

- Picture of 4th plinth
- Story of seeing it when in London recently
- Talk about importance of Christ on the plinth

INTRODUCTION

We may wonder what the idea of standing on a plinth has got to do with Christians. We may feel that our calling is not to put ourselves on a pedestal, to set ourselves up as examples for other people to look up to. And we would be absolutely right.

As soon as Christians start to become self righteous about their faith, as soon as we put ourselves on the proverbial pedestal, we can be sure of what will happen next. Let's face it there are plenty of people who will be queuing up either to knock us off that pedestal, or to laugh when we fall off it due to our own shortcomings, both as Christians and as human beings. And fall off the pedestal we surely will if we are foolish enough to allow our faith to become something which we believe somehow makes us better than everyone else.

Yet the image of the pedestal still has a message for us. I was struck when I was in London as I watched people take their place on the fourth plinth that it is our responsibility as Christians not to put ourselves on that pedestal each day, but to put Christ on it – to hold Him up to the whole world, especially to those who cannot or will not see Him. Because he cannot be knocked off the pedestal.

And this idea of putting Christ on the pedestal, or proclaiming Him to the world, is exactly what Paul's letters to Timothy are all about. Paul is writing towards the end of his own earthly ministry to Timothy, who is just starting his. He is passing the baton on to the next generation, and this letter is almost an instruction manual to Timothy on how to discharge his ministry.

And in that sense it is relevant to us all – because we all have a ministry to discharge. As we have heard over the last few weeks as we have been studying Acts, we are all called to be active players in the spread of the Gospel.

And the short passage we heard this morning from Dorothy is a great summary of what is in the whole letter. You could read the whole of this short letter to Timothy and, if these were the only 8 verses you remembered, Paul's message would have got through to you.

I think any minister could preach all day on these 8 verses because they are absolutely filled with encouragement, with instruction and with inspiration for everyone who calls themselves a Christian. Most of all these verses are filled with the love and the power of the holy spirit; imagine how Timothy's spirits must have been raised by reading them! Just as our own spirits must surely be raised by reading them today.

Yet in some ways this is both a daunting, as well as an exciting, message, because it pretty much tells us what we need to be doing, day in, day out, to build our church. It's an instruction to each of us in our own ministry to those around us.

And when we look at some of the things Paul is telling us, I wonder how we in St Andrews Leckie REALLY shape up.....

As I said we could focus on so many aspects of this passage, but let's look this morning at just 3 things Paul tells us in this passage and let's ask ourselves if we rarely pass the test – if we are really building the sort of Church in Peebles Christ wants us to build.

FIRSTLY in verse 1 we are told:

“in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:”

This sounds like a very formal instruction which was being given to Timothy – it sounds almost like a warning to him. And in many ways it is a warning – a reminder that we are all, ultimately, accountable to God. There is no escaping it. But it is much more than a warning – it is also a message of hope.

Yes, it is a reminder to Timothy and to us that God is ultimately our judge – but it is also a reminder that Christ has appeared AND WILL APPEAR AGAIN on earth. And it reminds us as Christians and as a church that we must ultimately be **ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD**.

What Paul says about Timothy as a church leader applies just as much to congregations. Every church will give an account of itself to God. Our ministry is on constant display before God, in the presence of God and of Christ. Nothing is hidden from his sight.

In short, you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can never fool God. So if we choose to deliver a watered down message, a sort of 'Christianity light', diet Christianity, I-can't-believe-it's-not-Christianity type of message, then it may well go down well with people at first – it may be exactly what they want to hear – but if we only deliver a message which people want to hear, we are trading short term popularity for long term accountability to God.

God uses churches that know they are accountable to God. This was the message Paul was delivering to Timothy – he was telling him that this is what he must keep at the forefront of his mind at all times.

Whatever more detailed instructions we may receive, whatever tasks we are asked to fulfil, our overriding principle as individuals and as a church is one of ultimate accountability to God. If we lose sight of this, if we start to feel we are accountable to people, then we are missing the point of our ministry.

So that is the first message – accountability to God.

SECONDLY we are reminded in verse 2:

“preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction”

Surely this one goes without saying? **In season and out of season** – in other words, preach the Gospel both when the message is easy and when it is hard. Tell people the truth about God's kingdom both when it is fashionable to do so and when it is not.

There will be times when the message is easy – when the Gospel message is one which people want to hear. At Christmas, for example, when churches are traditionally full and people are receptive to the good news (at least for the duration of the festive season).

But most of the time the Gospel message is not easy to preach. Nor is it intended to be. And this is exactly what 'in season' and 'out of season' means – it means preaching God's word both when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient.

This verse contains five commands, but the primary command is for Timothy to preach the word. And what Paul says about Timothy as a pastor applies just as much to churches – including our church. God uses churches that are committed to communicating the whole Bible, at all times.

- Discussion at recent ministry candidates' get together
- Key word in our ministry
- Comfort or challenge?

Now for us, this means that sometimes we will actually go away from here on a Sunday morning troubled by what we hear. We may even – horror of horrors – disagree with what we have heard. We will certainly have cause to go away and debate what we have heard. I wonder, when was the last time we went home from church and sat down and challenged each other – or even ourselves – by asking 'what does this passage mean to me in my life, and how can I take this message to other people'?

As Christians we are committed to preaching the whole Bible, even those parts that make us uncomfortable. And that is the second message – in season and out of season, the Word must be preached.

THIRDLY we read in verse 7:

"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry"

In many ways this is the most difficult part of the message to comply with – **do not be distracted**. We could be accountable to God in all we do. We could preach the word when it is easy and when it isn't. But to do so in the face of the many distractions and challenges of the world – let alone the false teaching Paul also refers to – is surely the most difficult challenge we face. Concentration on the task in hand, in the face of many temptations, is never easy.

- Viewing soldiers parade in York last week
- Seeing wee boy shouting to his daddy who was on parade
- Soldier didn't flinch – couldn't tell which one was the boy's dad

It's no less difficult for us. Paul goes on to reinforce the importance of not being distracted by

using a sporting metaphor in verse 8. He tells us he has fought the good fight, he has finished the race, he has kept the faith. We must do nothing less.

To put these instructions into context I'm going to finish with a story of 2 conversations I have had over the last year with 2 different ministers.

(Finish with story of 2 ministers – 2 different situations)

How would Paul have reacted in these situations?

Imagine someone from one of Paul's churches coming up to him and saying 'Paul, you're a great minister but your message is a wee bit close to the bone. Be a good chap, water it down a bit for me and I'll make sure the coffers are still filled each week'.

I think Paul's response would have been interesting to say the least. He was not a man to mince his words. And indeed the minister in question did say to me his immediate response was to ask "what would Christ do?".

Or could we imagine Paul talking towards the end of his ministry about winding down, taking things easy?

Of course not. These were not his instructions to his protégé Timothy – nor are they his instructions to us. When we think about building our church according to Paul's instructions – according to biblical principles, according to the teachings of Christ Jesus.

How do we measure up? Are we living up to the instructions given by Paul to Timothy?

Are we building God's church here in Peebles – are we challenging people with the message of the Gospel?

Are we:

- Accountable to God?
- Preaching the Gospel when it is fashionable AND when it is not?
- Keeping our head despite all distractions?

This is the challenge of Paul to Timothy. This is the challenge of Christ to us.

We can put Christ on that pedestal. We can proclaim Him to Peebles. We can follow in the footsteps of Paul, and of Timothy. This passage tells us what we need to do – the power of the holy spirit will sustain us in our task. Let's be equal to that task – let's build the church of Christ right here in Peebles.