

Sermon – 2 Timothy 1:1-2:13. 6th May 2007.

* III – Olympic torch relay

What's your favourite part of the Olympic Games? I remember before the 2000 Olympic Games watching the torch relay – the only part of the Olympic games I saw! 127 days, 27,000 kms, and 13,300 torch-bearers. Three things struck me about that torch relay.

* **First:** Every person who carried the flame considered it a privilege. No-one was ashamed of it.

Second, nothing stopped it. It even went underwater at the Great Barrier Reef!

Third, it had to make it to the end. It had to make it to Olympic Stadium.

Hold on to that thought for a moment and let me give a little background to 2 Timothy:

The chapters of 2 Timothy are the words of a dying man, written about 66AD in a dungeon somewhere in Rome. Nero is Emperor and Paul knew he was facing death. He writes to Timothy, a young minister, around 30, who will probably replace Paul as the next Bishop. There is a lot of persecution under Emperor Nero. Many Christians have fallen away. There are false teachers and heresies all around. Timothy faces a lot of challenges. But as Paul writes, he's passing on the flame of the gospel to Timothy with some important instructions:

- * 1. Don't be ashamed of the gospel.
2. Don't let anything stop you preaching it.
3. And endure until the very end.

Let's have a look at these instructions one at a time.

*** 1. Do not be ashamed.**

Timothy carries the flame of the gospel, passed on to him from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice who taught him God's word as he grew up. And passed onto him also by Paul himself, who laid hands on him and commissioned him for his work as a minister. But it seems Timothy is a bit of a shy man. He is faithful. But Paul wants him to be **bold**. These are difficult times. And Timothy will need to stand up against many enemies.

Paul says to him in verse 7:

** "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me as his prisoner."*

Don't be ashamed of Jesus. Don't be timid about the gospel. Take the gifts that God has given you and fan them into flame. For Timothy it was the gift of leadership in preaching and pastoring. **You** may have the gift of hospitality or the gift of preaching, the gift of administration or the gift of welcoming, the gift of cleaning or cooking or pastoral care or encouragement. Whatever gift God has given you, fan it into flame, because it is a gift from God! **Don't** be ashamed of what he has gifted you with. Use your gifts for the gospel..

1. Don't be ashamed.

*** 2. Don't let anything stop you!**

Have you ever heard that expression "No pain, no gain"? Look at 1:8 with me:

"So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me as his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God"

Often we like to think that running a race is full of glory. But Paul's invitation to Timothy is not to join him on a glory filled tour, but to join him in *suffering*. Running a race, a marathon, is not romantic. It's hard work. The only glory comes at the end. Everything from the start until the end is hard work. Pain.

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Let me tell you about Angelo. He was a fire-fighter. In February of 2000 he was diagnosed with cancer. Angelo had five young children. Before he died, he sent a letter to the fire station he worked at. Listen to what he wrote:

"Hi guys,

I used to ask "WHY," all the time. "Why do bad things happen to good people? Why me? One day, while getting chemotherapy, I saw a small boy, maybe 8 or 9 years old awaiting some tests. He looked pale and weak and he had no hair. It was then that I realized just how lucky I am. Here was a young boy, sick with this terrible disease and he was laughing and playing with a Gameboy.

*Everyday since then, I've awakened happy! I look at my girls and watch them laugh...that's what it's all about – smiling, laughing, enjoying every minute to the max. **So what** about the traffic...**who cares** about the Contract?*

I know many of you don't feel that lucky right now, but YOU ARE. You have each other. You have your families. You have your health. Please learn to enjoy it all. Like the saying goes, "Don't sweat the small stuff." More than anything please appreciate what you have while you have it! ...

Love your wife and kids a little more. Give out more hugs. Laugh ... at least once a day. I guarantee you'll feel better.

... May God bless and keep you. Angelo"

It sounds nice. Nice sentiments. Nice thoughts. But let's think about some of those thoughts – "enjoy what you have while you have it.", "Laugh at least once a day", "enjoy every minute to the max".

They're sentiments that a lot of people like to hear. But while they sound nice, they are **hopeless**. They are **without hope**, because Angelo talks about **death** as being **final**. The end. Of everything. They are meant to be encouraging words from a dying man. But all they say is: "This is as good as it gets – make the most out of it. There's nothing else."

Yet when we look at the last words of Paul, they are **full** of hope! He tells us why he is so willing to go through the suffering he faces, why he's willing to sit in a dungeon waiting for his head to be chopped off, and not be afraid. I can't imagine Paul was laughing at least once a day in that dungeon! Where does Paul's hope come from in the midst of his suffering? From God's grace ... "the grace that has (*) been given to us by God through the appearing of our saviour Jesus Christ (verse 10) "*who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel... (verse 12)... that is why I am suffering as I am.*"

Enjoy every minute of this life? RUBBISH! DEVOTE every minute of this life to something worthwhile – to **someone** worthwhile. Because we haven't got just one life to **LIVE**, we've got just one life to **GIVE**.

Everyone in the province of Asia had deserted Paul, except Onisephorus. Paul had been rejected by his own brothers and sisters. Many Christians had fallen away because the pain was too much, the suffering was too much under persecution. Angelo's answer to Paul is "Come on Paul! Enjoy every minute to the max!" Rubbish. Paul knows who he has put his faith in. Nothing will stop him, even in his suffering. Will anything stop you?

1. Don't be ashamed. 2. Don't let anything stop you. And finally,

*** 3. Endure until the very end.**

Paul gives us 3 great metaphors to think about in chapter 2:

*** First, the Soldier.** v3: "*Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ. No-one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer.*"

A good soldier doesn't stand face to face with the enemy and start thinking about if he left the iron on at home! When you're fighting a war, your mind is focussed on serving your commander. This doesn't mean that we **ignore** the world around us. It means that we don't become **entangled** in the civilian world. This world is not the centre of your universe. Your aim is to please your commander. Be **IN** the world. But don't be entangled **BY** the world.

* **Second, the Athlete.** v5: *“Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules.”*

You can’t cheat as a Christian! There’s no easy way through! When you come to the challenges that the world throws at you, there’s no easy way around them. God doesn’t promise to **remove** the hard times. He promises to bring us **through** them. I think many of us might imagine that if we were threatened with death, we would stand firm in our faith. But often we find it difficult to have the courage to stand up under the simplest of tests every day.

When I was 14 I played baseball. If I ever turned up 5 minutes late to training, I had to do 5 extra laps around the oval. 10 minutes late, 10 laps. If I SKIPPED a training session... you don’t want to know what happened!

Athletes train. Constantly.

When we say as a Christian “I’ll skip my Bible reading this week” or “I’ll just have a short prayer time.”... that’s a Christian who’s skipping the training sessions.

When we say “I don’t feel up to church” or “I’ll give Bible study a miss this week”, that’s a Christian taking a short cut in the race.

We’re too sick for church, but we’re not too sick to go to a movie,...

We don’t have time for prayer but we’d never miss dinner...

No time for ministry, but plenty of overtime at work...

When we’re happy to skip out on God, we deny Him. We cheat God. And we cheat our Christian brothers and sisters. In the end, we’re the athlete who gives up training. The one looking for the easy way. The short cut.

A friend said to me last week: *“If you feel like you’re going around in circles, it’s because you’re cutting corners.”* Don’t cut corners. Don’t look for the short cut in commitment. Don’t cheat God. Commit **fully** to the race, and you will be able to finish it.

* **Finally, the farmer:** verse 6:

“The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.”

Hard work and training. Train hard with God’s word. Don’t make it an option. Struggle hard to avoid sin, all the time remembering that you struggle with the strength of God’s Spirit within you. As Paul says in verse 14: *“Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”*

It’s exhausting to be a Christian. **Did God EVER say** it would be easy to follow him? We’re saved by the work of Christ on the cross. So isn’t the appropriate response to give ourselves **wholeheartedly** to the work of the gospel?

Being a Christian isn’t about taking it easy. It’s about working hard **NOW** for the rest we’re going to enjoy **LATER** in heaven. **NOW** is the time to work hard. **THEN** we will share in the harvest.

* In a nutshell, what Paul is saying in these chapters is that we are **“saved to serve”**. Look with me finally at 2:10 –

“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.”

It is for the sake of the salvation of people that we work hard and endure to the end. When we’re tired we persevere. When we’re discouraged, we find strength in prayer. When we’re alone, we seek God’s guidance through his Word. When we’re timid and weak, we seek the strength of his Spirit. But we DO NOT give up, because we are saved to serve.

* Don’t be ashamed. Don’t let anything stop you. Make sure you endure until the very end.