

Holding Fast to the Gospel

Call to Worship: Psalm 63

1st Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1-7

2nd Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:8-13

Hymn Insert- *Here I am to Worship*

Hymn Insert- *The Power of the Cross*

Hymn #477- *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus*

Introduction

In a Christian context where the persecution was greatly intensifying and the Apostle Paul himself was on death row, we have seen that this second letter to Timothy was written with great fervency and many tears, as Paul sought to exhort his protege to remain steadfast and to persevere in his labors. The temptation to give up, or at the very least, to compromise, was great, and many, whom Timothy himself had once fought alongside of, had gone astray.

Last time, we considered three urgent orders that Paul had given to Timothy, exhorting him to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, to raise up other qualified men to teach the life giving, life changing doctrines entrusted to Timothy, to others, and finally, to be willing to suffer hardship for the sake of Christ, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, always engaged in the warfare without getting entangled in the affairs of everyday life.

This morning, we move on into verse 8, where Paul gets to the very core and heart of the matter; where he presents the “main thing” as the “main thing,” the very substance of the system of life saving, life changing doctrine, which Timothy is to teach to others, and which must be the very foundation of all his faith. Timothy, above all else, must hold fast to the Gospel! In doing so, he will face fierce opposition and persecution, because the enemy is not too keen on witnessing the power of God tear down and destroy his kingdom of evil. And so, this is not a simple matter, which Timothy can take lightly. He must fight, tooth and nail, to remain fixed to, and to continually spread, the gospel, even to his own hurt and potential martyrdom. Paul, himself, was soon to be put to death for this very cause. Timothy must be willing and prepared to do the same.

I. The Heart of the Matter

“Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel...” (vs. 8).

There it is. A short, simple, brief, statement; but the very core of everything Timothy needed to cling to, jam packed with a truck load of assumptions. Now, at first glance, anyone of us might say, “Remember *that*, Paul?” “Really? Isn’t that the very basic, kindergarten statement of theology? And in the urgency of this letter, while you are imprisoned and near death at Rome, you want *Timothy* to *remember* that? That’s like asking a Harvard graduate to remember his “ABCs!” Why does Paul command Timothy to “remember” what even the youngest and most immature of Christians ought to know, like he knows his own name?

Simply put, Brethren, as I have already stated, this short statement contains the very heart of all theology and of the gospel itself, and it is upon the realities spoken here, that the entire foundation of our Christian faith rests. And that being the case, nothing; nothing has been, and nothing will be, more attacked from devils and wicked men, than that which is contained and summed up in this statement. And furthermore, our own flesh will always seek to lead us to compromise, trivialize and/or minimize these simple, but essential doctrines, throughout our journey to heaven. These are the very truths that Phygellus and Hermogenes and every other apostate, throughout all of history, had ultimately walked away from, in their departure from the faith. And it may not have been evident by their original profession, but their compromise and their apostasy ultimately exposed what was in their hearts. Let us consider the statement in its parts:

1) “Remember that Jesus Christ, the seed of David...” Wrapped up in this portion of the statement alone is the content of every single Messianic prophecy, given and recorded from the time that Adam and Eve fell at the beginning, up to the arrival of the New Covenant. Literally, hundreds of Scriptural texts and hundreds more of Scriptural shadows have spoken of the coming Messiah, who would ultimately fix what Adam broke, offering reconciliation with God, free salvation, a new heart and life, and every promised blessing of glory. They have all been fulfilled in this historical Jesus. There is a double blow, given by this statement.

“Remember Jesus *Christ* (not a last name, but the Greek word for the Messiah), summing up every ounce of hope stored up from the fall and kept under the protective watch of the Jews, the Old Covenant people of God, who possessed the divine oracles. This in itself, was the decoding key for the entire Old Testament, which centers upon the coming Messiah. And then, “Remember that Jesus Christ, *of the seed of David...*” The Jews knew very well that the coming king, who would reign on the throne of God forever; the one who would ultimately defeat all of the enemies of God’s people, and deliver them from the bondage of sin and man, would be one, who came from David’s loins. That was the glorious promise given to David, when he had desired to build a house for God, a temple. The Messianic promise was, through this divine promise, narrowed down from Judah to David’s specific line. And Jesus was born of Mary, and fathered by Joseph even, both of whom, were direct descendants of David.

And furthermore, in this statement, we are not only to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah, who came through David’s loins, but also, that this Jesus is the Son of Man. He is not only a divine being. He is not simply an immaterial spirit. No, He is fully Man, able to meet all of the requirements of the original covenant that God had made with man from the beginning, which Adam (and we in Adam) failed to meet, so that, as the Second Adam, upon fulfilling that covenant, His righteousness could be imputed to (or held to the account of) all who are united to Him by faith. As Paul states in Romans 6, in Adam, all of humanity dies and is condemned eternally, inheriting the guilt and sin nature of Adam. But, in Christ, all united to Christ by faith, inherit the innocence and righteous nature of Christ, bringing them immediate justification upon embracing Christ by faith, and a progressive sanctification to be completed in glory! The Seed of David, presumes the Seed of man, who alone can justify sinful men!

2) “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, *was raised from the dead...*” Again, a simple statement/profession with eternal, weighty implications! By this one profession, “raised from the dead,” the life, teaching, ministry, death, atonement, resurrection and divinity of Christ are all affirmed. You might say, “Why not emphasize the death of Christ?” Well, the death of Christ, in and of itself, proves little by way of accomplishment, apart from the resurrection. It ends with “He died,” and proves nothing. It is the resurrection of Christ that affirms not only His death, but every single success that has been achieved by His death.

Furthermore, it affirms every single word and teaching of Jesus as true and authoritative. That Jesus was the Messianic seed of David, affirms every OT promise and prophecy surrounding Him, and the fact that this Jesus was raised from the dead, affirms every NT teaching, which comes from Jesus. And so, professing the resurrection of Christ sums up the entirety of every foundational principle that makes up the gospel: Because Jesus was raised, repentant sinners are justified, redeemed, reconciled and sure to be sanctified and glorified. The atonement was victorious and sinners have eternal hope!

And so, that is why Paul fervently charges Timothy, “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead *according to my gospel...*” “There are all kinds of distorted gospels out there, which rob the true Gospel of its power by denying or minimizing these essential truths, but this Gospel is my Gospel, and the only Gospel that truly brings salvation, Timothy!” “To be sure, you will find an easier and much more convenient road; you will minimize both demonic and physical opposition, if you compromise this gospel, but such a compromise will be to the expense of all saving and sanctifying power that comes only through the true Gospel!” Notice, what Paul says in the first portion of verse 9, and how it relates to this:

“...for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains...” Seemingly such a simple, harmless teaching, this teaching of Christ. What trouble could it bring? And yet, Paul is imprisoned and persecuted by the Roman law because of it...even to the point of being shackled! It is his commitment to this very simple and yet profound gospel of Jesus Christ, that has brought about Paul’s present imprisonment, which will lead to his death! Paul is no thief or murderer or criminal, and yet, he is treated as an evildoer (a criminal), simply because he believes and proclaims this gospel of the risen, Messianic Jesus. And he is unbudging in his profession, because he values the will of God over the will of men. And Timothy must do the same. And so, that is why he urges Timothy to remember what would seem so simple and basic to remember. Because all manner of visible and invisible threats would compel him to compromise and to forget. [The struggles of the church through history affirm this]

But notice, Paul moves on to add another profound statement of motivation to this charge. You see, one might be tempted to say, “Well Paul, what good is this message, if you are imprisoned for it? You have limitations, Paul. You are imprisoned and incapable of going forth

with your message. You lack the freedom to come and go, because of it. Look where your commitment to this Gospel has gotten you.” And so, Paul responds, “Yes, I am limited by chains, *but the Word of God is not chained!*” “They can chain me, but they cannot chain the spreading of God’s Word! It will fly forth and accomplish all of its intended purpose, with or without me, and that, far beyond my time!” “All flesh is like grass and the flower of the field. The grass fades and dies quickly. The flower wilts and sheds its petals in but a day,...but the Word of our God continues forever!” And we can certainly testify to the truth of that matter, some 2000 years later, can we not, Brethren? Though many have tried to snuff it out, God’s Word has spread out to the whole world, as it is this day!

And so, a motivation for Timothy to hold fast to this Gospel, is to recognize that while Paul will soon die and Timothy will one day follow, the Word of God will successfully run its intended course! It is not, nor could it ever be chained!

“Therefore,” Paul adds in verse 10, “I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” Since the power of God is attached to His Word and not the physical well-being of Paul, and since this Gospel is what saves and sanctifies “never dying” souls, Paul endures all things (all suffering, persecution and even death) for the sake of the elect (for the sake of those whom God will call and redeem through this glorious Gospel), so that they might obtain the free and eternal salvation which is provided in Christ with eternal (unending, forever) glory! Paul would gladly suffer anything in this brief life, if he could but lead others into the glorious entryway of free salvation in Christ, while the portal of grace still exists. How could he do anything less, since he himself has been the object of such free and amazing grace, while others still perish?

Finally, Paul closes with a short motivational saying, which apparently was used and quoted by some of the brethren, following the resurrection of Christ, and which could serve to further drive home, everything Paul was here exhorting Timothy:

Verses 11-13, “This is a faithful saying: 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; He cannot deny Himself.”

“This is a faithful saying...” We have heard Paul use this phrase back in 1 Timothy, as well, and here, it is simply Paul’s way of giving his apostolic approval to the short creed (hymn or recited confession) that follows, which again, serves as a means of motivating (not only Timothy, but) all believers to stay the course. Let’s briefly break the confessional statement down then.

1) “For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.” If we died with Christ; that is to say, if we were truly baptized into His death, upon our profession of faith, such that the old man has died with Him, and the new man, has risen in service to God; or if we have truly died to this life and the life of the flesh, so that, we might live together for God, with Christ, then we will also live with Him (a Romans 6 concept). We will live with Him eternally, in glory, just beyond the grave. The true Christian has taken up a cross and has committed his/her life to following and serving Christ, in anticipation of living with Him, forever, in glory. And so, this little reminder compels those who proclaim it, to press on in the battle, not looking back, remembering that our true home and rest is up ahead in glory.

2) “If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.” If we endure (the clear implication here is that suffering is part and parcel for the Christian life. Endurance is necessary, which is why Paul orders Timothy to “Suffer and endure hardship with him, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus”). However, those who endure, do not do so unto a fruitless end. For, if we endure, we shall also reign with Him. Christ is a great and glorious King, and His kingdom will know no end. He reigns right now, but His kingdom will be fully recognized by every living creature, when He returns to consummate His kingdom. And He, willingly, graciously, shares the glory of His reign with His people; with those who endure and bear their crosses, even as He did His.

3) However, “If we deny Him, He also will deny us.” Those who do not endure; those who compromise and deny Him; those who forsake Him and fail to persevere to the end, He also will deny them in the end. We must hold fast our confession to the end, if He is to confess us before the Father, in the presence of His holy angels. For, He takes no delight in those who walk away, exhibiting a lack of true faith in Him.

4) Finally, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” If we are without faith; if we deny Him and fail to persevere, that is to our own shame, and His rejection

of us and His judgment upon us is justified. He remains faithful, in spite of us, and bears no guilt in our lack of perseverance. Indeed, He will condemn us and deny us, because He cannot deny Himself. He will do exactly what He has promised, in every sense. And so, those who are riding the fence; those who are considering walking away, must recognize that they do so to their own eternal hurt and shame, and they will not find mercy at the final judgment, because He cannot and will not go back on His Word.

All in all, Brethren, this short recited creed is a faithful saying, which Paul delivered over as a reminder to Timothy, encouraging him to hold fast to the gospel in anticipation of what lies ahead, while also warning him of the danger of turning back, like those who have already fallen away. In many ways, this little creed, is a declaration and definition of the doctrine that we call, “the perseverance of the saints.” Rather than state, “once saved, always saved,” which while true (if the individual is *truly* saved), we would better state, “those who are truly saved, must and will persevere to the end.” Again, God takes no pleasure in those who fall away.

And so, that is the compelling declaration that is found in this short confession, which Paul defines as a “faithful saying.” The whole of this short text that we have considered here this morning, might best be summarized in one short plea: “Timothy, hold fast to the Gospel!”

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Brethren, let us be a people who major in the majors and minor in the minors, with the Apostle Paul. People today are so quick to damn everyone to hell, who don't have all of their “theological ducks in a row,” and it really is disgraceful! Paul could have emphasized a lot of deep theological truths to Timothy, but here, in his last letter to Timothy, Paul says, “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel...” Notice, he doesn't say, “Remember the Five Points of Calvinism and the doctrines surrounding your election.” Now, I love those truths, but they are not the foundation of the gospel. And there are many brethren out there, in several different denominations, who may not be able to avow, everything that we have written in our Confession of Faith, whom we yet, can call brethren. Anyone...anyone, who can truly affirm that Jesus Christ, of the Seed of David, was raised from the dead, and having embraced Him as their personal Lord and Savior to that end, I would gladly

call my brother. And to say different, is to add to the very gospel that we would be jealous to protect. Let's keep the "main thing," "the main thing."

2) Particularly, in a society and culture that "lives for the moment," Brethren, we have to constantly, consciously strive to be "big picture" people. This life is short. This life is fragile. This life is passing away. You and I are a dying people. And so, we must strive to persevere unto those things that are soon to come, in glory, which really matter. Let us not hold onto anything in this life too tightly. Let us be certain that heavenly realities, govern the way in which we conduct ourselves now (in the present) for the short, remaining time, that we have on this earth. Let us be willing to suffer hardship and loss now, for the sake of the Gospel, always remembering that our true riches are in the glory to come. It's only those who persevere now, to the end, who are truly saved.

If you are not saved; if you are not presently in Christ, this may presently be a foreign concept to you, but understand, that the course that you are presently on, will lead you to a rude awakening...an eternal rude awakening, with eternal regret. You may enjoy your fill of sin in this life, but don't you see, this life is but for a heartbeat, a blink in all of eternity. But, the ramifications of your choices and actions now, are eternal in consequence. You are soon to die, and perhaps sooner than you may think. And if you die in your sin, there is no turning back. You will forever be an enemy of God, and the object of His undiluted, righteous wrath, forever. Doesn't that concern you? [The Gospel...]

3) Finally Brethren, let us, with Paul, never lose sight of the fact that souls are perishing, and let us be willing to "endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." What else really matters in this world, Brethren? It's God's world, created for His glory. And most are alienated from God because of their sin. And we have; we carry the only message that has the power to save never-dying souls! We have the true Gospel! How can we sit on it, and bury it, in our pursuit of worldly things and worldly prosperity? The difference between an eternity in hell (forever ruined and enduring the wrath of God) or heaven (forever reconciled to God and an object of His grace) lies in one's response to the Gospel that *you* have! But how will they believe if they never hear? And how will they hear, if it is not spoken? God has an elect! Let us seek them out! Amen!!!