

ME

central point: The Life of a Christian (leader) is a life of distinctiveness

gospel theme: Christ lived a distinctive life and died a distinctive death.

sermon aim: To embrace our calling to distinctive living.

illustration: First visit to Albania...

My wife, Emmy, was born in Albania and grew up there until she was about 13. I had finally had the opportunity to visit for the first time 4 years ago. One of the places we visited was the mountain village where her dad grew up. And to say this village is remote is an understatement. It's only about 8 miles from the nearest big town, but it takes close to an hour to drive up the mountain "road" in a 4 wheel drive truck. So, once you're up there, you're up there. There's no popping out to Tesco to get some milk.

Our visit to the village was a whole family affair. All of Emmy's aunts and uncles and cousins came with, which meant we needed to buy a lot of supplies before we made the trek up the mountain. So we stopped in the large town at the base of the mountain to buy all the food and drinks we would need for our three days in the village.

The whole family—Me, Emmy, Emmy's parents and all of Emmy's aunts and uncles and cousins crammed into this tiny grocery store about half the size of a Tesco Express. It became so overwhelming to have this many people in a small confined space, I went and stood outside on the pavement—and that's when it happened...

At first, it was just a couple of children, but eventually, the entire town came out to see the spectacle. Something incredibly rare happened in this town, something that has maybe only happened once or twice in the history of this rural town at the base of a mountain...

The spectacle was a very large, red bearded, blue eyed, baseball-loving American had come into town and is standing out on the pavement for everyone to see..

Children came out from what seemed like every house and every apartment to try out their english on me, then their parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles all heard about this extraordinary event of the tall-red-bearded-American man standing on the street and they started peeking out their windows and coming out of their front doors.

Directly across from me was a 4 story apartment building with balconies and after just a few minutes every balcony was filled with people looking at me with confusion and interest.

I had never stood out more in my life. I had never felt more exposed, more uncomfortable, more peculiar in my life. It wasn't that I was unsafe, it was just that I felt completely exposed, like I was out there for everyone to see and nowhere to hide.

And it's that exposure—that distinctiveness—that we all tend to avoid in life. We don't want to stand out in that way because standing out—being distinctive—is uncomfortable.

WE

But is there any circumstance that would cause someone to choose to live exposed like that?

What would cause someone to choose discomfort when our entire culture is consumed with creating a comfortable life?

Would someone really choose to live life differently than their siblings, or their colleagues or neighbours or housemates?

What we're going to find out in the passage we're looking at this morning is living distinctively is the call of, not only the Christian leader, but the call of every Christian.

That in a sense, to be a Christian is to be standing out on the curb with the entire town looking at you. On the surface, that doesn't sound like a great calling because to stand out is to be uncomfortable—and if we're being honest, we prefer the comfortable life.

If you're here and you're not a Christian, or you're a new Christian, you might be thinking—"well if that's the case, why would anyone want to be a Christian?" Stick with me, because we're going to see that the Christian is given incredible resources to live this distinctive life.

So, let's take a look at this passage and see what it says...

GOD

CONTEXT:

To catch you up if you weren't here last week, we're spending this autumn term looking at the Apostle Paul's letter to a young church leader named Timothy. Paul is the seasoned Christian and experienced leader who is near the end of his life. And Timothy is the new, young leader who is just getting started. Paul has written a letter to challenge Timothy and to confirm the calling on his life. And what we get to do, is have a look into their relationship as we read through this letter.

Last week, we looked at these verses [2 Timothy 1.6-7]. Paul very warmly calls Timothy into a life of distinction and courage...

slide: 2 Timothy 1.6-7

text: 2 Timothy 1.6-7 - **6** For this reason I [Paul] remind you [Timothy] to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. **7** For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

So, let's sink our teeth into the kind of Life that Paul is calling Timothy into. The first thing we're going to see in verse 8 and 9 is a distinctive calling. Take a look again...

1. A Distinctive Calling - 8-9a

slide: 2 Timothy 1.8

text: 2 Timothy 1.8 - **8** So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

Today, if you asked the average person what they think of Jesus Christ—whether they believe he is God or not—they will probably have a positive view. They might say he was a good man, or a good moral teacher, they might even say that his life is something that we should follow.

But you have to remember that Jesus was tried and killed as a criminal by the Roman government. The Romans were not a fringe group, this was the dominant empire of the western world in the first century. And they killed Jesus.

And Paul, as he was writing this letter, is sitting in a Roman prison in the midst of his court trial...and it's not going well. It's clear by the end of this letter that his death is imminent. Not only that, but Paul was kicked out of the city where Timothy lives after a huge riot *because* of his ministry.

So, when this letter was written, to align yourself with Jesus Christ who was tried and killed by the Roman Government— and with Paul who was kicked out of your own city and who is currently on trial and about to be killed by the Romans—is to put yourself in the spotlight of shame.

Who in their right mind would step onto the pavement with one arm around Jesus Christ and the other around Paul for the entire city to see?

Imagine the headlines in the local paper: “Local Young Man Embraces Criminals and Bases His Life Around Their Teachings.”

But that is the very distinctive calling Paul is making to Timothy. “Don't be ashamed Timothy! Don't be ashamed of Christ or of me.” Instead, he says: “Join with me.” Come stand on the pavement with me.

A. Two Types of Shame

Now, there are two types of shame, so let's just be clear which kind of shame Paul is asking Timothy to take on.

1. Well-Placed Shame. This is the shame you feel when there is good reason to feel it. It's the shame you feel when you've done something wrong, or the shame you feel when someone close to you does something wrong.

illustration: It's the shame I felt when I was a teenager and had to call my dad to tell him I crashed his car.

2. Mis-Placed Shame. This is the shame you feel when there is **no** good reason to feel it. It's the shame for something that is good or honoring to God or others.

illustration: It's the shame I felt when my Connect group had a little surprise birthday cake for me a couple weeks ago. There's not one thing wrong with that, in fact, it's the opposite, they're honoring me, but there was some mis-placed shame I felt as all the attention was put on me for a moment.

So, to be clear, Paul is calling Timothy into a distinctive life that will be filled with ***mis-placed*** shame. He's not calling him to a life of sinful or harmful activity, he's calling him into a life of testifying about Jesus Christ. But that kind of life will put him in the spotlight of shame as he says to Timothy—**join with me in suffering for the Gospel**.

But notice where the power for enduring the spotlight of suffering comes from. Look again at verse 8...

B. ***BY*** the Power of God

slide: 2 Timothy 1.8 / emphasis "by the power of God."

text: 2 Timothy 1.8b - join with me in suffering for the gospel, ***by*** the power of God.

This very distinctive calling is carried out—not by Timothy's ability to keep his face from turning red—not by Timothy's sheer force of will. The distinctive calling to join with Paul in suffering for the Gospel is done ***BY*** the power of God. And notice now in verse 9 how God has exercised his great power...

slide: 2 Timothy 1.9a

text: 2 Timothy 1.9a - He has saved us and called us to a holy life...

1. He has saved us. God's great power is exercised by his saving us, we're going to dive deeper into God's saving power in a moment. But saving power is perhaps the greatest power there is.

illustration: If you're at all into the Marvel Universe, you get this already. All the main characters have power, both the heroes and the villains. Some of them are genius scientists who make special suits that can fly and shoot rockets and stuff. Others are really strong and have a big hammer, and some of them turn green. One is even really good with a bow and arrow. **They all have their power, but the thing we all seem to love about them—the thing that brings us back to the cinema time and time again—is not their individual powers—but that they use their power to save, save the individual, save the city, save the world, and even the universe.**

And that's what God does. He uses his immense power to save us and to call us to a holy life. And, in short, the holy life is a distinctive life. It's a life where we put aside our old sinful ways of living and live distinctive lives of purity and goodness and generosity and grace. And it's that kind of life that makes Jesus look attractive to the rest of the world.

And if you're not a Christian, you might be thinking: Ah ha! That's what I thought you'd say, being a Christian is all about being a good person. I've got to clean my act up first. Well, Take a look, verse 9...Why does God save us?

slide: 2 Timothy 1.9b

text: 2 Timothy 1.9b - ...not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of grace. It's not something we achieve, but something we accept. God didn't call us because we are holy. He didn't save us because we were worth saving. He did it because of his own purpose and grace.

So, let's just pause for a moment and think about what Paul has called Timothy to.

He has not called Timothy to the path of least resistance. This is not a calling of risk aversion. He has not called Timothy to a "that'll do" attitude about life and the gospel. Instead he has called Timothy to shame and suffering.

Now, this leaves us with a question. If it's so hard, why on earth would Timothy accept this calling? And why on earth would **you** accept this calling? What is worth all the shame and suffering?

Let's take a look. Here's point two:

2. A Distinctive Gospel - 9c-10

Look with me one more time at verse 9, this time the very end of verse 9...

slide: 2 Timothy 1.9c-10 / emphasis 9c

text: 2 Timothy 1.9c-10 - This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, **10** but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

A. Before the Beginning of Time

The Christian gospel was not an afterthought. It was not a plan that God hatched at the last minute. No, God has been thinking about you infinitely longer than you've been thinking about him.

From before time began, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit planned together, not only creation, but all of salvation: the coming of Jesus Christ, the death of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the ascension of Jesus Christ to Heaven, the giving of the Holy Spirit, the growth of the Church and the return of Jesus Christ at the end of all things.

God planned specifically that you would be born—all of this was planned before God ever said "Let there be light."

But it was only recently from Paul's perspective as he writes this letter—within just a few decades—that the gospel was revealed. Notice as we read on into verse 10...

B. Revealed Through the Appearing of Christ

slide: 2 Timothy 1.9c-10 / emphasis 10a

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, **10** but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus...

Now, I realise it's a hard thing to ask anyone to choose to step out onto the pavement into the spotlight and to take on shame.

But it's the appearing and revealing of Jesus Christ that gives us all the fuel we need to choose the path of shame and suffering in our workplaces, on our campus, in our halls, on our streets, at our family dinners. Think with me about how incredibly world-changing is the appearing of Jesus Christ...

The word that Paul uses here in the original language is where we get our modern word "epiphany". It literally means "shining forth." And back when Paul used it, in the Greek-speaking world, it was used to talk about the ascension of the Emperor to his throne. It was used to describe the manifestation of a new Emperor as he took up ultimate authority and power—really as he became a deity—over the empire.

But here Paul uses it of Jesus Christ to say that God's grace has now been revealed through the shining forth of our true Emperor, the one Saviour, Christ Jesus.

Up until the birth of Jesus Christ, God's presence has always been hidden. Some people, like Moses and Elijah and Isaiah got veiled views of the presence of God, but no one saw him in his wholeness until Jesus Christ.

Listen to how Paul describes Jesus Christ in Colossians chapter 1...

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation... **19** For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

You see, now, in the person of Jesus Christ, God has appeared, he has shown forth. He has stepped out onto the pavement for all to see. The light of the world has been revealed...

And by the way, he didn't step out into glory, he didn't step out into comfort or luxury or opulence or cosiness and he didn't live in a semi-detached. He stepped out onto the pavement of our world—for all to see—into shame, into sacrifice, into suffering and unto death.

Oh, but look at what he accomplished when he appeared! Look at the rest of verse 10...

C. Christ has Destroyed Death

slide: 2 Timothy 1.9c-10 / emphasis 10b

but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, *who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

Even though he himself was lead to death, it was his own death that destroyed death! And it was his own resurrection from the dead that brings life and immortality and light to the world through his appearing!

And what we're going to see in just a moment is if you take him into your life, you can have complete confidence that all of your well-placed shame is taken away. All the shame that you do deserve for all the wrong you've done and ever will do is taken away. And instead of facing ultimate death at the end of this life you get ultimate life—immortality when you take Jesus Christ into your life and when you entrust your life to him.

This is why *Paul* would choose to step out onto the curb for everyone to see, this is why *Paul* would choose shame and suffering and this is why *Timothy* would choose it too—because Jesus Christ stepped out onto the pavement of our world took on our shame and our suffering and bore it on our behalf as he died the death we should have died for our sins.

Now that we have an understanding of why someone would choose this life of shame and suffering, Paul reflects on his own Distinctive Life. That's our third point...

3. A Distinctive Life - 11-14

So, before Paul gets to describing the kind of distinctive life Timothy is called to live, he describes his own distinctive life. Take a look at verse 11, Paul talks about his calling in three ways...

A. Paul's Life

slide: 2 Timothy 1.11

text: 2 Timothy 1.11 - And of this gospel I was appointed a *herald* and an *apostle* and a *teacher*.

To help us understand this, I've done a little drawing for you—enjoy it while it's here—The Tate Modern have called and they want to put it up in their next child artists exhibit.

slide: Drawing 1: Paul's Calling

The thing I want you to see is that each of these three aspects to Paul's calling are outward looking.

Heralds herald a message to others. They herald not to themselves at home, but out in the public.

The word apostle means "sent one". Paul is sent out.

And he's a teacher. A teacher teaches not a subject, but a subject to people. A history teacher doesn't teach history, they teach history students. It's an outward looking job.

He is a herald, he is an apostle, he is a teacher not just of any message—notice here in verse 11—a herald, apostle, teacher *of this gospel*.

And, his appointment to these three things: herald, apostle and teacher, has led him to a life where he lives exposed—it's an outward facing life. The kind of uncomfortable life we talked about at the beginning.

B. Paul's Suffering

Take a look at verse 12...

slide: 2 Timothy 1.12a

text: 2 Timothy 1.12a - That is why [my calling] I am suffering as I am.

And certainly no one thinks this way of life—to choose to live exposed, to choose to live distinctively, to make the uncomfortable life choices that mark you out from your peers—is easy, or even desirable.

If Timothy is going to live this way—if you or me are going to live this way—it means embracing the suffering that comes along with being open about your faith at work. It means embracing the suffering that comes along with friends or family members rejecting you because of your beliefs. It has meant for some in our church embracing the suffering of having to flee your home country to preserve your life.

And so no one, not least Paul, is saying this kind of life is easy. But the question is. And the question has always been when people choose to live distinctively, is it worth it?

So, let's ask Paul: Is it worth it?

Take a look at the very next sentence, verse 12...

slide: 2 Timothy 1.12b

text: 2 Timothy 1.12b - Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

Oh, I love that word “yet”. “Yet this is no cause for shame.”

Paul, is it worth the suffering? Is it worth the shame?

Paul's answer is a resounding “yes”.

Now, in this letter, Paul is quite understated about his own suffering. He doesn't really list it out. But if you read Paul's other letters or the stories about his life in the book of Acts, you will see Paul's shame and suffering weren't small.

Paul is able to say: “I've been appointed a herald, and apostle, a teacher...that's why I'm suffering, that's why I've been rejected by my peers, arrested, shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned, it's why I'm facing death today!”

...”yet...yet, None of this is a cause for shame.”

Why can Paul endure the shame? Why is it worth it to Paul to live such a distinctive life? Look again at verse 12...It's because he knows whom he has believed—Jesus Christ—and he's convinced that Jesus Christ will guard what he's entrusted to him...

illustration: Imagine for a moment you all of a sudden came into some money, let's say a wealthy aunt has left you with an inheritance of £1,000,000. And obviously, you need to keep that money somewhere. You're not going to keep it all under your mattress, it just won't fit and it wouldn't be very comfortable. Ok, are you picturing this? You've got all this money and you need to keep it somewhere safe, somewhere secure. Where are you going to keep it?

I've got an idea! Keep it with me! I'll keep it safe for you! I've got a spare bedroom, I'll keep it in there. Every now and again, we have a guest staying there, but...it will be ok. How are you feeling about that? Have we got a deal?

NO way! Just to be clear, I wouldn't give you my money either.

We only entrust the things we care the most about, to someone we trust the most.

Now just think about what has Paul deposited with Christ for safe keeping.

He's deposited his very life. He's put on safety deposit with Jesus Christ his eternity, his future comfort, his future joy, his future rest, his future honor and glory. He has hung it all on Christ who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

He has entrusted everything to the one who has appeared, to the one who has destroyed death, to the one who has brought life and immortality to light. Who else is there that is so trustworthy but God himself who has appeared and done all these things?!?

This is the reason Paul can "yes, because of my calling, I am suffering. Yet...yet, it's no cause for shame because I know Christ. And I know for certain Christ will guard what I have entrusted to him."

So, now, only after he's shown Timothy the example of his own life. Like a loving compassionate father, he says to Timothy, here's what your life can look like. If you choose to join with me in suffering for the gospel. If you choose to take on this distinctive, exposed life, here's what it looks like for you....

C. Timothy's Life

Verse 13...

slide: 2 Timothy 1.13

text: 2 Timothy 1.13 - What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Of course, the specifics of Timothy's calling are different than Paul's.

So, Timothy's drawing doesn't look the same as Paul's, but here's how I would draw Timothy's calling.

slide: Drawing 2: Timothy's Calling

Timothy doesn't seem to have an apostolic calling, he's not being sent off to a foreign land. He's called to be a teacher, to keep the pattern of sound teaching he learned from Paul.

But notice, Timothy's calling is still outward looking. He is still called to make an impact on others. He's called to live a distinctive and exposed life of pouring himself out on behalf of others for the sake of the gospel. Both as a teacher and—you'll see later on in the letter—as an evangelist—a herald.

And now that Paul has entrusted the gospel and sound doctrine to Timothy, as he teaches and heralds, he is also responsible to guard it, verse 14...

slide: 2 Timothy 1.14

text: 2 Timothy 1.14 - Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Paul gives this instruction here in verse 14 because, as we'll see as we read on in this letter, when you live this distinctive life, there will be lots of pressure to conform to the culture around you—to change the teaching of the gospel, to soften it or as Paul will say later, to distort it.

But instead, Timothy is called to guard the good deposit of the gospel and sound teaching with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Now, here's an implication I want us all to see from Paul's very personal call to Timothy. Even though this is a very specific letter to a specific person, there is one very big implication for all of us who are looking in. Here it is...

The one thing a Christian can't be is inward looking. The call of every Christian—whether a church leader or not, a missionary or not—the call of every Christian—of every Christian teacher, every Christian mom, every Christian doctor, every Christian musician, every Christian student—is to be outward looking.

slide: Drawing 1 & Drawing 2

In some ways, your drawing will look different from Paul's and it will look different from Timothy's, but every Christian's drawing will have arrows pointing out, as an evangelist, as a servant, as a herald, as an encourager, as a teacher, as a leader.

Because when we take the gospel into our lives, it means the gospel must pour out of our lives.

And so because of that, I want to leave us with two challenges.

YOU

1. Take one step to be like Paul...

Maybe you're not yet a Christian, why not today, take the first step of entrusting your life to Jesus Christ. Put your life on deposit with him by trusting in his death for the forgiveness of your sins and trusting in his resurrection from the dead as a guarantee that you too will live for eternity with him.

In a few minutes we're going to take the Lord's Supper. And that practice is a picture of us taking the gospel of Jesus Christ into our lives. Why not take the first step today of taking him into your life?

But it shouldn't stop there, because when you take the gospel in, it should then flow out. So, here's the second challenge.

2. Take one step to be like Timothy...

Perhaps the step you need to take is to reveal to your colleagues that you're a Christian. That's the first step in being a herald of this gospel. Maybe that's your first step. Or maybe you've taken that step, perhaps ask them about their own beliefs or even invite them to church next Sunday.

Or maybe you need to take a step to help guard the good deposit. That could be as simple as joining a connect group where you'll look at God's Word together each week and encourage one another. Or maybe it's a bigger step like going on the North West Partnership Training Course where you can really dig into the pattern of sound teaching.

Either way, I want to encourage everyone to take just one small step into this distinctive and exposed life.

WE

Yes, it will be uncomfortable, yes it will probably bring some shame and it even might make you suffer. But we can say along with Paul:

Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

Let's Pray.