

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. 2 Timothy 2.8.

When I was ordained in Bradford one sunny July afternoon 27 years ago this was the text my old professor took as his charge to me: 'remember Jesus Christ'. And for 27 years I have striven to do exactly that, to 'remember Jesus Christ'. I've always been deeply grateful to my old teacher for making sure that I got the focus of my ministry right. The truth is that it is so easy to get the priorities of your ministry *wrong*. I have seen too many ministers over the years lose their way. They have forgotten why they are doing this job. We all start off so keen and idealistic, but then over the years we get bogged down with admin, and fund-raising, and tending to people's pastoral needs and putting a new roof on the church. Sometimes, I'm afraid, we ministers become too concerned with our career path. We start to network and get on to committees to be noticed. Or we pursue some pet scheme. I have seen too many ministers become politicians, or social workers with dog-collars on. Politics and social work are honourable callings, but if that's your main interest, then become a politician or retrain as a social worker. It is all too easy in this whirl of activity to forget the central task of the ministry which is to promote Jesus Christ and bring others to him.

It is *the* temptation today, and it was also the temptation 2,000 years ago. That's why St Paul has to remind Timothy to 'remember Jesus Christ'. In 1.15 we see that many, including Phygelus and Hermogenes, have forgotten Jesus. Only Onesiphorus in v16 has not fallen away. And so our 'timid Timothy' must also be strong and stand his ground, 2.1...

You'll see that even *that* command to Timothy is Christ-centred. The point is that Timothy is *not* by nature strong. His natural tendency is to buckle under attack and go with the flow. But if he is open, *Christ* will strengthen him, even though he does not deserve it: it is *grace*, 2.1... You may feel very inhibited about telling others of Jesus or find it a struggle to live your daily life in a Christian way, but he will give you the strength.

It is easy for ministers, as I say, and for those in the pew to lose sight of why we are here at all. Why do we work so hard to keep up our buildings, raise funds, keep our organisations and Junior Church going? What is the point of all this activity? It is to glorify Jesus Christ. Once we take our eye off the ball, we lose our way. And many of our churches *have* lost their way. Not only over the years have we forgotten what our product is, we have lost *confidence* in it. And that, of course, is fatal. It's not really a wonder why our churches in the west are declining, is it?

I have heard so many sermons where Jesus simply isn't mentioned. God comes up quite a lot, but not God as we see him in the face of Jesus Christ. Is that because we might offend our Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu neighbours? I think we need a bit of integrity here. Once we are ashamed of Jesus our core product we've lost, and we *deserve* to lose.

What we Christians believe is important, and it's vital that we don't unconsciously or deliberately alter our beliefs either to make them easier to accept or more palatable to society. Actually, that's precisely what the churches *have*

done these past few decades. Miracles, resurrection, virgin birth? Too hard. Dump them. The Bible against homosexuality? Get rid of it. We've moved on. No! 1.13-14 speak of sound teaching and the 'deposit' of teaching which must be guarded ... And Timothy must be true to the core teaching, the 'deposit', and not twist it to make himself popular. 2.2 ... 'Commit thou to faithful men', says the AV. Our theological colleges must pass on the core deposit about Jesus Christ to our students; so must preachers from the pulpits, Junior Church leaders, and parents. What are we passing on to the next generation?

And that is hard, because, as Timothy found it, it is unpopular. Integrity and having the courage of your convictions will make you enemies. And that's why Paul stiffens Timothy's resolve with the three examples of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer, 2.3-6... No-one at college warned me that being faithful to Jesus as portrayed in the Bible would be hard work which demands integrity, backbone, and stickability. Being a Christian is hard, isn't it? But then there's a warning, in v12b... I think a lot of churches which have disowned Jesus are on the way out because Jesus has disowned them. But there's also a great *promise*, v12a... and look at v10... So let's get the focus right, back on Jesus.

But it's not enough simply to 'remember Jesus Christ'. Even Muslims 'remember Jesus Christ', or at least 'Jesus'. The Koran honours Jesus as a great prophet. Jews wouldn't accept Jesus as the *Christ*, the Messiah promised in the OT. Paul tells Timothy to remember Jesus as the one descended from David, ie the royal one, the King, the Messiah.

If the Jews have difficulty with Jesus as the Messiah descended from David, the Muslims specifically deny that Jesus *died*. But that is the very heart of the Christian Good News, that God became man, descended from the seed of David, and died on Calvary's Cross in shame to take our punishment on his shoulders, to be raised to new life as God's Son in glory.

So it's no good just mentioning Jesus all the time. What matters is *what* you believe about him. *Is* he both man and God? *Did* he take our punishment on his shoulders? *Did* he die for sinners? *Was* he raised physically from the dead to new life?

In that one simple verse Paul tells us all we need to know about this incomparable Christ. In my troubles and struggles I need to know that God became man in this Jesus to walk alongside me. When I am crushed by guilt and shame, I need to know that God in Christ died to take all that away. When my heart is broken because my loved one has died, I need to know that God in Jesus was risen from the dead to defeat death. If we don't believe this of Jesus with all our hearts, we have absolutely nothing to tell this needy world except some platitudes and a bit of moralising. Perhaps that is why the people turn away from us; and perhaps they are right.

But I want you to get your focus right. I want you to remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. When you feel alone and abandoned, remember Jesus Christ. When you are frightened and lost, remember Jesus Christ. When your heart is aching, remember Jesus Christ. When you wonder what it is all about, remember Jesus Christ, because you can be sure, he will remember you, everlastingly.