

Motives for Sacrificial Ministry, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:10–14a

Code: 55-8

I. INTRODUCTION

When the apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy, the namesake of his letter had apparently reached a low point in his spiritual life and ministry. Because of the difficulties he faced Timothy may have developed an attitude of self-pity. Paul's response was not sympathy but an exhortation to spiritual strength. The appropriateness of that response can be seen elsewhere in Scripture.

A. An Old Testament Precedent

1. Jeremiah's predicament

The prophet Jeremiah was the epitome of righteousness and godliness in his day. He did not live a happy life and would have been a poor advertisement for today's prosperity gospel. He was born a priest but exercised the office of a prophet. He endured extreme suffering for most of his life, which was an ongoing martyrdom. The people of Israel so hated him that had God not spared him, he would have been killed on numerous occasions. During the years of Jeremiah's ministry the people of Israel were apostate. God called him to deliver a confronting message of repentance and holiness that the people did not want to hear. At times he felt God had abandoned him—he even cursed the day he was born (Jer. 20:14). King Jehoiakim once became so angry with Jeremiah that he cut the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecy into pieces and burned it (36:20-26). King Zedekiah imprisoned him. Cumulatively he received more opposition than any other Old Testament prophet. Much of the opposition to Jeremiah came from his uncompromising message of total commitment to God. Tradition says that because of his message he was finally stoned to death. Yet in the midst of such rejection, Jeremiah wept at the prospect of the coming judgment God would bring upon his people (9:1). Jeremiah 11:21 records one of the many sorrows in the life of Jeremiah: the men of his home village of Anathoth sought to kill him. They threatened him, saying, "Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord, that you might not die at our hand." They were angry because of the condemning prophecies Jeremiah had uttered against Israel. In response to that threat Jeremiah turned to God for an answer: "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, that I would plead my case with Thee; indeed I would discuss matters of justice with Thee: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?" (12:1). He didn't consider his predicament to be fair and said to God, "Thou knowest me, O Lord; Thou seest me; and Thou dost examine my heart's attitude toward Thee" (v. 3). It appeared to him that God was prospering the wicked (v. 2) while he—a righteous and true servant of God—was allowed to suffer. He wanted to know how long the land was "to mourn and the vegetation of the countryside to wither" (v. 4). He wanted to know how God could allow the wicked to prosper while the righteous were persecuted. Jeremiah's questions to God have been asked by many suffering saints. I have struggled with the prosperity of others while I was persecuted for preaching the truth—and my difficulties have been nothing like what Jeremiah suffered! Yet it's natural for God's servants to cry out to Him when suffering comes, wondering how what is happening to them can be reconciled with God's justice.

2. God's Answer

God's answer to Jeremiah is striking—He didn't offer sympathy or consolation. Jeremiah asked God to punish his enemies (v. 3), but instead God told Jeremiah, "If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how

will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?" (v. 5). In effect God was saying, "You may think you've suffered up to now, but you haven't begun to suffer." Jeremiah had been running against mere men, but soon he would be running against horses--a much tougher race. Jeremiah's present suffering was like being in a land of peace compared to the future, which would be like a wild jungle. Jeremiah's present sufferings were but training for suffering to come. God's answer to Jeremiah was not a show of sympathy but a call to spiritual strength.

B. The New Testament Pattern

God's response to Jeremiah's cry for help was the same response Paul made to Timothy's lack of resolve in the face of persecution. God warned Jeremiah that he needed resolve in facing treacherous dealing by those closest to him (Jer. 12:6). Paul exhorted Timothy to spiritual strength in light of actual and anticipated persecution (2 Tim. 2:1-7). In 2 Timothy 2:8-13 Paul undergirds that exhortation with motivations for Timothy to fulfill his calling--motivations that apply to us as well. We find similar motivation in Hebrews 12:3, which says, "Consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart." Jesus affirmed that, like Him, His disciples would suffer persecution: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!" (Matt. 10:24-25). That's a warning we need to remember.

Three times in Matthew 10 Jesus exhorted His followers not to fear persecution (vv. 26, 28, 31). We are not to fear because God knows about our circumstances, cares for us, oversees us, and will vindicate us in the end. In light of such assurances we are called to sacrifice all that hinders our relationship to Christ (cf. Matt. 10:34-37; Heb. 12:1-2). Christ promises that "he who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).

Hebrews 11 describes saints who were willing to endure persecution, commenting that the world was not worthy of them (v. 38). They devoted themselves to God's will because they had a higher agenda than the things of this world. That's the agenda Paul calls us to in 2 Timothy. It's an agenda we can meet only if we are motivated by something more than our own sense of personal well-being. If comfort, prosperity, success, and fame is what motivates you, you will not be able to endure persecution for Christ's sake. The church has been built on those motivated by a Christlike agenda.

Review

Believers have four truths to motivate them in the face of persecution. 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."

II. THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST (v. 8)

If you're focused on yourself, you won't tell others about Christ. You will compromise to avoid offending people. You won't confront evil at work with righteousness. In family situations you won't confront spiritual error with the truth. People who endure without compromise are like Daniel: they are willing to endure a lions' den rather than compromise their relationship with the preeminent Christ.

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

Lesson

IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE WORK (v. 10)

"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."

A. Why We Are to Suffer

The phrase "for this reason" (v. 10) explains Paul's willingness to work and endure suffering. He was willing to suffer "all things" (hardship, sacrifice, persecution, chains, and prison) "for the sake of those who are chosen"--the elect.

Scripture identifies some people as elect--chosen by God for salvation from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Some might ask, "If those people are elect, won't God save them regardless of what anyone does? Why should Paul or anyone else endure suffering when they're going to be saved anyway? I sure wouldn't!"

That's an unbalanced view of the doctrine of election. Verse 10 balances it by the words, "that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory." In that statement Paul explains he was willing to suffer for the elect that they might obtain what they have been elected to. God not only chooses those who will be saved, but has also chosen believers to be the instruments for bringing His people to salvation.

A Christian isn't given spiritual life to move up the corporate ladder, make more money, buy a new camper, go on a longer vacation, get new furniture for the living room, or buy a new house. Every Christian's foremost desire ought to be being used by God for evangelizing and edifying God's elect. While from God's perspective salvation is by God's choice, from man's perspective it is obtained by faith. That's accomplished in time as God uses believers to proclaim the gospel, bringing the elect into a saving relationship with Christ.

Romans 10:13-15 says, "'Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. ' How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" We are called to preach the gospel so the elect may call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. Paul was willing to endure anything to fulfill that calling.

B. How We Are to Suffer

1. The example of John Wesley

John Wesley parted company with ease early in his ministry. He lived very simply, giving away nearly all he had for the advance of the gospel. He was abused and maligned in his day, but resolved to leave his reputation in the hands of God. He is said to have traveled 225 thousand miles by foot or horseback and preached 2,400 sermons, all the while under attack by mobs, other preachers, and the press. He was misrepresented and did not know the comforts of home, yet he never lost the joy of the ministry. His mind was set on whom he was serving, not the things of the world.

2. The example of George Whitefield

George Whitefield was greatly used by God in America after being similarly used in England. In thirty-four years he crossed the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times and preached thousands of sermons. It is said of him that as a soldier of the cross, humble, ardent, devout, he put on the whole armor of God, preferring the honor of Christ to his own interest, repose, reputation or life. Why should we be willing to follow the example of others and endure suffering for the sake of Christ's elect? Because we have the privilege of participating in a marvelous work. Those who avoid proclaiming the gospel for fear of offense lose that privilege, and God gives it to others who will obey him. In Acts 18:9-10 the Lord told the apostle Paul, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;

for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." Paul obeyed--and we are to do the same.

V. THE PROMISED REWARD (vv. 11-13)

"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."

Verses 11-13 are one of five faithful or trustworthy sayings in the pastoral epistles of Paul (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; Titus 3:4-8). They were sayings that expressed axiomatic ideas in the early church--truisms everyone knew to be accurate reflections of the gospel. Because of its parallelism and rhythmic structure, verses 11-13 may be a hymn sung by the early church.

A. The Positive Reward

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy the church was under increasing persecution. Therefore it must have been of great comfort to be able to affirm that "for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him (v. 11).

1. Life through death

Verses 11-13 are all stated as first-class conditions in the Greek text: each "if" can be read as expressing reality--not merely a possibility. In verse 11 "we died" is expressed in the Greek text as an aorist tense verb, which views the action of the verb as a completed whole, while "we will" is in the future tense. Thus verse 11 could be translated, "If at any time we have died with him, we will in the future live with Him." The presence of aorist and future tenses in verse 11 shows the effect of a present reality on the future. Verse 11 promises that loss of life in the present means the gain of life in the future. That reality is implicit in Paul's statement, "To be absent from the body [is] to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Similarly Jesus looked forward to spiritual life beyond death as an absolute certainty, as did the martyred Stephen (cf. Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59). Verse 11 may also carry the implication that those who have died in Christ by faith now live and walk in newness of life (cf. Rom. 6:2-4). But the main sense of Paul's statement in verse 11 is to assure those who face martyrdom that death for Christ's sake will certainly result in spiritual life in His presence.

2. Reigning through endurance

In verse 12 Paul moves from martyrdom to present endurance. The verb translated "endure" speaks of continual, patient, present endurance. Most of us won't be martyrs, but we will have to continually and patiently endure suffering and persecution. The promise for such endurance is that "we shall also reign with [Christ]" (v. 12), going into His presence immediately upon death. Death or endurance for Christ's cause are promised to have been worth bearing in light of coming glory. We may have to submit to persecution, animosity, and bitterness now, but the future holds life, authority, and exaltation in the presence of Christ for all who are loyal to Him. We will live and reign (Gk. , *sumbasileu[ma]o*, "to reign together with") with Christ. Those are wonderful promises!

The Perseverance of the Saints

The promises in 2 Timothy 2:11-12 speak not only of faithful service to Christ, but also of the perseverance of the saints. All genuine Christians stay true to their Savior through whatever trials, struggles, persecutions, and difficulties they may pass through. That's not to say there won't be momentary lapses--but such lapses never characterize genuine believers. True Christians who lapse eventually repent of their sin and go on to live the life of a persevering Christian. Though Peter denied his Lord, he repented and wept bitterly (Mark 14:66-72). Tradition says that Peter died a martyr's death, just as His Lord predicted (cf. John 21:18).

Everyone else who is elect likewise perseveres. We are secure in our salvation by God's choice and made to be secure by His power. Those who persevere demonstrate that God is indeed at work in them unto salvation (Phil. 2:12-13).

In John 8:31 Jesus said to "those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine. '" In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 Paul reminded the Corinthians of "the gospel which I

preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (emphasis added). It's possible to profess to believe in Christ yet not be saved. A "decision for Christ" or having "accepted Christ" mean nothing apart from perseverance. Those terms aren't even found in Scripture to describe entering a saving relationship with Christ. In Scripture when a person is invited to salvation in Christ, it's always an invitation to follow Christ--not just accepting Christ so He'll give you a wonderful life.

Evangelism that offers a Christ who does not need to be followed has produced a lot of still-borns--people who think they are born again but who never understood the nature of a relationship to Christ and never show perseverance in the Christian faith. Calling people to salvation in Christ is a call to correct doctrine and a living discipleship, not to a meaningless decision void of loyalty or faithfulness to Christ. Only those who are loyal and faithful to Christ can rest in the promise of one day reigning with Him.

As Christians we once "were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds" (Col. 1:21). But now we are reconciled through Christ "if indeed [we] continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that [we] have heard" (v. 23). That means we must be faithful followers if we are to look forward to reigning with Christ.

B. The Negative Reward

The hymn in 2 Timothy 2:11-13 also has a negative side. Verses 12-13 declare, "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."

1. Denial for denial

The Greek verb translated "deny" means "to reject", "disown," or "renounce" (cf. Acts 3:13; Titus 1:16; 2 Pet. 2:1). It is stated in the future tense, implying that some who call themselves Christians will deny Christ in the future. The promise to such people is that Christ will likewise deny them. They are like the rocky soil described in Mark 4, for "when they hear the word, [they] immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away" (vv. 16-17). That doesn't refer to someone who temporarily denies Christ, but who continually disowns and renounces Christ without repentance. The promise in 2 Timothy 2:12 was stated by Christ Himself: "Everyone . . . who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33). Those who deny Christ are the Demases of the world: they love "this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). They will follow Jesus for a while but when a difficulty arises they will leave Him (cf. John 6:60-66). They are those to whom Jesus will say on the day of judgment, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23).

2. Faithfulness for faithlessness

Similar to verse 12, verse 13 warns of coming judgment for those who at one time profess to know Christ but who later deny Him and became faithless. In my life I have known many such people. Many of those I grew up with once professed faith in Christ, but now completely deny Christianity. They are unfaithful to their promise to Christ. Christ's promise to the faithless is damnation. The Greek verb translated by the phrase "we are faithless" (apistē[ma]o) means "not to believe" and implies a continual state of unbelief. According to John 3:18, "He who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." That is God's promise, and God is faithful to fulfill all His promises. So when Paul says that "He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself," he means the faithless will be judged and condemned as promised. Second Timothy 2:11-13 is a trustworthy statement about rewards and punishments. Two positive statements promise eternal life and reigning with Christ to those who endure for Christ no matter what. Two corresponding negative statements promise Christ's denial and judgment to those

who deny Him and are faithless. In light of that we ought to serve Christ and endure anything for the glorious reward He promises.

Conclusion

The American President Theodore Roosevelt declared, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deed could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, who's face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

"Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checked by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in a gray twilight that knows little victory nor defeat" (cf. Hamilton Club Speech, Chicago, 10 Apr. 1899).

We are to be loyal, faithful, consistent, sacrificial, and enduring--not living in the gray twilight of a life that doesn't count for God. In light of the preeminence of Christ, the power of His Word, the purpose of the work, and the promise of reward Paul says at the beginning of 2 Timothy 2:14, "Remind them of these things." That's what Timothy was to do because of who Christ is, and that's what we are always to remember.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why would the prophet Jeremiah have been a poor advertisement for today's prosperity gospel (see p. 1)?
2. It is natural for God's servants to cry out to Him when _____ comes (see p. 2).
3. What was God's answer to Jeremiah's predicament (see pp. 2-3)?
4. Why shouldn't Christians fear persecution (see p. 4)?
5. What kind of agenda does Paul call us to in 2 Timothy (see p. 4)?
6. For whose sake was Paul willing to suffer "all things" (2 Tim. 2:10; see p. 5)?
7. Every Christian's foremost ought to be being used by God for _____ and _____ (see p. 5).
8. What was John Wesley's response when he was abused and maligned (see p. 6)?
9. What do the faithful sayings in the pastoral epistles express (see p. 7)?
10. What do the Greek tenses in verse 11 show (see pp. 7-8)?
11. What is the main sense of Paul's statement in verse 11 (see p. 8)?
12. What promise is given to those who endure suffering and persecution for Christ's sake (2 Tim. 2:12; see p. 8)?
13. Do believers experience lapses in their endurance? If so, do such lapses become ongoing (see p. 9)?
14. Is it possible to profess to believe in Christ yet not be saved? Explain (see p. 9).
15. Describe what those who deny Christ are like (Mark 4:16-17; see p. 10).
16. What is Christ's promise to the faithless (2 Tim. 2:13; see p. 11)?

Pondering the Principles

1. J. C. Ryle said of George Whitefield, "He was a man of remarkable disinterestedness and singleness of eye. He seemed to live only for two objects--the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Of secondary and covert objects he knew nothing at all. He established no denominational system, of which his own writings should be cardinal elements. A favourite expression of his is most characteristic of the man: 'Let the name of George Whitefield perish, so long as Christ is exalted'"

(Christian Leaders of the 18th Century [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, p. 58). Only a mind fixed firmly on the glory of Christ alone can endure whatever comes so that God's elect might be called and saved. A mind fixed on other things inevitably falters. If you hope to endure and lead others to Christ, ask yourself this: On what is my mind set?

2. Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 [sc]B.C. In spite of the devastation the "weeping prophet" remarkably declared, "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness" (3:22-23). Jeremiah worshiped and proclaimed a God who is faithful to Himself and His Word. The destruction of Jerusalem proved God's faithfulness to judge the ungodly (Jer. 4:4-9; Hab. 1:5-11), yet Jeremiah had already prophesied that God in faithfulness to His promise to Israel would restore His people (Jer. 29:10). God is indeed faithful to do what He has promised in His Word. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, take comfort in God's promise that none who belong to Christ will be lost and all will enjoy eternal life and exaltation with Him (John 6:39). If you refuse to follow Christ, God has promised to judge you with His eternal wrath (John 3:18, 36). Turn to Christ now and exchange the promise of judgment for that of exaltation in the presence of God!

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