

SCRIPTURE FOCUS	2 TIMOTHY 2:1-13	DATE	07.21.19
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LESSON SUMMARY	Believers should be prepared to faithfully suffer for Christ when the situation demands it.		

All scripture taken from NIV

ENCOUNTER THE TEXT

2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. 3 Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Having put positive and negative examples before Timothy, Paul now calls Timothy to the better way. “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” can refer to both fanning God’s gift into flame and guarding the gospel as it was received. Strength derived from Christ is necessary for both. Then, Timothy is to go a step further by passing the same message on to others. This act also looks back to both fanning the flame and guarding the deposit, as the flame must be fanned if Timothy is to pass on the gospel, and the gospel must be guarded if it is to be passed on faithfully. Suffering is then held out as a likely consequence of these same actions. Paul encourages Timothy to embrace the suffering as Paul himself has.

In calling Timothy to embrace suffering for Christ, Paul uses the examples of soldiers, athletes, and farmers. These different occupations ultimately point to concentrated work for the gospel, though each in its own distinct way. For the soldier, pleasing the commanding officer is key. For the athlete, competing according to the rules is a necessity. For the farmer, diligent work leads to harvest. In all of this, Paul instructs Timothy to (1) keep his focus on Jesus, his commanding officer, (2) play by the rules that have been set out for him, and (3) work diligently at the task he has been given. These insights are generally helpful when considering the Christian life, and they are especially helpful in times of suffering for the faith. In the case of suffering, the key is to endure faithfully despite the pain. Note also that Paul calls Timothy’s attention beyond suffering as he speaks of the athlete and farmer. The athlete will receive the victor’s crown, and the farmer is first in line to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. 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.

Paul now reiterates the center of his gospel, defining it as “Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.” For this truth, Paul is chained. The gospel itself, however, is not chained, and Paul therefore endures hardship for the sake of those yet to receive it.

11 Here is a trustworthy saying:

***If we died with him,
we will also live with him;***

**12 if we endure,
we will also reign with him.**

***If we disown him,
he will also disown us;***

**13 if we are faithless,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.**

Paul employs “trustworthy sayings” throughout the pastoral epistles. This one has to do with how the saving effects of the gospel are appropriated in Christians’ lives. These effects include:

- Dying with Christ (in baptism) will lead to resurrection with him in new creation.
- Endurance in suffering for the gospel will end in reigning with Jesus in new creation.
- Disowning Jesus will end in being disowned by Jesus.
- Our faithlessness is met by God’s faithfulness, for God has tied himself to his people.

While the first, second, and fourth of these sayings are uncontentious (at least among believers), the third gives us pause. This part of the trustworthy saying is not out of step with wider scripture, though. Jesus himself said, “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.” (Matt 10:32-33) Regardless of theological stance, perseverance is a necessity for the believer. At the same time, the one who disowns Jesus is not necessarily beyond God’s grace, as Peter was reinstated after he disowned Jesus three times. That said, this is not a point to take lightly!

Regarding how numbers three and four interact, number three refers narrowly to one’s continued profession of Jesus as Lord, while number 4 refers to general unfaithfulness in the lives of committed disciples. When it comes to the latter, God forgives not because of who we are but because of who he is.

In offering this saying to Timothy, Paul is once again drawing attention to the necessity of perseverance. This is especially true of the last three parts of the saying (the first part deals with salvation generally). Endurance in the face of difficulty leads to reigning with Christ. Disavowing Christ due to difficulty leads to being disavowed by Christ. At the same time, we need not be fearful perfectionists, for God remains faithful to us when we fall short.

TEACH THE TEXT

The primary theme of 2 Tim 2:1-13 is endurance in the face of difficulty. Vv 1-7 amount to Paul calling Timothy to suffer for the gospel. Vv 8-10 then speak of Paul's own suffering, and vv 11-13 offers a trustworthy saying that grounds endurance in grace and reward. This thrust of the text allows teachers to discuss (1) the possibility of suffering in the Christian life, (2) how to remain faithful in the midst of suffering, and (3) the logic behind endurance. A fourth topic is how the insights of this section of text apply to the ordinary Christian life, for the images of soldier, athlete, and farmer can also apply beyond suffering to discipleship in general.

Addressing the Elephant in the Room

Before moving to discuss the different insights from the passage, it will be helpful first to address the elephant that will be in the room as the lesson unfolds: v 12's talk of "disowning." In a Baptist context, which stresses "once saved always saved" theology, this passage is sure to raise a few eyebrows. After all, doesn't it sound like a person is losing his/her salvation? The way forward here is three-fold. First, we need to stress that this passage is talking about the specific situation of a person denying the faith and not the sins that beset a faithful life of discipleship. Second, we need to highlight the importance of perseverance in the Christian life. The idea here is that a true Christian will profess Jesus to the very end. This comes about by God's grace, and the assumption is that if a person turns away from Christ/the faith, he/she wasn't saved in the first place. Third, if class members are concerned about their own salvation, we need to stress God's continued grace. We can point here to Peter's reinstatement after denying Jesus.

Suffering in the Christian Life

In the US, we Christians exist in a culture that not too long ago was amenable to the faith. Blue laws ensured that businesses were closed on Sundays, and Christian morality was the norm. Suffering for the faith can therefore seem like a strange phenomenon to American Christians. For Christians in the first century, however, suffering was simply par for the course. To become a Christians was to make yourself a target for social and possibly familial scorn. Rather than questioning this state of affairs, early Christians assumed that suffering was simply part of the normal Christian life. In their experience of persecution, early Christians surely remembered words of Jesus on the subject. Note these words of Christ from John and Matthew:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

-John 15:18-21

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

-Matthew 5:11-12

As culture in the US continues to turn away from Christian values, we will find ourselves more and more in a situation similar to the of early church, and these words of Jesus will become important touchstones for discipleship. In the end, suffering for Christ is to be expected because we live in a depraved world. At the same time, Jesus says that we are blessed when we face suffering for his name.

Remaining Faithful in Suffering

If suffering is to be expected, how are we to remain faithful in the midst of it? First, we take Paul's call to Timothy in v 3 as a call to ourselves: "Join with me in suffering." Before we can even talk about enduring suffering, we must first accept suffering into our lives. Importantly, this does not mean that Christians are masochists who go out looking for pain. Instead, it means that we accept suffering when it comes our way.

Once we have accepted suffering, we can move to Paul's images of soldier, athlete, and farmer. From these images, we derive three directives. First, we should keep our eyes on Jesus in the midst of suffering, seeking to please him above all else. Second, we should play by the rules of the faith, even when doing so is hard. Third, we should work diligently expecting to receive a portion of the harvest.

The Logic of Endurance

Having looked at directives for faithfulness in suffering, we now move to why we should remain faithful. 2 Timothy 2 offers two reasons. First, our bearing up under suffering can lead others to Christ. This was the case for Paul in prison, who endured for the sake of those yet to be saved. Second, endurance ends in reward. This idea is found in v 12 of the trustworthy saying.

General Discipleship

While Paul applies the images of soldier, athlete, and farmer to times of suffering, these are also wonderful images for unpacking day to day Christian life. In general, Christians should seek to please Jesus above all else, exist within the bounds set for us by Christ, and diligently follow Christ in the places we find ourselves.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Vv 1-7

1. Why does Timothy need to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus?
 - a. What does that mean?
2. Paul calls Timothy to join him in suffering. Is the same call given to Christians today?
3. How might Christians suffer in the US? What about the rest of the world?
4. Why do Christians suffer for the faith?
5. What do the images of the soldier, athlete, and farmer tell us about faithfulness in trying times?
6. How might these same images inform us in day-to-day discipleship?

Vv 6-7

1. Why does Paul endure suffering?
 - a. Is the same true for us – can our endurance lead to the salvation of those around us? How?

Vv 11-13

1. What does the saying teach us about endurance in suffering?
 2. How should we understand the part about disowning?
 3. How should we understand the part about faithlessness and faithfulness?
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