

The Heart Of The Gospel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 April 2023

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] I want to ask you this morning, what are the things in your life that you are willing to fight for? That you're willing to kind of get into the ring or willing to risk your safety and life to protect?

Your children, if your parents, I'm sure you, well I hope you're willing to fight for your children. In fact, in today's world, parents have to fight for the minds of our children from the world.

But what else would you fight for though, if it was under threat? Your home? Your property? The things that you've earned, that you've worked hard for?

You'd probably fight for those things if they're under threat. Let me ask you this, what about your church? Would you fight for your church if it was under threat?

Because it is. It is. Every day. From both visible and invisible powers, your church is under dire threat.

[1 : 0 3] And that was the case in Ephesus when Paul was writing this letter to the young minister Timothy. And if you look in this letter, it's six chapters long.

At the beginning and the end of it, in the first and the last chapter, Paul tells Timothy that he needs to be prepared to fight for his church. So, in chapter 1 verse 18, in our passage this morning, he says, Timothy, my son, I'm giving you these instructions.

And then he says, so that by recalling them you may fight. The good fight. It's fighting talk. And then he reminds him again, right at the end of 1 Timothy in chapter 6 verse 12, he says, fight the good fight of faith.

So, these are kind of bookends. Paul's instructions to Timothy to fight and be willing to fight for this church are bookends to this letter he writes them. But it's not just instructions to Timothy.

In fact, this letter that is addressed to Timothy was actually written to the Christians in his church. And Paul kind of gives that away right at the end of the letter.

[2 : 1 6] The last thing he says is, grace be with you all. Which proves that he's actually writing this letter for all the Christians, for all the church. And therefore, this call to fight is the call to all Christians to fight for their churches.

Are you willing to fight for your church? Well, how do we do that? How do we do that as Christians? Well, that's what this letter is all about. That's what we're going to spend the next few weeks looking at. But in today's passage, at the last half of chapter 1, we discover the first and most important way to fight for your church.

And that is to fight for its message. The gospel. Because that is the first thing that is attacked in any church. We see it. And we've seen it for thousands of years.

A church collapses and it is destroyed from within once its message starts to get attacked. Once its gospel starts to get compromised. And that's what was happening in the Ephesian church.

Remember last week? We looked at how the letter started. And Paul was saying to Timothy, you've got to watch out for these false teachers who are infiltrating in your church. Because they are diverting people from the true gospel message.

[3 : 28] And that's what he said to Timothy, you need to fight for. And that's what we need to fight for. If our church is going to survive in this world. Because this world will attack its message from without and from within.

And so how do we do that? Well, to do that, we need to know what our message is. We as Christians need to be clear on what the message is. And what is at the heart of the message we have for the world.

And that is what Paul goes on to explain. And that's what we're going to be looking at this morning. The heart of our message. What is it as a Christian? What is your message to the world?

What is our message to the world as a church? What is your, if you're a Christian, what is the message, the main message that, that you have the responsibility to share with those that God has put into your life?

What is our message as Christians? Well, our message is big. Right? Our message to the world is profound. It is deep.

[4 : 29] It is wide. It is big. And there is a lot to it. It's a message about the God who made this world. And how we messed it up.

But how God has a great plan to restore it. And to bring it back to what He intended it to be. To reverse the curse that we're all under. And to bring blessing back into the world.

Our message is a message about the prophesied one who has now entered into our history. And has begun that process. And who turned out incredibly to be the creator Himself in human flesh.

Who came right into our mess to rescue us from it. Who bore our suffering. Who died. Who rose. And then who left us with real power to transform our lives.

And transform the world around us. And who is coming back one day to bring perfect justice. And make all things new. That is our message.

[5 : 32] And it is huge. And it takes a lifetime to fully grasp all of those aspects of that message. It takes a lifetime to fully appreciate the extent of the great story we're caught up in.

And it takes a while to learn how to communicate all things. Right? All those things to the people around us. But. But. At the heart. Of our message.

Is actually a very simple. Yet profound truth. What it all comes down to. Do you want to know what it is? Well if we're going to fight for our message.

We need to know what it is. And it is in verse 15. Have a look in your Bibles. I had it on the screen of course. We don't have that. So I want you to look at that verse. If you don't have your Bible in front of you.

Get your phone out. Go to Bible Gateway. Or get your Bible app open. And look at 1 Timothy 1.15. Because this is the heart of our message. All that stuff that I mentioned. About the great gospel message.

[6 : 34] Comes down to this. Verse 15. Let me read it. This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

And I am the worst of them. That is the heart of the true gospel. That we are to fight for.

And so we need to make sure. Before we do anything else this morning. We need to make sure that we fully appreciate. Just what that message means. What it means for our lives.

So I am just going to look at that verse. Verse 15. I am going to say it again. And then we are going to look at the main points of it. This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

And I am the worst of them. Firstly the true gospel is for sinners. And how easily we forget that. The true gospel is for sinners.

[7 : 39] The gospel and therefore the true gospel church isn't for decent people who have their lives together. But it's for broken people who don't.

And this is one of the ways that Christianity differs from all other religious systems in the world. You know other religious systems say well you can benefit from this.

But to do that you need to qualify. If you want to benefit from this religion you need to qualify somehow. You need to do certain things. You need to be a particular type of person. Well you know in Christianity your only qualification to benefit from it is that you need to be a sinner.

That's it. And then Paul makes this point by using himself as a perfect example of that. Look at verse 13. Even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man.

And yet I received mercy. I of all people Paul says received mercy. Now we've got to understand you've heard of the apostle Paul. He writes a lot of the stuff in scripture.

[8 : 48] God used him to reveal a lot and to plant churches. But did you know who he was before he became a Christian? He was a bad guy. He used to persecute Christians.

He used to round them up. Drag them out of their homes. And put them into prison. Often standing and watching their executions. Paul was the bad guy.

You know in the movies there's a bad guy normally. And he's the guy in the movies that you want to see taken out by the hero. He's the anti-hero.

It's the guy you want to see justice done. Paul was the bad guy. And it turns out the bad guy is the one Jesus wants to save.

The bad guy in the movie? That's who Jesus came for. The bad guys. In fact he described this to us in Mark 2.

[9 : 46] You don't have to turn there. But I want to read you a very important account in Mark. Where Jesus was hanging out with a bunch of really bad people. And you can imagine the religious establishment wasn't very pleased with this.

Let me read to you what happened. Mark 2 verse 16 to 17. When the scribes who were Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors.

They asked his disciples. Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? When Jesus heard this. He told them. It is not the healthy who need a doctor.

But the sick. I didn't come to call the righteous. But sinners. See and the decent people. They didn't like that one bit.

They didn't like this rabbi. This person who was claiming to be the Messiah. Was hanging out with the sinners. Not with them. Just like Jonah. We read earlier.

[10 : 47] Jonah didn't like the fact that God wanted to save Nineveh. Who were wicked people. Jonah complained at God. It's humorous actually.

He complained at God. He says I knew you were merciful. I knew you were compassionate. I knew you would save these people. That's why I didn't want to go. Because he was grumpy. Because he's been a decent person.

And yet it looks like God actually cares about the most wicked people. And that's exactly what Jesus did. That's exactly the type of people who Jesus gravitated to.

You know when he was here. And when he walked this earth. And when he did things. He gravitated to. You'll notice in the narrative. The worst of sinners. He didn't go to the respectable righteous people.

He went to the prostitutes. He went to the sinners. He went to the thieves. He gravitated to the worst of sinners. Because that is who he came for. And so it stands to reason that his church should be a place for those people.

[11 : 54] Shouldn't it? If that's who he came for. Shouldn't his church be a place for those kinds of people. Not just the decent people. A church is a hospital.

Not a day spa. A church is not here to pamper the spiritually healthy. But it's here to give life saving treatment for the spiritually sick.

But I think many churches don't act that way. Right? Let's be honest. Many churches I don't think realize that that's what they're called to be. Many churches I think have the attitude of are you qualified to be here?

Do you qualify to be amongst us? Are you Christian enough? Are you good enough? Are you decent enough? And if we're brutally honest with ourselves. I think each of us, part of us doesn't want people in our churches or in our lives who are too messed up.

Right? Who have too many problems that will burden us. And so we select and we curate the people that we allow into our lives. People who are decent enough. Not the messed up people.

[13 : 09] Oh, you know, other people can handle those people. You know, maybe they can go to other places. But not our church. We're decent here, aren't we? Let's be honest. That is actually a sinful attitude in each one of us.

But you know what that's like saying? That's like saying, well, we don't want the very sick people in hospital. No, we just want the mildly sick people in hospital.

Because it would be much more pleasant that way, right? And we don't want the very sick people to chase away the normal healthy people in the hospital. I mean, it's ridiculous, right? To say that.

And yet that's our attitude often as Christians in churches. But let me tell you, a medic who doesn't want to be around sick people shouldn't be a medic, right?

Well, a Christian who doesn't want to be around sinners or broken people shouldn't bear the name of Christ. Because that's exactly who Christ came for. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

[14 : 12] But that is good news for any of us who are sinners, right? It should be great news if you're one of them.

Because maybe, let's ask yourself, maybe you don't feel like you belong here this morning. Maybe some Sundays you do because you lived a good week.

But maybe this morning you don't feel like you belong here. Or maybe you never have. Maybe you come here and you feel like an alien in church. Because your life is too messed up. There's too much deep shame that you haven't told anyone about.

And you think you're being a hypocrite being here. You think you're living a lie. Or maybe this week you've just failed miserably in some way in what you've thought or said or done.

When you fail to be the person you know you should be and you don't feel like you should be here. When you pray the prayers to God you feel like you shouldn't come to Him. You shouldn't approach Him.

[15 : 16] You're too messed up. Well I want to tell you if you feel that way this morning, you're exactly who Jesus came for. You, feeling messed up, feeling like you're too much of a sinner, that is exactly who Jesus left heaven and came to earth for.

And that is who this church exists for. And so you are welcome here. When you sin and when you fail and when you're overcome with guilt and you say to yourself, I'm not good enough.

I failed again. I thought I was over that sin but now I've done it again and I keep on, I just can't get this right. Do you feel that way? I feel that way. We all feel that way at times.

And I want to tell you when you feel that way, that is exactly when you need to recite this trustworthy saying in 1 Timothy 1.15. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and I'm the worst of them.

When you are, when you've just fallen again, when you've just failed again and you're just feeling the depth of your sin and you're feeling the shame of it and you're thinking I can't do this.

[16 : 30] I can't be a Christian. You need to recite this verse. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and I am the worst of them. That is the true gospel message.

And that is the message this church exists to proclaim. But just as important as Christ coming for sinners is what this trustworthy saying also tells us is that he came to save.

He didn't just come for sinners, he came to save sinners. Right? So what does that mean? What does it mean that the true gospel saves?

What does that word mean? What does that mean? Christ came into the world to save sinners. Well, Paul describes this again using his own life as an example.

Verse 14. Look what he says. And the grace of our Lord overflowed along with the faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus.

[17 : 36] He's talking about his own life. He says, I was once the bad guy. I was once a terrible sinner. I did terrible things. Then he says, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ overflowed into his life along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

This word overflowed is an interesting one in the original. It literally can be translated. It super abounded. It super abounded. It didn't just abounded. It didn't just flow out to me, but it overflowed.

It super abounded. It more than made up for Paul's sin. It overpowered his sin. It overpowered his sin. In that it not only forgave him his sin, but it did more. It did more than forgive him.

It overpowered his sin and transformed him. It gave him, what does he say? In verse 14. The faith and the love that are in Christ Jesus.

That's how it super abounded. It gave him life-changing faith. It changed how he viewed the world and changed what he lived for. And it gave him real love for God's people.

[18 : 40] Genuine love. I mean, if you think about his change and why it's such an appropriate example of the point that he's making here. He was a vehement hater of Christians.

Of all people in the world, he hated Christians the most. He loved tracking them down and dragging them out of their homes and throwing them into prison and persecuting them and watching them stoned to death.

He loved it because he hated Christians and he thought he was doing God a favor. He thought he was serving God by doing this. He changed from being a vehement hater of Christians to the Paul we read about in Scripture.

A man who gave his life in service of the least of Christians. And he deeply loved them. You read through his letters how he writes to these Christians he used to hate and persecute.

He loves them like a father to a child. He writes to Timothy, my child, my son, Timothy. He often just asks after people. He's so concerned about them. He loves them so much.

[19 : 43] What a change. Well, that is what real salvation looks like. That is what it means to be saved. It changes people.

It really changes people. We often make the mistake of thinking that salvation is referring to something in the future. When we talk about being saved, we think automatically being saved in the future, going to heaven when you die kind of thing.

But in the Bible, salvation is just as much talking about something in the present. Being saved from sin now. To be a person of real faith and genuine love in increasing measure.

Now. And that's how you can know that you've heard and believed the real gospel. It changes you. It's saving you from the power of sin now in your life.

And I mean, if you don't experience any of that present salvation, well, then you can't assume you have future salvation. Because salvation means it changes your life now.

[20 : 53] Just like it did Paul's. Maybe not as drastically, but in ways that you can see and in increasing measure. If you are saved, your life, like Paul's, demonstrates God's grace.

It is a demonstration of God's transforming power. Look at verse 16. That's how he puts it. He says, But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life.

But Paul sees God's grace in his life as a demonstration. And that is the truth of all Christians who truly believe the gospel. We are demonstrations to the world of grace.

We are demos. We are demo models. You know, you go to a phone shop. Maybe you want to buy a phone. And they've got these demos on the table, you know, with the strings attached so you can't take them.

And if you try to pull them off, then... Anyway, the point is... They're demonstration models. So you've got these demo models that you can look at, you can play with, and you can see what the real phone looks like.

[22 : 10] Well, you know what we are, Christians, who have believed the gospel? We are demos of God's grace so the world can see what God looks like. And the way God loves demoing that grace to the world is by choosing the worst of sinners and saving them.

And you know what that means? That means that whoever you are, no matter how messed up your life is, God longs to demonstrate his grace through you in your life.

And the worse it is, the more he can. That's what he excels in. That's what he specializes in. You can never be too sinful or too messed up for God's superabounding grace.

Because that's exactly the type of person God loves saving. That's what he's about. And so if you are a Christian, is that what you're about?

Showing grace to the worst of sinners. Because this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. Christ, Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

[23 : 33] And I'm the worst of them. That is the gospel we need to fight for. That is the heart of the true gospel. And so we must make sure that it is at the heart of our church.

And at the heart of each of our lives if we call ourselves Christians. Well, let's pray that it will be. Will you bow with me? Oh Lord, we are overwhelmed by your superabounding grace.

Lord Jesus, this reminder this morning that you came into the world to save the worst of sinners. That's what you're about.

And Lord, we confess when we, not only when we think that we are not that sinful.

But when we try to pursue in our lives relationships with people because they're decent.

[24 : 42] And yet you came and sought out the worst of sinners. Lord, would you help us to exhibit that kind of grace in our lives. And we thank you that you didn't limit yourself to the decent people.

Because there are no truly decent people. Lord, help us to be real about our sin. And help us to remember when we are feeling guilty.

When we are feeling ashamed. Lord, would you help us to memorize and recall to mind. This trustworthy saying that demands full acceptance.

That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the worst of them. Thank you for this promise. Amen.