

Never Be Embarrassed About Good News

Theme: In an era of intimidation, don't be embarrassed about the good news, but rather guard the deposit of the gospel entrusted to you.

Text: II Timothy 1:8-18

Series: Live With the End in Mind

Introduction

Just like the first century, we live in a climate of intimidation. The conditions in which the gospel of Jesus Christ was originally formulated look increasingly like the culture in which we find ourselves today.

Generally it is not cool to be a Christian today. In an era that has been described as post-Christian, we do not have a very good reputation in the minds of many. On Television and in Hollywood, Christians are often portrayed as hateful and narrow-minded bigots. On the TV show *The Simpsons*, the Flanders are the Simpsons' Christian neighbors. One weekend they were away. Upon return Homer Simpson asked them where they had gone. Ned Flanders replied, "We went away to a Christian camp. We were learning how to be more judgmental." Don Feder, actually a conservative Jew, draws this conclusion about Hollywood, "Christians are the only group Hollywood can offend with impunity, the only creed it actually goes out of its way to insult. Clerics, from fundamentalist preachers to Catholic monks, are routinely represented as hypocrites, hucksters, sadists, and lechers. The tenets of Christianity are regularly held up to ridicule." A college student was sitting at a bus stop on campus, when a young woman asked her what she was reading. She said it was a book about Christianity. The woman recoiled with a grimace, "Oh, Christians. They are wicked people."

Yikes! How did such animosity come about? Make no mistake, there is selective animosity in many circles today. Certainly this should lead us to some level of self-examination. We need to ask ourselves honestly, what is that we have done to leave this impression?

On the other hand, how has our culture shifted so that we are a threat to the prevailing spirit of our times? Does Christianity pose legitimate peril to the assumptions of our age? I believe it does. We hold to a view of truth that put us fundamentally at odds with the spirit of our times. Today all truth is considered personal. You have your truth, I have my truth. There is no such thing as objective truth or a truth that is true for all. Instead the god of this age and the spirit of our times is **Maximum Choice**. To take a position on an issue that appears to limit personal freedom is to incur the wrath of the gods of modern culture, to violate the spirit of our age. This is why it is so difficult for Christians to publicly weigh in on issues such as same sex marriage. Two weeks ago Pastor Meyer spoke in defense of heterosexual marriage from a biblical and societal

Never Be Embarrassed About Good News

perspective. Yet, if same sex marriage is simply cast as a civil rights issue, then Christians will come across as judgmental, trying to restrict rights that all Americans feel they are entitled to. In a climate of everything goes, we appear negative.

The times in which we find ourselves are quite similar to the intimidating circumstances in which Timothy was called to be faithful. Last Sunday, we were introduced to Paul's Second Letter to Timothy. We noted that this was the last correspondence of a dying man to his key protégé, who is a spiritual son. The theme of Paul's motivation letter to Timothy is that he urging him to carry on the transmission of the gospel to the next generation. Paul's work is done. Death is imminent. Paul wants to make sure he affects a baton pass. The baton is the gospel. It is time for Timothy to take center stage. But Timothy has a problem that Paul is attempting to address. His Achilles heal is fear. So Paul writes in II Tim. 1:7, **"God has not given us a spirit of timidity or cowardice."** Paul was concerned that Timothy was shrinking from fulfilling his ministry, fearful of the consequences.

In today's Scripture lesson, we get further insight into the fear producing circumstances and challenges facing Timothy. Timothy lived in an era of much greater intimidation than ours.

Read II Timothy 1:8-18

What is Timothy's potential problem? **"So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel..."** (II Timothy 1:8) Paul would not exhort Timothy to not be ashamed if there was not a tendency in Timothy to be intimidated by the climate of fear. Who wants to be the odd person out? There is a strong drive for approval and acceptance in us all.

Timothy had his own particular challenges when it came to his willingness to suffer for the gospel. Timothy appears to be a rather timid and sensitive soul. Perhaps he was just naturally shy in temperament. He was also young. Paul pumps him up in his first letter by saying, **"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young"** (I Tim. 4:12). By this time Timothy was probably in his mid-30's, because he had been sharing ministry with Paul for about 15 years. But in his day there were only two categories of people, the young and the mature. Timothy had not reached that latter stage yet. Finally, Timothy apparently had a weak physical constitution. He had constant ailments to deal with so Paul writes to him, **"Stop drinking water only, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses"** (I Tim 5:23). Many have taken this verse to heart. So there might have been some natural reticence Timothy based upon his quiet personality, youth, and physical constitution.

Never Be Embarrassed About Good News

But though all these are true of Timothy, they cannot be an excuse for being silent. He is not to be ashamed of bearing witness to the crucified and living Messiah, Jesus, nor of his spiritual father Paul, who is ending his days in a dark hole of a Roman prison. Proclaiming Jesus as the truth in an age where Caesar was considered the only Lord, placed Timothy on collision course with the powers. This could cause the most courageous to shudder. Paul also wonders whether Timothy is fearful of guilt by association. Paul was in prison, considered an enemy of Rome because he dared say that there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, not Caesar. Sedition and rebellion were the charges against him, though Paul never considered himself a prisoner of Rome, but a prisoner for the Lord. Timothy perhaps does not want the stigma of guilt by association. Maybe Timothy thought, "What is it with Paul so that he keeps having run-ins with the law?" To motivate Timothy Paul holds up an example of someone who was not ashamed of his imprisonment. "May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me" (II Tim. 1:16, 17). There is more than a bit of a dig in the contrast.

Let me ask you, is there anything more anxiety producing for us as Christians in this age of intimidation than the pressure to be witnesses for Christ? Is there any aspect of the Christian life about which we feel more inept than telling others about Him?

For many of us, it may be our image of what a witness is supposed to be that gets in the way of our sharing our faith or testifying about our Lord. Becky Pippert in her wonderful book, *Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World*, puts into words my own anxiety. In her early days of faith, she said she laboring under a view that witnessing was to be equated with "offending people for Jesus' sake." She had gotten the impression that to testify about the Lord was where she trapped an unsuspecting victim who was forced to listen to her speech about Jesus. She writes, "The result was that I put off witnessing as long as possible. Whenever the guilt became too great to bear, I overpowered the nearest non-Christian with a non-stop running monologue and then dashed away thinking, 'Whew! Well, I did it.'"

Sometimes it is our image of what a witness is that needs to change if we are to overcome fear. Witness is not a two-minute drill, a drive by shooting. Paul addresses Timothy's fear or potential shame not through a change of technique or approach, but by instilling in him confidence that he has a message in the gospel that is truly the best news anyone would have to offer another.

Paul motivates Timothy by reminding him of the nature of the gospel itself. Paul calls the gospel in v. 14 "a good deposit". He considered it a treasure that it is put in a bank vault for safe keeping. The "good deposit" was entrusted

Never Be Embarrassed About Good News

to him. This is a favorite word of Paul's in this letter. Paul continues in verse 14, "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you." This is commercial language. We entrust our resources to a bank to be preserved intact. A steward is entrusted by an owner with the keeping of his goods. A list of all the property has been accounted. So Paul message here is this: The gospel message is not something we created, but something that has been entrusted to us and we are to make sure that it arrives undamaged to the next generation.

So Paul includes here a little mini-recitation or encapsulation of the message of heavenly origin that he is to pass on to the next generation. "But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of 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 in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time [this was God purpose from the moment he created humans], 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 life through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:8b-10).

We have good news to offer. Who doesn't want to hear good news in an age of daily din of bad news? When my wife was experiencing the rigors of employment as an elementary school principal, I could usually find her stretched out on the couch at the end of work day trying to recover from its intensity. I knew never to violate those sacred moments. Except. The one exception was when I would come home and say, "Honey, do you want to hear some good news?" The eyes would open and the head would turn in anticipation.

We have the best news to offer. God has saved us. The message of the gospel can be captured with what I would call the three tenses of salvation: Past tense: we have been saved; Present tense: we are being saved; Future tense: We will be saved. Let's look at Paul's description of the gospel under these headings.

The Past Tense of Salvation: We have been saved

"But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us..." (II Tim. 1:8, 9a) Yes, there is a catch to this good news. The good news of God's grace only makes sense against the backdrop of bad news. C. S. Lewis said that Christianity only makes if you start with the assumption that there is something drastically wrong. Being saved assumes that we have something to be saved from. We are the object of a rescue operation. Paul gives us a hint about what we need to be saved from, when he writes that we have been "saved—not because of anything we have done but because of His (God's) own purpose and grace" (II Tim. 9).

Never Be Embarrassed About Good News

In other words, there is something so drastically wrong at the core of human beings, that in our own efforts we cannot bring about our own salvation. The Scripture and our experience tell us, if we are honest, that there is a stain in the human heart that is beyond our comprehension. The core problem that has led to the chaos on this planet is what the Bible calls sin. Sin is a full scale rebellion against God who made us for relationship with Himself. We used our freedom of the will to exalt ourselves to the position of being our own god, rather than live in submission to the God who wanted us to experience his love. What is so offensive about the gospel to modern man is that there is something so corrupt in our spirit that we cannot save face by making ourselves right with God through own efforts of goodness.

We will do almost anything to hold onto our pretended goodness rather than admit that we are in need of a Savior. Sometimes we can see ourselves best in cartoons. One of my favorites from the past is *Calvin and Hobbes*. Calvin is the precocious kid who has an imaginary tiger for a playmate, named Hobbes. Calvin and Hobbes are out making a snowman during the Christmas season. Calvin says, "OK Hobbes, I've got a plan." Hobbes responds quizzically, "Yeah?" "If I do 10 spontaneous acts of good will a day from now till Christmas, Santa will have to be lenient in judging the rest of this last year! I can claim I've turned a new leaf!" Hobbes is not so sure about this plan, "Ten spontaneous acts of good will a day? That's pretty many." Calvin, already feeling the weight of his plan, looks glum, "Don't remind me." Hobbes sees Calvin's nemesis coming, "Well, here's your chance. Susie's coming this way." Calvin still trying to hold to his goodness says, "Maybe I'll start tomorrow and do 20 a day."

There is nothing we can do but plead for mercy and ask for God's grace. We have accrued a debt before a holy God that 10, 20, 1000 acts of spontaneous generosity cannot repay. I can't portray the grace of God any better than to tell you a true story about Fiorello LaGuardia, who was mayor of New York City during the Great Depression and throughout World War II. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, he turned up at night court that served the poorest ward in the city. He dismissed the judge and took over the bench for the evening. A tattered old woman was brought before him for stealing a loaf of bread. The woman told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. The shopkeeper pressed charges, "It's a bad neighborhood, your Honor. She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson."

LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions—ten dollars or ten days in jail." As LaGuardia was pronouncing sentence he was reaching into his wallet. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous sombrero saying: "Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty

Never Be Embarrassed About Good News

cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Baillif, collect the fines and give them to the defendant." The next day the newspaper reported that \$47.50 was turned over to this bewildered woman.

This is the grace that Christ purchased for us. We, the guilty stand judged before the law. Christ paid that price for us on the cross. Then he lavished his goodness upon us in his love beyond measure. If we admit our need and place our full weight upon Him, **we have been saved**. The Past Tense of salvation.

The Present Tense of Salvation: We are being saved

Sometimes people think, that's it. I have done it and that is all there is to it, and now my future is secure and I can live as I please. When people are asked to witness to the Lord, they tell a story that is 30 years old. Nothing much has happened since. But included in the good news of the gospel is that **we are being saved**. From the time of our initial commitment to the time we leave this earth, we are to enter into a process of transformation that encompasses all of our days while still on here on earth. Paul puts it like this, "**who saved us and called us to a holy life...**" (II Tim. 1:9) The Present Tense of Salvation.

Let the following quote from John Stott summarize the point that we are called to a holy life and are being saved. "**You can become a Christian in a moment, but not a mature Christian. Christ can enter, cleanse, and forgive you in a matter of seconds, but it will take longer for your character to be transformed and molded to his will. It takes only a few minutes for a bride and bridegroom to be married, but in the rough-and-tumble of their home it may take many years for two strong wills to be dovetailed into one. So when we receive Christ, a moment of commitment will lead to a life-time of adjustment.**" It is this theme that marks much of the rest of this book. Let this suffice for now. We are being saved.

The Future Tense of Salvation: We will be saved

Not only is the past covered so that we are freed completely from the guilt of our sin; not only are we given our present vocation to live to the praise of God's glory with our life; the future is taken care of as well: **we will be saved**. Paul puts it like this, "**The 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.**" (II Tim. 1:9b, 10)

What he accomplished was to "**destroy**" death and bring the nature of our future life to light through the gospel. Death is considered in Scripture to be

Never Be Embarrassed About Good News

result of our sin and our final enemy. It stands mocking us at the end of our life. But Paul says that Christ *"destroyed"* it. *"Destroyed"* does not mean eliminated, but made ineffective, rendered inoperative, made powerless. It is like removing the stinger from a bee or a scorpion. It has lost its power over us. Christ took on death and won victory over it in the resurrection.

And it is his resurrection that is the picture of our future life and immortality. This is what he brought to light. The Christian hope is the resurrection of the body. Our future state will be in a spiritual body. Christ in his resurrected state is a picture to us of what our life will be like. When Christ rose from the dead he took on new powers so that he could pass through walls, and move from one place to the next instantaneously. Yet Jesus still had bodily substance as we know it. He told doubting Thomas to place his hands in his side, and feel the wounds on his hands. Our hope is that we will get the bodies we have always wanted. We too will have spiritual bodies. Death does not render our life meaningless, we don't simply hope for some human immortality, like getting our name on a building. No for Christians the best is yet to come. Jesus faced death down and defeated it and then promised that we would have life with him forever.

I will tell one more story this morning to cap off the good news of the gospel. There was a missionary in Brazil who discovered a tribe of Indians in a remote jungle. They lived near a large river. They were friendly, but a contagious disease was ravaging the people and they were dying daily. There was an infirmary in the jungle and the only hope was to get the people to it for treatment. But to reach the hospital they had to cross the river. Yet the people believed that the river was inhabited by evil spirits, and to enter it meant certain death.

The missionary explained how he had crossed the river to get to them and nothing happened to him. No response. He led the people to the river's edge. He put his hand in the water to show that it is not dangerous. Still no response. He walked out into the river and splashed water on his face. They were unmoved. Finally, he dove into the water, swam beneath the surface and emerged on the other side. As he came out of the water, he punched his hand in the air triumphantly. The Indians broke into cheers and followed him across the river.

Death represents our ultimate fear, because we don't know what is on the other side. Death is ultimately the fear of abandonment—that we will be utterly alone. Jesus absorbed that fear in the cross when he cried, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* He took our fear of forsakenness, bore it, and utterly crushed it in his resurrection.

Never Be Embarrassed About Good News

Paul is reminding Timothy of the good news that is to be transmitted to the next generation. The good news is this: Though human beings are under a death sentence, God in his grace poured out his loving forgiveness in the gift of His Son; in faith we enter a relationship with him and enter a process of becoming like him; all along knowing that we will be raised with him to newness of life. This is the Gospel of which you need not be ashamed. You have something to offer that is the best news anyone can possibly have.

The god of this age, Maximum Choice, says that all truth is personal and subjective. There is no true truth. Paul counters that by saying, "O, yes there is." There is a grand story that contains within it the power of God unto salvation. It makes no difference whether people believe there is truth. It does make a difference whether you believe there is truth, a good deposit to preserve. This is the reason for Paul's final exhortation to Timothy, "*Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you*" (II Tim. 1:14). Literally, stand as a sentry or soldier, who at the cost of his own life will protect what has been deposited into your account.

This message is not about 3 tips to share the good news nor is it about technique and methods. There is a place for that. Our witness must be grounded in something much deeper. We first must believe that we can be bold, because we have a wonderful story to tell that is a fresh drink of water to a parched world. Our first step to overcome our timidity is to know that there is a story that sets people free.