

2 Timothy 2:1-13

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Date: 05 March 2023

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[0 : 0 0] So we're going through this fantastic book, 2 Timothy. Paul wrote two letters to his young apprentice, the pastor, Timothy.

Lots to say in both of them. And one of the things that maybe we picked up from the first chapter we looked at last week is we get an idea of Timothy's character. We see that he says we do not have a spirit that is fearful, that is timid, which gives the impression that Timothy perhaps was a timid, a man that was fearful, that maybe his faith had started to dip a little bit.

And he says to Timothy, found that gift into flame. And so it's a really great book to look at for us. Because actually what Paul is telling Timothy is he's telling him what Christian ministry, or not just Christian ministry, but Christian life is actually like.

And it's a helpful thing for us to discover. It's encouraging because many of the things that he tells Timothy is really relevant to us. And one of the things that we're going to talk about this morning that comes out actually throughout the whole of 2 Timothy, I think it's probably one of the most difficult aspects of living as a Christian.

It's suffering. And it comes out, you can see it, numerous times throughout the letter. But in particular we get it mentioned a few times here. However, there are two types of suffering that we can think about.

[1 : 3 8] There's the suffering that you can't do anything about. Tragedies, illnesses are held there. That's one type of suffering. And I know amongst us, we have all experienced suffering that just comes to us.

Or we certainly will in the future. But there is also the type of suffering where you choose purposefully to suffer. It's not suffering that you can't do anything about, but it's suffering that you choose.

Now, that might sound strange, but I think you'd know what I mean if I talked about suffering for children. If any of our children were put in harm's way, and not just my own three little ones, but any of the children here.

And we read, don't we, where there is heroic acts where strangers have dived in front of moving cars to save a little one that has run into the road. That is choosing suffering because of what is at stake.

And we see, there's other examples of that. We see heroic acts of suffering and our armed forces who put their lives in harm's way to alleviate the suffering of a particular nation.

[2 : 5 6] We see that with maybe our emergency services. You know, finally, they choose to put themselves in harm's way to protect someone who is at risk.

Even more than we might think of, even people who suffer for particular beliefs in our world right now.

We might see, you know, the environment is a big cause of concern amongst many. And we see people doing things where they almost know that they're going to get arrested.

They cause great damage and upset, you know, chaining themselves to roads. They're suffering because they believe in the cause. Now, you might not agree with why people choose to suffer.

You might not agree with that. But that's not really my point. My point is that there is a legitimate reason why people choose to suffer. And the deciding factor of why anyone would choose to suffer is always what is at stake.

[3 : 58] What's at stake if we don't suffer is the question. That is the pertinent question that we must ask ourselves.

Because as followers of Jesus, suffering is part of the cause. For us in the West, that is difficult here.

Because, and sometimes a surprise. Because it's something new, probably. Because for at least for the last 100 to 150 years, being a Christian in the West, in this country, would not be questioned in the same way that it is today.

But if you were to look throughout the history of the Christian church, Christians have always suffered, they've expected to suffer, and they have chosen to suffer because of what's at stake.

And sure, that looks different for every generation, every church, every individual group of body of believers, and every individual themselves.

[5 : 07] Yet the same is true for us today. And the question is still there for us today. What is at stake? And so this morning we're going to be thinking, not about suffering in general, although that's really important, but about suffering because of our association with Jesus Christ.

Our association with the truth. And we're going to think of three things. That suffering is a gospel necessity. That suffering is only possible by grace.

And then that suffering is not persistent denial. Suffering is not persistent denial. So three things that we'll be thinking about. So I mentioned earlier, this is written to Timothy.

It's written from Paul. A great friend of his. They had a great relationship. And all the way through, Paul has a deep heart for him. He wants Timothy to find that gift in the flame of the gift that was laid on him.

He wants him to grow. He wants his ministry to be... He wants him to flourish in his Christian life, in his ministry. And so the first thing I'm going to say, I want to talk about is that part of what Paul wants to say to Timothy is that suffering with Paul is going to be a necessity for gospel, for Christian living.

[6 : 28] So I'm not talking about suffering in general, because, like I said, everyone experiences that at one level. But I'm talking about suffering that is in connection with being associated with Jesus.

That it is a necessity. And just look with me from verse 3 of our reading today. Paul says to Timothy, join with me.

Join with me in suffering. The theme of suffering comes up throughout Paul's writings, but particularly in this letter to Timothy. There is a concerted effort to remind Timothy that suffering, because of the name of Jesus, is normal.

It shouldn't be a surprise when it happens. And he uses three key illustrations, metaphors, if you like. And they're there to stress the importance of what this looks like in the Christian life.

The first one comes in verse 4. Suffer like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Verse 4. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

[7 : 41] A good soldier is always ready. Ready to... He knows who his commanding officer is. And he's always ready there to please him. Yet, as a soldier, I'm sure many of us, we hear, don't we, after a great conflict, there's always terrible stories come out of where certain soldiers, in the midst of conflict, have been distracted by their abuse of power.

We hear, don't we, of them offering protection, sort of, for cash in hand. Or maybe they're even distracted by the monotony of life in the barracks.

But a good soldier is always ready to please their commanding officer. Ready to... Always ready to fight when called upon.

And in the same way that a soldier is ready to fight, Paul is saying, Timothy, be ready to suffer with me for Jesus' name. In verse 5, we have the illustration of an athlete.

Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. If you follow the...

[8 : 59] If you follow athletics at all, you know that, particularly with the Olympics, an athlete must... They must train really hard. Four years' worth of training there. I always think that's amazing when we watch the Olympics, particularly for the 100 metres.

This is, like, the pivotal moment of an athlete's sort of sport. And they train for four years and then it could be over in ten seconds. I thought, that must be crushing.

And I don't know if you remember this as a while back, but I remember it was the 96 Olympics in Atlanta. And the British sprinter at the time was Linford Christie.

He'd won gold in Barcelona four years before. And everything in the press leading up to the 96 Olympics was, was Linford Christie going to be able to defend his gold, his 100 metres gold?

And he's in the first heat. He's trained for four years. Everybody's excited. Everybody's watching. And then he double falls. And he's disqualified.

[10 : 02] And that's his four years' training. It's all led up to that. It didn't matter how hard he trained, but he didn't compete according to the rules. And Paul is saying, as a Christian, we must compete according to the rules.

And in the context of suffering, what does that mean? In the context of suffering, that means self-denial. It means mark aim. The reason is it denies ourselves to pick apart a cross and follow Jesus.

The reason is it's relating how the cross actually bears on our lives. You see what Paul is saying. He's saying that suffering is part of the course.

It's part of the rule of what it means to follow him. And then final one in verse 6, we have the hard-working farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

It's the one who works hard. It's the one who puts in the hard yards for Jesus, who suffers him, who was expected to receive life for him. It's all connected.

[11 : 14] That suffering is actually a good work that's produced. It's not the thing that you receive faith for, but it is an outworking of your faith. When you're willing to stand and be associated with the name of Jesus for the gospel.

It's obviously a really important point that Paul wants to make. Because you don't normally get three illustrations from Paul all about one thing.

He's hoping, I think at least one of the illustrations should land with us of how important this is. And if we haven't quite got the point of how much this means to Paul, he's used three illustrations.

He states this again in verse 7. Reflect on what I'm saying. Reflect on what I'm saying to you. For the Lord will give you insight into all this. He said, Timothy, don't move on from my letter until you get this.

If you, my son, my dear Timothy, if you are a gospel person, a good news kind of a man, keep this in your thinking.

[12 : 29] That you will suffer for the name of Jesus. It's not optional, but it is expected. Join with me, Timothy, in suffering. And as you pass this on to other faithful men who are qualified to teach, make sure they know it too.

Make sure they know it too. I don't know if you were, I was watching a documentary recently about some, a wild, you might have seen these wildfires that happen in certain parts of the world.

And I was, there's this amazing flower. And there's a few of them, but there's this amazing flower called a fire poppy. And the fire sweeps through the whole of the forest or the bush.

And after everything has gone, only then can the fire poppy start to bud. It is actually the fire that scorches this little plant that enables it to have life.

It is only after this, when everything looks dead, when all that can be seen around it is ashes, it is only then that the fire poppy springs out.

[13 : 40] In the midst of, all you can see is ash. You get these little pockets of red sparking up all around. In the middle of death and destruction, there is life.

In the middle of suffering comes beauty. We shouldn't be surprised when we suffer for Jesus. Our trajectory actually maps onto his trajectory that he went down to be exalted.

And our trajectory is the same that we go down. We shouldn't be surprised because the gospel itself is Jesus' suffering. It is Christ crucified. And in order for Jesus to have the victory over death, he had to suffer.

The good news could only come through that. And if we're called to imitate Jesus, that is us growing in a way that our suffering demonstrates that our association with him.

And we know this, don't we? We know this. And because we've experienced it. We've experienced rejection by our friends.

[14 : 54] We've experienced humiliation. We've experienced being alienated in the staff room. We've experienced people talking about you as you walk in the room. We've experienced not getting invited to groups because they thought my morality might bring down the tone.

And I want to just be real and straight down the line with you that if this day comes, and especially in certain lines of work, particular public sector jobs, the reality is that being associated with Jesus and standing for what he stands for can get us into trouble.

It can involve suspensions and appeals. And it might not be what we expect. It's suddenly what we wouldn't pray for. And I don't want to make a false promise to anyone.

Now, I'm not saying that to induce fear. I'm just being realistic. And the point of this is to prepare ourselves to give a reason for the hope that is in us if this day comes. I can't promise that.

But I can promise that Jesus will take care of you. I can promise that Jesus says, those who honour me, I will honour. I can promise you'll have everything you need in him.

[16 : 13] I can promise you that. Second point we come to.

Grace. The grace of Jesus Christ makes suffering possible. Now, at this point, after what I've just said, you're thinking, this doesn't sound like the most encouraging, thrilling sermon I've ever listened to, to join with Jesus in suffering.

I can't hear any whoops going on or any hallelujahs that we're all going to suffer. But the reality is that suffering actually, it might, when we say it in the terms I've just mentioned, it could almost feel like that's impossible.

And the reality is that suffering for the name of Jesus is possible, but it's only possible by God's grace. Without God's grace, I'd probably say it's not possible.

The only way you can do this is by the grace of God. And the only way, and we read that in verse 1. You then, my son, my Timothy, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

[17 : 34] Grace is the only thing that can strengthen you to suffer for him. Grace is the free, undeserved, unlimited gift of God.

And it really helps us answer the question, is there any degree of suffering of which, if you went to God, if you went to him, he would say, I'm sorry, son.

I'm sorry, my child, but my grace is lacking today. It's not strong enough for what you need. I can't get you through this. Is there any degree of suffering for the name of Jesus to which that would be God's answer?

No. The resources of God are immeasurable, unlimited, bounding, and freely available. Timothy, my child, my son, my Timothy, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Will, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

[18 : 50] Ruth, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And as part of that grace comes an increasing knowledge of God and of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

When we plumb the depths and the riches and the knowledge and the unfathomable mystery of God, the Scriptures, for all they have, that we must remember and cling to.

Paul writes to Timothy in verse 8, Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel. This is my gospel.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. Jesus is the king. He's saying Jesus has been raised and God's word is not bound.

There are three things which by God's grace make the unbearable bearable in the heat of suffering. Verse 8, Jesus is king. Do we see that?

[19 : 51] Jesus is the Christ, descended from David. That word Christ just means anointed king. And in addition, what we know is that Jesus is the promised king of the Old Testament.

He's saying, descended from David. He's in the lineage of the great king that we know about. Verse 11, if you endure, you will reign with him.

Verse 8, he said he's been raised. Jesus, right now, at this very moment, is alive. More alive, you might say, than any of us. More real.

And because he's raised from the dead, he has resurrection life to give each one of us. He possesses a body that we all long for. He's the resurrection.

And just like that fire poppy, that is beauty and life and joy in the middle of ashes. That is the resurrection life that we have right now.

[20 : 49] And that is promised for us. In the heat of suffering. Verse 9, the word of God is not chained. Suffering will never mean that the gospel suffers.

Suffering happens because the oppressor hopes to extinguish the fire. They don't realise that after the fire is gone that the fire poppy will spring in the ashes.

The name of Jesus will not be squashed or removed. But isn't that what people thought would happen to Jesus at the cross? The leaders thought killing Jesus would bring an end to this strange man's life and beliefs and this peculiar sect.

But new life can only happen because of death. The more you try and squash the gospel, the bigger it gets. The word of God cannot be chained.

God's word is unstoppable. It cannot be held down. You see the church of China, the underground church that for years was oppressed and pushed down.

[22 : 03] And now is the biggest church in the entire globe. Still underground. People think that squashing the church is going to extinguish it, but it doesn't. It just gets bigger. The word of God cannot be chained.

Death to life. Enduring means reigning with him. Take a moment. Take a moment to marvel at this Jesus who is alive.

He reigns in heaven and he rules over his church. He's your king. He's king over this church and over your life. And he exerts that rule over his church through his word. It is an unchanging reality.

And your trajectory, your destiny, our destination is where he is now. That is where you're headed, whatever happens. You will be raised.

You will reign with him. And whatever happens cannot change that reality from coming to pass. Whatever happens. These three things are so important in the face of suffering for Jesus because it means that your suffering for him does not have the final say.

[23 : 12] If you isolate what's happening from the story of the Bible, then yes, suffering might seem meaningless, maybe even pointless, but it's not isolated from the Bible story.

As your story maps onto Christ's story, it's actually proof, assurance, that your resurrection is certain. Do you see how it works? If Christ had to suffer in order to rise, you're suffering, your participation in the same journey means that his journey becomes your journey.

You're going to rise with him on the last day. And Paul has been hinting that all along to Timothy. Even at the start of the whole book, what does he say?

He says, he writes to Timothy, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. Verse 10, he's destroyed death and brought life because of all this.

Verse 10, 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.

[24 : 17] Remember Timothy. Remember Christ Jesus, risen from the dead. Christ, this is my gospel. Can I suggest that you refresh yourself in the knowledge of these three things?

And I don't mean a heady knowledge, but let these sink into your heart. Put your situation, maybe the suffering that you anticipate, all that you experience right now, or will do, into the knowledge of these three things.

Is Jesus the king over the situation and over these people? Does this suffering have the final say, or does Jesus Christ?

Will my suffering impinge the gospel, or may actually result in gospel growth? Will my suffering mean that the word of God loses its power?

Answering these three questions with the truth of the Bible, that is actually wisdom. That is actually how to live wisely. When you bring your situations and you put them under what the word of God and what Christ has to say.

[25 : 35] And it will mean that you deal, that you're able to make the unbearable bearable. Now I'm not, what I'm not saying, that doesn't mean that suffering is not difficult.

And we still all have wisdom calls to make regarding it. Remember, remember Paul. Paul did two things in the face of suffering. He stood up to it, but he also fled.

He was also let down the side of a wall in a basket. Neither of those decisions was wrong. It takes wisdom to make the right call when we're faced with suffering for the name of Jesus.

Remember Proverbs 26 says two things. It says, answer a fool, not according, answer a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him. And then it says, answer a fool, not according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

So answering and don't answer him, both given by God as hell to answer. So we need wisdom in the midst of this.

[26 : 45] And remember, even the very process of having to think that through is a kind of suffering in itself. When we're standing for his name, knowing that that difficulty is coming as we feel unable to live out our faith, how we wish to.

Last point. Last point is suffering is not persistent denial. Now, so far, we've been thinking about what it means to suffer for Jesus' name.

But the last verse, verse and a half, it strikes a different tone to what's been said before. Paul is bullish with Timothy and he's warning him of what Christianity would, without being willing to suffer for Jesus, might actually mean.

That to be unwilling at all to suffer for him is actually equivalent to disowning him. Or denying him.

Just to be clear, what I'm not saying is that running from potential harm is the same as denying him. As I mentioned, Paul did both things.

[27 : 59] I just want to be clear that if there is the difficulty or potential of losing your job, that there's wisdom in acting carefully in how to construct sentences, how to answer in the right way.

That's not the same as disowning Jesus. Just need to be clear about that. We get this in this poetic section that comes at the end. We do get the positive of what it looked like, but then we get this really changing.

If you disown him or deny him, he will disown you. Or he will deny you. He's saying, Timothy, if you know that suffering for Jesus' name is coming your way because of your association with Christ, and if you deny or disown me, if you deny or disown Jesus, or if you deny or disown any association with what Paul believes, if you do that, Timothy, he will disown you on the last day.

Famously, we know about Peter who did that very thing. Denied Jesus three times. But there is hope, isn't there, because he repented and received forgiveness. This is not ultimate. Just to rest assured, if we have denied Jesus in the past because we've feared rejection, that that is still not the bottom line on your future.

We can turn to Jesus, ask for forgiveness, and for the Spirit to give us courage next time to be strengthened by his grace. But, if there is a persistent unwillingness to be associated with Jesus, it's a little bit like the seed that gets choked by the thorns and dies.

[29 : 50] It's persistent disobedience and an unwillingness to suffer for our King. It suggests faithlessness. Here's the line that really gets it.

He says, If we are faithless, he remains faithful. Now, on first read, we might look at that. That sounds like a positive thing. That's amazing.

Even when I'm faithless, God is still faithful to me. That's not... We might have a different way that we use that word, faithless. That's not actually what this means. The reason we know it just totally doesn't fit the flow of the passage.

We have a positive reason, a positive reason. If we die, we'll live. If we endure, we'll reign. And then we have this negative reason, followed by...

It wouldn't make sense if it was a positive thing. It's to end with. It's two negatives. Because it says, Then, God can't deny himself. All he's saying to Timothy, God is faithful to his character.

[30 : 47] God's always faithful to who he is. Verse 13. Faithless here, It means without faith. Faithless. It's more sort of, like, literal.

A faithless person, a person without faith, who is someone who denies Jesus and does not want to be associated with him at all. That person is...

It's saying that person, Jesus, will disown. To the faithless, the denier of Christ, God will always remain faithful to who he is. He can't act contrary to his character.

To be clear, Jesus will deny them. He will be the one who, Jesus says, I never knew you. You imagine... Imagine you plant an apple tree, and a few months later, the apple tree has grown.

But it's... But to your surprise, there's oranges on the end. Now, there are two things you could say. You could say... You could either say, Man alive, those apples are really strange.

[31 : 55] Or you could say, perhaps that's not an apple tree that I plant. God can't act contrary to his character. He can't act...

If he acts contrary to his character, that's not the living God. He can't deny himself. If someone is without faith, without trust, doesn't accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, he will be faithful to his character and how he acts towards them.

It's a very striking and challenging moment for us. Where do we stand with that? Where do we stand with what it means to deny, to disown Jesus?

To know that on the last day, the door to eternity will be shut. Now, I said earlier, I just want to reiterate this, before we all start self-flagellating ourselves, that remember, Paul stood for the truth and he fled because of the truth.

Neither of those was wrong. It's not what Paul is getting here. He's talking about persistent denial of being associated with Jesus. And so as we come in from Monday, let's remind ourselves what's at stake.

[33 : 21] What's at stake? It goes back to the line, the reason Paul says to this young pastor we looked at last week, probably, I think, the highlight of the book, guard the good deposit that's in you.

Guard the good deposit. The gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ is at stake. Someone's salvation, someone's eternal future might be on the line.

It might be a stake. That matters. It matters. I want to just give you a hypothetical situation.

I want you to imagine this evening, you're, it's dark, you're driving home, and on your way home, you stop at the traffic lights, and at the corner of your eye, you see like an orange glimmer.

And you look at the house that is there, and all the lights are off. It looks like the people who live in the house are upstairs, they've gone to bed. And you see that the downstairs is on fire.

[34 : 36] What do you do? I think most of us would jump out, would slam on the handbrake, jump out of our car, run up to the front door, and be braying on the front door.

There's a fire. There's a fire. Quick, there's a fire. There's a fire. There's danger. What is at stake?

The people in the house, their lives are at stake. Spiritually, that is 98% of people in Scotland. Suffer as a good soldier.

Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. His unlimited resources. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. This is Paul's gospel, and it's our gospel.

Let me pray. Lord Jesus, we praise you and thank you that you have given us the gospel that saves.

[35 : 55] We thank you that you love us and that you've called us into your kingdom.

And we mourn for those who have turned away from you and who live lives away from you. And we pray that you'd help us to know what's at stake, to suffer for what's at stake, that you'd keep us with others' salvation in mind.

I ask that you'd bless us and give us courage.