

(Keswick) 1959, Ministry From 2 Timothy - Part 2

by Paul S. Rees

Jesus Christ should be at the center of everything, including our testimony and militancy, and our confidence is in the power of the word of God.

Duration: 34:26

Scripture: Exodus 14:21, Matthew 5:16, Mark 16:15, Romans 1:16, Ephesians 6:10, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Keswick Convention"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the need for the whole church, including laymen, to be active witnesses of Jesus Christ. They acknowledge that the task of evangelizing the world is too big for ministers alone, and that laymen must be enlisted as productive witnesses. The speaker shares a personal experience of witnessing a powerful movement of the Spirit in a church congregation, where individuals made a dedication to be God's witnesses to others. They highlight the importance of not just speaking a testimony, but living a life that reflects the gospel. The sermon also addresses the need for discernment in choosing battles and not wasting energy on unnecessary controversies within the faith.

Transcript

And now for his second message in this Bible hour, Dr. Paul Rees. We are following some trailways of truth through the second letter that St. Paul wrote to Timothy. In chapter one, yesterday afternoon, we concerned ourselves with the making, to live again, of a dying fire.

And this afternoon, our topic is making Christ the center of everything. I'm using as a text the eighth verse which I should like to have you receive in the Phillips translation. Phillips, as you know, is an attempt to put into more conversational vernacular the truth that we have in the New Testament.

And in dealing with this eighth verse, Phillips has the rendering, remember always, as the center of everything, Jesus Christ. A man of human ancestry, yet raised by God from the dead, according to my gospel. Particularly do I want to use as the clue to our thinking these words, remember always, as the center of everything, Jesus Christ.

Now if we miss that, no matter what else we may say about what we believe and that for which we stand, we have missed something that is so central to our Christian message that the loss is really irreparable.

It's so easy for us to think about the Christian message in terms that are theological, in terms that are institutional, or terms that are liturgical, and miss the fact, the supreme fact, that Christianity at last is Jesus Christ himself. I've just been in India, and every time I go to India, in some way or another, I cross the trail of that amazing Christian saint, Sadhu Sundar Singh, who was brought to know the Savior out of deep-dyed Hinduism, and whose conversion created a tremendous sensation.

Now on one occasion, Sadhu Sundar Singh, as the story goes, was a visitor in London. And the professor in a London university had heard about his conversion and asked for an interview with him. And in the interview he said, I should like to ask you, what did you find in Christianity that you did not have in Hinduism, which accounts for your conversion? And with his eyes all aglow, Sadhu Sundar Singh said, I found Jesus Christ.

Oh, he said, I don't make myself clear. I mean, what philosophy of life did you find in Christianity that wasn't in Hinduism? And he led you to turn. He said, I found Jesus Christ.

I still am not making my point clear. He said, what ideas or concepts did you discover in Christianity that you found missing in Hinduism? And refusing to budge from his position, Sadhu Sundar Singh replied again, I found Jesus Christ. And he was so right.

One of the greatest mistakes being made today in religious thinking is the mistake of imagining that conversion is giving up one religion for another, or giving up one church for another. There's nothing in the New Testament that hints of that. The gospel is not religion.

The gospel is Jesus Christ. Religion is man's quest for God. It's man's search for God.

The world is full of religion. Good religion, vile religion. And religion never saved anybody.

The gospel is revelation. And it's the revelation that comes to its supreme center and focus in Jesus Christ, our Lord of the seed of David, yes, linked with humanity. The Son of Man, as Morgan used to say, the ideal man.

But the Son of God with power according to the resurrection from the dead. Now that's the center of everything. Now let's see how Paul develops this.

This is the second chapter of the second letter that he wrote to Timothy. First of all, at the center of all of our energy is Jesus Christ. Notice how the chapter begins, So my son, be strong in the grace that Jesus Christ gives.

How often Paul emphasizes this matter of the boundless energy that is made available to the believing Son of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Quit you like men. Be strong, he said to the Corinthians.

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, he said to the Ephesians. And here he says to his beloved junior son in the gospel of the grace of God, Timothy. My son, be strong.

We saw yesterday Timothy needed this because he was faltering in a crucial moment. Be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ. My father used to say sometimes when he was preaching along this line, it is a crime to be weak when power is offered to every one of us.

And yet how few there are relatively who seem to think that there is anything seriously wrong about being weak and feeble. Kind of doormat for the devil to walk on. Instead of being, as the New Testament puts it,

more than conquerors through him they love God.

Where is that note in our lives? Where is it in your life, somebody who is listening to me right now? The name of Christ is on your lips. The Bible is in your hands. Your name is on a church row.

But where is the energy, the spiritual energy that enables you to cope with temptation, to cope with circumstances, to cope with the powers of evil, the powers of this world, and to be victorious? Be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ. Now this strength, you notice, this energy is linked with personality. It is linked with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the measure of whose power, made available to his disciples, is the resurrection.

Just as the standard miracle of the Old Testament was the crossing of the Red Sea, God's miraculous deliverance of his people from Egypt through the crossing of the Red Sea, and again and again the Old Testament refers Israel back to that. If I did that for you, I can do anything. No matter where you may be, what foes you may be facing, what problems you may be confronted, I'm the God who brought you out of Egypt.

The standard miracle of the Old Testament and the standard miracle of the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus. And you and I are to be filled with and energized by the very same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the measure of the power that resides not in some abstract idea or some lofty principle, no, but in the person of Jesus Christ.

It's power that's linked with mercy as well as personality. It is all of grace. It isn't something that you and I deserve.

It isn't something that you and I can merit. It is the energy that God offers us as the free gift of his heart of love through his Son, Jesus Christ, and in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The second thing that I want you to notice in making Jesus Christ the center of everything is that at the center, at the center of all of our testimony is Jesus Christ.

Let's mark well the language of verse two. Everything that you have heard me teach, says Paul, everything that you have heard me teach in public, you should in turn entrust to reliable men who will be able to pass it on to others. Now here is the testimony of the gospel regarded by a man like Paul as a very sacred trust.

It's the testimony that has its center in Jesus Christ, the seed of David risen from the dead. But Paul's concern is not only with the content of the Christian witness. It is also concerned, he is also concerned with the extent of it.

See that this gets into circulation, says Paul. Have those under you who are not only men and women who have experienced the new life in Christ, but who are instructed and trained to pass on the witness concerning him. There is one very hopeful sign among others that one finds in the Christian world today rather generally, and that is this growing realization that in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, we really did not go all the way.

We reformed our doctrine, but we didn't always reform our practice. And particularly are we now discovering that in these post-Reformation days, we have failed to think of the whole community of the Church, laymen as well as ministers, the whole community of the Church as the witnessing body of Jesus Christ. And we are now discovering, with the population of the world exploding as it is into astronomical

figures, that the task of evangelizing the world and winning men to Christ is staggeringly too big for the ministers.

There simply are not enough of us. And if we do not enlist our laymen as productive witnesses of Jesus Christ and to the power of his gospel, we are fighting a losing battle. And so it is that Jesus Christ stands at the center of all our testimony, and that he asks that the whole Church, the whole Church, shall face up to its responsibility for making known the good news to others that Jesus Christ is a Savior who is able to save to the uttermost.

I remember one night, I'd spoken in the course of the All-Scotland Crusade under Billy Graham. I'd spoken out in one of the Scottish cities on a weekend. And in this Church of Scotland congregation, there had been a moving of the Spirit this particular night, and I'd invited those who had some business, some unfinished business with their Lord, to go down below.

They had told me that rooms we might use for counseling purposes would be all downstairs below the worship room. So we were using several of these rooms because they were all rather small. And when I thought that everybody had been dealt with who remained, one of the deacons came to me and said, There are two ladies across the way here who want to have a word with you.

And so I went over, and they said, Now, the Lord used one thing that you said tonight to send us down here for this prayer time. You said tonight that it is the responsibility of every Christian to have a testimony, to be communicated to others. And we don't have such a testimony.

They said, We know, both of us, that we're Christians. Long years ago, we received Christ as our Savior. But we never give a testimony to anybody else.

We're too timid. We have imagined that this is something so intimate that you just don't talk about it. And yet, you said tonight that every Christian should have a testimony.

Well, I said, I didn't say that rashly. I believe it. And I think that God has a testimony for you, something for you to share.

You see, they have been under the influence of a kind of teaching that we do get in certain circles, that we really shouldn't say anything about our Christian faith and experience. Just live it. Just live it.

Well, now, the New Testament is full of emphasis upon the importance of living, of really being witnesses. Not simply speaking a testimony, but being a witness. And this little youth, you know, having a verbal or a vocal witness, unless there is a vital witness of the life.

But having said that, having said that, let us not forget that when the Christian church was at its best, the irrepressible feeling of the Christians was, we cannot but speak what we have seen and heard. And that night, those dear ladies made a Romans 12, 1 and 2, dedication of themselves, which includes the tongue, and went out under a covenant to be God's witnesses to others. Now, this is the kind of thing, dear friends, that we've got to have in all of our churches and all of our communities.

If we are going to deal with the sheer inertia, we don't have a great deal of irreligious hostility to the Christian church today, but we have an enormous amount of inertia. People are just sodden in their worldliness, in their preoccupation with the affairs of this life. And if we are going to challenge this day and our society around us, it isn't going to be done simply by preaching orthodox sermons or eloquent

sermons or biblical sermons.

Our laymen have got to be enlisted and prayed and sent out. There must be the witness at the center of which is Jesus Christ. The third thing that I want you to notice is that at the center of all our militancy is Jesus Christ.

All our militancy, you say? What in the world do you mean by that? Well, I mean whatever Paul means when he says to Timothy, put up with your share of hardship as a loyal soldier in Christ's army. Paul was not afraid to use boldly militant figures, figures of speech, to describe the life and service of those who have made Jesus Christ the captain of their salvation. And so he says to Timothy, my dear man, take a certain amount of hardship for granted.

It's bound to come. It is inevitable. Take your share of it without whining, without whimpering, without faltering, without even being astonished.

This is great business, says Paul in effect. This business of waging the warfare of truth as it is in Jesus Christ. And you're going to be shot at.

You're not only going to do some shooting yourself, you're going to be shot at, which is part of the business of war. And if you're afraid of the whiz of some bullets coming your way, you will never make the contribution to the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's up to you to make.

What's the trouble with so many of us today? There's really no militant spirit about us. We're not militant, we're dormant. We're not militant.

We're somnolent. We're just half asleep. And there is no red-blooded coming to grips with the world and the flesh and the death, such as you have thrillingly in the Acts of the Apostles, for instance.

Where is that? I put it to my own soul, and I put it to yours. At the center of our militancy is to be Jesus Christ. The battle isn't ours.

This is what we've got to learn and never forget. The battle is not ours. It is the Lord's.

And it is for Him and His gospel and His truth and His Church that we wage this fight. Now, in talking about the militant aspect in the life of the Christian, let us remember that there's something costly about it, this business of fighting in the ranks of Jesus Christ. And so Paul says, no soldier on active service gets himself entangled in business.

Do you know what it will cost you to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, to make a militant contribution to the victory of our Lord? It will cost you such a surrender to His captaincy that there isn't a divided allegiance in your life. That's what Paul means when he says, if he's a real soldier, he isn't entangled with the affairs of this life. He's all out for the commander and all out for the victory.

The trouble with so many of us Christians is that we've got a certain loyalty to Christ, but it's a disputed loyalty. It's a divided allegiance. When World War II came along, there was a young man who had been a problem to himself and a problem to his parents and a problem to his pastor, living a very unsatisfactory sort of Christian life, up and down, in and out, on and off.

And then the draft caught him. And at first his pastor was rather dismayed. He thought, well, now he's not spiritually ready to go into the Army with all of the temptations to which he'll be exposed and so on.

And then the Holy Spirit seemed to speak to this pastor, and he said maybe it's the best thing for him. So in his last counseling time with this young man, before he went off in response to the draft, he said to him, Tom, you are now joining something so big that it's going to demand all there is of you. And that's going to be good for you.

Remember, Tom, no more vagabonding among half-loyalties for you. What a phrase that is. Vagabonding among half-loyalties.

What a description of the weak, the ineffectual discipleship of so many people in our churches. One hand in the nail-pierced hand of Christ, and the other hand in the palm of the world. Part of our loyalty given to Christ, and part of it set on self.

Paul says, no, no. If your life is to be a soldier's life, making its solid contribution to the victory of our Lord in his world, then it's costly business. For everyone, it was for Paul.

For he says, for preaching this, verse 9, for preaching this I'm having to endure being chained in prison as if I were some sort of criminal. And the implication is, Timothy, there are worse things than being put in prison for Jesus Christ's sake. You are at large, you have your freedom, I don't.

This is part of the price I willingly pay and if you have to pay the same price, Timothy, don't think strangely of it. But at the same time, this making Jesus Christ the center of all of our militancy is not only costly business, it is confident business. Confident business.

What is our confidence, anyhow? Well, it's strikingly expressed by Paul in the very next breath here, after saying, for preaching this I'm having to endure being chained in prison as if I were some sort of criminal. He says, but they cannot chain the word of God. They cannot chain the word of God.

I remember the first time I was in China many years ago. I was at Bethel Mission in Shanghai and Dr. Mary Stone sat down and told me one day about how the Lord had answered prayer in their attempt to get into some soldiers' barracks very close to their compound after they had been refused any entrance to these soldiers, any entree to them with the gospel message. And they had been earnestly asking the Lord somehow to break down the barrier that was there.

It was at a time, incidentally, when the prejudice, the feeling against the Westerners was such that even the Chinese Christians were having to bear the onus of this dislike for the Westerners. And so they were earnestly praying that somehow God would enable them to break through there and get the gospel to these soldiers in the Chinese army. Well, now what happened was this.

That one day, in the warm weather, a dog strayed over from the barracks and got into the chapel on the compound of Bethel Mission and got hold of a Chinese Bible and chewed on it and played with it and had a big time with it when it was all through. The torn leaves of the Bible, two or three of them, remained caught between two of the teeth of that dog. And he went back to the barracks and the soldier saw this paper sticking out of the dog's mouth and pulled the paper out and looked at it curiously before throwing it down and discovered the characters were such that he had never read anything like this before.

And his curiosity was aroused. He wanted to know what book this was from. And finally, somebody suggested to him that it was from the Christians' book.

And he went over to the compound and asked if they recognized these torn bits. And the missionary instantly did and said, Would you like to have the book from which these pages are torn? He said, I would. And he took it and put it away under his uniform here because he knew the feeling toward the Christians among the soldiers.

And in relating it afterwards, he said he didn't read it in front of the men. He would wait until at night, everybody was asleep. And then he'd take his tiny little flashlight and read this tiny Bible.

And he read it until he became so convicted of his sin and of his need of the Savior that he got courage enough to go to the chapel and attend one of the services and he found Christ. And the night that Dr. Stone told me this story, I can see her face now, though it's been 30 years since she told me the tale. She said, 77 of these soldiers have been won to Jesus Christ.

The word of God is not bound. They may put all sorts of restrictions around us, but our confidence is that somehow his word proclaimed, circulated, his word is boundless. It is undeterred.

This is costly business, but it's confident business. This militant proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, it's sometimes confusing business also.

And we have illustrations of that in our own time. I could discuss this at far greater length than any time I now have at my disposal. But I point out to you in passing that Paul knew in his day, and he knew it would be true, I suppose, on down to our day.

Paul knew in his day, in dealing with Timothy, that it would not always be easy to distinguish between fighting, really putting up a militant front for things essential on the one hand, and being involved and embroiled in profitless controversies on the other. And so in this chapter, Paul has some most pointed things to say about the danger of confusion in this regard. And he reminds Timothy that it's easy to mistake fighting for essential truth for fighting for senseless, pointless issues.

Remember, he says in verse 23, have nothing to do with silly and ill-informed controversies which lead inevitably, as you know, to strife. I have a very dear preacher friend in the states quite a distance from here, who was attending a Billy Graham service one night, and after the meeting was over, immediately, with people being dealt with in the inquiry room by the hundreds, he recognized this man and rushed up to him and said, isn't it terrible? And showed him what somebody had written in a paper against Billy Graham. Isn't this terrible? And my friend looked at it and recognized it, and he said, it would be if it were true.

Well, she said, here it is in print. Maybe in print, said he. And then he made a suggestion.

He said, there's Mr. Graham. He hasn't left yet. Why don't you ask him? Oh no, she said, this is enough for me.

And this is the kind of thing we're spending our time on. In a day when God has raised up a figure such as the Christian world has not had in a long, long time. Allowing ourselves to be drawn aside from the great central gospel which no one denies dear Billy proclaims with tremendous power and passion and fruitfulness into a lot of senseless and ill-informed controversy.

Sometimes a confusing thing. And how we need discernment in our day to know where to pitch the battle and where to expend our energy. Not wasting them in fighting our own brethren, our own colleagues in the

faith.

Let me point out another thing as we hurry on here. We have to hurry because the clock hurries and is relentless about it. At the center of all our identity is Jesus Christ.

All our identity. What do we mean by this? What we mean, and here I'm going to return now from Phillips to the rendering that we have in the revised. Where Paul reminds us if, verse 11, if we have died with him that is with the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we have died with him we shall also live with him. Now enshrined in those praises is a fundamental principle of New Testament teaching. Namely the principle of identification.

It has two sides. It has the divine side. When Jesus Christ died on the cross he took you and me with him there.

And provisionally and positionally we died in him. Now he did that without consulting us. You were there, I was there when Christ died.

He took your sin, your guilt. In fact he took more than that. He took what you are as a once born son of Adam.

All that you are. Not only what you've done but what you are. He took it there to the cross with him.

Now the other side of it is our side. That is that we see that he identified himself with us in our need, our total need. Our need not only for forgiveness, justification but our need also for sanctification and for victory.

We seeing this by faith in self-surrender identify ourselves with him. And when that really breaks on you when you see that you are to renounce all self-identity you simply go out of business as John Smith. When you really see this and what you are, you are by the grace of God.

What you have, you have in Christ. And he so invades and cleanses and controls your personality that you can say with full not I, not I but Christ. Do you know what it means to make Christ the center of your identity? Augustine, having lived for years as you remember the sordid story in sin with a certain woman, more than one alas but this one notoriously then finding Christ his whole life revolutionized walking down the street one day and seeing, not knowing what had happened to him saw him and called from the other side of the street, Augustine, Augustine so seductively, he paid no attention to her Augustine, it is I. Then he looked and said yes but it is not I. He lost his identity as the Augustine that he knew to gain a new identity in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

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