

Sermon for October 13, 2013 – Pentecost 21

2 Timothy 2:8-13

Theme: Onward Christian Soldiers!

1. For the sake of Jesus
2. For the sake of others
3. For the sake of our own souls

⁸ *Keep in mind Jesus Christ risen from the dead, a descendant of David – this is the good news I tell.* ⁹ *For this I am suffering and am even chained like a criminal. But God's Word isn't chained.* ¹⁰ *That's why I can endure anything for the chosen people so that they, too, may receive salvation in Christ Jesus and everlasting glory.* ¹¹ *You can depend on this: If we have died with Him, we'll live with Him.* ¹² *If we endure, we'll rule with Him. If we disown Him, He'll disown us.* ¹³ *If we're disloyal, He remains loyal because He cannot be untrue to Himself.* (AAT)

I had a seminary professor, whose computer screen saver would flash the words: “NOT IN VAIN.” It was a reminder of 1 Corinthians 15:58, which read: *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV84).*

Serving the LORD can sometimes seem like it is all for nothing. A friend of mine once spent an entire summer knocking on doors every day, personally inviting hundreds of people to church, and not a single person came. And you also have experienced frustrations like this, haven't you? Maybe it was when you donated a lot of time for some project at church, only to see it fall apart. Sometimes we think: “God's Word encourages me to witness, and I try to talk to my family and friends about Christ; but all they do is make fun of me.” Yes, our labor for the LORD can seem very much in vain. And when it does, the devil tempts us to give up.

In today's sermon text, the apostle Paul encourages us to remain faithful in the face of such temptations. Just before our text, he writes: *Share hardships with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.* (2 Timothy 2:3 AAT). Even though we might not see or understand it, God promises that our faithful service is never in vain – even when disappointment and frustration meet us at every turn.

Let us learn, then, to persevere in our Christian service - to keep fighting for Christ: **Onward Christian Soldiers!** And why should we go on? 1) *For the sake of Jesus.* 2) *For the sake of others.* 3) *For the sake of our own souls.*

Part One: For the sake of Jesus.

As I mentioned last Sunday, Paul's 2nd letter to Timothy, was written from a Roman dungeon while Paul awaited certain execution for preaching the Gospel. As Paul reflected on his service as a soldier of Christ, he also thought about the difficulties, trials, persecution and heartache he experienced. There were a lot of things tempting him to give up – and some of these same things would tempt young Timothy. Knowing this, Paul let's Timothy in on the one thing that kept him going in the face of all trials.

⁸ *Keep in mind Jesus Christ risen from the dead, a descendant of David – this is the good news I tell.*

When Paul tells us to *keep Christ Jesus in mind*, it is as if he were saying, “Let the Gospel always be before your eyes, in your ears and on your heart. Let the Gospel be your first thought in the morning and your last thought at night. Think about Jesus at every moment because His service for us is the only reason we can go on living for him!”

And what is it that we are especially to remember about Jesus? That he is the Christ, the promised “seed” of King David, who would save us from our sins! Jesus is the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy. He is the King divine, who conquered death and the devil for us. And how did he do that? By taking on human flesh and blood in Mary’s womb in order to be born and live the perfect life we have all failed to live before God. On top of this he placed all our sins upon himself and went to the cross. When He died, and all our sins died with him too.

But that’s not the end of it. Paul says: *Keep in mind Jesus Christ risen from the dead*. Yes, Jesus rose from the dead – what glorious news! Why? Because if Jesus, our Savior, rose from the dead, that means that death has been conquered. If death has been conquered, then sin has been paid for. If sin has been paid for, then God’s law no longer condemns us. We are free. When we die believing in Christ, we can be certain that God will welcome us into heaven – all because of what Jesus has done!

⁸ *Keep in mind Jesus Christ risen from the dead . . . this is the good news I tell.* Paul loved this Gospel. Why? Because he knew his sins, and that he, in no way, deserved to be saved. But Christ Jesus came to save sinners like him (1 Timothy 1:15ff). He came to pay for the sins of all people. Paul was so excited about this truth that He went to every length possible to tell others. Why? So that Christ’s death would not be in vain; so that many more people would hear and believe.

I wonder how frustrated Paul must have felt in prison that he couldn’t go out and preach. He wanted so desperately to tell others about Christ, but he was chained to the floor. I am sure that the devil tempted him with thoughts like: “Aha, see! All your work was in vain. I’m going to hunt down every preacher Gospel just like I hunted you down and stamp Christianity out!” But Paul comforted himself with God’s promise: *My Word . . . will not return to Me empty but it will accomplish what I want and achieve what I had in mind.* (Isaiah 55:11 AAT). Paul knew that His preaching was not in vain. Even though he was chained: *God’s Word isn’t chained.*

Sometimes we feel like the devil is winning. Faithful Christian men and women, pillars in the Church, die or fall away. Is the devil seems to be snuffing out God’s Word in our nation? Is our service in vain? No. As God promises and history proves: the Gospel will always march on. We are but soldiers doing our part in the war. Even though faithful soldiers die, the war is not lost - our victory is certain. Even if we don’t perceive it, and the Gospel is advancing. The Gospel will prevail.

Part 2: For the sake of the others.

Paul persevered in his Christian service. As a soldier of Christ, He was willing to die – not only for His Savior, but for all those his Savior came to save.

That’s why I can endure anything for the chosen people so that they, too, may receive salvation in Christ Jesus and everlasting glory. Paul loved God’s people. He would do anything in order that they might be connected with Christ and saved. How deep was Paul’s love for the lost? He once wrote: *I’m telling the truth in Christ; I’m not lying, as my conscience assures me by the Holy Spirit, when I say I have a great*

sorrow and continuous pain in my heart. I could wish myself cut off from Christ and damned for my fellow Jews, my own flesh and blood. (Romans 9:1-4, AAT)

Now, it must be emphasized that no man can suffer hell for another person - except Jesus who suffered it for all people. The point is, that Paul truly loved the lost. This love made him willing to endure anything – persecution, torture, death - anything if it meant that someone might be saved.

Paul's love for the lost really puts ours to shame, doesn't it? Do we have such a love for the lost that we are not only willing to suffer life's little inconveniences, but also true hardship and possibly even death so others might be saved? Unfortunately we don't. We might find it hard to give up a Packer game to go canvassing, or a favorite T.V. show to come to choir or Bible class. May God forgive us for not having the heart of Paul - a heart willing to suffer hunger, thirst, sickness, crime, disaster, torture, death and even hell itself (if it were possible) for the salvation of others. Praise the LORD that he does forgive us through faith in Jesus. In the peace of this forgiveness, let us – as good soldiers of the cross - be willing to sacrifice our comforts, and even ourselves, for the sake of saving others.

Part 3: For the sake of our own souls

The apostle continues: ¹¹ *You can depend on this: If we have died with Him, we'll live with Him.* Paul's words remind us of something He wrote in his letter to the Romans: *We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? . . . We know our old self was nailed with Him to the cross to stop our sinful body and keep us from serving sin any longer. When we're dead, we're free from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe we'll also live with Him (Romans 6:2,6-8, AAT).* When we were baptized, we died to sin and we continue to die to sin every day when we confess our sins to God and remember his forgiveness. Through daily repentance and remembrance of our baptism we are clothed in Jesus' righteousness. Since we are clothed with Christ, we will also life with Him – now, and in eternity.

¹² *If we endure, we'll rule with Him.* Jesus not only saved us to live with him, but also to rule with him. He has saved us to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9ff). Jesus takes our every request into consideration when we pray to him. Jesus promises: *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne (Revelation 3:21; NIV84).* Our reigning with Christ is not only some symbolic thing either, it carries actual authority, even over angels, as Paul writes elsewhere: ² *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:2,3; NIV84)?* The honor Christ offers his faithful soldiers is great! We have every reason to remain faithful to him!

But if we disown Him, He'll disown us. Jesus was happy to give up everything and be associated with sinners like us. He was not ashamed of us. Therefore we should never be ashamed of him. But the world tempts us to hide our faith and love in him. This is why Jesus warns: *If in this unfaithful and sinful generation you're ashamed of Me and what I say, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when He comes with the holy angels in His Father's glory. (Mark 8:38; AAT)."* To be ashamed of the Gospel - to be ashamed of Jesus - is to be ashamed of our salvation. May God forgive us for the times we were too scared and ashamed to confess our faith in him to our worldly friends and acquaintances. God forgive us for buckling under the pressure of wanting to please men instead of God.

Praise the LORD for his mercy and grace – that he even forgives this sin of our if we turn to him in repentance and faith – for even *if we're disloyal, He remains loyal because He cannot be untrue to Himself.*

What a comfort this is to soldier like us, who have often retreated from battle or have gone AWOL when it really counts. Even though we have often been like Peter in the High Priest's courtyard and have denied

knowing our LORD through our words and actions, Jesus has remained faithful to his promise to forgive us. When we repent, He restores us as He restored Peter. God is loyal to all his promises – what a comfort this is!

On this evil earth, it is hard to persevere in Christian service. The devil is doing his best to frustrate our efforts and make us think that it is all in vain. But our service is never in vain. Onward, fellow soldiers of the cross. Continue confessing Christ. Continue volunteering for service in the Church. Continue using all of your gifts to his glory. Why? For the sake of Christ Jesus and his salvation; for the sake of the lost, that they might be saved; and for the sake of your own soul, so that you won't give up the great honor your divine commander has bestowed on you. May God bless us all as we persevere as soldiers of the cross - doing duty with joy; even ready to suffer and die for our heavenly king, country and countrymen. Amen.