**Reflections – 2 Timothy 2: 8-15 – Unchained!**

**Bible study on 2 Timothy 2:8-15**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

We humbly gather in God’s presence,
our creator, redeemer and sustainer.
We thank you, God, for the breath that sustains us
and the community that surrounds us.
Let us come and worship you with hearts thankful
for all your blessings to us.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

2 Timothy 2: 8-15

 8Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, 9for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. 10Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

11Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with him,
    we will also live with him;
12if we endure,
    we will also reign with him.
If we disown him,
    he will also disown us;
13if we are faithless,
    he remains faithful,
    for he cannot disown himself.

14Keep reminding God’s people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. 15Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

The passage opens with slightly more of the content of 1:10’s ‘sound teaching’. Verse 8 looks like a very slender statement of Paul’s Gospel (found also in Romans 1:3-4), but it compresses his faith perfectly. By holding together Jesus’ birth and resurrection, Paul insists that neither his earthly nor his heavenly story is sufficient: the one depends on the other. And if his earthly story accentuates his Jewishness, his heavenly story underlines his significance for all humankind.

Timothy is to explain this ‘word of truth’ (v.15) associated with the chained and imprisoned Paul without any sense of shame. Paul’s chains symbolise the freedom denied him because of his service of Christ. In the eyes of the world, he is no better than a criminal. Yet what looks like humiliation is actually his participation in Jesus’ dying and living. He is confident that by persevering in the gospel he will come to share in Christ’s heavenly salvation; abandoning his calling could only mean condemnation on the day of judgement. The ‘sure saying’ in verses 11-13 may have been part of a hymn or creed in the Early Church. It closes on a note of divine abundance: God’s abiding faithfulness has the last word in this pithy summary of the ‘word of truth’ (the ‘sure saying’ phrase occurs throughout the Pastorals, but not elsewhere in Paul’s writings, as a series of summaries of Paul’s gospel: see 1 Timothy 1:15, 3:1, 4:9; Titus 3:8).

Paul’s slender statements of his Gospel contrast sharply with other ‘words’ in his sights (v.14). These are not the debates aired among Jewish rabbis and Greek philosophers, whose give and take explores the mysteries of truth. Ruinous ‘wrangling’ over words is like the prisoner’s chains that chafe the skin and constrain bodily movement. The liberating truth of the Word of God is found in brevity.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

In 1696, one of the first free public libraries in England was opened, in Wimborne Minster, Dorset. The first donor believed his books would be safe in the church. This was a time when some religious books were burnt by the authorities. So a later donor insisted on having his books chained to the shelves, though the library itself remained open and free for the townspeople to use.

Wimborne’s chained books symbolise open access despite restricted movement, like the chains that held the imprisoned Paul. Being ‘chained like a criminal’ didn’t stop him spreading the gospel: ‘the word of God is not chained’ (2 Timothy 2:9).

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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 **Questions**

* Why are these books (from Hereford’s medieval library) in chains?
* In what ways can we free the Bible so that everyone can appreciate its message?
* Who can you pray for who is in chains (real or metaphorical)?

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word.
Help us to spend time reading it
and show us your truth through it,
so we can share it with others.
Give us opportunities to unchain your Word for others
so they can be free in you.
**Amen.**