

## SHIPWRECKED

Late in the book of Acts, Luke records how Paul's missionary journeys eventually lead him before official courts on charges of blasphemy from Jewish leaders, to which he then appeals to stand before Caesar himself to give testimony. As a Roman citizen he's granted that right and is sent by boat as prisoner to Rome.

This is where things get even more interesting. Acts chapter 27 tells us that before setting sail, stormy winds are picking up, and Paul warns the Centurions that the voyage will be disastrous and they ought to wait.

The Centurion doesn't listen and as they're sailing a hurricane sweeps down from the islands. They're quickly blown off course, and things start to get dicey pretty quickly.

It says the storm battered the ship so badly that they had to find a way to pass ropes under the ship itself to try and hold it together - or what they refer to in the nautical world as "frapping" - and they had to throw much of the cargo overboard just to save the integrity of the ship.

The storm raged on for days and they couldn't see sun or stars at all to help them navigate. So they lost all hope of being saved.

They are stuck adrift at sea for weeks and eventually things get so bad that some of the sailors try to sneak off in lifeboats and leave the prisoners to die.

But Paul warns the Centurion again and says, "No one will survive unless everyone stays." He advises them all to eat the last of the food rations they have to get ready for what's ahead.

The next day the ship ran aground on a sandbar and is broken to pieces by the pounding surf. The soldiers and prisoners all make it to land - some swimming, some floating on planks. It's a huge ordeal - but not one person dies.

For some strange reason, the Roman guards seem to take Paul's advice a lot more seriously after that.

Life is often life that: God longs to speak truth to us and guide us in right paths, but we have an incredible capacity to ignore Him - often to our own peril. The good news is that Good doesn't give up on us.

We're in our 2nd week into our series on Paul's first letter to his friend Timothy, reflecting on how his words and advice to this young leader can give us insights for faithful living with Jesus in the here and now.

Words that if we heed with wisdom may help us to avoid a lot of pain and hardship, but if we ignore them, we may just find ourselves underwater.

This is one of the few letters that we have collected in the NT that is directed to an individual - not a broader congregation city - and in it we see some very personal and honest reflections as well as some very specific instruction given for Timothy who has been charged to help keep the church in Ephesus from being swayed by any false teaching.

Last week, we saw how Paul didn't get very far into his letter before pausing to reflect on the value of the Gospel for himself - commenting that Christ came to save sinners, of whom he considered himself the worst.

Now he's turning his attention back to the task at hand - read with me in 1 Tim, verse 18:

#### READING

1 Timothy 1:<sup>18</sup> Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, <sup>19</sup> holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. <sup>20</sup> Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

Let's Pray.

I spoke briefly last week about how Paul had sent Timothy back to Ephesus to help sort out some messes being stirred up after his departure. Paul KNEW that God wanted him to head to Jerusalem, with the foreknowledge that it would then lead him to arrest and trial in Rome where he could share the Gospel in the heart of the empire.

But his heart was breaking for the church in Ephesus because just as he was leaving a riot broke out led by some local craftsmen who were angry that Paul's preaching was hurting their sales of idol statues.

In his absence, the church plant at Ephesus faced numerous threats from false teachers who wanted to mold the church more to their liking.

1. There's a pressure from some Jewish Christian leaders who keep trying to reflect on different myths and speculation about possible connections a person might have to a particular tribe or person that would somehow make them look better than others.
  - a. CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE: This would be like someone today trying to proclaim that they're Billy Graham's 2nd cousin twice removed, and thus they have a special anointing in the Spirit to evangelize. That's not how it works.
  - b. These are the same people that Paul claims in verse 7 - "they want to be teachers of the law, but they don't even know what they're talking about."

2. There's others who say the only real way to please God is to minimize earthly pleasures - so a REAL Christian should abstain from marriage and sex and certain kinds of food so that they can keep themselves pure and humble.
  - a. CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE: You see even today in different ways - Some folks treat sexuality as if its so sinful that even once they're married it feels wrong...on a completely different side, you've got folks out there who think it's a sin to eat meat and you should follow a vegan diet.
  - b. The error here isn't that they're taking seriously the consequences of their sexuality or their diet - the error is a failure to appreciate the good gifts God has given, and further to equate this kind of living with a means to salvation.
3. There were also some claiming some sort of salvation from secret knowledge and wisdom that only few could attain. Similar to the Ascetics, the Gnostics were a group that took a very low view of the material world, but they believed you could transcend this physical world with deep secret knowledge.
  - a. CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE: Scientology, or any spiritual or religious system that claims salvation comes from enlightenment and can only be attained by the few who reach the heights of knowledge.
4. Finally, there was an outward pressure from the Cult of Artemis, the goddess of nature, hunting, chastity and childbirth. While obviously not compatible with the Christian faith, we'll see some hints in future weeks as to how this folk religion in Ephesus still could have been a temptation for new Christians - particularly mothers fearing safety in childbirth.
  - a. CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE: The danger here isn't just idolatry - it's syncretism. That's a fancy word that means blending the truth of Christianity with the beliefs and practices that are native to your culture. But like I said, we'll talk more about this in coming weeks.

So the situation isn't looking too good. And the language that Paul uses here is pretty strong, but also a bit intriguing once you sit with it for a moment.

#### I. REJECTION OF TRUTH DESTROYS FAITH (19).

Paul draws a sharp contrast here between Timothy and those who have failed to hold fast to the faith and have rejected the truth their conscience has revealed.

Paul uses interesting imagery here - he says they've suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. There's 2 things of note about this wordchoice:

1. First, the action is occurring TO them, not by them. In other words, Paul's emphasis at the moment is not that they are causing others to be harmed, nor that they are in some way harming the Gospel. Those results may well be involved, especially if others follow

the example of these few. But Paul's focus here is that these individuals themselves are suffering on account of their choices. He cares about them, and it hurts him that they are hurting.

2. Second is the image itself: Shipwreck. There are many ways Paul COULD have described the destructive path of the choices made by some, but he specifically chose to refer to it as shipwreck - a kind of disaster he has himself experienced.

THIS is the first comparison that comes to mind when Paul thinks of these false teachers.

He remembers this disastrous incident that COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED if only they would have done what he'd told them.

Likewise, he thinks of these individuals from the community in Ephesus, likely friends of his, whose faith appears to be crumbling because they've abandoned what they know to be true.

The focus here is on a pastoral concern for those who are leading other astray, and yet even in the language there is a compassion over the condition of these teachers themselves.

There's an empathy in his tone as he reveals this profound wisdom:

#### REJECTION OF TRUTH DESTROYS FAITH

He's not talking about doubting or questioning. He's not talking about those times when you're uncertain and trying to figure things out.

Paul is talking about when we KNOW what is true and right and good, but we reject it nonetheless.

Illustration - I remember talking with a young girl at a church camp one summer while I was in youth ministry. She'd had some ups and downs over the years, and even though she'd found her way back to the church camp that year she came in professing to be a wiccan.

She wasn't combative about it or anything, but she just had that matter of fact sort of air about her and would scoff at some of the teaching times. She was just over this whole Christian thing.

Finally, about halfway through the week we had a little sit down chat, and she opened up about how she'd been so turned off by all the folks in her church that professed to be Christians but were just mean people who didn't live out what they said they believed.

NORMALLY, in that situation, I'd just nod and listen, and admit that yeah - sometimes the church does a really bad job of living out the Gospel - but Jesus still shows us a better way.

But that's not what I did this time. Because I knew this girl, and I KNEW that she had folks in her life that were living and modeling faith well...AND I KNEW that she'd had real, life-changing encounters with Christ.

So I said - sorry, no. In this situation, you don't have an excuse. Because you know. I know you know that everything the Bible says about Jesus is real. You've seen it others and you know it to be true. You can't use others an excuse just because it's hard to live this out.

May sound harsh to you - it even sounded a bit blunt to me as it was coming out of my mouth, but she admitted she knew I was right.

And her rejection of Jesus was leading her into all sorts of destructive behaviors to try and cope with the brokenness going on in her life.

That's the same kind of thing that was going on for these people Paul is writing Timothy about.

Because they'd rejected what they knew was truth, they risked endangering others faith, but their own faith suffered even more.

But unlike the girl from my camp, they weren't able to admit it.

## II. THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE IS ALWAYS RESTORATION (20).

Explanation - Paul goes on to mention two individuals by name - Hymenaeus and Alexander. We don't know much about these fellas, but we do have some info from elsewhere in the NT.

Hymanaeus is mentioned again in 2 Tm 2:17-18 as one who spreads teaching like gangrene, and he - along with a man named Philetus - is said to have spread the claim that the resurrection had already taken place. We're not told much else about the content of his claims, but it stands to reason that it would be pretty alarming to the church to hear that the final resurrection had already occurred and we'd all missed the boat (*shipwreck pun intended there*)

Alexander has a little more info to go on. He may be the same Alexander mentioned as a Jewish leader who tried to speak during uproar while Paul is at Ephesus. Acts mentions him as if he were known to readers, which would have been the case if he were known to the Ephesian church. He's ALSO mentioned in 2 Tm 4:14 as a metal-worker who did Paul a great deal of harm. This means he would have had ties to both the Jewish (non-Christian/Christian) community as well as the craftsmen who began the riot.

The one clear thing is that both of these individuals have caused some trouble for the Christian community in Ephesus and apparently continue to do so even after this first letter.

What is NOT clear is exactly what kind of relationship they had with the Church in Ephesus in the first place.

Paul says that he has dealt with these two finally by “handing them over to Satan, that they may be taught not to blaspheme.”

Paul is referring to a practice of discipline that was taught by Jesus and would’ve been firmly established by this time.

It’s rooted in Matthew 18 which gives instructions on confronting sin in the church:

1. Have a conversation to point out sin in love.
2. If your friend who claims to be a believer is unrepentant, bring along a witness.
3. If they still don’t recognize the error of their ways, get the rest of the church involved.
4. If after ALL OF THAT this believer still refuses to repent, then it should result in treating that person as if they are outside the church.

This is what’s behind the the Catholic practice of excommunication, and the Amish practice of shunning or social avoidance. The hope is that by depriving the person of the benefits of the Christian community, they’ll recognize the cost of their sin.

There’s a similar principle behind what Paul is referring to as “handing them over to Satan” - basically, turning over custody. If they are on a path toward Satan and have been repeatedly warned, yet they continue undeterred and unrepentant, then eventually the only thing you can do is to respect their choice and hope that they will learn from the natural consequences of their choice.

I never had to get to that point with the girl from that camp. I didn’t even have to get a second witness involved. When she was finally confronted with truth, she turned her life back around.

But that doesn’t always happen. Sometimes the situation is trickier or the person is too prideful or more stubborn in their sin - they might not be yet ready to repent.

If it comes to it, especially if that person is harming others or causing division in relationships, it may be that the only appropriate action at the time is to put up some healthy boundaries. But we understand the HOPE is always that they would repent and the relationship be mended.

#### THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE IS ALWAYS RESTORATION

Discipline is always given with the goal of restoration - even when treating others like outsiders, we recognize that Jesus treated outsiders with the most compassion.

You might be listening to this and think that breaking relationship with others sounds a bit harsh - but the truth is we do this ALL THE TIME. In fact, we do this way more often than we should.

Some of us are far too eager to hand people over to Satan.

Most of us are far too quick to dismiss others we disagree with, and rather than having a constructive conversation to try and win them over to the truth, we simply let them continue on down a path that will lead to destruction.

1. How many people in your life do you avoid rather than speak the truth to them in love?
2. How many people in your life do you go on ignoring their sin rather than addressing it because the conversation would just be too uncomfortable?

You've handed them over to Satan, whether you realize it or not.

It's one thing to do that once you've done everything in your power to win them over - it's another thing to do it without even trying to say anything.

Because if you know that someone is heading toward destruction and you don't warn them about it...that's on you as much as it's on them.

[PAUSE]

Before we close this morning...I want to end on a note of hope, because I know this is kinda heavy.

In the midst of all this, we don't have to be discouraged or overwhelmed, because Jesus is with us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### III. THE SPIRIT IS OUR GUIDE (18).

Explanation - At the very outset of this passage, Paul reminded Timothy that when he was first called into ministry, words were spoken over him to prepare him for just such a time as this. We don't know exactly what those prophecies were, but it's evident that whatever words were spoken would in some way be an encouragement to Timothy whenever his task seemed uncertain.

Not every one of us is given such a unique call, and even fewer receive as dramatic a calling experience as Isaiah in his vision of the heavenly throne room or Paul on his journey to Damascus. But ALL of us are given a common call to follow Jesus and to make disciples of all nations. And ALL of us are given gifts from the Holy Spirit that equip us for the tasks set before us.

When the time comes for you to share faith with others or to hold brothers and sisters accountable, the Holy Spirit will guide and equip you.

And not only that, but we can take comfort in the reality that God has revealed Himself to us through scripture, through the person and work of Jesus, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

God does not withhold Himself from us. God does hide Himself from us. God longs to reveal Himself to those who seek Him.

- Some are here this morning on the brink of shipwreck, there are truths you know but for whatever reason have rejected.
- Some are here who are have already been through it and you're in need of care.
- Some are questioning and in need of guidance.
- Some are worried about others but don't know where to begin.

Wherever you are this morning, let's come to Jesus expectantly.

We need not fear shipwreck in our faith if we seek Him with all our hearts. We need only fear a life spent rejecting the light and the truth He longs to offer.

Let's Pray.