

Guard the Good Deposit as a Good Soldier of Christ

2 Timothy 2:1-7

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn to HCC on 7/10/2011

Introduction

- ❖ Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2. **[READ 2:1-7]** There is a difference between guarding a local mall and guarding Fort Knox. On one hand, you have a mall cop riding around in golf cart guarding a parking lot and stores. On the other, you have a brigade of trained soldiers protecting our nation's gold depository. I'm pretty sure the level of dedication, devotion and diligence they are going to put into the task will differ.
 - It comes down to a matter of value. The more we value something then the more we will put into the task of guarding it. Add up the worth of all the stores in a mall, and it still pales in comparison to a vault that contains, at last count, \$228 billion dollars worth of gold.

- ❖ But do you realize that, if you are a follower of Jesus, you are, in a sense, a soldier assigned with the task of guarding a deposit far more valuable than gold? Paul calls it the *good* deposit. What is he referring to? The gospel. And what is that? Well in Paul's own words, in chapter 1:8-10, the gospel is the good news concerning the grace of God which now has been manifested in our Savior Christ Jesus.
 - This treasure, this message of salvation, has been entrusted to Christians, and our job is to preserve its content. Like the soldiers guarding Fort Knox, we are to see ourselves as soldiers of Christ guarding this message -- not from theft -- but in our case from tweaking, tampering and adjusting.

Background

- ❖ Timothy was an elder of the church in Ephesus, where heretics had found their way into the community and were tweaking and tampering with the gospel by teaching different doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3). So Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, charging him to confront these individuals and guard the good deposit.
 - But we learned, in chapter 1:7, that Timothy's temperament was not cut out for this. He had a spirit of timidity or fear, so this task was not going to come natural. Added to that, his mentor Paul was sitting in a Roman prison awaiting trial, and tradition teaches tells us that it resulted in his execution.

- ❖ So with Paul's arrest and the threat of persecution looming large, many in the province of Asia had grown ashamed and turned away not just from Paul but the gospel itself.
 - In vv8-14, Paul pleads with Timothy to not join their ranks, to not be ashamed of him or the testimony about the Lord. Instead he is to share in suffering for the gospel and guard the good deposit entrusted to him.
 - And in vv15-18, Paul presents two examples, one to avoid and one to emulate. He is trying to motivate Timothy to not be ashamed of the gospel but to instead guard it with his life.

- ❖ Well as we move on into chapter 2, Paul's subject remains the same. Notice how v1 of chapter 2 begins with "*You then (therefore)*". That connecting word indicates that what we read in vv1-7 will be a continuation of this call to guard the good deposit.

- ❖ Friends, as we study this ancient letter between a local church pastor and his mentor, I hope you will see how it still speaks directly to the problems and circumstances of our day. The call to guard the gospel is just as needed today because the same kind of tweaking and tampering is going on. It would be ridiculous to think the gospel message has somehow grown less offensive.
 - It is quite the reverse, and I have come to find that certain doctrines of the gospel tend to really rub people wrong. Doctrines like the sinfulness of man, the wrath of God, the existence of hell, and the belief that Jesus is the only way to God. These are judged to be irrational, hateful and intolerant. So out of shame and embarrassment, many gospel deserters have tried to tweak, adjust or deny these things altogether.
- ❖ It's in this hostile environment that we are called to guard the good deposit. But what are we supposed to do? Many times we feel like untrained soldiers who don't know to use their weapons. We don't have a strategy. There is this mounting pressure coming from false teachers challenging the gospel, and we don't know what to do.
 - Well this morning my goal is to help you understand your task as soldiers of Christ, as guardians of the gospel. I want to draw out three lessons from our passage to prepare you for guarding the good deposit entrusted to us.

Guard the Good Deposit with the Power of Grace

- ❖ First, I want you to understand your source of strength for the task at hand. Let's read v1 again. *"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."*
 - Considering the background from chapter 1, Paul is basically saying, "Timothy, never mind how timid or shy you might feel. Never mind what people are saying about you or threatening to do you to. I want you to be strong and guard the good deposit."
- ❖ John Stott said that if Paul's command had stopped right there, it would have been most absurd. He might as well have told a snail to be quick or horse to fly if he is going to tell a man as timid as Timothy to be strong and just leave it at that.
 - But Paul doesn't stop there. He commands Timothy to be strong *by* the grace that is in Christ Jesus. In other words, Timothy's source of strength is not from within himself. He is to draw strength from the grace of God in Christ, especially to overcome his natural temperament and fears. **So this is the first lesson: We are to guard the good deposit with the power of grace.**
- ❖ Notice that Paul is attributing some sort of power or influence to 'grace'. That sounds a bit strange at first because normally when Paul talks about grace he is referring to God's unmerited favor towards us. We usually think about God *showing* us grace or *being* gracious to us. We don't think of grace as something that has power to strengthen.
 - Well I don't want you to picture 'grace' as some sort of substance, a serum or steroid, that God gives you to make you stronger. No, the grace Paul is talking about is God's gracious enabling power. He's talking about God's own strength, graciously given, to enable you to carry out the task of guarding.

- ❖ If you look back at chapter 1:14, Paul says this particular strength to guard actually comes from the Holy Spirit, *“By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”*
 - So this power come by the Spirit, but notice how Paul says that this grace is in Christ Jesus. It is found in Christ. It is because of our union with him. If you are in relationship with Christ, you have access to a supernatural strength by the Spirit of God dwelling in you..

- ❖ I hope that is a strong encouragement for you. I realize how difficult it is to stand up for the gospel when so much of it runs counter to the prevailing views of our day and age. I’m not surprised if many of your non-Christian family and friends consider you ignorant or backwards for some of the views you hold. So like Timothy, it is natural to feel timid.
 - But take heart in the fact that you’re not expected to guard the good deposit on your own strength. Paul tells us in Ephesians 3 that there is a power at work within us that can do far more than what we can even ask or imagine (3:20). Let’s learn to lean on that strength that comes from the grace that is found in Christ.

Guard the Good Deposit by Entrusting it to Faithful Teachers

- ❖ Next, we need to understand God’s strategy for guarding the good deposit. Let’s read v2 again. *“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”*
 - For any good soldier understanding strategy is key. How are we to go about guarding the gospel? Are we supposed to shoot down false teachers with strong, passionate rebuttals? Are we supposed to get into a battle over words and interpretations? When we think of guarding the gospel, we usually think of debating with people.
 - Now there is a time for debate. There is place for apologetics and strong rebuttals. But all of that is reactionary, and God’s strategy for guarding the gospel is anything but reactionary. It’s proactive. We are to preserve the gospel by faithfully passing it on to others.

- ❖ **This is our second lesson: Guard the good deposit by entrusting it to faithful teachers.** Now notice there are four stages that Paul envisions for this process of passing it on.
 - **In the first stage, Christ entrusted the good deposit to Paul.** He mentions that in chapter 1:12. Now in Galatians 1, Paul says the gospel he preaches was not something he received from any man or taught by any other (vv11-12). Rather he received it through a revelation from Jesus. That means Christ directly taught Paul.

- ❖ **In the second stage, Paul entrusted the good deposit to Timothy.** Paul was Timothy’s discipler, and like any good discipler, he taught his disciple a pattern of sound words (1:13). He taught him sound doctrine. Now when Paul says he taught in the presence of many witnesses, his point is that he wasn’t passing on a secret truth only known by an elite few.

- There were heretics in the early church called Gnostics who were teaching different doctrine, and they justified their heterodox teaching by claiming to be in possession of secret traditions handed down from the apostles.
 - That is the same claim of modern day cults and offshoots of Christianity. They claim to possess new revelation hidden from the body of Christ until now. But Paul is saying that his teaching was done in the open before witnesses who are able to confirm its accuracy.

- ❖ So Paul laid out a pattern of teaching before Timothy, and now he is challenging his disciple to pass it on to others, to make his own disciples. **This is the third stage, Timothy is to entrust the good deposit to faithful men.** Considering the context of his two letters, the ‘faithful men’ that Paul had in mind were those whose chief task was to teach the Word of God. That would be the elders of a church.
 - Notice that the chief qualification for these men is faithfulness. It is not creativity or ingenuity. But that’s what we often look for in teachers of the Word. We want someone who is creative, who teaches new things. Paul has a name for these kinds of teachers. They’re called heretics.
 - Timothy is to entrust the teaching that he received to *faithful* men who are able to pass it on unchanged, unaltered, exactly as they received it.

- ❖ **That leads to the fourth stage, the faithful men are to entrust the good deposit to others.** This is why one of the qualifications for elders is the ability to teach. In Titus 1:9, Paul writes that an elder should “*hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*”
 - So the responsibility of an elder is to hold firm the word as taught so you can instruct others. Teaching, in this sense, is simply the handing down, from one generation to another, a carefully preserved and guarded set of doctrines.
 - There was no expectation for anyone, at any stage of this process, to adjust the doctrine, to improve it, or modernize it. In fact the whole goal is to *not* mess with the content and to faithfully pass it on to others who would do the same.

- ❖ It’s like the Olympic torch being passed on from one runner to another along different legs of the journey. It’s amazing over how many miles, through how many cities, through how many hands that singular flame travels. Not once does it go out. Not once does someone fail to faithfully pass it on. Friends, that’s how we guard the gospel. It is like passing on a torch.

- ❖ Now the immediate application of this verse would be to make sure that every elder/pastor in our church can fit the same qualifications required of these men. 1) Have they been instructed in sound doctrine? 2) Are they able to teach this to others and do so in a way that equips them to pass it on? 3) Are they known for their faithfulness in the way they pass on the message? Is their aim to preserve or to be creative?

- I would actually consider myself a failure as a preacher if you thought I was teaching you something new. I don't want to be known as creative. I want to be known as faithful. I want to pass on the old, old story just as I received it. You, as a congregation, have a responsibility to hold your leaders to that standard.
- ❖ But there is also a wider application for every Christian. This idea of guarding the gospel might have intimidated you at first because you thought it meant debating. You thought it meant apologetics. You thought it meant confronting false teachers.
 - But God's primary strategy for guarding the gospel is to take the time to learn the doctrines that are central to the gospel. Go find a more seasoned believer and ask him or her to disciple you in these matters.
 - And once you feel grounded in these doctrines, then pass it on. If you're a parent, start with your children. Otherwise pass it on to anyone younger than you in the faith. The important thing is to be faithful to pass it on unchanged, unaltered, exactly as you received it.

Guard the Good Deposit Knowing You Will Suffer for It

- ❖ So guard with the power of grace, guard by entrusting it to faithful teachers. **Third, guard the good deposit with full knowledge that you will suffer for it.** Let's read v3, "*Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*"
 - If you're a soldier, suffering is a given. No soldier on active duty expects an easy, comfortable time on the battle field. He expects opposition and difficulty. So should the soldier of Christ.
 - Later on in chapter 3:12, Paul makes it explicit, "*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" This should not be a shock to any believer. Instead we ought to prepare ourselves for the difficulty. Paul helps in this regard by offering three metaphors in vv4-6.
- ❖ The first is the military metaphor he's already been using with this idea of guarding. **1) We are to guard with the dedication of a soldier.** Read v4, "*No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.*"
 - So the emphasis is on a good soldier's dedication, and the key words are 'entangle' and 'please'. A good soldier of Christ is so dedicated to his task that he will not allow entanglements to hinder or distract him from pleasing Christ his commander.
- ❖ Now this idea of 'not getting entangled in civilian pursuits' need further explanation. The direct application would be for those we call pastors (vocational elders), the men we, as a church, have agreed to support and compensate. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:14 that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. The purpose is to free them from "civilian pursuits" so they can dedicate themselves more fully to the task of preserving and passing on the Gospel.

- This is why we pay our pastors. I want to challenge you to *not* view your tithing as simply a means of paying the salaries of your pastors. Instead, see it as a means of freeing and enabling them to more fully dedicate themselves to the task of teaching and tending the flock.

- ❖ But the application of this verse is wider than just to pastors. Every Christian is assigned the task of guarding the gospel as a soldier of Christ, and soldiering requires dedication, and dedication requires avoiding “entanglements”. That would include any activity or pursuit, that may seem innocent enough, but in reality, hinders you from doing your job and pleasing your commander.
 - So ask yourself: What “entanglements” have hindered me from taking the time to learn sound doctrine? What “entanglements” have kept me from passing it on to younger disciples? What activities am I involved in, that are good in themselves, but hinder me from fully dedicating myself to guarding the good deposit entrusted to me?
 - The task is difficult enough. You’ll suffer for it. So don’t let entanglements distract you in the process.

- ❖ **2) We are to guard with the devotion of an athlete.** Paul shifts metaphors in v5, “*An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*” Now surprisingly the ESV is missing the word ‘*also*’ or ‘*similarly*’ at the start of the verse. It’s important because it indicates that this metaphor is making a similar point as the previous. Just as Paul was highlighting the soldier’s dedication, here he’s emphasizing the athlete’s devotion.
 - In those days, athletes competed in public games to win evergreen wreaths. So instead of medals hung around their necks, winners were crowned with wreaths.
 - Now the “rules” could refer to the particular rules of a game, which you have to abide by if you want to win. In other words, you can’t be a cheater. But cheating doesn’t seem to be relevant to Paul’s point.

- ❖ It makes more sense to view these “rules” as the regulations imposed on all athletes for the purpose of maintaining high standards in competition. That would include rules on how much training you had to do. For example, in Paul’s day, athletes in the Olympic Games had to swear an oath before the statue of Zeus that they had been in strict training for ten months.
 - So if you’re an athlete, to be successful, you have to devote yourself completely to your sport. That means devoting yourself completely to disciplined training.

- ❖ Friends, if you are serious about following Jesus, if you are serious about pleasing him as a good soldier, then you need be just as devoted as any serious athlete. No athlete expects to be crowned unless he devotes himself to training.
 - Similarly, no Christian should expect to know how to guard the good deposit unless they devote themselves to training. No is born with sound doctrine. You have to study the Word, read good books and submit yourself under good preaching. No Christian is born knowing how to disciple others. You have to be disciplined yourself and equipped through proper training.

- I'm thankful that this church is dedicated to discipling its people and training them to know how. Talk to me later if you want to be a part of that.
- ❖ Now along with dedication and devotion, **3) Paul says we need the diligence of a farmer.** Let's read v6, "*It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.*" It's common knowledge that hard work is a necessity for good farming, especially in days when there were no machines, combines or tractors. It required a lot of sweat and toil.
 - But I think many Christians have a hard time reconciling the concept of diligence and hard work with the Christian life. We love to talk about God's grace and being saved by faith, as we should. But we don't seem to have the categories for understanding how personal exertion and hard work fits into the Christian life.
- ❖ But that wasn't the case for Paul. He knew how to work hard without denying or diminishing his dependence on God's grace. I love what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, "*For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*"
 - Paul realized what a debtor he was to the grace of God, yet he did not conclude he could take it easy in his duties as an apostle. On the contrary, he said he worked harder than the rest, but notice how he follows that by saying "*though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*"
 - It parallels what he wrote in v1. He worked really hard at guarding the good deposit, all the while being strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
- ❖ So Paul gave us three metaphors with one point. The task of guarding the gospel is tough. You'll be persecuted. You'll suffer for it. You'll face difficulty. But no good soldier expects victory unless he is dedicated to his task. No good athlete expects a wreath unless she devotes herself to training. No good farmer expects a harvest unless he diligently toils and labors.
 - In the same way, no Christian should expect to faithfully guard the good deposit without the same level of dedication, devotion and diligence.

Conclusion

- ❖ If I were to tell you that in a month's time you will be personally responsible for guarding \$228 billion dollars worth of gold, I bet you would spend the next month completely devoted to training yourself for that task. And while on the job, you would be completely dedicated, not allowing anything to distract you. And I bet you would end up working harder than you have ever worked before.
 - Friends, remember that you are guarding something far more valuable than gold!