

# Keeping the Treasure/The Young Prophet and the Old Prophet

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Every first day of the week, we assemble here to remember the death of Jesus in the manner He prescribed. However, that observance of the Lord's Supper isn't supposed to be the end of the spiritual process. It's supposed to be the beginning. Our consciousness of the sacrifice of Christ is supposed to change the way that we live in order to better glorify Him. Before we partake this morning, then, let's zero in on that spiritual obligation. Let's see what Paul has to say in 2 Timothy 1 about keeping the treasure.

Paul's discussion here begins with encouraging Timothy to remember **A SPIRIT FROM GOD**. Let's read together from 2 Timothy 1:6-8. When we consider the whole of 2 Timothy, it's not hard to figure out what Timothy's problem is. Apparently, the spiritual climate where he is, which is probably Ephesus, has turned hostile. Those who openly proclaim the gospel are likely to end up imprisoned like Paul has. Timothy has decided that the prudent thing to do is to limit his preaching of the word so as not to get in trouble.

Paul, however, won't have any of that. Timothy has a special gift from God, and he needs to be using that powerfully in God's service. He then starts talking about the spirit that all Christians have from God. We shouldn't mistake this for the capital-S Holy Spirit. Instead, Paul means this more generally. He's talking about an attitude in which we should share. Christians aren't supposed to be cowardly people. They're supposed to be people who are loving, self-disciplined, and filled with the power of the truth. Timothy had no cause to be ashamed. If suffering came from serving God, he needed to accept that.

Today, the climate of our society is also growing increasingly hostile to the gospel, so we need to learn the same lesson. God didn't want Timothy to be a coward, and He doesn't want us to be cowards either. We can't hide our faith. We need to own it. We should never be obnoxious, but we should never shy away from speaking truth in love either. That's true in our Bible classes here, where everybody agrees with us, but it's equally true in worldly settings where no one does. We need to be people of faith, not fear.

Next, Paul explains why we are responsible for following **A HOLY CALLING**. Read with me from 2 Timothy 1:9-10. Let's unpack Paul's logic here by taking it chronologically. First, God had an eternal purpose to show grace to men. This purpose was revealed when Jesus came to earth. In His death on the cross, He conquered death and brought life and immortality to light. This wasn't some abstraction; instead, it had significant implications for us. Because of it, God could save us despite our own failures.

However, the grace of God isn't meant to be a one-way street. God didn't merely save us. He also called us to a holy calling. The great gift that we have received from Him obliges us to do our best to reciprocate. We can never repay God for His salvation, but we are still indebted to Him for that salvation.

Sometimes, we hear talk of bought-and-paid-for politicians. Some fat cat has donated thousands of dollars to the politician's election campaign, so when the politician gets into office, he's responsible for looking after the fat cat's interests. He doesn't own his vote anymore. The fat cat does. The same thing is true for us. We are bought-and-paid-for Christians. We don't own our lives anymore. God does. If He wants us to face persecution and suffering for His sake, that's what we need to do.

After this, Paul defines **HIS CONFIDENCE** in God. Look at 2 Timothy 1:11-12. To understand what Paul is saying here, let's go back to the politician and the fat cat. When he's in office, the politician is willing to take all kinds of unpopular stands as long as they benefit his patron. Sure, a lot of voters might get mad at him for taking those stands, but the politician isn't afraid of the voters. He knows that when he's up for re-election, the massive influx of cash from the fat cat will protect him from defeat.

For exactly the same reason, Paul wasn't afraid of losing any popularity contests. He could preach the gospel without fear because he knew that God had his back. So what if people got angry at him? So what if they imprisoned him or even killed him? His trust was in God. God was the one who controlled his fate and would reward him. In the end, all of the anger of the enemies of the gospel would come to nothing.

Every one of us, friends, comes down on one of two sides on this issue. Either we're afraid of the ill opinion of others, and it keeps us from serving God as we should, or we trust in God to keep us safe no matter what. With that trust, we will fearlessly do what is right. When we're faced with one of those

decisions, either to speak out for God or remain silent, there's a question we need to ask ourselves. We need to ask, "Can this person's good opinion get me to heaven?" If not, his good opinion doesn't matter.

In the final portion of this context, Paul reminds us of **OUR CHARGE**. Consider 2 Timothy 1:13-14. This charge has two parts. First, Timothy, and indeed we ourselves, are responsible for living according to the Biblical pattern. We are faithful to God when we behave as He has commanded, both as individuals and as a church. If we follow some other pattern, we aren't faithful.

Second, Timothy was responsible for guarding what had been entrusted to him. We know from elsewhere in 2 Timothy that this treasure is the gospel itself. Timothy didn't protect it by remaining silent about it. Instead, he was faithful when he proclaimed it to others as it had been taught to him.

Before the Lord's Supper, then, let's reflect on these things. Let's remember the greatness of our Lord, who put to death the power of death and brought life and immortality to light for us. Second, though, let's remember our obligations. Because we have shared in the grace of Christ, we are responsible for holding to the pattern of His word and proclaiming it to others. Are we? Let's consider this as we partake.

As our first study this morning should have made clear, because we are Christians, we are obliged to live up to God's standards and to take appropriate care of His gospel. To us, the second half of this seems like the really troublesome one. It takes real faith to join Paul in suffering for the gospel!

However, failing to hold to God's pattern of sound words can be equally troublesome. In fact, the Scripture contains more than one story about men who found the courage to proclaim God's word but failed to stay true to that word themselves. Let's look at one: the story of the young prophet and the old prophet.

### **Jeroboam's Altar**

Sadly, all the way through this story, a different pattern than the pattern of sound words emerges. It is a pattern of disobedience, and this pattern begins with the story of Jeroboam's altar. Its first sub-context concerns **THE SIN OF JEROBOAM**. Consider 1 Kings 12:25-33. When you plot a curve on a graph, the point at the top of the curve, where it starts to head downhill again, is called an inflection point. It's fair to describe this moment as an, if indeed not the, inflection point in the history of Israel.

Up to this point in time, Jeroboam looks like a good guy. He is chosen by God from among all the people to be the king of the ten northern tribes of Israel. God keeps him safe from the vengeance of Solomon and arranges events so that the ten northern tribes reject Rehoboam, Solomon's son. The ten tribes happily acclaim Jeroboam, and God promises him that if he remains faithful to God, he will have a house that will endure as long as the house of David will.

So far, everything looks good, but then Jeroboam blows it. Even though God has promised him that he will be and remain king, he starts fretting over the religious situation in Israel. He worries that if the people go every year to Jerusalem to worship, that Rehoboam will somehow be able to regain their allegiance. From our perspective, this doesn't seem too likely. Rehoboam is one of the most conspicuous examples of ignorance, arrogance, and incompetence in the Bible, but Jeroboam is concerned about him nonetheless.

Jeroboam's solution is to devise an entirely new form of worship. He provides new gods, in new locations at Dan and Bethel instead of at Jerusalem, and new religious festivals when the people are supposed to come and worship these golden calves. Ironically, in human terms, this is a good plan. Jeroboam's new religion has some real staying power. Hundreds of years after Jeroboam and all his house are worm food, the kings of Israel are still walking in "the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat". That's an achievement, I guess.

However, Jeroboam's new religion also turns God from his biggest ally into his biggest enemy. Because Jeroboam knew what he was supposed to do and didn't do it, God promises him that rather than having an enduring house, his lineage will be destroyed. Sadly, that's exactly what happens. Jeroboam's legacy to Israel is a seductive false religion and continual plots and coups against its kings.

In passing, let's note the destructive effects of fear in our own spiritual lives. For some reason, we have sympathy for people who don't obey God because they're afraid of the consequences of obedience. That's not a sympathy God shares. All through the pages of Scripture, people who disobey out of fear are condemned. If we know what we should do and don't do it because we're afraid, we will be condemned too.

In any event, there Jeroboam is, officiating at his new idolatrous altar, when **A MAN OF GOD** appears on the scene. His first actions are described in 1 Kings 13:1-5. He curses the altar right in front of

Jeroboam, his priests, and his guards. The day would come when the bones of those priests would be burned on the altar. Predictably, Jeroboam doesn't take this too well. He stretches out his hand to command the guards to seize the prophet, but his hand shrivels up, and the altar itself collapses, dumping ashes everywhere. This is not what we would call a promising start for the king's religion.

It does point, though, to something that we must recognize. No matter how reasonable they seem to us, departures from God's pattern will not endure. When we consider the spiritual climate of modern-day America, it's easy for Christians to become afraid. It's easy for us to start hunting for ways to make our services "relevant", even if relevance means bringing in the praise band.

Friends, we need to worry less about what is relevant and more about what is right. As you know, I'm all for adapting our services within the liberty that God has given us, provided those adaptations are useful. However, we must never regard the ordinances of God as expedients that we can adopt, or not, as we see fit. We must look to the word honestly and faithfully implement everything that we read.

This section of the story ends, though, with **JEROBOAM'S PLEAS**. Look at 1 Kings 13:6-10. It's amazing how quickly his arrogance evaporates once he is punished. He starts begging favors from the prophet. The first, obviously, is that he wants his hand healed. Perhaps surprisingly to us, the prophet prays for the chastened king, and God answers his prayer. This highlights God's mercy. At this point in time, even after offending God as deeply as he possibly could have, Jeroboam still hasn't run out of chances. God gives him the opportunity to repent, and Jeroboam's ultimate failure is his fault, not God's.

After this, likely feeling grateful, Jeroboam invites the prophet to share a meal with him. This time, though, the prophet says no. God has warned him specifically and strictly that he is to go straight home, without eating or drinking anything, and that's exactly what the prophet intends to do.

It is here that we find the seeds of the prophet's eventual downfall. God told him, clearly and plainly, what God wanted. The man of God understood the commandment, and he understood the consequences of disobedience. With what he had been given, he literally had no excuse to disobey.

Today, brethren, we also are without excuse. Like the Jews of old, we have been entrusted with the oracles of God. We can hold God's completed revelation in one hand. I can fit my New Testament in my hip pocket. God's plan for His people and His church is simple. There is nothing that churches in the first century did that is beyond our capacity to understand. We come together to study these things twice every week. We know God's expectations for us as fully as the prophet knew God's expectations for him.

If we have the Bible and know what it says, we need to do what it says. There is grace through Christ for those who try and fall short, but there is no grace at all for those who reject the standard itself. If we reject the word, there is nothing left for us.

### **The Young Prophet and the Old Prophet**

Sadly, the last part of this story manages to end on an even lower note, if possible, than the first part. This occurs with the story of the young prophet and the old prophet. The tragic events in it are set in motion by **THE OLD PROPHET'S PLAN**. Look at 1 Kings 13:10-15. The old prophet hears about the amazing things that have happened at Bethel, so he gets on his donkey and catches up with the young prophet. To all appearances, his motives are good. This is not some kind of convoluted assassination plot. He's genuinely impressed by the miraculous goings-on, and he's genuinely interested in getting to know the guy by sharing a meal with him. However, he proves to have much less respect for the words of the Lord.

This points to the fatal flaw in a delusion from which our society suffers. Most Americans will sign on to the statement that as long as your heart is good, that's the most important thing. You can do pretty much whatever you want as long as you're acting from "the right motives".

Now, don't get me wrong. It is impossible to see God without purity of heart. The heart truly is of supreme importance. However, simply because we believe our hearts are good doesn't mean that they actually are. The test for whether some impulse is good isn't whether it strikes us as good. It is whether it conforms to God's will. Otherwise, it may be nothing more than evil desire under a cloak of nobility.

Let me give you an example. Let's say that a married couple wants to place membership here. After visiting with them, we learn that the wife is on her second marriage, and she divorced her first husband even though he hadn't cheated on her. All this happened before she became a Christian.

99 percent of churches in this country, and probably more of our brethren than I care to think about, wouldn't even blink an eye at accepting them into fellowship. Most of them have never heard of Matthew 19, and even those who have will hunt for reasons not to honor the Lord's command.

Such reasons present themselves in droves. Look at how happy that couple is! They seem like really nice people. They'd be a real asset to the congregation moving forward. Surely it's not fair to penalize her for a mistake she made a long time ago! She deserves a fresh start! Welcome aboard!

All of that seems very gracious, very reasonable, very considerate, but simply because it seems right to us doesn't make it right. A supposedly good motive that leads us to reject the commandment of the Lord isn't actually good at all. We are not called to the easy evasion. We are called to the truth, be it easy or hard, and if we embrace those whom the Lord condemns, we will destroy ourselves and them both.

Once he meets the old prophet, the young prophet makes **A FOOLISH DECISION**. It appears in 1 Kings 13:16-19. The young prophet actually starts out on the right track. The old prophet catches up to him, invites him to his house for a meal, and the young prophet gives the old prophet the same answer he gave Jeroboam. He'd like to, but he can't, because God commanded him not to eat or drink anything. Nothing daunted, the old prophet makes up a story about how God had told him differently, renews his invitation, and the young prophet fatally accepts.

When we read this story, our first reaction is indignation at the old prophet. He tricks the young prophet out of obeying God by lying to him. What a bad guy! We feel sorry for the poor deceived young prophet. That reaction, though, misses the point. Yes, the young prophet was absolutely lied to. However, the fact that someone else tried to deceive him did not absolve him of his responsibility to obey God.

Sadly, the old prophet is neither the first nor the last to lie about God's will. The religious world today is full of liars. People will lie to us about what we have to do to be saved. They'll lie to us about the organization and work of the church. They'll lie to us about what is and is not sinful. Maybe these people have deceived themselves too. Maybe they're just straight-up trying to trick us. It doesn't really matter. What does matter is that if we listen to them, we will end up believing a lie instead of God's word.

The only antidote to lies is the truth, and the only place we can find the truth is the word. If the Bible says it, it is true. If the Bible contradicts it, it is false, no matter how many others contradict the Scripture. We don't dare put our trust in the words of any man, and that's just as true of me as it is of anyone else. God's word marks the path to eternal life, and if we will only follow it, we will come to no harm.

Sadly, the young prophet chooses to listen to the old prophet instead of to God, and he meets with **GOD'S JUDGMENT**. 1 Kings 13:20-29 tells the tale. He goes to the old prophet's home, but in mid-meal, the old prophet receives a genuine revelation that pronounces the young prophet's doom. As God predicts, once he leaves, a lion attacks and kills him. The lion doesn't eat him or attack the donkey; it just waits beside the body until the old prophet arrives, so as to show that this is not chance, but God's punishment.

We must remember, friends, that however sympathetic we may find the young prophet, he made the deadly mistake of disobedience. God had told him to go straight home, he chose to do something else, and he was killed for his error. It might not seem fair to us, but it clearly was what God's justice demanded.

We must acknowledge, too, that God will act no differently in His dealings with us. Even in human courts, we see this. If some con man cheats a widow out of her life savings and vanishes, the state is not going to restore those life savings out of its own coffers. The court will be very sympathetic to the widow. It will happily divest the con man of that money if he shows up again and still has it—fat chance—but otherwise, those hundreds of thousands are gone for good, and jailing the con man isn't much comfort.

A false teacher is the spiritual version of a con man. However, if we listen to him, we aren't going to lose our money. We're going to lose our souls. Once we believe the false teacher's lies and walk according to them, we have set our feet on the path to destruction. There are no asterisks in the Lamb's book of life. Nobody gets a pass on wrongdoing because he was lied to. If we keep faith, we will live. If we don't keep faith, we will be destroyed, even if we failed because we were deceived. Sure, the false teachers who lied to us will be right there with us, but that's hardly comforting either.

The point is, brethren, that we all need to take ownership of our salvation. We're responsible for it, and we need to behave responsibly. The dangers of being lied to about God's will for us are very real. No matter whether you're listening to me or to an angel from heaven, you need to take what you hear and compare it to what the Bible says, and if it doesn't line up, you have to reject it.