

Motives for Sacrificial Ministry, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:8–9

Code: 55-7

I. INTRODUCTION

Second Timothy 2:8-13 says, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself. "

Second Timothy is a call to continue courageously in service to Jesus Christ. Timothy was in a difficult situation and was apparently not fulfilling all his responsibilities. In verses 8-13 Paul gives motivations for sacrificial service that all Christians can learn from.

A. The Necessity of Sacrifice

Jesus made it clear that to confess Him as Lord means to submit to Him and serve His cause.

1. John 14:15

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. " That often involves sacrifice and suffering.

2. Luke 9:23

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

" The Christian is to obey Christ even if it costs him his life.

3. John 15:20

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master. ' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. "

4. Matthew 10:17-18

"Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. "Hebrews 11 contains a great list of Old Testament heroes who gave their lives for the Messiah yet to come. We are to give our lives for the Messiah who has come and whom we know personally.

B. The Extremity of Sacrifice

A believer may be called to make the supreme sacrifice of death. Allegiance to Christ necessarily requires that he or she give up personal desires and ambitions. Now those are ideas hard for us in the United States of America to relate to--we live in a religiously comfortable environment. But while the example of the millions who have died for their faith in Christ in other times and parts of the world has apparently had little impact on us, we can relate to a husband or wife deserted by his or her spouse because of opposition to Christ. That can be worse than death because death ushers a believer into the presence of Christ.

Persecution may take many forms, but we may be sure that the Word of God and a godly life will create some kind of conflict with the world. As 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. " Second Timothy 2:8-13 presents the reasons that make that suffering worthwhile. Like Timothy, we are to understand that our service to Christ is worth far more than any personal considerations.

Second Timothy was Paul's last letter. It was a passing of the baton--Paul wanted Timothy to pick up and carry on where Paul would soon be leaving off. He wanted Timothy to be willing to make the same sacrifices for Christ as he had.

Persecution by a Mad Emperor

Timothy lived at a time of increasing pagan hostility toward the church. It's possible he anticipated bodily harm to himself or even death because of it.

The first major persecution of the church was brought on by the burning of Rome in July [sc]A. D. 64. Rome burned for six days and many public buildings were destroyed. Vast areas of tenement buildings were also destroyed and as a result much of the populace lost their homes.

As Rome burned, the Emperor Nero stood in a tower and watched. It is said he was thrilled at what he called "the beauty of the flames" (Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*). It soon became apparent that Nero himself was responsible for the conflagration--he wanted to destroy old Rome so he could build a new and more magnificent one.

The population turned against him. According to the first-century Roman historian Tacitus, "All human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor and propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order [by Nero]. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace" (*Annals* 15. 44).

Christianity was in disrepute at the time of the fire--either through deliberate slander or misunderstanding--and provided Nero with the perfect scapegoat for his own actions. Against the Christians in Rome he fanned into intense flame the fires of persecution.

Paul was caught in that new conflagration--that's why he was in prison when he wrote his second letter to Timothy. Timothy knew that if persecution spread throughout the empire he--as Paul's friend and a leader of a Christian church--might receive the same treatment Paul received. Paul wanted Timothy to be willing to suffer in the way he was. He wanted Timothy to consider suffering for Christ as much an honor as he did.

Lesson

In 2 Timothy 2:9 the phrase "for which I suffer hardship" means Paul was willing to endure evil treatment for specific reasons. In verses 8-13 Paul states four reasons that make hardship for the sake of proclaiming the gospel worth enduring.

II. THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST (v. 8)

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel. "

Verse 8 focuses on the preeminence of Christ--the driving motivation of Paul's ministry. "Remember" (Gk. , mn[ma]emoneu[ma]o) could be translated "keep always in your memory. " We will serve more boldly and courageously if we never lost sight of whom we are serving.

To Paul ministry meant "serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials" (Acts 20:19). He endured the tremendous obstacles put in his path because he never lost sight of who he served--not the church, a program, or his personal ambitions, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul understood his service to be like that of a teacher, soldier, athlete, and farmer (2 Tim. 2:2-6), looking to our Lord as his preeminent example of self-sacrifice.

First John 2:6 says, "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as [Jesus] walked. " Just as He was for Paul, our Lord is our example also.

A. His deity

The phrase "Jesus Christ, risen from the dead" (2 Tim. 2:8) is literally translated, "Jesus Christ, risen out from among the dead. " The resurrection of Christ was selective--Paul calls Him the "first-born" or "preeminate one" (Gk. , pr[ma]ototokos) from among the dead (Col. 1:18). Paul's point in both 2 Timothy 2:8 and Colossians 1:18 is that Christ is preeminent and living. Because of those two

ongoing realities we are to keep Him in constant memory as He is now.

The resurrection pictures God's destruction of death, which is Satan's greatest weapon. It also pictures salvation. Christ's death was a death for sin. His being alive means the penalty for sin is satisfied. The resurrection points to the living Christ who is both God and Savior.

B. His humanity and royalty

Christ is a "descendant of David" (2 Tim. 2:8). The Greek text says He is out of the spermatos of David. Christ was from the loins of David, which presents Him both as a man and a royal heir. We are to be motivated in our service by remembering that the one we serve is the God-man/the Savior-King.

C. His suffering

Our Lord suffered before He was glorified, was humiliated before crowned, and died before His resurrection. Since that's the path to glory the perfect Son of God followed, we should expect to walk it too, for we are no better than our Savior.

Hebrews 5:8 says, "Although [Christ] was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." As Christians we are to expect to learn obedience in the same way. That's contrary to today's prosperity gospel, which teaches God desires only happiness for His children in this world. It's also contrary to what the Bible says about repentance (a message not warmly received in our society). We must be willing to suffer with Christ and tell others they will suffer for Christ if they enter a saving relationship with Him.

D. His example

Our Lord is the supreme example of how all Christians are to react to suffering. First Peter 2:21-23 says, "You have been called for this purpose [patient suffering], since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." We are to react to suffering in the same way our Lord did.

Christ endured suffering for the sake of the truth. Hebrews 12:2 says that "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Our Lord was willing to patiently endure the shame of the cross because he saw the glory to come. As we live for Him with boldness and courage, and suffer for doing so, we are to remember our Savior and follow His example. We may do so confident of the glory to come.

E. His resurrection

When we remember our Lord we must remember He lives! He reigns now at the right hand of the Father in heaven as the royal heir of David. He lives to intercede as our great High Priest and reigns as sovereign over all creation. That realization ought to affect how we respond to the hatred of men toward Christ and us. He who suffered remembers our suffering and will bring us to glory.

F. His worthy cause

To remember Jesus is to remember He is the pr[ma]totokos (Col. 1:8)--the preeminent one. The worthiness of Christ's Person makes His cause worthy--a cause worth giving one's life for.

If we remember that Jesus Christ is the God-man, Savior-King, faithful High Priest, and sovereign over all creation with the most worthy cause of any, we will happily give our lives for that cause. I am amazed to see pagan monks lighting themselves on fire for demonic causes when many professing Christians refuse to give themselves for a cause fully worth living and dying for--the preeminent cause of Christ.

A well-trained memory forgets all that's not worth remembering and remembers all that is. The only thing worth remembering is Jesus Christ and living for Him.

II. THE POWER OF THE WORD (v. 9)

"I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned."

A. The Bound Messenger

The King James Version of 2 Timothy 2:9 declares that "the word of God is not bound. " That's the reason Paul could write with confidence in the midst of evil treatment and imprisonment. Though he was imprisoned, the Word of God was free.

1. Paul's imprisonment

The Greek word translated "imprisonment" can refer to a prisoner's chains (e. g. , 2 Tim. 1:16), but "criminal" implies something more: Paul was considered a criminal and treated like one. At the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy he was in the Mamertine prison in Rome. It was a pit without normal sanitation jammed with people awaiting execution. Undoubtedly they were not comfortable with the presence of Paul, nor he with theirs. This was a much rougher situation than the house arrest of his first imprisonment in Rome (cf. Acts 28:16-31). Paul's use of the word translated "criminal" (Gk. , kakourgos, a technical word used of robbers, like those crucified with Jesus) may reflect the shame Paul felt by being classified by the Roman government in the same way as those he was incarcerated with.

2. Paul's critics

Paul's sense of shame may have been increased by those who were glad he had been imprisoned. They might have said to him, "Why did you keep preaching and get yourself thrown into prison? You should have softened your message and stopped attacking public figures. Why couldn't you have quietly passed out tracts and left before people knew you were here? You weren't subtle--now your ministry is a mess!" Those kind of critics would have weighed heavily on Paul's heart.

Politics and the Gospel

Today some think the only reason we can freely share the gospel in America is because America is free. So they spend large amounts of time in political action to maintain a free America. Certainly a free America means the freedom to preach the gospel--but the gospel is not bound regardless of America's political system.

Paul affirmed that even though he was imprisoned, the gospel could never be imprisoned. That's an important message for those who say we need to soften the gospel message so we don't lose the freedom to preach it. They say we need to take away the offense of the gospel, but that would rob the gospel of its power (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23-25).

Some will respond, "If we boldly proclaim an offensive gospel we may be arrested and jailed. " But if that's where the Lord wants us to be, then that's great! Paul wrote to the Philippians, "All the saints greet you, especially [the new believers] of Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:22). Paul was a prisoner at the time he wrote that, yet many in Caesar's household had come to faith in Christ through his witness in such circumstances. Paul viewed the circumstances of imprisonment as an opportunity to evangelize his guards (cf. Phil. 1:12-13).

In 2 Timothy 4:2 he says, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. " That's a call to preach boldly without compromising the message of the gospel--even if it means chains and death. Paul could write that with assurance because he knew he proclaimed a gospel with power.

B. The Unbound Message

1. The testimony of Martin Luther

In His hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" Martin Luther wrote, "The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still. " Luther knew that regardless of what happened to us, God's Word remains unbound.

2. The testimony of the early church

During the persecution the church endured in its early years, many Christians hid in underground caverns in Rome and outlying areas. They dug many miles of catacombs and buried their dead there for nearly 300 years. Archaeologists estimate that as many as four million Christians were buried in those catacombs. When I visited the remains of those catacombs, I remember seeing the

inscription, "The Word of God is not bound. " Those persecuted Christians knew that even though they might be killed, no one could stop the Word of God.

3. The testimony of John Bunyan

When John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, was imprisoned in Bedford jail, his cell was in a building inside a high wall. During the day crowds would gather outside the wall and listened to Bunyan as he preached. His voice carried over the wall through the bars of his cell window. The Word of God was not bound.

4. The testimony of the church in China

Countless numbers of Christians died for their faith when the communists took over China. Ever since then the church has been persecuted and oppressed. Yet it is estimated that it has grown to between 30 and 100 million believers. That couldn't have happened if the power of the Word depended on political conditions. In his book *The Church in China* Carl Lawrence says that in the house churches of China, "sometimes the absence of those who are not there is as significant as the presence of those who are. "Missing from the meetings is a young science teacher, a Christian who refused to teach Darwin's theory of evolution as truth. She told officials that Darwin was anti-God and that the theory of evolution was not true. For weeks they tried to persuade her. Good science teachers were difficult to find, especially after the Cultural Revolution. She would not relent. Her reply was always the same. 'We are not monkeys. We are men and women made in the image of God. ' Later she would cry the same words through broken teeth and bloody lips. "Today, she is a janitor at the school and is forbidden to attend house meetings with her fellow believers. "There is also the noticeable void left by the beloved doctor who refused to confess that Chairman Mao was bigger than 'your Christ. "'He was beaten and left unconscious by the Red Guard. They covered him with a blanket and let him lie on the hospital floor. They told him they would be back in a few days. They returned and his response was simple, 'My Christ is bigger than Chairman Mao. My Christ is the Lord of lords, King of kings. He has been given the name above all names in heaven, on earth and under the earth. "'More beating, but the same response: 'My Christ is bigger. ' After several days, they decided to end this heresy once and for all. They stripped him naked and made him stand up on a narrow bench, barely six inches wide. 'Now,' they shouted, 'if your Christ is bigger than Chairman Mao, let him save you! Our Chairman Mao can save you; just admit it. "'Quietly and barely audible, he repeated the story of the men in the fiery furnace. He raised his voice as he looked at his persecutors and told them, 'They were not burned because the Lord stood with them, and He is with me now. "'The hours passed, not a muscle in his body trembled. Five hours, ten hours--people began to take notice. 'Where does this old man get his strength?' they asked. His very presence was becoming, not only a witness to Christ, but a source of conviction and embarrassment to the others who saw him standing, naked, on the bench. "Finally, the cadre could stand it no longer. Naked, and without a whimper, the 'man who believed Christ bigger than Chairman Mao' had stood, balancing himself on a narrow bench, from seven in the evening until ten the next morning. After fifteen hours of what he called 'peace and fellowship,' he was pushed to the floor. The Red Guard promised him that there would be another day. It came a week later. Dragging him away from his patients, they hanged him. "The Red Guard fought among themselves. They were frightened. Some wanted to cut him down before he died. After a scuffle, one cut the rope. He fell to the floor and preached his last message: 'As I was hanging there, my heart was melting for you. ' He then died, as his predecessor, Stephen, had done before him" ([Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985], pp. 42-43). That kind of persecution has not killed off the church in China, even though Bibles are scarce: "In 1966, the Red Guards made a concentrated effort to burn all the Bibles, hymnals and other Christian literature. They did their job well. Today, it is not uncommon to see a group of several hundred people with only one Bible" (Lawrence, pp. 61-62). One witness of the situation in China said, "I know of one village where there are 5,000 believers and four preachers, but not one complete Bible. One person has a New Testament which begins with the

thirteenth chapter of Mark and goes through the book of Titus" (p. 62). Another says, "I have 3,000 people in the house churches that I visit and teach. We have three complete Bibles and two New Testaments" (pp. 66-67). The writer of Hebrews wrote that "the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). It can't be bound--that's why we can preach it with confidence and without fear of the consequences.

Conclusion

We shouldn't fear to preach the truth of Christ boldly. Christians in America need to catch fire spiritually and begin to preach biblical truth boldly, and without compromise. That might result in hostility towards us--but perhaps that hostility would be used by God to purify the church in America. As Christians we need to covenant together to remember Christ and that His Word can't be bound.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Second Timothy 2:8-13 gives _____ for sacrificial service that all Christians can learn from.
2. Show from Scripture that to confess Jesus as Lord means to submit to Him and serve His cause.
3. How extreme may the sacrifice be that a Christian is called on to make for his or her Lord.
4. How do we know that the Word of God and a godly life will create conflict with the world (2 Tim. 3:12)?
5. What result did the burning of Rome have on the Christian community? What was its impact on Paul?
6. What does 2 Timothy 2:8 focus on?
7. What did ministry mean to Paul (Acts 20:19)?
8. Paul's point in both 2 Timothy 2:8 and Colossians 1:18 is that Christ is _____ and _____?
9. What does the resurrection picture?
10. How does description of Christ as a "descendant of David" (2 Tim. 2:8) present Him to us?
11. since the path to glory the perfect Son of God followed was one of suffering, what should we expect? What is that message contrary to? What does that indicate we must tell others if they consider entering a saving relationship to Christ?
12. Our Lord is the supreme _____ of how all Christians are to react to suffering.
13. Why was our Lord willing to patiently endure the shame of the cross (Heb. 12:2)?
14. Why was Paul able to write Timothy with confidence in the midst of evil treatment and imprisonment?
15. How did Paul's second imprisonment in Rome differ from his first?
16. Second Timothy 2:9 says that the Word of God is not bound. Discuss how history has borne that out.

Pondering the Principles

1. The nineteenth-century English pastor Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Oh, what mercy is that which has turned our hell to heaven, transformed our disease into health, and lifted us from the dunghill, and set us among the princes of His people! In infinite power to remove sin, to perfume with acceptance, to clothe with righteousness, to win blessings, to preserve saints, and to save to the uttermost, the Lord Jesus is great beyond all greatness" (The Treasury of the Bible, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962], p. 606). Powerful ministry for Christ depends on your mind-set. When you "remember Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:8) is it with a mind-set that affirms He is "great beyond all greatness"?
2. While God's Word is unbound, the hearts of those who truly know God's Word are to be bound its teaching. Yet the watching world must often wonder what power--if any--God's Word has when it

looks at those who profess to know the God of the Word. A. W. Tozer said, "The difficulty we modern Christians face is not misunderstanding the Bible, but persuading our untamed hearts to accept its plain instructions" (cited in Signposts: A Collection of Sayings from A. W. Tozer, Harry Verploegh, ed. [Wheaton, Ill. : Victor, 1988], p. 16). When the unsaved examine your life do they see a heart bound by God's Word and a life governed it?

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