

## **“Christ Destroyed Death” (An Exposition of 2 Timothy 1:10-12)<sup>1</sup>**

### ***Introduction***

We have spent a number of weeks unpacking this passage (v.8-12), in which Paul exhorts Timothy to not be ashamed of the gospel (nor of him), but rather to join with Paul in suffering for its sake (v.8). In many ways that is the central theme of this entire letter.

Paul spends much of the rest of the letter teaching us what such boldness and faithfulness in the ministry of the gospel looks like. It entails such things as following **“the pattern of the sound words”** that Timothy had heard from Paul (v.13); entrusting that doctrine that Paul had taught him to **“faithful men who will be able to teach others also”** (2:2); and **‘preaching the Word’** (4:2).

Lord willing, we will go into much more detail about each of those things – the *what* and the *how* of gospel ministry – in the weeks and months to come as we go through this book of the Bible together.

But here in our text Paul essentially starts by giving us the *right biblical motivation and encouragement for these things* first. Ask yourself this – what is it that can make a person willing and able to suffer for the sake of the gospel? What is it that can make a man willing even to lay down his life for the sake of the name of Christ?

Back in v.9, which we looked at together a couple Sundays ago, we saw that the first thing that Paul starts with in giving Timothy and us the sufficient strength to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel is *the sovereign grace of God in our salvation and calling in Christ!*

Here in v.10 Paul goes into more detail about that same grace and salvation that we have only in Christ. He reminds us that this grace and salvation were given to us **“in Christ Jesus before the ages began,”** but have **“now been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ”** (v.10).

He then reminds us of the results and blessings of the work of Christ in His cross and resurrection – that Christ has **“abolished”** or *destroyed death* **“and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”** (v.10).

That is not only the *message* of the gospel itself, but it also serves as the source of strength and *motivation* for faithfulness in gospel ministry in the face of opposition and persecution.

And so it seems fitting on this Sunday after Easter, after we have looked at the truth of Christ's death and resurrection, that we should follow that up by looking at a passage of Scripture where Paul shows us *the blessed results and implications* of Christ's cross and resurrection for us as believers.

### ***The Manifestation of the Grace of God***

The *first* thing that Paul turns our attention to in v.10 is *the manifestation of the grace of God in the coming of Christ*. He tells us that the grace of God that was given to us in Christ **“before the ages began”** (v.9), **“now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.”**

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

*What does he mean by this?* It is much like what the Apostle John says in John 1:16–18,

**“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”**

It is *not* that there was no revelation of **“grace and truth”** in the Old Testament age, but that the grace of God in the gospel that was foreshadowed and prophesied of throughout the Old Testament has now been revealed *in its fullness – no more types and shadows!*

The Apostle Peter likewise shows us *the great privilege that we now enjoy in this New Testament age*, where the fullness of Christ and His gospel has been made known. In 1 Peter 1:10–12 he writes:

**“Concerning this salvation, the prophets *who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully*, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, *things into which angels long to look.*”**

We who believe in Christ, and we who also have the great privilege of preaching the gospel live and serve Christ in an age that those who went before us could only see as in a mirror darkly. They could hardly imagine the fullness of the revelation of the grace of God that was to come in the coming of Christ, His death and resurrection.

The prophets who went before us throughout the Old Testament suffered and even laid down their lives to bear witness to the grace of God which had been revealed in far less fullness in their day, and shall we who live and serve Christ in such a privileged age as our own be willing to do any less?

And how was the grace of God in our salvation manifested in all its fullness? Paul reminds us that it was **“manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus”** (v.10). This surely involves everything that Christ Jesus has done as our Savior -His incarnation, His sufferings and glory, His death on the cross, His resurrection on the third day, and His ascension to the right hand of God the Father.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself and all that He did for our salvation from sin is the fullest manifestation of the grace of God toward us.

### ***The Destruction of Death***

The second thing that Paul points us to in our text is the destruction of death – that the Lord Jesus Christ has **“abolished”** (or *destroyed*) death. In v.10 he writes:

**“and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, *who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,*”**

This is part of Christ's work on our behalf in His cross and resurrection that He has now **“abolished death”** for those who are in Him by faith. It is *not* that death no longer exists in this world, but that for those who are in Christ it has now *lost its sting* and has been conquered.

This conquering of death is one of the greatest blessings of the gospel for all who believe. As Hebrews 2:14-15 puts it:

**“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he [i.e. Jesus Christ] himself likewise partook of the same things, *that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*”**

The gospel of Christ delivers every believer from the **“fear of death”** and the **“lifelong slavery”** to fear that it entails. *Only the believer in Christ can live confidently in the face of death!* And it is no accident that Paul brings this up *here* in the context of exhorting Timothy (and us) to **“share in suffering”** for the sake of the gospel (v.8).

John Stott writes:

“In order to appreciate the full force of this Christian affirmation, we need to call to mind who it is who is making it. Who is this who writes so confidently about life and death, about the abolition of death and the revelation of life? It is one who is facing the prospect of immanent death himself. Any day now he expects to receive the death sentence. Already the final summons is ringing in his ears. Already he can see in his imagination the flash of the executioners sword. And yet, in the very presence of death, he can shout aloud: 'Christ has abolished death.' This is faith triumphant!”<sup>2</sup>

Talk about putting your money (or your faith) where your mouth is! Paul boldly proclaimed the gospel of Christ, even in the face of the threat of violent persecution and death, *because he really believed and understood the truth of the gospel of Christ - he knew Christ!*

The truth of the gospel – that Christ our Savior has abolished death for His people through His death and resurrection – was not just theoretical or hypothetical to Paul.

Because of Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf, death itself has been *abolished* for the believer. *It is no longer to be feared.* Death no longer has the victory or the last word over us. Our Savior *is* **“the resurrection and the life”**, so that **“Whoever believes in [Him], though he die, yet shall he live.”** (John 11:25)

### ***Bringing Life and Immortality to Light***

Last but by no means least, Paul tells us *the flip-side* of Christ destroying death – He has now *brought life and immortality to light!* There is no abolishing of death unless it brings with it the promise of life!

Now Paul is certainly *not* saying that there was no promise of life and immortality before Christ came. He says in v.10 that He *brought these things to light*. In his commentary on the pastoral epistles,

Patrick Fairbairn notes that the Greek word that Paul uses here for *bringing to light* “means, not for the first time to disclose, but to bring into the clearest light what had hitherto lain in comparative obscurity.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Message of 2 Timothy*, p.39

<sup>3</sup> *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Geneva Series of Commentaries), p.321

Christ brought “**life**” to light – to it's clearest and fullest light. What kind of life? *Abundant life*. In John 10:10 the Lord Jesus says:

**“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have *life* and have it *abundantly*.”** (Italics added)

Outside of Christ we do not have real life. We are *dead in our trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1), and are *spiritually dead to God*, even while we live. But in Christ we who were dead in our sins were *made alive in Him*. In Ephesians 2:4–5 Paul tells us:

**“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved . . .”**

And not only has Christ given us *new spiritual life* from the dead, and an *abundant* life in Him, but He also gives us *eternal life*. As John 3:16 says:

**“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

Whoever believes in Christ – trusting in Him alone for salvation – shall not perish (as Christ has *abolished death*), but rather have “**eternal life**.” This is *not* just *existing* forever, but living forever with God, in a right relationship with God and Christ our Savior who Himself *is* life!

Paul briefly reminds Timothy that these are the things that have been brought to their fullest light with the coming of Christ, His sufferings and glory!

## ***Conclusion***

All of this is why Paul can say (as we read last Lord's day in 1 Corinthians 15:54–58):

**“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:**

**“Death is swallowed up in victory.”**

**“O death, where is your victory?**

**O death, where is your sting?”**

**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”**

It is because of the sure hope of the gospel, and the victory that Christ gives us even over death itself, that we can “**be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord [our] labor is not in vain.**” (v.58).

This is certainly what Paul has in mind in v.11-12 of our text when he says,

**“for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.”**

He was **“appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher”** for the gospel, and the sure hope that for every believer Christ has **“abolished death and brought life and immortality to light”** through it. And that is also why he suffered as he did, but was still **“not ashamed.”**

And why not? Because he knew whom He had believed – the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ – and was **“convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.”** That is why Paul abounded in the work of the Lord and exhorts us to do the same.

A life spent serving Christ and His gospel is *never* a wasted life. Even a life *cut short* for the sake of Christ as Paul's was, was not a wasted life or wasted effort. Why not? Because of the promise of eternal life in Christ.

It is because Christ our Savior has **“abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”** (v.10) that Paul and Timothy and even *we ourselves* can be unashamed of the gospel and **“share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God”** (v.8).

This is why believers in all times and places, even our own, must not be ashamed of the gospel, even if it brings suffering, even if it costs us our lives.

The Lord Jesus Christ has always made His truth to triumph through His church, and even uses the persecution of the wicked against His church to make the gospel spread and bear fruit.

Paul's *imprisonment* could *not* chain the gospel (2 Timothy 2:9). Paul says (from prison!) in Philippians 1:12 that **“what has happened to me has really served to *advance* the gospel.”** Only Christ can make that so!

Even Paul's *martyrdom* could not silence the gospel! Christ was and is **“able to guard until that day”** what He has entrusted to us.

May the Lord Jesus, who has *destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light*, work in us by His Spirit what is pleasing in His sight, that we might *not* be ashamed of His gospel, but faithfully bear witness of Him.

May He even make us willing to suffer for the gospel if need be, that His name might be glorified in us, and that the lost may hear and believe unto eternal life. - Amen