

**Bethel Christian Fellowship
Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message Of 2 Timothy (8): “Present Suffering and Future Glory”
2 Timothy 2:8-13**

June 4, 2023

Bishop J. C. Ryle once famously said, “I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no spiritual gains without pains” (Holiness). As we may recall, this is precisely the point that Paul has been hammering home in the opening verses of 2 Timothy 2. By way of analogy, he has likened the demands of the Christian life to the wholehearted dedication of a good soldier, the disciplined training of a good athlete, and the painstaking labor of a good farmer. Hardship, struggle, discipline and toil all must precede reward.

But if anyone needs greater understanding on this matter, Paul’s counsel is just as clear: “*Consider what I say*” (NASB), or “*reflect on what I am saying*” (NIV), *for the Lord will give you insight into all this*” (2:7). The greater our meditation and study, the greater the Lord’s illumination of this basic principle of Scripture.

In the verses before us today, Paul continues this same theme. First, he calls upon Timothy to “*Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead*” (v. 8). The implication “is that even he had to walk the way of the cross and taste death before being exalted” (J.N.D. Kelley). Then he points to his own suffering as part of God’s plan to bring the elect “*to eternal glory*” (vv. 9-10). Finally, he reinforces this principle by a quotation from an early hymn, or creedal confession. All those who persevere in the face of hardship will reign with Christ in the age to come (vv. 11-13).

A. The Call to Remember Christ (v. 8): “*Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David, according to my gospel . . .*” It’s hard to imagine how Paul would have thought that Timothy could forget the Lord Jesus Christ. Why, then, the exhortation to “remember” Christ? The answer is nestled within the immediate context (context is king).

First, this is a call to remember the truth of the gospel, which is centered on Jesus, the risen Christ (the Messiah). Because He “*descended from David,*” Jesus fulfills the promise that God would grant to one of David’s heirs an eternal kingship, and thereby be the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:11-16). When He was “*raised from the dead,*” He was declared with power to be the Son of God by the “*Spirit of holiness*” (Rom. 1:3-4). The resurrection of Christ is central to Paul’s gospel message (1 Cor. 15:12-22), and in this context, it forms the basis for the hope expressed in verses 11-12a.

The second reason for this call is because Christ is the *supreme* inspiration for Christian service and ministry. The implication of Paul’s reminder is that Christ Himself went to the cross and suffered as a man at the hands of other men – *before* He was raised from the dead and exalted to glory. In the words of Stott, “He who died rose from the dead, and he who was born in lowliness as David’s seed is now reigning in glory on David’s throne. Both expressions set forth in embryonic form the contrast between humiliation and exaltation.” This is the underlying principle of the text in light of its context,

which is relevant for *all* followers of Christ. As Paul and Barnabas told their first converts, “*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God . . .*” (Acts 14:22).

B. The Experience of Paul (vv. 9-10): “*This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I **endure everything** for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*”

There are some who believe that the doctrine of sovereign electing grace makes evangelism pointless, since God will save His elect anyway – whether they hear the gospel or not. But it’s just the opposite. The doctrine of election does not eliminate the preaching of the gospel; it makes it essential. The *reason* Paul preached the gospel and was prepared to endure hardship and suffering was “in order that” he might bring the message of salvation to those whom God had chosen to save. He knew that both his preaching and his suffering were part of God’s plan to bring the elect to “eternal glory.” Just as Christ was resurrected in a glorified body, all believers united to Christ will receive glorified bodies on the day of resurrection.

For the moment, Paul was “chained like a criminal” in a Roman prison, but he also knew this was not the death knell for the gospel. For the Word of God was not bound, but was free to do its work in the hearts of the men and women whom God had planned to save. Prior to his imprisonment, he had been given a preliminary hearing (4:16-17). Most of his friends found it convenient to be elsewhere (4:10-11, 16); yet he said, “*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it*” (4:17).

This is yet another example of how suffering is the prelude to glory, namely, the “eternal glory” of the elect through the sufferings endured by Paul. There are *no* spiritual gains without pain; and *no one* knew this better than the apostle Paul. What an encouragement this must have been for Timothy, and should be for all of us today. When we are tempted to avoid hardship and opposition for the cause of the gospel, we should *remember* Jesus Christ, and then *remember* the apostle Paul, and then *think again*.

C. The Trustworthy Saying (vv. 11-13): “*Here is a trustworthy saying: (a) If we died with him, we will also live with him; (b) if we endure, we will also reign with him; (c) if we disown him, he will also disown us; (d) if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*”

This is the fifth and last of the “trustworthy sayings” in the pastoral epistles (Cf. 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Titus 3:8). They are not original with Paul; rather, he is quoting a fragment of an early hymn or a well-known confessional statement, which he then pronounces as a trustworthy or reliable statement. The statement “moves from comfort to challenge and back to comfort” (ESV Study Bible notes). Once again, the principle of *present suffering followed by future glory* is being reinforced. In each of the four clauses, the “if” assumes that the condition being described is true.

- “*If we died with him* (and I am assuming that we all did), *we will also live with him.*” As Paul has taught elsewhere, salvation comes only to those who are united to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. As Christ rose into newness of life, so also believers will live with Him in the age to come (Romans 6:1-8).

- “*If we endure* (and I am assuming we will), *we will also reign with Him.*” This second stanza calls for perseverance, since perseverance in the face of hardship (v. 10) is the hallmark of saving faith. All true believers will persevere in faithful service to Christ as evidence of the grace of God at work within them. When Christ returns in glory, those who have persevered to the end will reign with Him over the new earth (Rev. 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5)
- “*If we disown him* (and I’m assuming some of us may), *he will disown us.*” Here Paul is issuing a sober warning against apostasy, as did the Lord Jesus Christ; “*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven*” (Mt. 10:33). Perhaps Paul may have been thinking in particular of those he’s mentioned in 1:15; “*You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.*” True believers, however, will not turn away from the Lord Jesus Christ or those who know and love Him (1 John 2:18-19).
- “*If we are faithless* (and I’m assuming some of us may be), *he will remain faithful, for he cannot deny himself.*” In this context, being faithless would seem to entail a much less serious offense than disowning or denying Christ. Christians *are* faithless, in the sense of experiencing temporary lapses in remaining faithful to Christ (even as Peter did). But God *is* faithful, and will pardon, restore, and preserve those who are truly His (1 John 1:9). To do anything less would be to deny Himself, or the unchanging nature of His faithful love towards those who truly belong to Him.

Most who live an authentic Christian life will suffer hardship in one form or another. Sometimes it means mockery and scorn; sometimes it means restrictions on the free exercise of our faith; and sometimes it means imprisonment, torture, and even death (especially for Christians living in countries hostile to the gospel).

This is the principle which led Jesus Christ to His lowly birth and shameful death, and then to His glorious resurrection and heavenly reign. It is the same principle which had led Paul to his chains and prison cell, in order that the elect might obtain salvation and eternal glory. It’s the same principle that leads us to endure hardship in this life, knowing that we will reign with Christ in the world to come.

When Jim Elliot was a college student in 1949, he wrote the following words in his diary: “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*” Seven years later, on a hot Sunday afternoon, he and four other young missionaries were spared to death by the people they had come to win to Christ. The world called it the worst of all tragedies. But the world didn’t recognize the truth of the second part in Jim Elliot’s creed. The invariable law of genuine Christian life and service is that we *give* what we cannot keep to *gain* what we cannot lose. Suffering leads to glory, and death leads to life – for all who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

There really are *no* spiritual gains without pains. Why, then, should we expect things to be easy for us, or promise an easy time for others? We shouldn’t, for if we understand the message of these verses, it would be ridiculous to expect our Christian life and service to cost us nothing.