

2 Timothy 2:8–15
Our Faithful God
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In this second chapter of 2 Timothy, Paul continues to offer Timothy final words of encouragement—final because as we learned last week, Paul is in jail and his death is imminent. The chapter begins with him saying, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” As we also saw last week and will continue to see throughout this letter, the thing that Paul is most concerned about for this dear son in the LORD is Timothy’s faith in and relationship with Jesus Christ. So in urging him to “be strong” in Christ, he provides three analogies of a life of faith: [1] a soldier pleasing his commanding officer (3–4), [2] an athlete seeking the victor’s crown (5), and [3] a hardworking farmer (6). What these analogies have in common with living as a follower of Jesus Christ is a sense of sacrifice, focus, hard work, and discipline in the way in which they carry out their work. Similarly, faith, a relationship with God in Christ, doesn’t just happen—it must be fostered, nurtured, and developed.

Then in verse 8, Paul turns to his attention to the foundation of our faith, telling Timothy, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.” And with this, we’re presented with a number of

juxtapositions and tensions that will continue in the verses that follow.¹

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. His title, *Jesus Christ*, points to his being fully human since God came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And though he was fully God, he descended from David—pointing to his full humanity for as David was human so was Jesus and the Messiah was to come through the line of David. So in Jesus Christ, God entered human history. But *Jesus Christ* was also God, fully divine since he came as the Messiah, *the Christ*, to save and deliver his people from their sin and death. And this deliverance occurred when he miraculously rose from the dead. Jesus the Christ didn't simply *resuscitate* from death. He wasn't simply revived in the way that Lazarus, Mary and Martha's brother, was brought from death to life by Jesus who *is* eternal life. For *unlike* Lazarus who eventually died again, when Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he *remained alive* and so was able to give his life to all who follow him. As we're presented with a tension of his being fully human and fully God, we can't emphasize his humanity at the expense of his divinity nor can we emphasize his deity at the expense of his humanity for he was *fully both*. His resurrection proclaims his deity; his descent from David points to his humanity. And so in Paul's seemingly simple words to Timothy, he is

¹ **Juxtaposition:** the fact of two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect; **Tension:** a relationship between ideas or qualities with conflicting demands or implications

expressing a profound truth. The God who has ever existed as one God in three Persons, sent his ever-existent Son to earth in the form of Jesus the Christ for this was the Godhead's means of redeeming a fallen humanity. Since Christ Jesus is *God*, his death has *infinite* value for God is infinite; and since Christ Jesus was *human*, he could rightfully become the substitute for humanity's disobedience and sin. So Paul calls Timothy to remember who Jesus Christ, the founder and finisher of our faith, is and what he did that Timothy might persevere to the end, in living out and proclaiming the Gospel message.

Paul then states, "This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal." Isn't it extraordinary to consider that the whole reason for Paul's suffering and imprisonment, for his being "chained like a criminal" is that he had given over his life to telling others that Jesus Christ is the one and only way of returning to the God in whose image we have all been made?

That Paul is "chained like a *criminal*" for proclaiming God's love for them in Christ?

That Paul is "chained like a criminal" for sharing that we *all* are in need of the salvation that God in Christ has provided?

Try as I might, this proclamation of the Good News of the salvation God has provided in Jesus Christ simply *doesn't* seem to merit imprisonment and death. I can't wrap my mind around this possibility. Why not just *ignore* Paul if you don't agree with him? Why not just treat him like a madman? Why not have pity on him if you think he's wrong? Imprisonment simply makes no sense to me and death certainly doesn't either. Think about it: Paul and the early Christians were *exemplary*

in their care for the poor,

in their compassion for others,

in their respect for government, giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, even as Jesus taught.² These early followers of Christ sought to live out the *highest* moral standards as summarized in the fruit of the spirit—expressing love, joy, peace, forbearance (or patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—for they sought to emulate, to pattern their lives after, the One whom they proclaimed, Jesus Christ. Conversely, they were against behaviors that can harm us, as Paul also lists the fruit of the flesh in Galatians 5³— sexual immorality, impurity

² **Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25.**

³ **Galatians 5:20–26:** ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. So, again, *why* is Paul being imprisoned for proclaiming such an edifying, life-affirming message? ¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love,

and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. Why would *any* government want to do away with those who were proclaiming and seeking to live in accord with such teaching?

Yet in my bafflement, I speak as someone who was raised in a country where we're free to live as we believe and desire so long as what we believe and desire doesn't impinge upon the rights of anyone else. But even today, this isn't the case everywhere in the world. This past Wednesday I had the opportunity to hear Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American U.S. citizen who was imprisoned by the North Korean government for 735 days on charges of planning to overthrow the government. He shared how one official noted that they *had* to imprison him for if many others came to faith in Christ, the government would be in danger of being toppled over. And though we don't currently experience this kind of intolerance in our country, it should be sobering even for us to remember that if Jesus, our Savior and Lord, wasn't spared persecution and death, neither should *we* expect to be spared persecution and death.

joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Again, Paul is writing this second letter to Timothy from prison as he is awaiting his own death. Though an earlier imprisonment was a house arrest, this one was far more serious as he was suffering and “chained like a criminal.” But rather than dwell on his own circumstances, Paul turned Timothy’s focus back to the Gospel. Though at the end of verse 9 Paul told Timothy *he* was chained, he adds “God’s word [was] *not*.” God’s Word cannot be held back by human circumstances. As borne witness to by God’s prophet, Isaiah, hundreds of years earlier,⁴ “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, *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*.” Though God’s messengers may suffer and be chained and be put to death for proclaiming God’s Word, their end won’t end God’s working. As Paul states elsewhere about God’s providential working, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, *but God has been making it grow*.”⁵ Again, God is *not* limited by our circumstances but is able to work in and through *all* circumstances. He is God.

⁴ Isaiah 55:10–11.

⁵ I Corinthians 3:6.

Next in verse 10 Paul introduces a second tension. *Because* God’s word is not chained—because God is ever able to accomplish his purposes—Paul goes on to say, “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.” So what is he saying here? If the salvation of “the elect” is secure—for isn’t this what *being* elect means?—then why does Paul go on to say that the *reason* he endures everything for the sake of the elect is that *they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus*? In other words, if our election—our *salvation* in Christ—is a done deal, why does Paul indicate that he is enduring the suffering he is enduring *so that* the *elect* may obtain salvation? Though this may feel like a contradiction to *us*—we can become obsessed with questions of how and whether God’s will works with our human will in bringing about salvation—*Paul* understands that God, in his divine and mysterious wisdom, has chosen *us*, believers in and followers of him, to be the *means* of his election of others coming to fruition. As Paul notes in Romans 10: “*Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”^[Joel 2:23]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?¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the

feet of those who bring good news!''''[Isaiah 53:1] So the *way* in which others, God's elect, will come to a saving faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ is by our sharing, our proclaiming, this good news to them. So we shouldn't get wrapped up in knots about how the mystery of salvation—of someone being convicted and convinced of his or her need for Christ—ultimately comes about. Instead we should be willing to be used by God to draw others to himself as we seek to share his love in word and deed.

Brothers and sisters, God has chosen you and me to be the way in which he can reach others with the Good News of the Gospel. To share this good news with others is the highest expression of our love for them for the most important thing we can know in life is that we were made for God. And in God's Son, Jesus Christ, the effects of the Fall have been overturned so that we *can* know our Father in heaven. So though God certainly knows those who are his, *we don't*. But *our* call is to share the Good News of Christ that others "too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus" even as Paul states here. And this salvation is with "eternal glory." If God's "glory" is his manifesting of his presence, then those who obtain the salvation he provides will be with him forever; they'll experience his eternal, his everlasting, glory and presence.

Next Paul lists a “trustworthy saying”⁶ which is comprised of various parts in verses 11–13—possibly part of an early Christian hymn. And he is focusing on Jesus Christ’s work for our salvation. As he states, first, “if we died with him, we will also live with him.” And this juxtaposition between dying and living is a third tension for how can something which has died be alive? Yet our heeding the call of Christ upon our lives means just this—that we no longer belong to ourselves, but to *him*. When we are baptized, this death to self is symbolically represented as our old nature dies beneath the waters of baptism and we rise to our new nature and identity based *not* upon *our attempts*—and consequent failures—to do what is right but on *Jesus’* attempt and *success* in resisting all temptation and dying and rising for us. In committing our lives to following Christ, we are united with him by his Holy Spirit. As we died with him in his death on the cross so we will rise with him in his resurrection *even* when we physically die.

Next, Paul states what follows from this dying and living with Christ: “if we endure, we will also reign with him.” Though not what we may want to hear, the Christian faith requires perseverance, a daily choosing to live as God in Christ would have us live. And this perseverance, this steadfastness

⁶ Paul uses this phrase five times, all in the Pastoral Epistles. **I Timothy 1:15** (Christ Jesus came to save sinners); **I Timothy 3:1** (aspiring to be an overseer is noble); here in **2 Timothy 11** (Christian hymn); **2 Timothy 4:9** (godliness beats physical training in this life *and* the next); **Titus 3:8** (God saved us to eternal life by the Holy Spirit’s rebirth and renewal poured on us through Jesus Christ because of his mercy nor our righteous deeds).

in following him, again is made possible by Christ's Holy Spirit now living within and enabling us, and it will result in our one day reigning with him in heaven.

Third, Paul goes on, "If we disown him, he will also disown us." This is a hard truth—and this is *also* the reason we are called to proclaim the Gospel of God's forgiveness in his Son, Jesus Christ, and his Son alone. For in the end, the only thing that allows us to come before our loving and heavenly Father is accepting—or *owning*—his Son's work on our behalf; and the only thing that will *keep* our loving and heavenly Father from forgiving us is *rejecting*—or *disowning*—his Son's work on our behalf. Paul is saying nothing other than what Jesus himself taught about himself. In Matthew 10, Jesus says,³² "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven."³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven." And Luke also records Jesus' teaching on this in chapter 12 of his Gospel:⁸ "I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God."⁹ But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God." Eternal life with—or without—God all comes down to this one question: Do we own Jesus Christ? Do we accept that he is the only way God has provided to himself?

Or do we *disown* Jesus, *denying* that he is the only way God has provided to himself? Again, *this* love of the Father for, and in, and through his Son is the *good news* we are called to share that God, by his Holy Spirit, might unite himself and bring life to all who heed his call.

Paul's last point in this early hymn is a key part of this good news of the gospel: "if we are faithless, he remains faithful, *for he cannot disown himself*." Once we *do* respond to the truth of who Jesus Christ is, he will *never* let us go for we *belong to him*. Because God sends his Spirit and unites himself to all who give their lives over to following Jesus, *even* if we have moments in which we may lack faith and have doubts, he will *never* disown us. To do so would be to deny himself and this he cannot—and will not—do for he now indwells us. God *knows* our weaknesses. He *knows* the things that are difficult for us to believe in and hang on to and his *response* to our weakness is compassion, not anger. Again, we belong to him so *even if* we are faithless, he remains faithful, *for he cannot disown himself*. By his indwelling Holy Spirit which he has given us, we are *marked* as belonging to *him*. His love will *never* let us go. Paul is reminding Timothy of these truths because as he is faced with his own death, he is worried for Timothy. In a context of persecution, he wants to make sure Timothy's faith is girded as he shepherds his flock. So, he exhorts his son in Christ by reminding him of our

oneness with Jesus, of our *union* with him by means of his Spirit. This union is *so* strong that *even if we are* faithless, he will remain faithful, and *even if we die*, we will live with him forever.

Beginning in verse 14, Paul again encourages Timothy about his charge to care for Christ's church. He tells him to "Keep reminding God's people of these things." We need to be reminded of the truth of who Christ is and of what our relationship with him requires for we are a forgetful people. But additionally, we need to be reminded because we can be led astray. Isn't this why we gather together each week to focus upon our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ? To be reminded of who he is and what he has done for us? To be encouraged by his love for us? To be grounded in the hope of the resurrection when we are tempted to despair.

And Paul also reminds Timothy that he is not only to keep reminding his sheep of right teaching but to guard them against wrong teaching: "Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen." Timothy is to keep God's people grounded in the truths that matter rather than in quarrels that detract and distract from God's truth. And Paul then again reminds Timothy of his role in caring for Christ's church in verse 15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly

handles the word of truth.” As is true of all ministers, Timothy is to live in a conscientious and consistent manner as he carries out his ministry of proclaiming God’s Word to those in his charge.

Brothers and sisters, what a wonderful God and Savior we serve! Though he was God, he willingly took on a human body that we might know what God is like *in the flesh*. And doing so, he also lived out what human life was *intended* to be. Jesus lived prayerfully before our Father, seeking and acting upon his will, loving and caring for those around him. And, because he knew that the *only* way that we who had turned from God could return to God, he not only died in our place but he rose from death that by his Spirit we might be able to enjoy eternal life with him. So now even if *we* die, we also will *live* with him. Even if *we* are faithless, he remains faithful, *for he cannot disown himself*.

Let us turn now to our loving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, asking him to help us believe and live and *share* these wonderful truths as an encouragement to each other and for the sake of the elect, that they *too* may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.