

# Remember Christ Jesus

*2 Timothy*

By Dr. Liam Goligher

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** 2 Timothy 2

**Preached on:** Sunday, March 24, 2013

## **Tenth Presbyterian Church**

1701 Delancey Street

Philadelphia, PA 19103-6714

**Website:** [www.tenth.org](http://www.tenth.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tenth](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tenth)

Turn in your Bibles with me to 2 Timothy 2. That's page 995 if you're using the church Bible. 2 Timothy 2 and we're going to read from verse 8.

“8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! 10 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. 11 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself.”

If you've come here this morning and you're feeling somewhat threatened by the questions that people ask you about what it is you believe, every time they ask you what does your religion have to say about the origins of life or the conflict, apparently between Scripture and science or the record of suffering in the world or the record of the church in its interaction with society. Those threatening questions often, don't they, set us back? We don't know how to respond. We don't know whether to respond. We don't know whether our response will be competent enough to answer their questions. Of course, not only questions threaten us, sometimes people threaten us. They may be members of your family, they may be colleagues at work but their posture towards you as a believer is such that it makes you uncomfortable or it makes you feel inadequate or it makes you feel like a fool. People, questions. Sometimes and for some Christians watching this by website, I imagine, circumstances threaten them in a physical sense because following Jesus is going to have some physical ramifications: persecution, perhaps loss of job, an end to career prospects.

You've come this morning a bit threatened. These words of Paul are for you because he's writing to a young man, or perhaps a not so young man. I think by this stage, Timothy has grown up a bit. He's now not in his 30s, he's really pushing it probably into his 40s. I sympathize with you in your 40s, it's a terrible decade but there is life after it, let me just assure you of that. He is struggling. One of the things that I always thought was that Paul was overstating things here in this letter but as I've come to actually study it, this is

always the difference, there is what you think a book says because you've read it several times, hundreds of times in your life, but you come to study it and you realize that, in fact, Paul is being very serious with this guy. This guy is, as I've called him several times here, wobbling in his faith. He is unsettled in his faith. Paul is using strong language because he knows what Timothy is going to walk into if Timothy comes to Rome to visit him and I'm not going to give you the answer to this, but we actually know what happens to him. This is your homework: to find out what actually happens to Timothy later on after this period covered by this letter. That's your homework and one day I'll tell you where it is but you can do the digging for yourself. I'm not going to do all the work.

This is a man who is cowed. He is almost ashamed of the gospel. That's why Paul says, "Don't be ashamed." And then his unsteadiness: he is forgetting this great key teaching that the Apostle gives here and that's why he begins with these words, "Remember the Lord," and he responds by saying, "He is," Jesus is, "our salvation." He says to Timothy, "Consider me the Apostle. Suffering is your calling." And then he says to Timothy, "Ponder the same. Glory is your destiny."

Let's look at those together. "Remember the Lord," says Paul, "he is our salvation." Over and over again in Paul's writings he will say this to people. Remember, he's writing to God's people; he's writing to the church and he says, "Remember." Moses does the same. This is Passover week and the people of the Jewish religion will be reminding themselves of the words of Moses, our patriarch and theirs. Moses regularly is telling the people of Israel to remember. They'll be saying, "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. He brought you out by a mighty hand." And just as under the Old Covenant, people remembered that great work of God in rescuing the people from their bondage and slavery in Egypt, rescuing them, bringing them through the Red Sea, bringing them through the desert, bringing them to the Promised Land, so today, God's people are urged to remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead. There is a mightier action, a mightier work of God than even rescuing a million people and bringing them through the Red Sea and through to the Promised Land, a mightier work of God in raising Jesus Christ from the dead. And Paul says to Timothy, "Don't let that elude you. Remember it. Get it back into your mind in the forefront of your mind."

He says, "Remember Jesus Christ." Do you know that Paul usually refers to the Lord as Christ Jesus, Messiah Jesus, but here he puts his given name, his human birth name first. Now, that may be merely stylistic the way we change things around in order to kind of ring the changes in our writing or, I think, with Paul more likely deliberate to suit his purpose here because he's emphasizing, I think in a double way, the humanity of the Lord Jesus. He wants to put that up front in the thinking. It's Jesus who was descended from David. In other words, he has human roots, he has a human name, he was a human being. He is the man Christ Jesus.

And in his humanity, he was made perfect through suffering. In his humanity, he suffered being tempted. Because we have flesh and blood, he took on flesh and blood and lived a flesh and blood existence. He's saying to Timothy, "Remember, you're a follower of the

man Jesus Christ. Remember, he is the one who has ascended to heaven. He is the one who is exalted to glory.” As one old hymn puts it like this:

“Though now ascended up on high,  
He bends to earth a brother’s eye.  
Partaker of our human name,  
He knows the frailty of our frame.

Our fellow sufferer, yet retains,  
A fellow feeling with our pains.  
And still remembers in the skies,  
The tears, his agonies and cries.

In every pang that rends the heart,  
The man of sorrows has a part.  
And sympathizes with our grief,  
And to the sufferer sends relief.”

This Jesus knows that experience of being threatened by the questions of men, by the assaults of men, by the temptations of the devil, by the circumstances of life. He knows what you’re going through and he went through it as the Messiah, the Messiah who is the offspring of David. That is not just a reference to the physical descent, of course, in a particular family name but he is in line with a promise of God that God would raise to David’s throne a descendant who would reign over the world and his church forever. In the four gospels and Acts and Revelation and in Paul’s letters, there is this great stress on Jesus’ descent from David’s line. He is God’s Messiah King. He is the Davidic Messiah who suffered and was raised.

Jesus taught them that at his resurrection. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? Paul, when he’s defining his gospel, says it’s the gospel of God that he promised beforehand through the prophets, in the Scriptures concerning his Son. His Son descended from David according to the flesh. His Son declared to be the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead. Peter, in announcing on the day of Pentecost what has been happening in these succeeding weeks, explains to the crowd that David as a prophet had foretold and foreseen and spoken about the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh see corruption but God raised him up from the dead.

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.” Why had Timothy to remember? He was to remember it because in the struggles of life we forget that our Messiah Jesus suffered too, that he learned obedience from what he suffered, that he endured from sinners such hostility against himself that he was crucified, dead and buried but God raised him up. And whatever you’re going through, however threatened you feel, however much opposition you feel there is in the world, however hard your circumstances may be, however great your struggle with yourself as well as with your circumstances and with other people, whatever you’re experience, know this: that no suffering for the believer, no

suffering for the believer ends with a period, a full stop, an end of a sentence but all suffering for the believer ends the way Jesus does, God will raise you up on that final day. That's the reality.

“Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead.” That's why right through the gospel, right through the gospel, this is the good news. This is the good news: that Jesus Christ is alive and if he's not alive, if Christ is not risen, then we're still in our sins, we're of all people most miserable. We might as well shut up shop and go home and sell the building as a tourist attraction. But Christ is risen from the dead. That's the message of Easter, isn't it? And do you see this as not only a matter of history, it is a transforming reality in which every believer participates. The resurrection of Jesus.

So, Paul starts with the resurrection. He's talking to this man who's under threat, who has become destabilized, who might trip and fall and he says to this man, “Come back here.” And when people bring their questions to you, whether it's about science or about suffering or whatever it may be, will you please help them and help yourself by asking them if they would, to come back to this question first and then say that you will then deal with the other issues? Bring them back to the resurrection. Here is something that has happened, not 50 billion years ago but something that has happened within the historic period in which we are. We have evidence. We have documents. We have witnesses. We have their record. We have their names. We have their life experience. We have their martyrdoms. We have these evidences and proofs that we can put before people which they can study for themselves, which they can look at for themselves and which they can see for themselves, demonstrate this Jesus is alive. Let me tell you this: if God can raise Jesus from the dead, there is nothing the Bible says he can do that he cannot do. Nothing. “God raised Jesus. Timothy, life is falling apart. You don't know what the future holds. It may hold death for you but remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead.”

That was Paul's gospel. He tells us that. He preached it. He preached it everywhere. That's what makes the difference. Jesus is alive. Jesus reigns. Right now he is reigning. Right now he is reigning in this church building as his people gather here hungry to hear his word, to hear the King's mind, to hear what's on his mind as he addresses us, all of us from his word. “Remember the Lord.”

Consider the apostle and consider that suffering is our calling. Here's what Paul says, “I am in chains, bound like a criminal.” Now, you can imagine that would have smarted to be categorized as a common criminal. Of course, Paul realized that his own Lord, the Lord Jesus, was categorized as a common criminal. He was crucified between two thieves. Paul was not perfect like Jesus was, but Paul was blameless in terms of the outward keeping of the law. He was, we would say, a godly man. He was a good man. He was a moral and upright man and in God's grace he was all of those things. He had never knowingly, consciously broken the law. He was honest enough to know that inadvertently and unconsciously and subconsciously we do things that make us fall short of the glory of God, of course, we all do. We are sinners but nonetheless, the degree to which you are a sinner is all relative and some people are less simple than others although we're all

constituted sinners and all fall short. Nonetheless, there are some people who are a bit better than others. Paul was one of those who was a bit better than others but that didn't mean that he was saved by his works but it did mean that he would have been thoroughly embarrassed to find himself locked up with common criminals. Yet, there is not one scintilla of self-pity on the one hand or masochistic self-delight in suffering on the other. You know, "Hit me again, Sam." That kind of attitude. Nothing of that in Paul.

What does he see? He says, "I am bound with chains," then using the same word, he says, "but the word of God is not bound. The word of God is not bound." In other words, they may have locked me up in prison but the word of God is out there doing its work. Doing its work, working in the lives of hearts of men and women all over the place. The word of God cannot be confined. The word of God is unfettered. The word of God is the word of the gospel. It's a good news word that carries the tune of glory. It is an unchained melody. The nine o'clock lot actually recognized that because they're older than you are. The gospel is an unchained melody of grace. It is unfettered, he says. It is not bound. God is the author of it. The gospel is the content of it. The prisoner, the preacher may be behind bars, the preacher may be dead and buried but the gospel goes on to do its work.

Well, he says, as a prisoner he endures everything for the sake of God's people. Why does he say this? "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect." He sees his own experience benefiting you. If you're here this morning and you believe in the Lord Jesus and you're one of his people, he sees his experiences teaching, benefiting you because he knows about you. He knows about you because he knows God's word. He knows that God has from all eternity planned before there was a world and before there were people, planned and conceived and plotted to secure a people and give those people to his Son that his Son might act on their behalf, might live the life they should have lived, might die the death they should have died and secure their salvation. On the night he was arrested, there is Jesus on the mountain having this conversation with the Father and he's saying to the Father, "I'm not praying for the world, I'm praying for those that were yours. You gave them to me. I'm going to keep them and now I'm going to sacrifice myself for them. I'm dedicating myself. I'm laying myself on the altar to be their Savior. I sanctify myself for them that you have given to me."

Paul knows that God has his people and he knows that God's people will need Paul's testimony here. You remember, he's talking to Timothy. Timothy belongs to a generation of preachers who actually lived and worked alongside the apostles of Jesus. Who were the apostles? The apostles were the people who were eye witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Now Paul, one of the big names, he is the big hitter. He is a big league player among the apostles. He is in prison and he's under the death sentence and he's going to die. Do you not understand why Timothy is a little bit shaken up? Shaken and stirred by this experience? More James Bond people here. You can understand it.

The question is: can Christianity survive without the apostles? I mean, they had seen Jesus alive. Once they're dead, there is going to be nobody alive who's actually seen Jesus in the flesh. Is Christianity going to get beyond the death of the last apostle? That was the big issue. Can you see why it's so important? And why Paul is writing this letter

to Timothy is, “Look, I want you to be able to tell people, Timothy, that when I was in the last days of my life, I’m still saying the same stuff. I’m still telling the same story. I’m still proclaiming the same gospel. I’m not cowed by this. I’m not terrified by this death thing. Why? Because God raised Jesus. I’m a witness to that. I’ve been proclaiming that. I saw that with my own eyes. I saw the risen Jesus.” And throughout his ministry, the Apostle Paul’s mind was fertile with direct revelation from God, something none of us will ever experience. Fertile with direct revelation from God which he pours out through his preaching and his writing so that what we have in our hands today in this little book, is the word of God and the word of God is not bound and the word of God is for the church. It’s for the church. It’s for you.

Here’s the lesson for you and me: we all go through stuff in our life, we will be disappointed in love, lose a job, be overtaken in our promotion prospects, we may lose money, we may gain weight, we may take ill and one day we will die. How can we possibly serve Christ in such times? What possible ministry can we have in such days? Paul is teaching us here by his example that you can have a ministry towards the people of God by the way you live, by the way you suffer and by the way you die.

I remember visiting a friend of mine, he was an elder in another church that I was in and he was a godly man. I went to see him just as it turned out, in the last few days of his life. I remember he joked when I went in to see him and he said, “You have come to see me. I didn’t realize I was that ill.” I took that as an insult and gave him a rough time for that. But I remember he knew he was going to die and he had just been told that he only had hours, really, to live. He managed to last about three days but in those three days, he wanted to talk about what was coming up at session. He wanted to have his say on issues that we were facing as a church. He wanted to talk about what preaching engagements I’d been asked to take and whether I should do them or not, going into the years into the future because the church was on his heart and mind and he lived while he lived and he was still going to be a member of the church once he’d been promoted to glory.

That’s what the apostle is speaking, that’s how he is speaking because, you see brothers and sisters, nothing of God dies when a man of God dies or a woman of God dies. Nothing of God dies. So, why does he endure? He endures for the sake of the elect. We’ve always have to have a view in the way we conduct ourselves to the people of God. But also for the salvation of the elect. Do you see that? “That they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” He says, “I hope that somehow or other God will use even my chains here,” as a means that God will use to reach out to one of his people, somebody listening to my voice here in this room or over the webcast. Somebody listening to my voice today may very well on this day reach out for Jesus as their Savior. What will happen in those circumstances is, that God will be calling his elect. His elect will hear the voice of God behind and in the voice of the preacher from the word of God and that word, like the word of creation, will create faith in their heart, will make them alive by the power of the Spirit, will draw them to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Consider the apostle: suffering is part of our calling. I know you know this. I know some of you struggle and you struggle with your inner tensions. There are things you wouldn't admit to because you don't want other people to judge you but you struggle every day to be God's person with the most profound inner tensions. You struggle with habits. You struggle with sin. You know, you wouldn't be struggling with sin if you weren't a Christian. Wouldn't matter anything to you. It would not be a struggle. You would never feel a pang of conscience. You would never feel that you were letting the Lord down. You would never feel those tensions that you feel if you weren't a believer. That's part of suffering, isn't it? That's part. That's an interior form of suffering.

Well, here's the last thing, ponder this saying: glory is our destiny. Here's one of those famous faithful sayings about the Christian life that we find in Paul and its basic message is that we should endure. I think these faithful sayings were well known to believers and I think you'll see that in the way it's framed. This is a personal letter written to Timothy but here he's quoting something that's said obviously in public, corporately, part of public worship, probably a confession or something said or sung. We don't know but you'll notice the use of "we," we have died, we endure, we deny, we and so on.

There is a way of learning Christian truth and getting it into your system and the emphasis is our loyalty to King Jesus. Look at the way he breaks it down. There are four lines to this: if we have died with him, we will also live with him. He's looking backwards to the cross, to our union with Christ there. There are various ways of understanding our union with Christ that we think of. We think of our union with Christ in what we sometimes describe as a federal sense: he is the second and last Adam. Just as when Adam in the Garden sinned, we were all in him, we were all attached to him. He was acting on our behalf so that when he sinned, we were considered sinners. We attach federally to Jesus. When Jesus is righteous, we are considered righteous. When he obeys, we are considered to have obeyed. When he dies and rises, we are considered to have died and risen.

But there's more than that, isn't there? There is not only that federal connection there is what's sometimes called a mystical connection. I don't like that word but it's a real connection. It is a saving, faith union with Christ in which all that he does in his life and in his death and resurrection, we are doing, we are there when it happens even though we are not conscious of it. Let me illustrate this: many of you are covenant children, a long time ago you were baptized. Before you were conscious, you were just little babies in your parents' arms and you were baptized then and baptism, of course, is the sign and seal of your death with Christ and your resurrection with Christ and the blessings that that brings into your life. Now, in your great old age of teenagers and 20s and 30s, perhaps even as old as 40, whatever and you look back and you've come to faith in Jesus, you trust in Jesus, you're resting on him for your salvation and that sign way back when has borne fruit in your conversion, in your relationship with the Lord Jesus. Well, I want to tell you that actually your relationship with the Lord Jesus goes further back than the sign. It goes way back. It happened when you were unconscious. It goes way back to before you were even born. It goes way back to the cross itself. When he died, you died. When he arose, you rose. If you're connected to Jesus, he has done all the work for you.

Then he goes on to say, “If we endure, we will also reign with him.” We sang this great song that Dr. Boyce wrote and Dr. Jones wrote the music to and he gave it the name, the music the name, “Perseverance,” and I think that summarizes really what that song is about. It’s taken from Romans 8 and that’s what Paul is talking about here when he says, “If we endure,” if we persevere, “we will also reign with him.” He says this, “I endure everything for the sake of the elect.” To endure, to persevere, is an essential component of saving faith. Those who believe continue. Those who believe into Jesus continue pressing into Jesus. The word was used when the Roman commander told his men to endure the charge of a bunch of barbarians. “They are coming upon you,” he said, “persevere, endure, take it.”

And when he uses this language of perseverance, you discover Christian living is not about health and wealth with no problems and no difficulties. You know, sometimes when things go wrong in your life you think, “What’s wrong with me? What’s wrong with me?” because life has taken an unexpected turn. Or things have gone difficult. “What’s wrong with me? What have I done?” Well, you know, there’s a sense in which that’s not the primary question a Christian should ask. What you should be thinking to yourself is, “Aren’t I lucky to get this far without that happening,” Calvinistically speaking. Because suffering is our calling, it’s going to come. Hard times are going to come so see them in the light of glory.

If we endure, if we endure, if we keep going, we will also reign with him. Keep keeping on. I love that picture in the book of Revelation where there is “a great multitude that no one can count standing in front of the throne crying out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God.” And John says, “Who are these people?” And he’s told, “These are those who are coming out of the great tribulation that washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb and now they are before the throne of God and he will shelter them and the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and God will wipe away every tear,” every tear, “from their eyes.” Endure and you will reign with him.

And then the third little line, “if we deny him, he will also deny us.” Here is a warning. It’s a warning to the church, to those who are associated with the church. I think this is the important thing. Jesus said, didn’t he in Matthew 10, “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 him before my Father who is in heaven.” We need to take that warning seriously. If you are a covenant child and have not yet come out by stating, professing your faith in the Lord Jesus, I want to put this word to you: if you were to reject Jesus, if you were to deny Jesus, that would be a deliberate action on your part. It would be a deliberate, deliberate denial of what you know. It would be a deliberate rejection of what you have. And the danger that is spelled out here, “whoever denies me before men, I will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” That’s a sobering word, isn’t it?

Here’s the last line, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful.” Now, I want you to capture this. There is a rhythm in these sayings here. Two are positive, two are negative. But on

this fourth stanza, there is this startling, unexpected reversal. You see, this is the way we would have expected it to read. We've had two positives, then we come to the negative, "if we deny him, if we are faithless." We would have expected it to read like this: "if we are faithless, God will reject us for our faithlessness." That's what we would expect but I want you to notice that there is a difference between the third and the fourth stanza. In the third stanza, people who know better deny Jesus. They reject Jesus. In the fourth stanza, people who believe in Jesus stumble and fall. Yes, they sin. They have their moments of unbelief. They have their years of doubt. But they do not deny, they do not reject, they do not turn their back on, rather they struggle in their faithlessness, in their weakness.

I want you to take comfort from this: when the disciples say to Jesus, "Lord, I believe. Help our unbelief." When Joni Erickson Tada sings in one of her songs she released way back in the 70s or early 80s, when she talks about the Christian life from her perspective, she thanks God for the grace to doubt and yet believe that God is really there. Doubt is not the opposite of belief. Unbelief is the opposite of belief. In many ways, you can only doubt what you believe, you see. Think about it. You can only really doubt what you believe. Doubts come from outside of you very often. Sometimes they come from circumstances and they assail you and so on. Don't let the presence of doubt usurp your faith in the Lord Jesus.

If you are faithless and what's the counterpoint? He is faithful. He is faithful. Here is something God cannot do, he cannot deny himself. He cannot deny himself. Augustine argued, "It is precisely because God is almighty that he cannot deny himself because he cannot choose to cease to be God." He cannot deny himself.

We had two weddings in church. Yesterday, I was responsible for one of them. As far as I know, they're legally married and I hope that is the case. And whenever we do a wedding here and we have the marriage certificate, of course, and there's a copy of it that goes to the bride and groom. They get it and that's their marriage certificate and they put them on the wall or whatever you do with these things. Basically, I would have to ask Christine where it is but it's somewhere in our house. There's a marriage certificate that they get and then there is a copy that we keep here at the church and then the official part is taken to city hall and is kept there. A permanent reminder. And when we read that God cannot deny himself, we're being told that God has entered into a solemn covenant with his people. Samuel Rutherford, one of the great Presbyterian fathers, spent years in an Aberdeen prison for the gospel and he wrote this thinking about these two parts, there is my part and there is the part that God has of this covenant arrangement and he says this, "Often and often I have in my folly torn up my copy of God's covenant with me but blessed be his name, he keeps the copy of the original safe in heaven for me."

My dear brothers and sisters, there are times in our unbelief, perhaps in our sin and the wandering of our hearts, there are times when in our foolishness like Samuel Rutherford, we tear up our copy or we misplace our copy or other things crowd it out and we can't find our copy of that relationship, that covenant relationship we have with God and what Paul is saying is this: if you have lost it, he's got it. If you have torn it up, he's got the original. If you've misplaced it. If other things have crowded it out for a little while, be

sure of this, God keeps the original safe in heaven. He cannot deny himself. He will not do it. Nothing, nothing separates us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus. We sang it earlier, we roared it out earlier, "What can take away what God has given to us in Christ?" Nothing! Hallelujah!

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you that there is in your word comfort for us in times when we feel threatened, times when we feel as if we've been destabilized by circumstances, by questions, by doubts, fears within and without. We pray that today you would stabilize us by your grace and your word. In Jesus' strong name we pray. Amen.*