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Faithful to the Truth

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Introduction

Navigation isn't my strong point. Ask Claire to tell you about the time I tried to lead the family to a lighthouse, and it went badly wrong. I can't even blame it on age, as I've never been great. I remember as a student in Glasgow, I used to have a bit of time before catching the train home, and I'd go into John Menzies or W H Smiths to browse for a while. When I came out, more often than not I'd turn the wrong way.

I always went through the same four stages. First of all I'd look up expecting to see the Highlandman's Umbrella - the bridge of Central Station over Argyle Street. Instead I'd see that I was walking past Marks and Spencers. Secondly the realisation would dawn that I was going the wrong way. Third would be a 180 degrees turn, so I was facing the right way. And finally I'd hurry towards the station to catch the train.

That third stage was the hardest. It was a bit embarrassing to admit I was wrong and turn around. So sometimes I would keep going the wrong way. I'd take a left turn at the next junction. Then work my way back round to where I'd started. Sometimes too late to catch the train.

Often in life we need to accept the truth, that we're going the wrong way, turn around and start following the right way.

Recap

In Paul's letters to Timothy he has written several times about those going the wrong way. He says they swerved from the truth. Last week we read about some of the terrible characters causing problems to the church in Ephesus. Timothy was to avoid them. And our passage this evening starts with the words "You, however". Timothy is to be different from those people. He is to be someone faithful to the truth.

Following Paul

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, [2 Timothy 3v 10]

Timothy knows better than to be like those people Paul warned him about in the first half of the chapter. How does he know better? Because he has been a pupil of Paul. He hasn't just learned from Paul, observing him over the years they were together, but he has "followed" him. Timothy had learned to imitate Paul in the good things he was teaching. And not just by his words. In fact Paul's teaching is just the first thing in his list. Timothy also knew about Paul's conduct: the way he lived his life and treated others. He knew about Paul's aim in life. What was that? Well in Paul's letter to the Philippians Paul talks about his aim:

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [Philippians 3 v 13]

What was that one thing Paul wanted? To know Christ and to be like him. That was his one aim. And all the things Paul did in his ministry were to forward that aim. The other attributes of Paul's character were also things Timothy had seen and had imitated: Paul's faith, patience, love and steadfastness. If Timothy continued to practise these things he was going to turn out alright. And these things all flowed from the truth that Paul had taught him.

Paul's Persecutions

But it's not all sweetness and light. In fact there was a good deal of hardship. And Paul knows that Timothy is aware of all the persecution he has suffered:

my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. [2 Timothy 3 v 11]

- In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas had great success, and many came to salvation, but the Jewish leaders stirred up anger against them and they were thrown out. They shook the dust off their feet and carried on to Iconium.
- Again in Iconium they had good success, with lots of converts. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up trouble again. The city was divided for and against the apostles, and there was a plot hatched to stone Paul and his team. But they found out about it and escaped. They fled to Lystra.
- In Lystra they preached again, and healed a lame man. The locals were so impressed they thought Paul and Barnabas were gods and wanted to sacrifice to them. But the Jews from Antioch and Iconium caught up with them and persuaded the people of Lystra to stone Paul, until he was dead, or at least they thought he was. The disciples escaped to the nearby town of Derbe.

Timothy knew all about these sufferings of Paul. He saw how Paul endured, and he saw how God rescued him. But perhaps even more impactfully, he saw what Paul did next:

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. [Acts 14 v 21-22]

You see persecution isn't a sign that you're doing something wrong. Quite the opposite: when we are serving the Lord effectively then we should expect opposition. Paul says so in the next verse:

Inevitable Persecution

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. [2 Timothy 3 v 12-13]

Serving God is not easy. Of course we don't like pain, we don't like opposition, but we should expect it. What makes it bearable is that we know it's a sign that we're doing the right thing. It

might seem unfair that godly people suffer while the wicked keep on doing their evil seemingly with impunity. However we know that God's judgement will come. And we know that those deceivers are themselves being deceived. They think they're winning, but they're heading for torment.

Remember Your Teacher

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [2 Timothy 3v 14]

Bringing the focus back on Timothy again, Paul says to remember and continue in what he has learned, remembering who taught him. Not just Paul, but his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, who had brought up Timothy to know and trust the scriptures.

How thankful are we for those who have taught us? Not just preachers, but parents, Sunday school teachers, older brothers and sisters in the church. And not just by teaching but by example. It's all very well the preacher saying we should love one another, but the sister who goes and sits with a new arrival, the brother who stands in the cold and welcomes everyone in, the couple who invite others over to dinner, these are living examples of that love.

The message is the same to us: continue in what you have learned and believed, knowing from whom you have learned it.

Wise for Salvation

and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [2 Timothy 3 v 15]

Are you acquainted with the scriptures? Do you know your Bible? If someone was teaching something contrary to the Bible, do you know it well enough to spot that? Scripture is so important. Sadly it is often relegated to second position. Have you ever watched a sermon that was mainly about the speaker's life, and experience? If there's more content on the speaker than from the Word, there's a problem. Because the scriptures tell us about Jesus. They make us wise for salvation. Read your Bibles. As we sing to the children: read your Bibles, pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow.

The Purpose of Scripture

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [2 Timothy 3 v 16]

We say that the writings in the Bible are "inspired", that is they are "breathed in" from what God has "breathed out". They are the words of men and reflect the character and nature of those men, but their true source is God. And what are they good for?

Well, the scriptures are good for teaching. They show us the truths about the world around us, about the creator who made it all, about his nature, his holiness, and the sin of man.

They are also good for reproof. They are a warning that we're going the wrong way. That our sin is leading us away from God, not towards him.

They are good for correction, showing us that we need to turn around. The bible uses the word "repent" for this, but it just means doing a 180 degree turn so that we're facing the right way.

And they're also good for training in righteousness. They show us how we should walk, how we should be living our lives. They help us to walk the right path.

That third step is often the hardest. People let pride get in the way and don't want to admit they were wrong. They think that they can get to God their own way, by making small adjustments to their walk that they think will eventually get them round to God's way.

Those people are going to miss the train.

The Goal

> *that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. [2 Timothy 3 v 17]*

That's why the Bible is so important. It shows us the way to salvation through faith in Jesus. It shows us how to live our lives as Christians. And it helps us to show others the same message that we have received and believed. By following it we become complete, mature, equipped for every good work, ready to serve the Lord.

Summary - Where are You?

So where are you?

Are you at the first stage, where you are seeking out truth? I urge you to read what God has to say, about the world, about himself, about humanity, and about sin.

Have you seen that there is a God, but you're not sure of your own position? Let the Word show you that you're going the wrong way. And it's not just you, we're all like that. The Bible says we are like sheep, we wander off in our own direction.

Have you been confronted by your sin and realised that things need to change? The Bible says "repent". Turn away from your sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only way of salvation. The good thing is you don't have to try and work out what's the best way for you. There is only one way, and that way is Jesus. It is only by his sacrifice that we can be saved.

And if you are saved, this book should be your daily guide for how to live your life. It should guide your thoughts, your words and your actions. If we do that we can be like Timothy, faithful to the truth.

It should also be your weapon in spiritual warfare. It is the way you can show someone else the way of salvation.

Follow the Word. Don't try and do it yourself. Don't miss the train.