

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021

2 Timothy 4:1-22 (Hard work)

Talk by Andrew Griffiths, Prayers by Hazel Willson

Hi, my name is Andrew and thanks for downloading the talk from St John's Penge, for Sunday 8 August. This morning, I will be reading 2 Timothy 4, giving a short talk and then Hazel will pray.

### **Reading - 2 Timothy 4**

**4** In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: **2** Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. **3** For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **4** They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. **5** But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

**6** For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. **7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **8** Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

### **Personal Remarks**

**9** Do your best to come to me quickly, **10** for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. **11** Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. **12** I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. **13** When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

**14** Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. **15** You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

**16** At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. **17** But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. **18** The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Final Greetings**

**19** Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. **20** Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. **21** Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters. [\[b\]](#)

**22** The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.

## Talk

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. That's the famous beginning of which book? That's right, *Pride and Prejudice*. Such a famous sentence, but conveying such a terrible sentiment, don't you think?!

Anyway, as I am sure you will all know, *Pride and Prejudice* tells the story of Elizabeth and Mr Darcy – and their eventual, and seemingly inevitable, journey to the altar. Yet, before they get there, the character of George Wickham causes untold trouble. Wickham is everything that Mr Darcy is not – he is a charmer, he tells Elizabeth (and Lydia) what they want to hear. Darcy, in contrast, is a bit dour, a bit difficult to like. But, in the end, it turns out that Wickham is only superficial – below the surface he is self-centred and an all-round blaggard. Darcy, in contrast, whilst dour is dependable – he forgoes the flashiness of Wickham for the solidity and stability of integrity.

Darcy is, of course, a terrible snob – the prejudice in the title – but Jane Austen was a snob as well so she clearly approved. But let's put that to side for one moment. Because one of the points Austen was trying to make, is the very point Paul makes in verse 1-5 of today's passage. That it is tempting to see value in flashiness, in those who say, verse 3, 'what your itching ears want to hear.' But do not trust the showman with no integrity. Do not trust the person who tells you to do one thing, but does the other themselves. Do not believe in the person who lies to get ahead, who wears dishonesty as a badge of honour.

We see these people all around us – people who are 'post-truth', and say whatever in the moment will get them what they want, safe in the knowledge that they can just contradict themselves in the future. Humanity has always been the same – we like sheep have gone astray – it is not a coincidence that the bible consistently uses sheep as a metaphor for humans. We are consistently suckered in by those who will say what we want to hear. Yet instead, we are called to trust honest, consistency and integrity.

More than that we are called to *be* honest, be consistent and have integrity. Paul finishes his letter to his young colleague, Timothy, with these words: Verse 2, 'preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.' And verse 5, 'keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.' Paul quote Psalms in Romans 3:13 to describe those whose 'throats are open graves; tongues practice deceit; the poison of vipers is on their lips.' In the face of these people, we are called to be consistent and honest.

It can be tough, because the world will value those who tell them they can get what they want. But remember, Paul says, it is not a popularity contest. He starts, in verse 1, with the reminder that we do what we do 'in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead'. We are called to be patient, kind, hardworking, consistent, to live with integrity and honesty, because that is what God has called us to do.

Have you been watching the Olympics? I love them. Athletes doing ridiculous things. Like walking 50km in three-and-a-half hours. That's walking faster than I run, for 50km! Or making horses dance; doing summersaults off a 10m diving board; jumping over 8 metres; doing something called a laser run in the modern pentathlon... I could go on. Not one of the athletes I have watched has given an interview afterwards and said 'yeah, that was easy,

everything always went my way and I didn't have to put in any hard work at all.' Of course not.

And Paul makes the same point in verse 7 – if this is a race, it is not supposed to be easy. But there is true value in living as a faithful Christian. In keeping our focus on God, not living our lives constantly looking for the approval of our fellow humans. Sometimes it can feel like we want recognition from others, but that is of little value compared to the recognition God gives to his faithful servants. Paul, himself, is a witness to this. Verses 7 and 8:

'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.'

Paul had not won any popularity contests – he had not won in the eyes of the world. He was in prison, awaiting execution. In the world's eyes he had lost. But in God's eyes he had won – and that is what mattered to Paul, and should matter to us. When we are faced with the temptation to lie to get ahead, to sacrifice our integrity for popularity, let's remember Paul's message to Timothy.

This is true to us as individuals, but it is also true for us as a church. We can look at churches with bigger congregations, more money and more staff, and be envious. But none of those things matter – that is not what defines success as a church. Rather, it is faithfulness to God's mission that matters, it is whether our church is a place that 'preaches the word; is prepared in season and out of season to correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction'. Those are the things that God values. If we are consistent followers and share the, sometimes tough and unflashy, but always loving message of God to the world; with honesty and integrity – that is what God values in us as a church and defines our success.

This is a message for us all, and it is a message for both St Johns and Holy Trinity; it is a message for the new church leadership, and it is a message for anyone involved in any ministry here. We are to do God's work with honesty, integrity and consistency, and though it may be hard and sometimes unrewarding work, that is the good fight for which God will reward his people.

I also want to reflect on verses 9-22. These are the mandatory greetings and personal messages that we find at the end of Paul's letters. It can be tempting to just move straight past them, because we do not know who these people are, they are all dead now, and it is clear that if we go to Troas and try to find Paul's cloak, then we will have a disappointing time. But actually there is an important message to learn from these verses. And it is that Paul lived in, and saw himself, as part of a close and faithful community. Paul was keen to recognise the role of others and was equally keen to greet them.

We are all part of a church; a people called to serve and worship God together. Community matters, society (whatever Margaret Thatcher thought) is not dead, but an essential part of who we are. Paul was not just being polite at the end of his letters; he was recognising the essential nature of the gospel. Paul wrote to Titus, chapter 2:14, that Jesus 'gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good'. Jesus died and rose again to create a people, not a person – to create a community of people eager to do good. Without community the gospel will die – it is nurtured through community, it is shown to the world through the love we have for one another, and it grows in a people who are centred around the source of all life.

Let us be a church that nurtures the gospel and sees it grow.

Now, there are two people that Paul consistently speaks about at the end of letters, that I thought are worth a mention. Priscilla and Aquilla – a married couple with excellent names. They are clearly important to Paul – in Acts 18:2-3 we read how Paul met Aquilla in Corinth. Aquilla had recently arrived, a forced migrant from Rome, because of anti-Jewish discrimination. He welcomed Paul, who lived with him and Priscilla, whilst Paul set up the church in Corinth. Both then went with Paul to Syria, Acts 18:18, and in Acts 18:26, Priscilla and Aquilla explained the gospel to a Jew called Apollos, who became a great evangelist in his own right.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, Corinthians, and here in 2 Timothy, passed on greetings to Priscilla and Aquilla, who were clearly continuing their early work of evangelism. In Romans 16:3, Paul described them as ‘co-workers in Christ Jesus’. Priscilla was mentioned as Aquilla’s wife in the first instance – but from this moment on she gets top billing. Priscilla was an excellent example of women in leadership from the bible – someone who had a clear role in the spreading of the gospel and Christian ministry. Both Priscilla and Aquilla are the example of consistency, honesty, hard work and integrity that Paul called Timothy to follow, and they are an example to us. We don’t know much more about them, but we do know that they had a long ministry and were always part of a community.

Throughout 2 Timothy, Paul has a clear message for Timothy – do not look to the world for validation, but trust, and be faithful to, the gospel of Christ. And what is that gospel? It is this: Romans 3:23-24, ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.’ Focus on this, make this the centre of our lives and our church, and as Paul said in verse 8 of our passage: ‘there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.’

Amen.

Now Hazel will bring us our prayers.

## **Prayers**

In the power of the Spirit, and in the name of Jesus, let us pray to our Father, knowing He hears both our spoken and unspoken thoughts.

God our Father – Just, long-suffering, and full of grace and truth – who created us from nothing and gave us life; we confess we have sinned against You and our neighbour. We have wounded Your love, and marred Your image in us. Forgive us we pray, and in Your mercy renew and restore us for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour.

Thank you, Father, for Your continued grace and mercy to us day by day. For sunshine and showers, food to eat, clothes to wear, places to live, and strength to enjoy Your blessings. Keep our eyes fixed on You, amid all the turmoil and uncertainty around us, and may we always be prepared to give a reason for the hope we have in Jesus.

*‘O Lord, over the nations now, where is the dove of peace – her wings are broken  
O Lord, while precious children starve, the tools of war increase – their bread is stolen’*

Father, when we listen to the news, the problems seem overwhelming. News of warfare, natural disasters, and increasing confusion and vulnerability for so many people. We pray especially for Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia and Mozambique – but we are aware of so many other countries struggling. Father, as we live in these end times, You said this would happen, and we pray that Your church will awaken, that Your message of salvation, hope light and peace may be faithfully preached to all nations, despite opposition. Strengthen Your people, that they may not fall away from faith, and may overcome and win Your crown of righteousness. Amid all the difficulties and dangers may they know that ‘greater is He that is with you, than all that is against you’.

*‘O Lord, dark powers are poised to flood our streets with hate and fear, we must awaken, O Lord, let love reclaim the lives that sin would sweep away, and let Your kingdom come’*

Father, we pray for our country, and especially those who have the privilege and responsibility of leadership in any way. Equip them with heavenly wisdom, integrity and strength. Break through the confusion surrounding the easing of lockdown and give safety and patience. Keep our young people safe during the school holidays, and thwart the plans of those who seek harm for others and themselves.

Father, we rejoice in the news the Rev Jessica Smith is to lead and serve our two churches, into the future that You have planned for us. We pray for her, as she prepares for her licensing, and her move to Penge; and we thank You for her passion for, and commitment to, the community – and pray for her and ourselves, as we find new opportunities to demonstrate Jesus’ love for all. Thank You for the varied ways St John’s and Holy Trinity have already found, to meet and get to know each other, and we pray for the picnic today. Please continue to bless and prepare the wardens and PCCs.

Father, we give thanks for the joyful marriage of Ola and Seun last weekend; and for Françoise and Mick’s wedding yesterday. Please continue to bless and watch over those couples. We pray for those in need – for Betty and Val’s mobility and mending; Will, Tom and Yvette’s continued healing, and safety and care for Andy, Anthony and Maria. We think silently of others known to us.....

Thank you, Father, that each person is known intimately by You, and thank You too, for all the names of people mentioned by Paul in his letters – they, and we, are all a part of the eternal family of Christ through the ages.

Father, we pray for individuals and organisations actively spreading Your Word – may they thoroughly prepare – as athletes for a race; as soldiers on active service; as farmers preparing the soil to produce crops. May we not be ashamed of the gospel, be strong in Your grace, and use Your Word wisely, appropriately and winsomely.

Father, may we be confident that Your grace will be just as sufficient for us today, as it was for Paul and Timothy – and let us give You all the glory in our service.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus. **Amen**

Thank you very much for listening. God bless.