

Scriptures: Luke 17:11-19; 2 Timothy 2:8-15

## **The Bible Is God's Story**

Last week we launched a month long sermon series, "Not Ashamed," looking at Paul's letter to Timothy, specifically the second one. There's a lot of unpacking to be done in both those letters which Paul wrote to his young protégé, Timothy. We'd be wise to read them both entirely, but since we're using sermon series based on the lectionary cycle, we don't have that luxury. I encourage you, though, to spend some time over the rest of October reading the two letters to Timothy. They're basically an instruction manual for good, Godly living, and for administering the Church at Ephesus.

There are a lot of people in America who hear Bible stories and think that what the Bible says doesn't apply to them. They think they are like fairy tales, fables, or something like that, to just try to get people to live morally in the world today. That's a messed up thought process. As followers of Jesus Christ, we must recognize that the Bible is God's word. He selected various men over a period of a few millennia to get His story down on paper.

The Bible is God's story – detailing all the ways throughout history that He has tried over and over again to bring people into relationship with Himself. We see that most clearly in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who willingly laid aside His place of glory, to be born a human, in absolute poverty, and then to suffer the ultimate insult by being crucified for the sin of the world. Our role, as His followers, is to make what He did on the cross and at the empty tomb known to the world – because the world is a mess – a hot mess, as friends younger than me might say. It's broken beyond our ability as humans to repair. Left to it's own devices, there's nothing good in it. Left to our own devices, there's nothing good in us, either. This is why we need both personal and corporate relationship with Jesus Christ. Only God is good. So, if you have your Bible, or Bible app handy, turn with me to 2 Timothy 2:8-15, so we can hear a good word from God this morning. I'm reading from the New International Version. **Read 2 Timothy 2:8-15.**

## **Jesus Christ, the Magnificent One**

Last week we talked about having an active faith. Basically, it's what Paul tells Timothy in the section of the book we read last week. Between that section, and the one we just read, there are a list of people and various jobs, like soldiers, athletes, and farmers which Paul uses as examples of how to live in the reality of who they are, and what they do based on what role they have. One of the things Paul reiterates to Timothy sounds very much like a creed. "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, de-

scended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained," (2 Tim. 2:8-9).

If the Human Jesus had only died on the cross, that wouldn't have been enough for us. People die every day from a wide variety of things – old age, accidents, disease, war, murder, self-destruction – the list goes on and on. We need Someone more than an ordinary, run-of-the-mill human to take our mess from us. Jesus died, like all humans eventually do, but then He didn't stay dead. He resurrected on the third day – He came back to life and proves He is God. Because He is God-in-the-flesh, His death has infinite value – we can't calculate it's value – because it's a fair exchange for the sin of every living human being who ever lived, are alive today, or will ever live in the future.

He is the most Magnificent One! Only Jesus Christ is equipped to be our substitute for sin. No other person – no other god – can ever or will ever be able to do that. And Paul, because of his devotion – his faithfulness – to Jesus Christ, is chained up in Nero's dungeon like a common criminal.

## **The Elect**

Notice what Timothy is told next by Paul. "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory," (verse 10). Paul's willing to go through every trial, embarrassment, and hardship imaginable if it means that by doing so, people hear about Jesus Christ. People hear that word, "elect," and depending on their backgrounds, they get funny about it. We could define "elect" as people who God has chosen. That's a good start. The problem with putting all of it on Him though, is, that it does away with the idea of free will.

God loves us enough to give us choice. We choose to follow Him, because we see His love fully poured out for us on the cross of Christ. If God could, He would rather that all people would be "the elect," because we know He loves them all. I am convinced that the God we serve is far more inclusive towards people of different races, backgrounds, ethnicities, and political persuasions than we are, or even than the Church is, generally speaking. John writes in his gospel, that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life," (Jn. 3:16, BSB).

God does the heavy work, of giving us salvation through Christ alone, but it's up to us individually, to claim it and then live into it as a new creature directed by the will of God through His in-dwelling presence we receive in the Holy Spirit. You see, friends, He loves us enough to save us from our sins – but He loves so much that He doesn't want to leave us stuck in it. He calls us to be transformed. Made new. That boils down to us putting Him on the throne instead of self.

## **If..., Then...**

In doing that, besides having our sin washed away, being given a new life in Christ, we're also given a place with Him in eternity, Paul tells us. What comes next in our text, some Bible scholars believe, may be the lines of a hymn from the ancient church. "Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; if we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself," (2 Tim. 2:11-13). That ancient hymn gives us a lot to unpack this morning.

The structure of it is similar to some things I remember reading years ago in my undergraduate studies in an Introduction to Philosophy class at Edison. It's structured like a Greek proof. "If x happens, then y results." It's a form of logic. The ancient Greeks loved logic and reason. They worshiped it – that's why when we see John's gospel talk about the Word made flesh – that appeals to those ancient Greek, logic-loving readers. It was a gospel written to bring them into the Church, so they could see the connection between the Greek concept of logic, with "Logos," the Word, Jesus Christ.

Notice though, that they are all conditional. "If we do something, [then] we will get or have something as a result." If we die with Him – trusting in His death on the cross – then we also get life in Him. If we faithfully endure during hardship and suffering, He rewards us when He comes again. If we disown Him – that would be us saying we don't know Him – that's pretty harsh, right? Can you imagine real Christians saying they don't know Jesus?

Believe it or not, there are some out there. They're involved in the Church, in general, because they have a view of it as a social club or a status symbol. You know, you've maybe heard something along the lines of, "I'm a Christian because my Mommy was a Christian, and my Grandpa was a Christian," or "I'm a member of XYZ Church because Dad was a member there, Grandma was a member there," and so on, and they'd try to tie it clear back to Noah if they could figure it all out. This is as blunt as I can get about this, if you don't know Jesus, you can't be part of His glory. It's a no-brainer, really. You either know Him and follow Him, or you don't. It's a very basic concept that even little kids understand.

## **God Is Faithful, Even When We Are Not**

One thing which stands out to me, in that section, though is the last piece, verse 13. "If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself." As a kid I can recall a couple ladies – members of the church I grew up in – who were about eight or ten years older than me. They were wild. Running men. Married, with children, then divorced, then remarried with more children, then running women. Occasionally they'd show up in church and want to rededicate themselves to being faithful followers of Jesus Christ, so they'd get re-baptized. That's a humanistic theology. In baptism, it's

God who does the work. He does the washing. Jesus washes away our sin, and we die with Him in the waters of baptism and raise to new life through the in-dwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. Every time we sin – we are unfaithful – we don't get re-baptized.

The covenant God makes with us through baptism is sealed by that conviction that comes over us every time we fall short. That's the nudge of the Holy Spirit letting us know we haven't held up our end of the covenant relationship. He is faithful, even when we are not. I'm going to talk more about the idea of covenant relationship in just a minute, but I want to get through the rest of our passage this morning. Paul tells Timothy, "Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen," (verse 14).

Paul wants Timothy to remind the Ephesian Church that they're going to fall short, but in their falling, Jesus stays the same. He's ever faithful. Paul says to "warn them before God against quarreling about words." What an interesting statement to make, which very much applies to what we see happening throughout the United Methodist Church! I have wrestled with how to approach the current crisis in the Church with you because of the controversial nature of it.

### **Present Yourself to God**

A wise person, which I think many of you know, told me when I was preparing to take on this appointment as your pastor, to "never bring politics into the pulpit." That's a hard thing to do. I have my opinions, and I am very opinionated on many of the issues facing our country, the world, and the Church, but I have to temper that with lovingly guiding all of you. Anytime you have a group of more than one, there will always be disagreement over something.

So I've attempted to address the elephant in the room, without naming it. In naming it, it gives it more power. Words are powerful things. Once we say something, it's out there, in front of the world – permanently. Paul says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth," (verse 15). And so, that's what I've attempted to do here. To continue to stay focused on the Word of Truth – Jesus Christ – instead of focusing on quarrelsome words which will harm someone.

Friends, my heart breaks for what I see happening around us. Times are changing. The United Methodist Church, the covenant relationship we as a local church, are in, is in crisis. People and local churches, even in our area, are splintering off and forming separate denominations or independent churches. It's a broken system, with people and relationships being collateral damage. Just like any other system which involves broken people in need of a Savior.

Matt and I went and listened to a representative of the Global Methodist Church talk at one of our local churches here in Shelby County a week ago Wednesday night. They talk a good game about the future, just like the United Methodists do. And, just like us here at New Hope – all on our own – we, also have short-comings. The bottom line is, none of us have a crystal ball to be able to clearly see what will happen in the future. We're all broken people, in need of a Savior.

## **Beautiful Things**

I want you to watch this music video, "Beautiful Things," by Gungor. (Play <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls6weMrenls&t=16s>). We're all broken. The United Methodist Church is broken. The Global Methodist Church is broken. Every independent church I've ever known is broken. In the breaking, people and relationships become collateral damage. But Jesus loves them all anyhow. Since we are only humans, we are only as capable of doing as much good as what we will allow the Holy Spirit to do through us.

Our society is in what's called a period of discontinuous change. Around the world, things are happening so rapidly, that we hardly have time to breathe. And so, despite John's word to me at the ending of his pastoral ministry, and the beginning of mine, the Church writ large has become so embroiled in politicking, that it has entered into our faith community here. And now we need to have a conversation regarding our future, which we'll do over lunch on November 6.

Do we stay? Do we go? These are questions I've been wrestling with, and I've been praying over. It's why I've asked you to be in prayer for the last three weeks, and to continue in prayer for the remaining three weeks. Through the basic habits of our faith – daily Scripture reading, prayer, fasting – collectively we will have God's wisdom to decide what we need to do, so that we can restore our focus on Jesus Christ instead of on the various idols of this world – including our own ideas of what we would prefer the Church – both denominationally, and locally to look like. I'll close now with one of John Wesley's most famous prayers.

**Prayer:** We are no longer our own, but Yours. Put us to what You will, place us with whom You will. Put us to doing, put us to suffering. Let us be put to work for You, or set aside for You, Praised for You or criticized for You. Let us be full, let us be empty. Let us have all things, let us have nothing. We freely and fully surrender all things to Your glory and service. And now, O Wonderful and Holy God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, You are ours, and we are Yours. So be it. And this promise which we make on earth, let it also be made in heaven. Amen.