

Guard the Good Deposit

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: 03 September 2023

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 01] Well, I didn't plan it in this way, but in God's providence we have topped and tailed the summer with sermons about the place of a minister in a church.

We've had gaps between our series as they've come up. I have chosen to preach from key passages in the New Testament about what ministry is, the New Testament work of ministry, because this time next week what ministry looks like here at Bon Accord will have changed. Not in character, not in content, I hope we'll see that as we go on, but who you hear from on Sunday, what it looks like, what it feels like, how I work, how we work, and tonight I want to take this last opportunity before it changes to assure you from God's word that what matters most isn't changing.

What matters most isn't changing. In fact, I hope we'll see that the way that we preach and honour and guard what matters most in this church will be better for the changes that we begin to see. Now, 2 Timothy is obviously the follow-on from 1 Timothy. Together with Titus, they're known as the pastoral epistles because in them Paul the Apostle is teaching and training pastors, Timothy and Titus, church leaders, about what matters most, priorities in the gospel, in the church, and how to put that into practice in church life.

[1 : 43] But by 2 Timothy, you would think that Timothy would have it all sorted, right? He's had one letter. Hasn't he got it all done and dusted?

This is the last letter from Paul that we have in our Bibles. This is Paul's last words in Scripture. Timothy, decades have passed since what he describes at the start of this letter.

Timothy's learning the faith from his mother and grandmother as a child, his early training with Paul, his ordination as a minister.

Timothy, by this time, is not like me and Donald, starting out in ministry. He is a seasoned pastor. He's seen conflict. He's got scars.

We know that from our time in 1 Timothy last year. And so the remarkable thing about this letter really is how unsurprising it is. You know, I don't know what you think happens at ministers' conferences or behind closed doors at our seminary at ETS.

[2 : 47] But there is no secret wisdom being passed on. There's no 67th book of the Bible only for the initiators. We all only have the Bible.

And it should give us a lot of confidence to know at the end of his life, when he's about to be poured out as a drink offering, as he will say, that Paul doesn't take Timothy aside and say, oh, Timothy, here's the secret.

Here's the silver bullet. No, what does he say in 1 verse 8? Just look at these verses with me. He says, 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. Why? He has 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 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 brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

[3 : 56] That's the message. Paul's last words. The gospel. And do you know when Timothy learned that? Not from this letter. On his mother's knee. This is nothing knee.

Why is Paul writing to him then to remind him about Christianity day one? Okay, basic gospel truths. Well, because, friends, that is all we have.

That is Christianity beginning to end. That's what I have. That's what you have. It's what Paul had. It's what Timothy had. Paul doesn't have anything kind of hiding in the bottom of his apostolic bag

that he has to kind of pull out at the end.

Paul has emptied his apostolic bag, and all that is in it is that. The gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. He has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we've done, but because of his purpose and grace.

That's the message. This is what Donald and I learned at ETS. This is what we were taught in the churches where we trained. This is what we preach. So understand, we have no right to stand here and preach and teach anything but what comes from the Bible in your hands that you have at home.

[5 : 13] Because that is Christianity beginning to end. The gospel is not the ABC of our faith. It is the A to Z of our faith, top to bottom. That is the remarkable thing about 2 Timothy.

You can read it later on. Just notice, there are no secrets. There's nothing new. Donald and I don't get to preach because we're in on the secret and you're not.

Simply because that's the work that we've been called to in God's kingdom, but we all only have the Bible. 2 Timothy 3, verse 16. It might be a verse you've memorized.

It's well known. But what comes straight after it, notice? All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Often we stop at verse 16, don't we, and say the Bible is inspired. It tells us where it came from. But Paul's going on to make the point in verse 17, isn't he, that therefore the Bible is sufficient.

[6 : 20] It tells us what it does. His point is, because the Bible is breathed out from God, it is from God all the way.

It is his word. But therefore it is all a minister needs for every good work. Fully equipped. Just puts through the shredder, doesn't it?

Every novel technique. A new model. A new way of doing it, doesn't it? Who on the back of that has any right to come along and say, I have something extra to give you on top of what every generation of ministers has ever had with a Bible in their hands?

The Bible is a minister's training manual, tool belt, mat, sword. I got a Swiss army knife as a gift a few years ago. It is nothing compared to this book. And again, here's the punch.

When did Timothy first get his hands on a Bible? Was it the day he was ordained? Was it when Paul decided he was ready? No. 3 verse 15.

[7 : 25] As for you, continue in what you've learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you've known from the Holy Scriptures, who are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus?

You know, I can't remember the first time the Bible was read to me. Imagine it's the same for Donald. Maybe his mother can. But understand, Paul has nothing more to give us than that. Read to you this letter tonight, later in the week, and just take that in, that there is no point at which Christianity is more complicated than Christ in the gospel that is revealed in your Bible.

It's not simplistic, but it is as simple as that. Simple enough for a two-year-old to understand, and deep enough for the greatest thinkers that our world has ever seen to delve into and enjoy throughout their entire lives.

And so when Donald and I meet, it won't be to talk about mysteries. When we meet as elders, it is not to discuss secrets. It is to talk about this book and how to preach it and teach it and live it and apply it to our church family.

[8 : 40] And I hope tonight that you are as excited about that as I am. Does that excite you? Really, the rest of our time tonight, I just want to kind of press that truth into a few areas of church life so that we can begin to see how that will look and feel for us at Bon Accord over the next while.

And let's start in the most obvious place, I guess, which is preaching on a Sunday. How will that look, given what we have heard? Well, there are different ways to share Sundays. Lots of you have been part of different churches.

Maybe you've seen it done in certain ways before. Even if you did a survey of free church congregations, you would notice a great variety in the way that ministers share a pulpit or teams of preachers.

There are lots of moving parts. Preachers and services and sermon series. This is the first time that Donald or I have done it. I think it's the first time it's maybe been done here at Bon Accord, at least in living memory, I think.

So the question is, what is the fixed point? What is the pivot around which everything else revolves? Well, get this, Donald and I were on the phone and I suggested a way that we might be able to do it and Donald said if he had had a blank sheet of paper and come up with a way of doing it from scratch, that is what he would have come up with.

[10:02] It's a good start, isn't it? I expect we won't always be that in sync. However, on this we are and it is really important that we are because the fixed point has to be the word.

The pivot around which all else revolves has to be the sermon series. The Bible is 66 books. Normally we'll be preaching through two of them at a time, morning and evening. But the books of the Bible have to take priority over us, the preacher. So what does that mean? That means from next Sunday you will get Ecclesiastes, probably for 13 weeks in the evening. And from October you will get the beginning of Matthew's Gospel in the morning. And those series will be fixed in those services. That will be what is consistent. But what about the preacher? Isn't the preacher a fixed part in this system? I guess one model, maybe, is that the minister does the morning and the assistant does the evening. Why is that?

[11:13] Sometimes we maybe see the morning as the kind of main service, but I don't think we want to reinforce that, do we? The church gathers twice on a Sunday. And whoever is preaching, when the Bible is open, God is speaking.

And so who's preaching morning or evening won't be fixed. Donald and I want to share the services and the sermon series. Why is that? Well, it stresses visibly that the word of God stands apart from the preacher.

Whether it is me or Donald or whoever, when the word of God is being preached, God is speaking. To quote the Reformers, the faithful preaching of the word of God is the word of God. It is not our personal thoughts and reflections about his word. It is God's word being spoken and preached. And me and Donald and the other elders, we are simply undershepherds of the chief shepherd.

We are servants of the lead pastor. Okay, that's not me. I hope you know that. That is Jesus Christ. On Saturday, Donald will take a vow, as I have and the other elders have, to uphold the headship of Christ over his church.

[12:29] And that no lesser human power should come to override or take control from his leadership over his church. And Christ leads his church by his word.

He says in John 10, my sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. We hear his voice. And so we want to bake that into the way that we do things here so that no one's left with the impression that one preacher or another is ultimately in charge or more in charge than he really is or should be.

Brothers and sisters, Christ is who we want to hear and Christ is who we want to follow. Christ we proclaim. And we think it's really important not only that we do that, but how we do that. So what will you see on a Sunday? Normally, Donald and I will take one service each and every few weeks we'll switch. So it shouldn't feel bumpy, hopefully.

There should be some element of consistency. But ultimately, we want to root that consistency in the word, not the preacher. We're not the first to do it, not made it up. In fact, there is a New Testament precedent.

[13:43] Sometimes your church wanted Paul to go or Paul wanted to go to a church, but he sent Timothy. And he doesn't tell the church, Timothy is just there as a kind of filler or stopgap until I get there and then really start preaching.

He says to Timothy in the church's hearing, preach the word, do the work of an evangelist and trust the gospel to faithful guys. Because for Paul, it didn't matter whether it was him or Timothy that was preaching, as long as it was Christ being preached from the word of God.

Preaching. Secondly, partnership. partnership. One verse eight, Paul says, 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. Join with me. A partnership is so important, not least between ministers in the same church.

That might sound like a really obvious thing to say, but it doesn't always happen. Ministers and gospel workers working closely together. It's something that Anne and Judy and I have worked really hard on this last year.

[14:59] Maybe you know the expression, culture eats strategy for breakfast. We might make any number of plans, but if we're not together, it won't happen. That's the principle.

We've worked hard on it. We're still working on it. It's something we're trying to do more widely in the church as well because you don't bring someone on board and just load them with stuff and send them off to do it.

You bring them on to share the load within the team. Join with me. Join with me. Partnership. There's back and forth.

There's communication, conflict, compromise, and you can expect the same from me and Donald. We're sharing sermon series. That takes partnership. And I can hear some of you maybe thinking, oh great, we're going to get to hear what two guys think about a book of the Bible now.

We're going to get Donald's thoughts and Joe's thoughts about Ecclesiastes. Well, I'm sorry. You will get two preachers, two hearts, two minds, two styles of preaching, but we're going to be working together on it.

[16:02] We want to understand the book and preach the book, not what Joe thinks and what Donald thinks. Partnership. But it goes beyond preaching. Partnership in ministry means not two separate ministries with two separate agendas, but one ministry of the church carried out by two ministers, elders, deacons, members, all of us pulling in the same direction.

And that has to happen first among the elders and the ministers. But of course, it includes all of us. Teamwork makes the dream work. So Donald and I are going to spend quite a bit of time together. There's going to be things that we are each more invested in than the other that we're going to be able to do independently of one another. That's part of the benefit of bringing somebody else in, sharing the work.

But the operative word is sharing, not dumping. And partnership too is something that people can be brought in on. Without partnership, you can't train people for work and for ministry.

In fact, all the way up to the training of new ministers, the free church have enshrined that as a principle in the way that we train new ministers. See, if Paul had just picked Timothy up and given him tasks to do and sent him off to do them, he probably wouldn't be writing him letters because that isn't how you learn how to be a gospel minister.

[17:33] Instead, Paul can say, you, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance. Because he said to Timothy, join with me.

Join with me. Talk with me. Walk with me. Work with me. Partnership. But where does the team ethic come from? Where does the team culture come from for partnership?

Well, thirdly, pattern. Pattern. This is 1 verse 13. Just have a look. But Paul writes, what you heard from me keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you. Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. So Paul is saying he has given Timothy a pattern to follow.

That there is a pattern of words. The gospel. But also a pattern of life and of suffering. This is 3 verse 10. You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

[18:47] It's a pattern that Paul has given Timothy to work with. A gospel attitude to life and church and ministry. That's the basis of their working together.

That is the basis of our partnership here at Bon Accord. Me and Donald, the elders, the wider team. And it doesn't matter, actually, how far you scale up. The partnership between the six churches, us and five others that have partnered to set up the ministry training academy, even there. It is this pattern, this character, this way of life, this form of words that is the basis of that partnership.

I would even go as far as to say that where that pattern isn't the basis of partnership, that partnership won't get very far. Now, that doesn't mean that we're cookie-cutter ministers, but rather that through our personalities, our circumstances, our families, that it's this character, this pattern that we're working out in Christian life and ministry.

And I think there's three elements to this pattern in 2 Timothy. You might spot more, but just to touch on them briefly. Firstly, the pattern of sound teaching. That is the story of the gospel, our confession of faith.

[20:14] Again, it's a vow Donald will take, as I and the other elders have, to uphold our church's confession, the Westminster confession of faith. That is to say, this is the essence of what we

believe the Bible teaches, and we will teach it.

That is a good deposit, a pattern of words entrusted to us. The truth. And you don't have to look very far to see that it needs guarding. We need to be sure what the gospel is.

We need to know our Bible truths. We need to preach them and teach them. The saying applies, if you don't use it, you lose it. And churches have lost it because it has fallen into disuse.

Because ministers and elders stopped bothering with the gospel and the basic truths of the Bible. and it doesn't get rejected at first. Other things just take the front seat and the Bible takes the back seat until eventually it is forgotten and then it is rejected.

So something that ministers can do for one another is sharpen one another's understanding and convictions. Like iron sharpens iron.

[21 : 30] We can make sure that we are following the pattern of sound words, that we are preaching the truth. we can challenge and correct and encourage and feed back. We both want that. I think it can speak for both of us in saying we want to become better preachers of God's word because we have been entrusted with a good deposit and we can guard it better together than we can on our own with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, pattern of life. I've said before from here that it's always character over competence in the New Testament. Who you are is always more important than what you do.

Paul's clear on that again in chapter 3. Notice the thing he hits hardest about the false teachers isn't necessarily what they have to say though he does but at the start of chapter 3 it is their character.

Just a massive list isn't it? Of character deficiencies. Lovers of themselves. Lovers of money.

Lovers of money. Boastful. Proud. Abusive. Disobedient to their parents.

Ungrateful. Unholy. That's just verse 2. He goes on for another three verses like that. The issue isn't only what they're teaching but how they're living. They have a form of godliness but deny its power.

[22 : 45] That is to say they can talk the talk but they don't walk the walk. And verse 10 that we've looked at a few times is in contrast to that. You have a know all about my teaching way of life purpose faith patience love endurance.

And so again church leaders can help one another follow that pattern of life to ask how it's going and challenge and probe and encourage and pray because you know it's subtle the heart is a deceitful thing but it is possible from the pulpit to sound godly but actually deny God's power to change me in my heart and my life.

We are prone to that. We're human beings. We're sinners. We need help. Thirdly, pattern of suffering. In some ways this is the headline in 2 Timothy because gospel witness and godly lifestyle will always bring suffering.

Join me in suffering for the gospel says Paul. In fact, 3 verse 12 everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted while evil doers and imposters go from bad to worse deceiving and being deceived.

Suffering. Maybe this is the one we're most surprised by but the three go together. If you want to avoid suffering for the gospel there comes a point where you stop preaching it and living it.

[24 : 16] If you want to faithfully preach and live the gospel suffering will come. To Paul that meant going to prison. For Timothy it meant opposition and the stigma of being associated with a convict.

We don't go looking for suffering but Paul says be in no doubt that suffering will find you if you're serious about the gospel. And so Donald and I can partner in suffering as well.

Yes, in supporting one another when ministry is tough going as it can be. But more specifically urging each other not to give up in the face of opposition but to suffer with each other and point each other to the bigger picture.

What's that? Jesus said a servant isn't greater than his master. If they persecuted me they will persecute you. You sometimes brothers and sisters we need to be reminded that sometimes we suffer simply because we follow a suffering saviour.

and we need to walk together in that or we will lose hearts. We need to tell each other when suffering comes for the gospel and we endure it faithfully that that is a good sign that we really belong to Jesus.

[25 : 35] And so as I say I hope that kind of threefold pattern won't be new to us as a church. I hope you've seen something of that in this church and in this pulpit over the last couple of years but it can only get stronger with partnership.

It can only get stronger together bigger as we grow into it together. This letter is a great example of that isn't it? Brothers helping each other to live out the sound pattern of the New Testament. There's loads more that could be said about that. Maybe it's something we can talk about over coffee. Maybe you've spotted other things as well. But the last area to press into tonight is passing on.

Now this is implicit in everything that's been said because this whole letter is about Paul passing on the baton to Timothy from an apostle to a pastor. But that's not where it ends.

One bit that we didn't read but I'd like you to look up is chapter 2 verses 1 and 2. You just look at that. Paul says you then my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and the things you've heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will be qualified to teach others.

[26 : 57] So there's four generations in view there. Paul Timothy reliable others and those who are taught.

In fact Paul says in other places he insists actually that what he learned he learned personally from the risen Lord Jesus. So Jesus, Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others.

See I hope you knew that tonight we've not been speaking about a kind of special breed of Christian called a minister. What we've read tonight in these pages actually applies at some level to all of us if particularly and all the more so for ministers.

We've all been given the gospel. We've all been given a way of life. We've all been given the expectation of suffering. We're all to speak and share the gospel and the opportunities that the Lord gives us.

We're all to partner in it and be united as a church family in our life and witness. And so part of what you'll see I hope is passing on teaching, training, helping us all to grow in this.

[28 : 04] A long time ago now we ran a Bible handling training course. We want to do more of that. Some of the areas we want to work on with Donald here is in discipling new and young Christians and having input into new and existing leaders.

Passing on. One thing we have to think about as a congregation is formal ministry training. It's great, we've got the MTA here now. Let's be identifying and seeking out and training new gospel workers and ministers here in Aberdeen.

Some of you will know better than I would, when was the last time there was a free church candidate for ministry based in Bon Accord? Well now that is the free church vision that ministers in training as they are now called will be resident in a congregation to train as well as studying at ETS. Why shouldn't that be us? Do we not have the capacity and the resources to do it? We run out of room for fruitful work in the northeast of Scotland. I don't think so. Now don't think that I have a plan but we have to be thinking about it don't we?

Passing on. Passing on. So there are four areas to look out for over the coming months. Sorry this has been a whistle stop tour but I just wanted to give you a taster ahead of time and I hope we can see that what matters most isn't changing.

[29 : 36] If anything I hope we can see that it is getting stronger better more faithful more fruitful or at least let's pray that it would because by God's help it can be.

Brothers and sisters there's no secret we don't have a silver bullet but we all have the Bible we all have the Gospel we all have the Holy Spirit we all have each other and it is all about Jesus.

I hope you're excited. Let's pray together as we close. Let's pray together as we close. Let's pray together together as we close.