



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon: Rev Dr Brenda Robson

Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:5

Background to the reading

It is widely considered that this letter to Timothy was Paul's last letter. To the Philippians, Paul had written **"I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this I know that I will remain and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith."**

Contrast this with what he writes to Timothy – **"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."**

It is generally believed that Paul was martyred in Rome around AD66. He writes what could be considered his last will and testament to Timothy, his young colleague and successor in Christ's work. He probably writes from a dungeon in Rome.

When Timothy received this letter he had been working with Paul for about 15 years. He had been chosen and trained by Paul and he was his best worker, totally focused on Christ and his missionary work. Often he went with Paul, observing him and learning from him. Sometimes Paul sent him alone on missions to the Gentile church.

Theirs was like a father/son relationship, full of affection and mutual respect and trust. Timothy had his difficulties. Paul wrote to him with

advice for his frequent illnesses. He often wrote letters to him of encouragement, building him and strengthening him for his tasks. Paul wrote to churches to look after Timothy and protect him.

When Timothy received this letter from Paul he was in Ephesus and he needed every encouragement because Ephesus was a dangerous and ungodly place. Many apostles visited Ephesus. Philip was killed there. The city was on the main road linking Europe with Asia and Africa. It was prosperous and highly cultured under the influence of Greek and Roman philosophy. The magnificent temple to Diana was in Ephesus. Coins and money were invented in Ephesus.

And so Timothy and the early church had their work cut out to reach the hedonistic and proud people in their city. Paul encourages Timothy to remember his first love, that is Jesus Christ. Interestingly, when we read the letter to the church at Ephesus in Revelation, the one thing that God holds against the church is this – **“You have forgotten your first love.”**

And so in this letter Paul reminds Timothy of all that the Lord has done for him. He is to endure hardship, remain strong, avoid conflict, suffer persecution –all with love and patience and understanding.

And finally Paul ordains Timothy in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus to continue his work in preaching the gospel faithfully to all who will listen.

Sermon - All scripture is God-breathed

Text 2 Tim 3:14 – 4:5 and specifically at 4:3,4

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

I heard a man say, “I do not believe that I have committed any sins which would have required Jesus to die on a cross for me, and my wife

and my children have not committed any sins that Jesus had to die for them.”

We might hear such a statement from many people around us, our neighbours, work colleagues, even family and friends, those who profess no faith in the Lord Jesus. But this statement was made by a minister of the Church of Scotland, and moreover the statement was made on Easter Sunday as he prepared to conduct communion –later saying the words **“This is my body broken for you, this is my blood shed for you.”**

Sin is not spoken about so much these days in many churches. We can think of the great preachers of old, regaling the congregation about their sinful lives, the need to repent if they want to be saved and the fires of hell awaiting those who do not repent.

Today in many churches we are more likely to hear about justice and peace and equality and God’s love – all valid within the Christian gospel message but only half of that message.

In a discussion over coffee last week, a woman said to me that she was surprised and even shocked that some churches would not use the Alpha Course and she asked me why that would be. A few churches do not like the format of Alpha and will do other similar courses – but many churches do not like the theology and the emphases of Alpha – emphases on people’s sinful lives, God’s judgement, the need to repent, the need to submit our lives to Jesus and to ask the Holy Spirit to rule in our lives. These things are felt to be too negative, off putting for people, unnecessary, things that the itchy ears of the people do not want to hear. I would guess that the majority of congregations in the Church of Scotland would not use the Alpha course because of its theology.

Since I became a Christian at the age of 23, I have attended evangelical churches in Falkirk and Birmingham and Edinburgh. It has only been during the past ten years as an auxiliary minister that I have found myself in numerous churches and discovered the extent and influence of liberal theology

The doctrine of universal salvation has widespread acceptance, the belief that everyone will go to heaven. If that is the case, I have to ask,

“Why did Jesus come live on earth? Why did he suffer the agonies of the cross?” if everyone is going to heaven anyway. Surely he did not do all of that just so that we can be happier during this brief life on earth?

And did Jesus not talk more about the judgement of God than any other subject? About separating sheep from goats, about wheat gathered in and chaff burned, about the great chasm between heaven and hell across which no-one can cross.

Of course, I have heard ministers explain that Jesus was speaking symbolically, not literally, about these things so no-one should worry. God is a God of love, they say, he cannot reject any of his children on judgement day – just what the itchy ears want to hear.

I have heard people sing that wonderful Stuart Townend song In Christ Alone – but omitting a couple of lines in the second verse – where it says

Til on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied, for every sin on him was laid

A minister explained to me that they don't sing these lines because God is not an angry God, God is incapable of such wrath that would send his son to the cross for us, to die for our sins.

Perhaps linked to universal salvation is the popular notion that there are many ways to salvation, many paths lead to the same God. Again, it is suggested that we are not to take literally Jesus' declaration that “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

It is seen as offensive to people of other religions that we as Christians claim to have the Truth. We are encouraged to believe that other religions also contain Truth. And so people can be confused, they are not hearing a clear message about the one true God, the triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I visited a woman in her home a couple of weeks ago. As she made coffee, I had a look along her book shelves and next to the Bible was the Koran and books about Hinduism, Buddha, Spiritualism and even witchcraft. She has a serious illness and may be actively seeking

spiritual guidance and comfort and it is my prayer for her that she discovers for herself that Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life.

We are often told that the Church of Scotland is a broad church. It is broad in the sense that it is open to everyone who wants to come in, it encompasses all, it ought to view everyone as equal, all should feel welcome.

But the term “broad church” is also used by many to describe the doctrines of the church, the practices and beliefs that are valid and acceptable. We live in a secular society in which humanist beliefs prevail – with focus on human rights, freedom, choice, self-determination, just do it if you want to do it.

There is, therefore, pressure to water down the gospel message to make it more palatable for people, so that they feel more comfortable, to say things that the people want to hear rather than what they need to hear. People only want to feel good, not to be made good.

Focus is on the love of God, not the judgement of God.

Focus on the gift of eternal life but don't say too much about sin and repentance.

Focus on gentle Jesus meek and mild but don't say too much about Jesus' as the sacrificial lamb or being a ransom for our sins. One minister actually warned me, when choosing Easter hymns, not to choose any that mentioned the lamb or sacrifice!

Another minister, at a Kirk Session meeting, said that he did not refer much to Paul's letters because they were gloomy and depressing and they were written to address specific problems in specific churches in Paul's day. In other words, he ignored most of the New Testament. He said that the letters were not for the present generation. They were not what people wanted to hear. He described Paul as “just a man” and a rather severe, arrogant and dictatorial man.

Oh my! Paul knew 2000 years ago that this would be the attitude of some people. The housegroups have started to study Paul's letter to the Galatians. In the first chapter he writes “I want you to know brothers that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not

receive it from any man nor was I taught it, rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”

And To Timothy he wrote that **“all scripture is God-breathed.”** And why does Paul say that scripture is God-breathed? It is to be **“For the teaching, rebuking, correction and training in righteousness.”** And that is what proud, arrogant, self-important people do not want to hear. They do not want to be rebuked or corrected in this “just do it” age.

It is amazing that the message of the bible is so relevant today. In Ecclesiastes we read that **“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”**

We know that the Israelites in the Old Testament were contrary people who turned against God at the slightest challenge and went back to their old ways. When they faced hardship on their travels, they complained to Moses that they should have stayed in Egypt. When they grew tired of the manna that God was feeding them every day, they longed for the leeks and onions and garlic of Egypt (Numbers 11). In Isaiah 30:9 we read –

These are the rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord’s instruction. They say to the seers, “see no more visions”, and to the prophets, “give us no more visions of what is right!” Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions.....stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel.

Paul knew human nature and God revealed to him that people would be no different in the future. The words at the beginning of 2Tim 3 could certainly have been written for our time – **“People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”**

These are serious criticisms of the human state. One minister told me that church needs to be fun, people need to have a laugh on a Sunday. He always felt compelled to have a joke in his sermon and if he could not think of a relevant joke to fit with his theme, he would tell a random

joke. Often people remembered the joke and not what he had preached – which maybe wasn't a bad thing!

Of course it is good to laugh in church! But not in the sense that church should be providing entertainment. Jesus' teaching was not exactly a bundle of laughs for those who heard him – because when speaking to the Pharisees and hypocrites of his day, he taught the Word of scripture, he rebuked and corrected, challenged, scolded and he even condemned. But to those who were willing to listen and learn, he taught love, kindness, forgiveness, salvation, peace and joy.

We are called to be faithful to our calling as children of God, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Timothy was reminded of the scriptures he had known from infancy. There is a clear message here for parents, grandparents, godparents and all those entrusted with the lives of young children –

Make sure that children grow up from infancy knowing the great stories of God's love and faithfulness towards his people in the days of Noah and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph and Moses.

Make sure that children grow up knowing that Christmas is about more than trees and lights, shopping and eating, Santa Claus and Rudolph – it is the story of a miraculous birth, God becoming flesh, God coming from the glory of heaven to live amongst his people

Make sure that children grow up knowing that Easter is about more than chocolate eggs and fluffy bunnies – it is about the greatest gift in the history of the human race as Jesus poured out his life on the cross for us, took on himself the burden of our sins so that we might be forgiven, conquered death by rising from the grave so that we too might have eternal life.

Timothy was also reminded that God had given him a spirit of boldness and not a spirit of timidity. This is especially needed if we are to faithfully proclaim the gospel message in the present social and cultural climate. There are many forms of ministry, we are all called to minister using the gifts God has given us as individuals.

And so take to heart the final verse of today's reading "**Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry**"

AMEN