



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

2nd Timothy 2:8-13 For Which I am Suffering...

I am reading from 2nd Timothy 2:8-14. If you're using a pew Bible, the passage is located on page 995. That's 2nd Timothy 2:8-14. Follow along then as I read God's holy, inerrant, infallible word.

ESV 2 Timothy 2:8...Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself. ¹⁴ Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your

Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

I am so grateful to both Justice and Phil for their willingness to spell me the last two weeks. I am so grateful to God that we have elders who are willing and able to do the hard work associated with making the text and the truth of the text come alive. And I am so grateful to each of you for giving them your attention and ear.

The letter we know as *2nd Timothy* was originally written by the Apostle Paul at the very end of his life. He wrote the letter while he was in prison in Rome, in chains, waiting to be executed. The letter itself is last thing the Apostle Paul ever wrote or at least the last thing he ever wrote that has survived. In that sense, it is a sort of spiritual last will and testament. I think that makes it extraordinarily important. Of course being Paul's last letter does not make it any more inspired or any weightier than the other books of the New Testament. It isn't. It has exactly the same authority as any other portion of Scripture. We know that from *2nd Timothy* itself. Paul writes this in *2nd Timothy* 3.....

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:16**...All Scripture (not some Scripture) is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

You see what I mean. All Scripture is breathed out by God. All Scripture is equally authoritative. The red letter portions of your Bible are not any more inspired than the black letter portions of your Bible. *2nd Timothy* is not any more authoritative than Genesis or Romans. Of course, the converse of that is also

true. It is not any less authoritative than Genesis or Romans. It is not any less authoritative simply because it is filled with pathos. Still, the fact that it was Paul's last letter and the fact that Paul knew it was his last letter draws us in I think. And that is right and proper that it does so. I think the fact that *2nd Timothy* is Paul's last letter ought to make us sit up and pay very close attention. I say that because whatever *2nd Timothy* does say was what mattered most to Paul in the last few days, weeks and months of his life.

And what Paul was most concerned about in the last few days of his life...was that his young disciple Timothy keep on going...that he not falter or quit his calling. Timothy, of course, was Paul's young protégé. He had often travelled with Paul on his missionary journeys. Paul loved Timothy like a son and referred to him as his child in the gospel. Paul often relied on him to visit troubled churches as his official representative. That's how Timothy came to be sent to straighten out the mess at Ephesus in *1st Timothy*. And now in *2nd Timothy* Paul is calling on Timothy again. This time he is calling him to Rome in order to see his face one last time.

You see during their time together, Paul poured his heart and soul into Timothy and because he did that he was deeply concerned that Timothy not fold up or quit under the pressure he was about to face. He was deeply concerned that Timothy carry on. He was concerned that Timothy carry on in his calling...that he carry on in his, that is Paul's place.

Now in one sense *2nd Timothy* is addressed to Timothy, but in another sense it is a public letter. It was intended to be read not just by Timothy but also by the

church at Ephesus and, I think, by other churches as well. And for that reason it has special relevance for us here at Grace this morning.

In many ways, the church at Ephesus was not unlike our church here at Grace. The fact that our church is as young as it is as a congregation, and I mean that both in terms of how long we have existed as a church, and in terms of our median age as members in our congregation, means I think, that we should pay very close attention to what Paul says. We should do that because each new generation has a responsibility both to guard and to advance the gospel. And that was Paul's chief concern for Timothy. Most scholars think that Timothy would have been about thirty years old at the time Paul wrote him this letter. A thirty year old man was considered even in the ancient world to still be a young man. I bring that up because it was, I think, Timothy's age and timidity that worried Paul.

In *2nd Timothy*, Paul writes to Timothy to encourage him in the faith and to bolster him in his work. And what was that work? It was, I think, to take Paul's place in the in the proclamation of the gospel. This was not simply Paul wanting Timothy to carry on his legacy. It was deeper than that. But he doesn't simply want Timothy to carry on his legacy. No, he wants Timothy to carry on in the relentless proclamation of the gospel.

Paul thought it necessary to write Timothy because he was worried that Timothy might collapse under his burden. He was afraid that Timothy's natural timidity might somehow couple together with the shame of Paul's imprisonment and cause him to quit his calling altogether. That's a legitimate inference drawn from

a number of places both here in *2nd Timothy* and also in some of Paul's other letters.

Now when I say Timothy was a bit timid, I don't mean to imply he was a coward or anything like that. But he was young. He was young and inexperienced and persecution and opposition and suffering are powerful forces and can beat down almost any man or a woman no matter how strong they are unless...unless something greater than the fear they feel pushes them on. Apparently, such forces were having their way with Timothy, and Paul knowing he was about to die wanted to write Timothy to strengthen him for what lay ahead. We saw that two weeks ago in the lesson Justice taught over Paul's concern at the end of chapter one that Timothy not to be ashamed of either the gospel or of his relationship to Paul.

The reason Timothy was apt to be ashamed was because prison in the ancient world carried the same sort of stigma prison does today...maybe even worse. It carried a stigma that could cause the heart to grow faint. At the end of chapter one, Paul implicitly exhorts Timothy to be like Onesiphorus who was unashamed and faithful and unlike Phygelus and Hermogenes who were not.

And then in last week's lesson, Phil showed us that Paul did not stop at simply asking Timothy to lay aside his shame. Paul went far beyond that. Paul not only asked Timothy to be unashamed of him but also to suffer with him in his proclamation of the gospel. Now there are a number of other elements in chapter two, but the unifying thread holding the chapter together is the unifying thread of suffering for the cause of Christ.

The suffering that Paul describes is of two kinds. It is both the kind of suffering that comes as a direct result of opposition or persecution, and it is also the kind of suffering that comes as the result of undertaking a long hard thankless task.

Both kinds are very real. Both kinds are inevitable.

Both require a sort of heroic inner strength that none of us possess in and of ourselves.

In his lesson last week Phil explained how Paul's command to Timothy in 2nd Timothy 2:1-7 was to take up those things he needed to endure the suffering that he knew was coming. You can see what I mean if you look for a moment at verse one.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:1**...You then, my child, *be strengthened by the grace* that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Paul is concerned that Timothy appropriate the kind of strength he needed to face the long, dark days ahead. But Paul doesn't simply tell Timothy to be strong. I don't think that would have done much good. Telling a timid person to be strong is a little like telling a fat person to be skinny. If they could have, they would have already. Rather, Paul tells Timothy to be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The strength Paul wants Timothy to lean on is not his own strength but the strength that comes directly from the grace or kindness of Christ. That is, it is the kind of strength that springs not from fear or from guilt but rather from a grateful heart...the kind of heart that understands and rests so completely in the gospel that it winds up being unafraid. Paul tells Timothy to be

strengthened in the grace that is in Christ so that he can face the suffering that is about to come.

In doing that, Paul reminds Timothy what his ultimate goal or purpose actually is. And what he says to Timothy is essential for us to remember. In fact, just thinking about the purpose of the church reminded me again of the sign some wag posted on the door of the University Church in New York that closed in 1963. Someone placed a sign on the front door of the church that read:

*Gone out of business.
Didn't know what our business was.*

Paul had no intention of letting Timothy forget what his business was. So he reminds Timothy that his goal, his primary task, his purpose was to commit to faithful men and women the same gospel that Paul had entrusted to his care. He was to commit to faithful men and women the gospel that had been entrusted by Jesus to Paul and that had now being entrusted by Paul to Timothy. And even though this gospel was passed down from Jesus to Paul and then from Paul to Timothy, it was not some sort of secret gnostic gospel because all this passing down was done in the presence of many witnesses.

Now why does Paul take the time to spell that out so plainly?

He does so because in the face of opposition and unrelenting, thankless labor, in the face of suffering, it is easy to forget what our ultimate goal or purpose actually is. It is a bit like that old East Texas quip that goes, **“When you are up to**

you neck in alligators it is exceedingly difficult to remember that the original objective was to drain the swamp.”

That is, in a sense, why Paul wants so badly to remind Timothy of his primary charge.

He is saying something like this, **“Find men that are faithful...that are reliable...and then cultivate them, train them, and then entrust the gospel to them...that they may teach others in exactly the same way I have taught you. And do that no matter what comes. Do that when persecution causes others to fall away like those in Asia did to me. Do that when you are all alone. Do that when the work seems thankless and backbreaking and no one anywhere seems to care.”**

That is what Timothy was called to do.

Now in verse three, Paul goes on to explain to Timothy just what entrusting the gospel to faithful men will cost. Paul’s principal point is that entrusting the gospel to faithful men will cost Timothy a boatload of suffering.

Look at verse three.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:3**...*Share in suffering* as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

You can see that Timothy’s doing that, that his entrusting the gospel to faithful men in order that they might teach others, will involve suffering. Paul doesn’t try to sugar coat the truth. He comes right out with it. He admonishes Timothy to

step up and join the brotherhood of suffering. In making his point in these five short verses, Paul uses three very distinct, very concrete metaphors. He compares Timothy's labor in the ministry to that of being a good soldier. He compares Timothy's labor in the ministry to that of being a competitive athlete, and he compares Timothy's labor in the ministry to that of being a hard-working farmer. He places all three of these descriptive metaphors under the general umbrella of *suffering*.

Phil, of course, covered all these metaphors brilliantly but let me just remind you of what he said. He said that when Paul uses the metaphor of a being good soldier, his point was that Timothy was not to get distracted by those things that were secondary. He was not to get entangled by the unimportant

And it was the same kind of idea with the metaphor of the athlete. Timothy was not to take shortcuts or twist the rules to try to make things easier.

And Paul intended the same sort of thing when he used the metaphor of the hard-working farmer. Paul's point was that there was no easy way to tend God's garden. It involved endless, backbreaking, thankless labor.

Of the three metaphors Paul uses this last metaphor, the metaphor of the hard-working farmer, is the one that I understand best. I don't know how many peas I have picked in my life...I don't know how many potatoes I have dug ...but if I never pick another pea or dig another potato in eternity that will be too soon for me. It is excruciating, backbreaking, thankless work.

But Paul's point is that it is the same kind of thing to teach others the gospel, to entrust to faithful men, women, boys, and girls the beauty of all that the Lord Jesus has done for them in his great work of atonement. There are times when it can be an excruciating, backbreaking, thankless task. There are times when it can make a person feel that nobody else knows the kind of effort and time and care and suffering it takes to do that. And yet Paul's point to Timothy is, **"I understand perfectly well what it takes, and that is what I am asking you to do. Don't quit. It is all worthwhile. Step up and share in the brotherhood of suffering."** It is what Paul called Timothy to do, and it is what we are called to do. It is a high privilege...a privilege like no other. It is a brotherhood and sisterhood of suffering and it is how we pass on the gospel.

Of course, the concept of suffering alone is not all that much encouragement to embrace suffering. No one wants to take up suffering for the sake of suffering itself.

So to give Timothy some real encouragement, Paul adds two new motivations to what he has said so far. It appeals to Timothy to remember Jesus Christ, and he appeals to Timothy to remember his own suffering.

Let's look first at his appeal to remember Jesus Christ. Look at verse eight.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:8**...Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ *for which I am suffering*, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!

Paul's point, it seems to me, is that Jesus for all his suffering is no longer suffering but is now risen from the dead. He is the offspring of David, of course,

the crucified Messiah, but more importantly he is risen from the dead. You can tell that that is Paul's principal point because he reverses the order of the two phrases from how he uses them in Romans.

There in Romans Paul writes:

^{ESV} **Romans 1:3**...concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

There he is the Son of David who is later declared to be the Son of God in the power of the resurrection. Here in Timothy, he says Christ is the risen from the dead, and he was of course the son of David.

His suffering had a purpose and now that purpose has been fulfilled in the gospel. He is risen.

And the truth is that while we suffer in the proclamation of the same gospel here and now, there will come a time in which our present suffering will pale in comparison to the weight of glory, to the eternal glory, that will be revealed when all is said and done.

As I thought this week about the glory that will be revealed when our suffering falls away, I couldn't help but think of that extraordinary book, *The Agony and the Ecstasy* by Irving Stone where he traces the story of Michelangelo and his epic struggle to paint the vaulted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In his heroic effort to paint the ceiling which he for all practical purpose painted by himself alone Michaelangelo suffered from cold, and fatigue and discouragement. He suffered

in unrelenting agony for four years as he painted and repainted the enormous ceiling lying flat on his back on a scaffold some sixty feet up in the air. Michelangelo suffered almost completely alone and yet all the while felt the cumulative weight of suffering to be an extraordinary privilege because he knew he was doing something wonderful. Listen to Stone's description:

For thirty days he painted from light to darkness, completing the Sacrifice of Noah, the four titanic male nudes surrounding it, the Erythraean Sibyl on her throne, and the Prophet Isaiah in the pendentive opposite, returning home at night to enlarge the cartoon of the Garden of Eden. For thirty days he slept in his clothes, without taking off even his boots; and when at the completion of the section, utterly spent, he had Michi pull his boots off for him, the skin came away with them.

He fed off himself. When he grew dizzy from standing and painting with his head and shoulders thrown back, his neck arched so that he could peer straight upward, his arms aching in every joint from the vertical effort, his eyes blurred from the dripping paint even though he had learned to paint through slits and to blink them shut with each brush stroke as he did against flying marble chips, he had Rosselli make him a still higher platform, the fourth on top of the scaffolding. He painted sitting down, his thighs drawn up tight against his belly for balance, his eyes a few inches from the ceiling, until the unpadded bones of his buttocks became so bruised and sore he could no longer endure the agony. Then he lay flat on his back, his knees in the air, doubled over as tightly as possible against his chest to steady his painting arm. Since he no longer bothered to shave, his beard became an excellent catchall for the constant drip of paint and water. No matter which way he leaned, crouched, lay or knelt, on his feet, knees or back, it was always in strain.

Then he thought he was going blind. A letter arrived from Buonarroto, and when he tried to read it he could see nothing but a blur. He put the letter down, washed his face, ate a few forkfuls of the overcooked pasta Michi had made for him, went back to the letter. He could not decipher a word.

He threw himself on his bed, sorely beset. What was he doing to himself? He had refused to paint the simple commission the Pope had requested, and now he would come out of this chapel a gnarled, twisted, ugly, blind dwarf, deformed

and aged by his own colossal stupidity. What Torrigiani had done to his face, the vault was now doing to his body. He would carry its scars to his dying day.¹

And yet when Michelangelo was finally finished and all the scaffolding was cleared away there it was...his extraordinary work revealed for all the world to see. Even his chief rival Raphael came to beg forgiveness for his rude behavior. He had not understood, he said, the extraordinary work Michelangelo was doing.

It was that same sort of thing for Paul. It was unrelenting suffering and crushing responsibility. He was shackled in a filthy hell hole in Rome but the beauty of the thing he was doing was greater than the suffering he was enduring. And because it was Paul was calling Timothy to join him. And because it was Paul is calling us to join him.

You see though Paul suffers and is bound in Rome in chains, he rejoices in the fact that the gospel itself is not bound...can never be bound. And that fact gives both Paul and Timothy a purpose to press on. Paul explains further in verse 10.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:10**...Therefore *I endure everything* for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Paul says here he is willing to endure anything and everything for the salvation of the elect. God's elect is not some nebulous, mystical group to Paul...it is rather a specific group of men, women, boys, and girls from every tongue, nation and tribe that have been claimed by the Lord Jesus as his own people. To Paul, the elect are his blood bought brothers and sisters and he is willing to endure whatever suffering he has to endure to see them obtain the glorious salvation that God has ordained for them. Paul's view of election here is, of course, no dull

sort of intellectual academic modern Calvinism. No, his view of election is a passionate belief that stirs his soul and causes him to embrace any and all suffering necessary in order to see the redeemed of God embrace the gospel. It is the kind of passion that we must have ourselves if we are to pass on the deposit we were entrusted with...it is experiential. If we possess anything less the next generation that follows us will think we were nothing but a bunch of insincere phonies.

To buttress his point even farther Paul adds an ancient epigram. Epigrams are something like proverbs. It is possible that the epigram he uses may have been an ancient church hymn.

The first part of the epigram relates what will happen to those who are faithful and endure suffering and persecution but remain faithful to the gospel. The second part relates what will happen to those who do not endure and who fall away from what they have been called to do.

I want to simply read it without much comment. It is powerful enough on its own. You can just imagine how it must have sounded in Timothy's ears.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:11**...The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; *if we deny him, he also will deny us*; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself.

You see on the one hand this ancient quote is an encouragement to those who are willing suffer. On the other hand, it is a warning for those who want to pull back. But the encouragement and the warning are not simply for Timothy alone.

They are for us as well.

Paul's point is that we must faithfully proclaim the gospel through unrelenting hard work and suffering. We must accept the responsibility of faithfully passing on the deposit with which we have been entrusted. We must flee youthful passions and not get distracted by mindless arguments. We must patiently endure evil to the end that God's people will be faithfully taught and his elect will be saved. We must take our place in the fellowship of suffering.

When I was a boy, I had a Sunday school teacher named John Tatum. Mr. Tatum was an amiable and gentle man, who fulfilled his duty as our Sunday School teacher week after week without complaint or grumbling. Looking back, I realize just how difficult that must have been. We were a rowdy bunch of boys...me, John Howard, and Herbie Trisler. We were like the wild mustangs of the American West, we were proud, swift, and untamable.

But Mr. Tatum kept on at his task. He blocked our way as we tried to crawl in and out of windows. He broke up our scuffles. He tolerated our fidgeting, and put up with our endless, mindless chatter. He put time and energy into his lessons in spite of the fact we didn't pay much attention. He even gave us candy.

I remember one Sunday morning, Mr. Tatum was particularly subdued. Of course, we still crawled in and out of the windows and yakked endlessly but we all knew something was wrong. When he finally got us corralled, he began his lesson. At several points during the lesson, huge large tears rolled down Mr. Tatum's face. That was unusual, Mr. Tatum was generally unflappable; that's a

requirement you know for anyone teaching elementary boys. But we were not a very sensitive bunch. We never asked him what was wrong and he never said.

On the way home from church, I asked my dad if he knew what was wrong with Mr. Tatum. He asked what I meant and I told him that Mr. Tatum seemed kind of sad in Sunday school. My dad seemed shocked.

"You mean Mr. Tatum was actually there this morning?" he asked.

"Yep just like always. Why?"

"Son, Mr. Tatum and his wife lost their baby late last night. It was a baby for whom they had waited a long time. It was a baby they thought they would never be able to have. You know the fact that Mr. Tatum was there at all this morning says a lot about just how much he cares for you boys. I hope y'all didn't torment him"

I have never forgotten that moment. I have to admit looking back that it did not immediately stop me from crawling out the window or fidgeting but I did begin to try to listen whenever Mr. Tatum spoke. I began to connect his concern for us with his weekly lessons and as I came to understand something of his sacrifice for us my affection for him grew as well.

You see you are called to do that whether you are an elder or deacon, whether you are a Sunday School teacher, or nursery worker. You are called to do that whether you are young or old, or rich or poor. You are called to do that whether

you are outgoing or timid. You are called to help pass on the good deposit entrusted to you. You are called to do that by joining the fellowship of suffering.

Will you do it?

Let's pray.

¹ Irving Stone, *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 351.