

Women's Bible Study – Winter/Spring 2011

## A Spiritual Legacy: Passing on What You Know

March 2, 2011

*Remember Jesus*

2 Timothy 2: 8-13

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My oldest child is a 10<sup>th</sup> grader this year. And 10<sup>th</sup> grade is the year students typically take the PLAN test, which is kind of a practice college entrance test. Well, this is all new territory to me, so I was not prepared for the deluge of email that commenced the day colleges received Luke's contact information from the testing company. The snail mail flood began about a week later. And ever since we've been filling our trash with junk mail from colleges everywhere. I've felt a bit of amusement at the whole thing—the subject lines on these emails are hilarious in their flattery: “We're impressed with you, Luke.” “Let us help you go places, Luke!,” “You've caught our attention, Luke!” But I've also felt a bit of sadness. Each communication is a reminder that our time with all 6 of us at home together will be over before I know it. Apparently I'm not the only one in the family feeling this way. Luke showed me an email he got recently with the subject line: “Come to the best college ever!” It went on to promise homecooked meals every day, his very own room, and a full ride scholarship! Turns out it was from the “Harris Homeschool College,” and it was crafted by Luke's younger sister Hannah, who is also dreading the day that he leaves!

You know that the book we're currently studying is Paul's farewell letter to Timothy. Paul knows he and Timothy will be separated in this life very soon, and I have been struck over and over at the poignancy this fact lends to this epistle.

Turn to II Timothy 2 in your Bibles, and we'll begin reading in verse 8: “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! 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. The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

If we endure, we will 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.”

So far Paul has used numerous examples to encourage Timothy in his ministry—He uses himself as an example. In verse 13 he says, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me.” He uses Phygelus and Hermogenes as negative examples in verse 15. Then last time

Myrna showed us that Paul held up the examples of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer for Timothy.

In this section on his letter, Paul gets to the supreme example—Jesus Christ. He says, “Remember Jesus Christ.” Did Paul really think Timothy was in danger of forgetting Jesus? Maybe not exactly forgetting him, but forgetting that he is the centerpiece of the gospel. Are we ever in danger of forgetting that? Do we ever miss the main point of ministry? Do we ever get wrapped up in all the peripheral issues? Has the church ever focused on humanitarian efforts, social ills, or political issues and forgotten the gospel? Has the church ever become consumed with programs or image or secondary doctrinal questions and neglected the main thing? I think we’re all susceptible to this. So Paul brings us back to the work and person of Jesus Christ. I’ve never been in prison, but I’m guessing it has a way of clarifying what are the most important things. So Paul says, “Remember Jesus.”

What does Paul want us to remember about Jesus? Two main things. He is risen from the dead and he’s the offspring of David. Notice how these two phrases capture so much rich theological truth about the person and work of Jesus. As the offspring of David, Jesus was a man. He climbed into our skin, he walked in our shoes, he moved into the neighborhood. He knows what it’s like to be human. And so when we want to quit, when we’re fearful or depressed or confused, we can know that Jesus experienced every temptation common to man (I Cor 10:13). Way back in II Samuel, God promised this to King David: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (7:12-16). Before Jesus was born, the angel Gabriel announces to Mary: “You shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33). “Jesus” is the human name given at birth; “Christ” means “Messiah,” which signifies the fulfillment of these Old Testament promises in “Jesus Christ,” a physical descendant of David.

And since he was fully God, Jesus was able to conquer death forever. He has the power of divinity to do what a man could never do. The resurrection of Jesus is a central theme for Paul. Listen to I Cor. 15: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. . . But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (15:14, 20-22). And as we’re reminded every spring, Easter happened! And so when we want to quit, when we’re fearful or depressed or confused, we can know that Jesus is omnipotent. He’s God. He’s divine. There is nothing too hard for him! We can celebrate Easter every day.

<p>“RISEN FROM THE DEAD”</p> <p><b>His person:</b> fully God, his divinity <b>His work:</b> died for sins, raised to prove the efficacy of sacrifice; our Savior</p>	<p>“THE OFFSPRING OF DAVID”</p> <p><b>His person:</b> fully man; his humanity <b>His work:</b> established his kingdom as David’s greater son; our King</p>
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And the last phrase of verse 8 makes it clear that these truths about Jesus are at the core of the gospel—the *euangelion*—the good news. Don't be confused on that point. Two Sundays ago Shawn Hunsakor led a discussion in our adult class on the gospel—what would a good definition include? It was a good exercise, especially as we compared how Scripture defines the gospel with definitions of the gospel from the Mormon church, the Unitarian church, the “health and wealth” preachers, and proponents of a purely “social gospel” (Rom. 1:1-4; I Cor. 15:1-4).

Verse 9, then, makes the reason for Paul's imprisonment clear—he is suffering because of the gospel in spite of being a Roman citizen and innocent of any crime. This might be hard for us to picture. Yes, Christians are not entirely free from persecution in the United States, and I don't think it's a stretch to say that prejudice against Christians is increasing. But compared to the rest of the world right now, we in the West enjoy remarkable freedom from fear. Just go to the Voice of the Martyrs website and read news stories for even 10 minutes. It will give you a reality check and will spur you on to pray for the persecuted church around the world—over 50 restricted or hostile countries right now. A person in Mauritania faces the death penalty for confessing Christ. In Nigeria Christian women are kidnapped and forced to marry Muslim men. In Libya recently a non-Libyan man sharing the gospel was beaten and imprisoned for 45 days before being deported. In Vietnam Christians hold baptisms at night to escape stiff fines and physical torture and will walk for days to obtain a Bible. Most scholars think Paul was martyred during the time of Nero's reign, which began in AD 64, coinciding with an uptick in persecution against Christians. The great fire that destroyed Rome occurred in AD 64, and though many speculate that Nero himself was responsible for it, he used Christians as a scapegoat for it. Scholars put II Timothy between AD 64 and AD 67, so Paul was likely imprisoned as part of this organized persecution against Christians.

Paul says he is “bound with chains as a criminal.” Read that “as a common criminal.” The word used for criminal is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Luke 23:32, 39—for the common thieves crucified alongside Jesus.

The word “but” in the middle of verse 9 is one of the most important words in this passage: “But the word of God is not bound.” The word “but” in this phrase is like the word “but” in the call from the highway patrol: “There's been a terrible accident, but no one was hurt.” Or from your boss: “We've had to make some deep cuts in the department, but you still have your job.” Or your doctor: “The diagnosis is cancer, but it's very treatable.” “But the word of God is not bound.” I love that wording—it makes the Word of God sound almost like a wild animal. It's not bound, it's loose! It's free and alive. That's what Hebrews tells us: “The word of God is living and active . . . and no creature is hidden from his sight” (4:12, 13). The triumph of the Word of God through all time is one of the most fascinating realities of history, I think. Many have tried to destroy it and to stifle it, but no one has ever succeeded and no one ever will succeed. When we lived in China we got to visit one of the house churches—a church that wasn't registered with the government and thus wasn't approved. It was an unforgettable experience. The church leaders were regularly thrown in prison, and their families were harassed. Yet there was a service every night, and the pastor had to tell people not to come more than once a week so everyone that wanted to would have a chance to attend. We sat on hard wooden benches for an hour-long time of prayer before the service of singing and preaching even started. It was packed. Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not

prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). God is building his church; nowhere more so than in countries where hostile governments are trying to stifle it. God has promised in Isaiah: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (40:8). “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (55:10-11).

Verse 10 starts out with an important connecting word: therefore. Paul’s saying “Because of what I’ve just said this is what’s true.” Because the word of God is not bound . . . what? “I endure everything.” There is a logical connection between the nature of God’s word and Paul’s behavior. And there should be for us, too. Paul was willing to endure everything. To what end? “For the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” This is profound. Paul is saying here that he endures suffering because of the efficacy of God’s word to accomplish God’s purposes. He endures suffering for the sake of unbelievers who are yet to become believers. We know that suffering is often a consequence of spreading the gospel. Jesus said, “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake” (Lk 21:17) and “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (Jn 15:20). But suffering is not just a consequence of spreading the gospel; it is often the means by which God chooses to spread the gospel. John Piper puts it this way: “Suffering is part of God’s strategy for making known to the world who Christ is, how he loves, and how much he is worth” (Filling up the Afflictions of Christ, p. 14). Have you ever thought of that? Suffering is not just the consequence; it can be the very means. That places those who are suffering in a hugely strategic place.

Now try not to get hung up on the word “elect.” The doctrine of election has been disputed in church history and is often misunderstood, I think. This doctrine affirms that, before creation, God chose some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure (Grudem, Systematic Theology, 670). The misunderstanding over this doctrine hinges on our perception of the justice of God and the choices or “free will” of people. But we see this doctrine all over the New Testament. Luke writes, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). Paul writes, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be confirmed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom. 8:28-30). Later Paul talks about God’s choosing Jacob and not Esau in this way: “Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, ‘The elder will serve the younger.’” (Rom. 9:11-13). And about Israel, Paul writes, “Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened” (Rom. 11:7). Some of the difficulty comes when we consider that the Bible also assures us that God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,” and that “whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). There is mystery here. My high school doctrine teacher explained this concept by drawing a picture of a tunnel. The end of the tunnel in this life had a sign over it that said, “Whoever will.” The end of the tunnel that opened into the next life had over it a sign that read, “the elect.” We experience God’s election as a tug on our hearts toward

spiritual things and, eventually, toward the gospel. For some, this is a long process. For others, like Paul, it's instantaneous. When we look back, we realize that God was the one pulling us.

But instead of going into further discussion about this difficult doctrine, I want to point out that its mention in this particular passage is to highlight the necessity of evangelism. Some opponents of the doctrine of election ask, "If God has chosen those who will be saved already, then why bother to present the gospel to anyone?" But election is the very reason Paul gives for missions here—because preaching the gospel is the God-ordained way of reaching the elect! Paul asks in Romans, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" In Acts God tells Paul "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent . . . for I have many people in this city" (18:9-10). Because there were many elect in the city of Corinth, Paul was spurred on to evangelize there. So the main point of this verse is this: The fact that there are people God has chosen as his own who haven't come to him yet should prompt us to share the gospel with passion and urgency, and it should make us willing to endure suffering for the sake of those people. After all, when we suffer we are not doing anything Christ hasn't already done: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life . . . (Mark 10:45). Rev. 5:9 says, "By your blood you ransomed people for God."

This section ends with a beautiful fragment of a hymn from the early church. It's one of 5 "trustworthy sayings" Paul writes in the pastoral letters. The first half is encouragement: "If we died with him, we will also live with him; If we endure, we will also reign with him." Here is insight into the paradoxical nature of the Christian life. It's a life of dying. Living by dying. Gaining by losing. Reigning by enduring. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:23-24). This is not just martyrdom that Paul is talking about. It's the deaths we all must die daily—death to the kingdom of me, my feelings, and my desires. Paul says in I Corinthians, "I die every day!" (15:34) and he sums up Christian experience this way: "We are persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh" (II Cor. 4:8-10). Listen to Phil. 3:8: "I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." This is a call to hold our ground, particularly when suffering.

The story of the life of John Paton is one of the best autobiographies you'll ever read. Paton was a Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The inhabitants of these islands were cannibals; in fact, in 1839, the 2 very first missionaries to go there were indeed killed and eaten within minutes of going ashore. Nineteen years later John and his pregnant wife prepared to go. Appalled, a certain Mr. Dickson urged them not to go: "You will be eaten by cannibals!" Listen to Paton's reply: "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms . . ." John Paton did go to the New Hebrides. His wife and newborn baby died within the first few months. He dug their graves and continued on for years alone. He eventually remarried and spent the rest of his life serving the people of the New Hebrides. Today the island chain is called Vanuatu; its population

is over 200,000. About 91% of the population identifies itself as Christian, with maybe 14% being what we would call evangelical ( John Piper, Filling Up the Afflictions of Christ, p. 53-57). John Paton knew what it was like to suffer and to endure.

These lines are also an affirmation of the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, which states that all those who are truly believers will be kept by God's power as Christians to the end of their lives. Jesus makes this clear when he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-29).

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints not only states that those who are truly believers will be kept to the end of their lives, but it also states that only those who persevere to the end have been truly born again. And though the first half of this hymn is an encouragement, the second half is a warning: "If we deny him, he also will deny us." A parallel passage is Matt. 10:32, 33: "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." This is the reality of the terrible parable of the ten virgins found in Matt. 25, in which the door is shut to those who seek entry because the bridegroom doesn't know them.

The final line of this passage reads, "If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself." There are two ways to look at the meaning here. The first is to see "if we are faithless" as a temporary condition of human weakness that even believers are subject to (as a contrast to the more final denial of the previous line). Think of Peter's momentary failures before Jesus' trial. Think of the sin in our lives every day. Paul could be saying that if and when we go through faithless times, Christ will never be faithless to us. This is certainly true. Our assurance rests not on ourselves but on God's faithfulness, which cannot change. There is a moral impossibility of self-contradiction with God. Some people have trouble considering that there is something God cannot do. But God cannot act contrary to his own nature. And so the second angle on this passage reinforces the warning—if we are faithless and deny him, God will be and must be faithful to his own righteous judgments. God cannot acknowledge those who disown him. He will deny those who deny him, not because he takes pleasure in the destruction of unbelievers, but because he cannot be faithless to his promises—promises for good and for ill.

Back before Nicole Kidman was really famous she made a tearjerker movie with Michael Keaton called "My Life." It's about a successful advertising executive who has a satisfying career, a large home, and a beautiful wife who's expecting their first child. Then he finds out he has 3 months to live. A large part of the rest of the movie shows this man making a video for his yet-unborn son, teaching him everything from how to give a firm handshake to how to treat girls. Sad as the movie is, it ends on a note of hope. One of the last scenes shows the couple's son, now a little boy with his mom, now a widow, sitting in front of the TV, watching his dad on the screen, taking all that instruction in. The message is clear—this man's efforts at the end of his life were accomplishing what he had hoped for in the life of his son. I find it heartwrenching to think of Paul suffering in jail, writing his last words to his dear son in the faith, Timothy. So let's also remember the whole message--that Timothy did carry out Paul's instructions, that Paul's legacy did continue in Timothy. And because of God's grace in our lives, it can continue in us today.

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