to others in this locality. As we wait for our new vicar, please prepare and equip all of us for the task ahead, and oversee the practical as well as the spiritual issues.

God of Compassion, we lift to You the members of our family who need Your special touch and blessing. We rejoice with Kemi and the family as Ola and Seun are married this afternoon; and with Francoise and Mick as they marry next Saturday. Bless those two unions, and their new life together. We pray for Betty, recovering from a broken leg, and for Val and Lorraine as their ankles continue to heal. We pray for Yvette, and ask Your care for Andy and Anthony; and for Sue, Linda and Ryan, and Sue's dad, following her mum's death last week. Thank you Father for Will's slow but continued improvement, continue to keep him, Kath and Sam at peace.

Heavenly Father, we pray for ourselves that we might be, as Paul says in Philippians, 'blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation – that we may shine like stars as we hold out the Word of life – Your Word – which is able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus'

Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armour on  
Strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son  
From strength to strength go on, wrestle and fight and pray  
Tread all the powers of darkness down, and win the well-fought day.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

### **Reading – 2 Timothy 3:1-17**

**3** But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. <sup>2</sup> People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— <sup>5</sup> having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

<sup>6</sup> They are the kind 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, <sup>7</sup> always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>8</sup> Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. <sup>9</sup> But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

<sup>10</sup> You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> In fact,

everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup> while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God<sup>g</sup> may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

## Talk

Last week Russ spoke about Christians presenting themselves before God as honest workers who do their best and correctly handle God's word. Today I will refer to some of those thoughts as we continue in Paul's letter to his friend Timothy.

Paul begins this chapter with "mark this" or "understand this" but understand what? Timothy already knew there was opposition and Paul had already urged Timothy to take his share in suffering as Christ's good soldier. No this is to remind Timothy that opposition to the truth is not a passing phase but a present reality in this world. Opposition is permanent and we too should understand this.

Paul continues "in these last days" which is not some future age but the time after Christ's resurrection in which we live now. The last days dawned when Christ rose and sent the Holy Spirit and will continue until he returns.

Times may have been hard for Timothy and for some living around the world now they are as bad if not worse. There will be times when the church and individual Christians are hard pressed, when it is hard to cope and to endure what is happening. Perilous times will ebb and flow but they will never fully go away.

Now these perils and persecutions are caused by humanity as it rejects God's laws and spreads all kinds of lies and hatred and this we must trust God to see us through.

In v2-4 Paul addresses our moral conduct. There are 19 expressions of conduct which cause the church of God stress. The range is wide but note that it begins with lovers of self and ends with not lovers of God.

The breakdown in relations between humans is shown here. Boastful, proud and abusive are traits of self-lovers who have exaggerated opinions of themselves and who treat others with disdain and contempt.

But Christians are called to humility and respect and love of others.

Then Paul turns to family life - disobedient, ungrateful and unholy words to parents. It shows a situation where there is no room for negotiation as relationships have broken down. Whereas there should be obedience, gratitude, respect and affection and reasonableness between parents and children.

Now the list turns to society - From slanderers to treacherous behaviour there are five things that are anti-social behaviour which are caused by godlessness and selfishness.

The order of living is wrong and it will only come right when the order is corrected to God, neighbour and ourselves. Only then can we love God and serve our neighbours. That is why we must die to self and live for Christ which is part of us being a new creation.

Finally they are lovers of pleasure (hedonists) those who believe that the pursuit of their own pleasure is above all else. The ultimate lovers of self and definitely not lovers of God.

The last condemnation in v5 “the form of godliness but denying its power” is the most shocking and is the worst in the list. The one that is hard to detect and maybe only God can truly know. This is the one Jesus addressed to the Pharisees when he called them hypocrites and whitewashed sepulchres – clean and pretty on the outside but rotten inside.

Prophets like Isaiah and Amos called for justice and mercy in society instead of religious show. This is what Paul means. True religion is not show but a changed person a changed life with a servant heart. This happens when the power of the Holy spirit is at work making a person more Christlike. To deny this power is to live in your own strength with no real deep spiritual change. Paul urges Timothy “have nothing to do with them” which doesn’t mean never mix with those who don’t believe in God rather don’t have dealings with such people who are in the church. This may seem shocking but the Book of Common Prayer in 1662 terms this as “a person who is an open and notorious evil liver” and they should be disciplined and if unrepentant excommunicated. That is how serious the church used to take it. How much damage is done to the gospel message by the church's self-inflicted wounds. The world would forgive if we, the church, acted as we should with regard to abuse but when we turn a blind eye or cover things up then the world rightly points and says shame on you – you hypocrites. Safeguarding should be our default position not something we have to be trained for but train we must for we live in a sinful world.

It is why it is important that the gospel reaches all parts of our life so that we hold to the truth and maintain our moral standards and our servant heart. Then we can be honest workers for God.

In v6-9 The people Paul describes in v5 are now shown as deceitful, praying on weak people. Those who are burdened with guilt or impulsive or easily persuaded. They are often visited when alone or vulnerable. Often they may not have a good understanding of the gospel and so were easier to sway.

This is why we have safeguarding and lone working procedures for everyone's protection.

The two people mentioned here Jannes (*Janies*) and Jambres (*Jambreeze*) are in Jewish writings and are said to be the two magicians who opposed Moses in front of Pharaoh but they were soon found to be wanting.

As Russ mentioned last week various new and sometimes fantastic ideas will arise but Paul says “do not worry they won’t get far” Beware of those who have new truths and revelations that take us away from the bible. So hold fast to the gospel and use the bible to check things. Above all allow the bible and the Holy Spirit to be your moral compass then you will be equipped to be a witness to God in your family and in society.

V10-13 says we are called to be different even if we are the only one.

Rom 12v2 amplified version says “do not let this world squeeze you into its mould”

We are to resist secularism as it creeps unnoticed into our lives.

Timothy is called to follow Paul’s example of word and deed. To be a disciple or follower by observing teaching and training. There is a gradual not a sudden change. It begins with hearing the teaching and trying to grasp the meaning. Then to take it on board by understanding and believing it. Finally absorbing it into his life and then by living it out. Thus in both teaching and conduct Timothy became a consistent example to others.

The process of equipping us is exactly the same.

Now it may seem vain that Paul lists these characteristics in v10 but actually it is to form a contrast to the selfish characteristics of those described in v3-5. What Paul is doing is trying to show he is genuine. He is not all do this and do that but rather he walks the talk and suffers for it. He knows he will be persecuted and is in prison now for the faith he professes in Jesus Christ. So he urges Timothy on to learn from Paul's teaching and his way of life or put another way his attitude and his conduct.

Maybe we should ask ourselves what our purpose is? What is our aim?

Do we really want this vision of working with families and children? and if so what can I do? What can you do to make it possible? How can each one of us serve God?

Let us look quickly at what these characteristics mean – What motivates and gives meaning to Paul's life.

**Faith** – in God but also means his faithfulness to the cause of the gospel message and to Jesus.

**Patience** – which is tolerance and long suffering with difficult or stubborn people

**Love** – towards God and humanity, also not self-centred.

**Endurance** – steadfast in purpose. Keep on keeping on with his task, no giving up.

Persecutions and sufferings, Paul lists three examples.

**Antioch** (Acts 13v50) where Paul and Barnabas are persecuted and expelled from the city.

**Iconium** (Acts 14v5) is where Paul and Barnabas heard of a plan to ill-treat and stone them so they flee to Lystra.

**Lystra** (Acts 14v19) which is Timothy's home town, Paul is stoned and left for dead outside the city.

So Paul literally bore the scars for his faith but he had made no secret of the prospect that following Jesus will bring suffering indeed we read about Paul and Barnabas returning to these cities in Acts 14v22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

We may not suffer such extremes but there will be little things all the time at work or in the family or neighbourhood.

Paul is sure of God's rescue and that it is better to do God's will and suffer than to please man. He is also sure this temporary persecution will lead to ultimate glory in heaven.

Jesus also said it would be so in Jn 15v20 "Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also".

So because we live in the world but are in God's kingdom our difference, and there should be a difference, will inevitably bring persecution.

Now Paul ends this chapter by again urging Timothy to "continue in what you have learned" or another way is to 'abide in it' or 'to stay with it'.

Timothy's mother was a Jew, who became a Christian, and had brought him up in the knowledge of the OT from a small boy. So it was ingrained in him, it was his touchstone, something he could trust in.

So Timothy is to trust the teaching because he knows from who he received it although here it is the teaching from Paul for he knows it is in harmony with the OT. This is the same for us as we must see the truth of the gospel and its roots in the OT that supports its authority.

V15b The truth about scripture is that we have it to enable us to know about God's plan for our salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

V16 Paul asserts that the bible is God's inspired word to us and that it is useful or profitable to us. We see in Paul's letters that he draws on the OT and the sayings of Jesus combining the two sources to teach and equip the young Christian church.

That scripture is 'God breathed' means that it originates with God not man. It is the word of God given to humanity and written down for us by human hand.

The scriptures usefulness for teaching is noted in v15 as I just mentioned. However, the bible shows the reason for God's plan for salvation from creation and the fall into sin. and human rebellion. God's love and mercy for his people until finally he sends his own son Jesus to die on the cross for our sin. Now God has sent his Holy Spirit to be our comforter and guide.

All of this is revealed in scripture the bible.

But remember it is God's gift of faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit that brings the bible to life and gives us understanding.

Paul shows in all his letters that faith is not just head knowledge. Rather it is about what we believe (our creed) and how we act and live (our conduct). So he mentions four areas:

**Teaching** – it is the only book available to tell the whole story. There are 1000's of books about the books in the bible and even more about Jesus. The OT points to Jesus and the NT tells of his words and works. Books are very useful to help understand but they should never replace reading the bible.

**Rebuking** – Not telling off or fault finding but rather with gentleness and respect showing or convincing someone of the error of their ways and pointing them in the right direction.

**Correcting** – This is about testing theories and teachings that are against the bible. We have been given wonderful minds full of imagination and ability to invent or discover things but always we should test them against the teaching in the bible and especially the words of Jesus.

**Training in righteousness** – So we come full circle. The bible is to train us in righteousness, that is, to help us understand how to live out our faith. For we are not to just change our minds like some intellectual exercise but rather to change our lives so that our actions and words will bring glory to God. To grow in maturity of faith and be equipped for every good work.

Every generation will face the same challenges of speaking the constant word of God to an ever changing world. We must always allow for translations to aid explanation to different people but be careful not to change the message of truth for we must correctly handle God's word.

We are privileged to have the bible to teach and to equip us and we must use it wisely and with care for they are not just words without power they are God's words.

Let me finish with a quote from Moses speaking to the people at the end of his life reminding them what God had done.

Deut 32v46

“when he finished reciting all these words to all Israel, Moses said to them, “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.”

Amen

Now a closing prayer by Moses from Numbers 6:24.

May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you His favour and give you His peace. Amen.

Thankyou for taking time to read or listen and may God bless you in this week in the coming days.