

## **“Why be faithful?”**

September 9, 2018

2 Timothy 2:8-13

### **I. Introduction**

Do you think Timothy went to Ephesus on a whim? That is, when Paul asked him to remain at Ephesus and help the church grow, did Timothy flippantly say, “Oh, sure, why not?” I think there was more to it than that, I expect that Timothy and his friends spent much time in prayer seeking God’s direction. *Was this God’s will? Was this an open door from God or not?* Timothy probably talked to his family and friends to get their input—*did they think he was ready? Did they think he could do the job?* Paul’s shoes would be hard to fill! *Was he ready to leave his mentor and go off on his own?* I suspect that it was only after much prayer and conversation that Timothy accepted God’s call through Paul to become the senior pastor at the church in Ephesus.

But things didn’t work out as Timothy had assumed they would. As we’ve seen earlier, Timothy had faced opposition from within the church and persecution from without. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy so that he wouldn’t retreat or wallow in self-pity. He was instead to **“be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus ... and to endure hardship ... like a good soldier of Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 2:1, 3). Jesus had told the disciples in John 15:20, **“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”** Faithful service to the Lord has always been costly. Making Jesus one’s Lord and Savior involves willing, unconditional submission to Him and to the work of His kingdom—whatever the cost might be, even if it is death. God’s way isn’t always our way.

Knowing his young friend, Paul may have anticipated questions that would come to Timothy’s mind after the admonitions of 2 Timothy 2:1-7. *“Why should I be a faithful teacher of teachers?” “Why should I suffer hardship like a soldier, compete to win like an athlete, or toil hard like a farmer?”* Whatever Timothy

may have thought, Paul gave four reasons to endure hardships—four reasons to be faithful beginning with Jesus Christ’s example.

## II. Reasons for Faithfulness

**A. Jesus Christ’s Example** Paul wrote, “Remember Jesus Christ.” With a similar thought, 1 John 2:6 says, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” Hebrews 12:2 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Turn to 1 Peter 2:21-23. The only way one can “follow in His steps” and “walk as Jesus did” is to keep remembering Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead.” In 1 Cor. 15:3-4 Paul wrote, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” This is of “first importance” because as Paul wrote later in verse 17, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” But rather than just remembering the resurrection, Christians are to remember Jesus Christ, who is alive because of the resurrection—He is “raised from the dead.” We do not serve a past event or a merely historical person. Jesus did live a human life and die a human death, but we worship and serve Him because He is no longer dead but alive. We remember and worship and serve the living Jesus Christ.

When we remember Christ as our resurrected Lord, we focus on His nature as God and His role as Savior. As 1 Corinthians 15:55 says, it was through His death and resurrection that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), took away the victory and sting of death. When you trust Him, He becomes your Savior and your Lord; the power of sin, of death, and of Satan in your life is broken. What greater reason for service to Jesus Christ could there possibly be than to serve the One who conquered death and did it for you—in John 14:19 Jesus said, “Because I live, you also will live.” Jesus conquered death for us.

Paul also wrote, “Remember Jesus Christ, ... descended from David.” Being in the lineage of David tells of Jesus’ humanity. Because of that Hebrews 2:14-18 says, He is our sympathetic and merciful high

Priest who knows all our suffering and has felt all our pain. Because of that **Hebrews 4:16** says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Being “descended from David” also tells of Jesus’ royalty and majesty—in **Luke 2:32-33** the angel told Mary that “he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” As Sovereign, seated at the right hand of God (**Hebrews 10:12**), Jesus controls everything that we are and everything that happens to us. We must resist temptation, but we don’t need to fear it, because, as this month’s memory verse says, our Sovereign Lord “will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (**1 Corinthians 10:13**). We can be faithful because of who Jesus is and what He did for us.

**B. The Power of the Word** Paul then gave a second reason for faithfulness: the Power of the Word. Although Paul was in chains, he knew that the Word of God was still going out into the world. **Psalm 147:15** says, “His word runs swiftly.” **Hebrews 4:12** says, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” The religious freedom that we have in America is something for which we need to be grateful. We must take advantage of the right to worship, to witness, and to serve others in the name of Jesus Christ. But the power of God’s Word is not dependent on man’s protection—“God’s word is not chained.”

Before the Communist takeover of China in the late 1940's and early 1950's, there were more than 700,000 Christians in China. During the following “cultural revolution,” at least 30 million Chinese were slaughtered, including many Christians. Yet, after more than 50 years of brutal oppression, imprisonment, and executions, the number of Christians in China number somewhere between 30 – 100 million. Although written copies of Scripture are scarce, the truth of God’s Word endures in the hearts and minds of the people. The power of the Word of God prevails. “God’s word is not chained.”

**C. That Others May Obtain Salvation** A third reason for faithfulness is that others may obtain salvation. “The elect” are God’s people, chosen by His grace and called by His Spirit—turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” In John 10:10 Jesus said, “I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.” God wants all to come to Him—to have eternal life.

But as Paul wrote in Romans 10:14, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” As the Great Commission in Matthew 28 says, it is the duty of every Christian to “Go, make disciples.” If we aren’t faithful in sharing the Good News that “Jesus Saves,” no one will hear and no one will come to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. There are yet many people to reach with the Gospel and it was Timothy’s and every Christian’s duty “to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Our faithfulness will lead others to Christ.

**D. The Promise of Eternal Blessing** A fourth reason for faithfulness to Christ is the promise of eternal blessing. The verses that make up Paul’s “trustworthy saying” are probably part of an early statement of faith recited by believers. They may even have been sung as a hymn.

“If we died with him” may refer to the spiritual death of which Paul wrote in Romans—turn to Romans 6:1-8. Paul put it this way in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Through our identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection, we have won the victory; we will live with Him forever. Similarly, “if we endure, i.e., persecution and hostility, we will also reign with him.” Death leads to life! Suffering leads to reigning in glory! Christians, children of God, have nothing to fear. There is a promise of eternal blessing.

This saying also included a warning, “If we disown him, he will also disown us.” There are those who refuse to endure hardships, who refuse to be faithful, such a person denies or disowns Jesus Christ. They never really belonged to Christ at all—2 John 9 says, “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” Those who remain faithful to the truth they profess give evidence of belonging to God.

Jesus warned in Matthew 10:33, “But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.” This isn’t the momentary denial like Peter’s denial in the courtyard in Matt. 26:69-75. This is a settled, final kind of denial that doesn’t ever repent. This is evidence of never truly belonging to Christ—turn to 1 John 2:20-23. In Titus 1:16 Paul described such people: “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.” Later in 2 Timothy 3:2-5 Paul will describe such false Christians as “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having having a form of godliness but denying its power.” Such people do not belong to God.

This hymn that Paul quoted closed with one more negative condition and a promise, “If we are faithless, he will remain faithful.” “Faithless” means those who lack saving faith, not merely a weak or unreliable faith—we all have moments of weak faith. The unsaved person, the “faithless” one, ultimately denies Christ, because he never had faith in Him for salvation. But “He will remain faithful,” i.e., God is faithful not only to those who believe in Him, but also to those who do not believe. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life;” we can trust God to be faithful and save “whoever believes in him.” BUT in John 3:18 Jesus said, “whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” God can be trusted to never renege on His promise to condemn those who do not

believe. To do otherwise would be to “disown Himself,” which His righteousness and just nature cannot allow Him to do—Titus 1:2 says, “God ... does not lie.”

### III. Conclusion

Until Christ returns, the bold proclamation of the Gospel, in word and deed, will continue to meet hostility and opposition from the spiritually blind, Christ-rejecting world. Just before His arrest, Jesus told the disciples in John 16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul will remind Timothy that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Satan makes certain that persecution accompanies faithfulness to Christ.

In today’s Scripture, Paul reassured Timothy and all Christians that there are many reasons to be faithful to Christ, to put everything in this life on the line for Him. No sacrifice—mocking, rejection, desertion, imprisonment, or even death—is too high a price to pay. The importance and the rewards of a faithful life and ministry, not to mention the honor and glory of the Lord we trust and serve, far outweigh any personal sacrifice that we may experience.

When hardship comes your way as a Christian, “remember Jesus Christ” and what He did for you. And as you “remember Jesus Christ,” keep in mind that Jesus’ path to glory was marked by pain before pleasure, sorrow before joy, death before resurrection, earthly hatred before heavenly worship. To continually remember those truths about our Lord’s earthly life will protect you from expecting smooth paths with no obstacles or what seem to be setbacks. Remember it was Jesus who said in Luke 9:23, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” If Jesus’ perfect and sinless obedience of His heavenly Father did not bring Him earthly prosperity and well-being, how much less can we expect to receive those things because of our imperfect service of Him? Like Jesus we need to look ahead to the “end of the story.” Turn to Philippians 2:5-11.

Remember the power of God's Word—the Word you model in your words as well as in your actions. God said in **Isaiah 55:11**, “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” As Jesus said in **Matthew 5:16**, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” God can and will use you to call others to Him—you just have to remain faithful and available. Don't give up on God, be faithful, He will never give up on you—**Hebrews 10:23** says, “Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”