

Suffering Hardship

📖 2 Timothy 2:8-13

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We are studying 2 Timothy. The historical situation here was that Paul was in prison in Rome for preaching the gospel and teaching the word of God. He had already had his first trial, was found guilty and sentenced to imminent death. He is writing his final letter to his protegee, Timothy, who was pastor-teacher at Ephesus, but who was afraid of being arrested himself and thrown in prison. So he was shrinking back from preaching the gospel and teaching the word of God. The problem with this is that if Timothy doesn't get with the program the torch of Christianity will go out and not be passed to the next generation. Therefore, he needs to faithfully endure persecution by means of the Spirit of God and the grace of Christ.

Last time we studied 2 Tim 1:15-2:7, where the emphasis is on being strong in the grace of Christ. In 1:15 Timothy was aware of the fact that all who were in Asia Minor had repudiated Paul. Perhaps they did not help Paul when he was arrested or perhaps they refused to testify at his first trial in Rome or maybe it was simply that they refused to come visit him. Among these even Phygelus and Hermogenes, men who were faithful followers and friends of Paul had rejected him. But in 1:16 there was one man who had not rejected him, Onesiphorus, a man whom Paul requested that the Lord grant mercy to his house. This man had often visited Paul and lifted up his soul. He was not ashamed that Paul was in chains for the gospel, but he was proud of him. In 1:17 when this man was in Rome he eagerly searched for Paul and found him. Because of this mercy Onesiphorus had shown him, in 1:18 Paul requests the Lord grant mercy to him on that day, that day being the day of the judgment seat of Christ, the day when Church age believers will be judged for our works done in the body. This judgment may be tempered with mercy or it may be merciless, depending on whether we showed mercy to others. And lastly, Timothy was very aware of the services this man had rendered at Ephesus. The bottom line is Onesiphorus was the only one in all Asia who had remained faithful to Paul and Timothy should follow his example. In 2:1 Paul makes direct application to Timothy. You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. This expression means to stay closely connected to the source of power in ministry, which is Christ Jesus, for apart from him Timothy could do nothing. He would crater under the pressures of Nero's persecution. He needed to remain strong in dependence upon Christ Jesus. In 2:2, the things I taught you, you entrust to other faithful men who will be competent to teach others also. This is the way the faith is passed from one generation to the next

and it is the finest expression of discipleship in the NT. In 2:3-4, training others requires focus, like a soldier who is not distracted by the things of this world, so Timothy should focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and be a good Christian soldier, pleasing the Lord. In 2:5, this requires following the rules, like an athlete training to win a competition, so Timothy should live by the rules of purity and devotion to the word so that he might win the prize. And in 2:6, this requires hard work, like the farmer who does all that he can to bring his crop to fruition, that he might enjoy the reward, so Timothy should work hard in the study and the teaching of the word of God. And to wrap things up in 2:7, Timothy should consider what Paul said here, ponder it, because the Lord would give him insight into these things so that he could be victorious.

Today we come to 2:8-13 and what is important to understand at this point is the context, because verses 11-13 are somewhat controversial, or at least misunderstood. And what is the context? Receiving rewards at the judgment seat of Christ for persevering in ministry. Notice this context as early as 1:18 where Paul requested the Lord grant mercy to Onesiphorus on "that day". "That day" is the judgment seat of Christ where believer's works are evaluated for reward. The theme of rewards continues in 2:4 where the soldier who remains focused receives the reward of pleasing the one who enlisted him as a soldier. And more rewards in verse 5 where the athlete who competes according to the rules wins the reward of the prize. And again in verse 6 the hard-working farmer receives the reward of a share in the crops. The context is clearly rewards for those who persevere, and in this context Timothy needs to persevere in the ministry despite the persecution he is facing. That controls how we understand the controversial 11-13, how we need to endure hardship in order to receive reward, or else be denied reward.

In verse 8 Paul gives a critical command. **Remember Jesus Christ.** Paul has told Timothy to remember many things; remember the faith of your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, remember the gift of teaching that you received, remember how God saved you and gave you a special career or calling, remember the sound teaching I gave you, remember Onesiphorus and how he risked life and limb to show mercy to Paul. But now **remember Jesus Christ.** Why? Because He's the ultimate example of one who suffered hardship and was victorious. Note the victory of the resurrection in this verse. Having been **risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel.** I think Constable nailed the substance of verse 8 when he said, "Paul may have intended his references to Jesus' resurrection and lineage to provoke meditation on our Lord's vindication and reign following His sufferings."¹ In other words, Paul told Timothy to focus on the end results of Jesus Christ's sufferings, His victorious resurrection as the seed of David who will reign forevermore. What is the context then? Rewards for suffering. And the reward Jesus Christ will receive for his suffering is reigning forever as the seed of David.

Now what Timothy must do, and we must do, is to remember Him, to remember His sufferings, and how they ended. If we are to remember we must know the Gospels, because that is where we learn of His sufferings. And in our short time we can hardly do justice to His sufferings, but let us recall some. He was born under the reign of

Herod the Great who tried to have Him murdered at His birth. He was raised at Nazareth, a city that was despised, which foreshadowed that He Himself would be despised. He was taken by the people of Nazareth to a cliff where they tried to throw Him over the side. He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a worthless slave. He was abandoned by His disciples on the night of His betrayal. He was denied twice thrice by Peter, His closest disciple. He was beaten by the Romans, spit upon by the Jews, mocked and hated by all but the few who followed Him. Therefore, **Remember Jesus Christ**. I must admit that it is hard to remember, mainly because we don't want to remember. We want to think of the rosy, wonderful things of salvation, but we don't want to remember what Jesus Christ had to go through to bring us this so great salvation. But Paul says **Remember it, remember it**. Very important for enduring suffering.

Now, this is the only time in the entire letter of 2 Timothy that Paul uses the word order **Jesus Christ**. Every other time he uses "Christ Jesus." Probably he does this here to emphasize that Jesus is a true human, because the name **Jesus** is His human name. And because He suffered in His human nature, He can identify with us in our sufferings.

And what was the result of His sufferings? The text says that He is **risen from the dead**. The victorious resurrection. He defeated death. This is powerful motivation for the Christian to endure sufferings. For there is really nothing that can defeat us, because we too will be resurrected from the dead. The verb **risen** is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense is a past completed action with ongoing results. This means that Christ was risen in the past and remains risen today. He sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven in His resurrection body, the same body seen by Miriam, the apostles, over 500 at one time, Stephen, and last of all, to Paul, as to one untimely born. And this one is said to be the **descendant of David**. The Greek says εκ σπερματος Δαυιδ, which is to say from the sperm of David. This emphasizes His earthly lineage and fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in this respect. The Davidic Covenant made in 1 Chron 17:10b-14 promised four eternal things; an eternal descendant who would have an eternal reign over an eternal kingdom sitting on an eternal throne. Verse 8 shows us that the eternal descendant aspect has already been fulfilled through the resurrection. When Jesus Christ was risen from the dead at His first coming, the first part of the Davidic covenant was fulfilled, He is the eternal descendant of David. That prepared the way for the other three aspects to be fulfilled at His second coming. As the author of Hebrews says of this present time in Heb 2:8, "But now we do not yet see all things subject to him." That means He does not right now sit on an eternal throne reigning eternally over an eternal kingdom. But what He does do presently is sit at the right hand of the Father on the Father's throne, awaiting Israel's acceptance of Him and calling on Him to come and reign over them. When they do He will come again and fulfill this covenant. But it is enough, Paul says to Timothy, to remember that Jesus Christ's sufferings gave way to His victorious resurrection as the descendant of David who will reign forevermore. And we who suffer hardship with Him, as verse 12 says, will also reign with Him. Now Paul closes verse 8 with the words, **according to my gospel**. It's interesting that he claims it is **my gospel**. It is his **gospel** in the sense he explains in Galatians 1:11-12, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to

man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." It is Paul's gospel because Paul received it directly from Jesus Christ. That doesn't make it any different from Peter's gospel or our Gospel, because as he said in Gal 1, "there is no other gospel." And it is the same gospel Peter preached and the apostles preached and we preach. And Paul tells us that gospel in 1 Cor 15, "that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that on the third day He rose." It centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. And here, as well as in Romans, Paul made sure his audience remembered that Jesus Christ was the sperm of David because He must be connected to the human race and this connection comes from the lineage of David through Mary; Mary contributing the humanity of Jesus Christ, but a humanity that was untainted by sin because the power of the Most High God overshadowed her, a word meaning barrier, and what the text means is that God put a barrier between her sin nature and Jesus such that the true humanity was transmitted from Mary but the sin nature of Mary was not. So when we face persecution for being Christians, what should we remember? Jesus Christ. And what should we remember about Him? That He endured persecution leading to His victorious resurrection, establishing Him as the seed of David who is coming to reign forevermore.

In verse 9 Paul says, **for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal.** Paul wanted to reign too. The Greek at the beginning there says, "in connection with which I suffer hardship." That is, he is suffering hardship in connection with the gospel. Paul wouldn't stop preaching the gospel even when it became illegal in Rome. Here is where we see how serious a crime it was to be a Christian and preach the gospel under Nero. Constable said, "The Greek word translated "criminal" (*kakourger*) is a strong one and occurs only in Luke 23:32, 33, and 39 elsewhere in the New Testament. There it describes the criminals crucified with Jesus. Under Nero's persecution non-Christians viewed Christians as serious criminals." The two criminals crucified are commonly referred to as the two "thieves on the cross," but what had they stolen? Life, those two men were murderers. And what this word shows is that by this time Christians were on the same level as murderers under Roman law. It is no wonder then that Timothy was not openly a Christian and not openly proclaiming the gospel. If he were caught he could be arrested, imprisoned, taken to trial, convicted and put to death. So he would need to remember that Jesus Christ was put to death among criminals, though Himself innocent, but that He was victorious over death and would reign in the future. Paul would be put to death soon, but he too would be resurrected to reign. Foxe's book of martyrs says over 5 million Christians were killed under Nero, but they will be resurrected to reign. And all those who suffer with Him will reign with Him, a great and powerful promise that will enable us to endure hardship.

So, it was in connection with preaching the gospel that Paul was imprisoned; **but** he says, **the word of God is not imprisoned.** The **word of God** cannot be put behind bars. You can lock up those who preach it, but you cannot imprison the **word of God** itself. It is words and ideas that are in the hearts and minds of its followers. And historically, putting its followers in prison has only spawned its further propagation. Those who have tried to burn the word of God, as in Jeremiah's day, were only end-routed by God Himself who had more copies made.

The word of God is eternal, it cannot be destroyed. It cannot be stopped. As Peter quoting Isaiah said, "...The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord endures forever." Such is the voice of the living God.

In 2:10 Paul says, **For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen.** For what reason did Paul endure his suffering in prison for others? For the reason that Jesus Christ Himself endured suffering to minister to others. This is probably not thought about enough in ministry, but it was a major impetus for Paul's ministry. He looked at Christ and he said, "If Christ suffered to minister to us, then I should suffer to minister to others as well." And the one's that He **endured** suffering **for** are stated to be **those who are chosen.** Now, the word **chosen** can be and is often misleading in that some attach a doctrine of election to the word. And quite frankly I think that 99% of the confusion is in the way we use the term 'election', as in when we vote for someone to fill some office. But that isn't really the meaning of the Greek word. Not even the etymology means that. The etymology means "to speak out or to call out." It's more similar to calling in that sense. But, by election most people mean one of three things. First, some hold to unconditional election, meaning God in eternity past selected certain individuals to be saved. Others hold to foreknowledge, meaning that God in eternity past foreknew who would respond by faith and selected them to be saved. Still others hold to corporate election, meaning that God in eternity past selected Christ and those who believe in Him are the ones who are saved. I disagree with all of these ideas. Yet that is what 99.9% of Christians believe and argue about. I think arguing about those ideas is purely human philosophy and a waste of time. Whenever this word is used in the NT in a salvific context it always, without exception, 100% of the time, refers to those who are already saved and never to a person or group of persons who are not yet saved, but will be. Therefore, the term is basically a term like "saint." All believers are "saints," and all believers are εκλεκτουσ. The issue then is how to translate it. The leading Greek lexicon gives three options; chosen, distinguished and choice. The first option leaves too many questions, since it makes one ask, chosen for what? And most people conclude: salvation. But as I said, the word is never used that way in the entire NT. The second option is "distinguished." That is a valid option because it means that the believer is "distinguished" in God's eyes. He looks upon all believers as "distinguished" from the human race. The third option is "choice." That is also a valid option because it means that the believer is "choice" in God's eyes, meaning premier. Why would the believer be viewed as premier? Because He is clothed with the righteousness of Christ! To me the word is conveying something very similar to Paul referring to all believers as saints. Saint conveys something most Christians are not comfortable being called, so this is another trouble word. Most Christians will say explicitly, "I'm no saint." Of course, Paul says you are and you are. But this word "saint" in the Greek simply means "set apart." Most Christians can agree that we are "set apart." To me, let's not let words get in the way of the truth found in the meaning of the words. When the Bible says we are saints it means we are "set apart" and when it says we are chosen or elect it means we are "distinguished" or "choice." And in proof of this, the ones in verse 10 that Paul was **enduring** his prison sentence for were not unbelievers that would one day become believers, but believers already, people who were distinguished in the plan of God, people like Timothy who he wanted to stimulate to endure suffering like himself so they would be qualified to

win rewards at the judgment seat of Christ. Never forget the context. The number one source of false teaching is neglecting the context. The context is enduring suffering like a soldier, an athlete and a farmer in order to receive reward! The Lord Jesus Christ endured suffering in order to reign on the Davidic throne. Paul was suffering hardship that he too might win reward. But Timothy was not enduring suffering, he was avoiding it. Paul is telling him that he is suffering these things for Timothy and other believers. Why? Obviously so they too might win rewards. As verse 10b says, **so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.** This is a **salvation** that Timothy and other believers have not yet **obtained**. The word translated **obtained** is from τυγχανω. It is the most important word in this section. It fundamentally means “to hit a mark,” as with an arrow. I would never translate it obtain, though that is valid elsewhere in different contexts. With the genitive of salvation it should be translated this way, “so that they also may hit the mark of salvation in Christ Jesus.” What is “hitting the mark of salvation in Christ Jesus?” It is suffering for Him. When the Christian is hitting the mark of salvation he is suffering for Him. That is what Paul was doing. He was suffering for Him. And look at the end of the verse, it is poorly translated in the NASB because they didn’t know what it was saying. Notice how they add two words in italics that are not in the original; *and* and *it*. What it really says is simply “with eternal glory,” It’s a prepositional phrase modifying hitting the mark of salvation in Christ Jesus. What it says is when you hit the mark of salvation in Christ Jesus you do so with eternal glory, the weight of eternal glory is added to you by way of rewards. I don’t know why this stuff is so hard to understand, it’s right there in the Greek text. It’s quite annoying though. All verse 10 means is that the reason Paul endured his imprisonment was because Jesus Christ suffered for us, and Paul suffered for the sake of those who are distinguished, that is, believers, so that those distinguished believers will also hit the mark of salvation in Christ Jesus with eternal rewards as a result.

Then we come to verse 11 it begins with the phrase, **It is a trustworthy statement.**

But what is a trustworthy statement? What came before or what comes after? What came before. It’s trustworthy that when we hit the mark of salvation in Christ Jesus eternal glory or rewards are the result. So what he is doing in verse 11ff is proving it by quoting an ancient hymn or saying. This is something developed by the earliest believers and probably memorized so that when suffering and hardship came because of their faith in Christ they were able to recall this and press on. So here’s the proof it’s trustworthy. And to begin I want to make two observations. First, you’ll notice that each expression uses the word **if**; if we died with Him, if we endure, if we deny Him, if we are faithless. In the Greek text these are all 1st class conditions. The 1st class condition means Paul is assuming it to be true for the sake of argument, not that it is true, but that he is assuming it is true for the sake of argument. Second, you’ll notice that the pronouns are all **we** or **us**. If we died, we will live, if we endure, we will also reign, if we deny, He also will deny us. By using **we** and **us**, Paul is clearly including himself and other distinguished ones, that is, believers. So there is nothing in here related to unbelievers. It is all written to believers and relates to rewards.

Let's start with the first one. **If we died with Him, we will also live with Him.** The verb **died** is in the aorist tense. The problem with the aorist tense is it does not convey tense. Yet, that is what the translators have done, they have assigned it a past tense and most commentators say it refers to spiritual death, like Romans 6:8, so our old man in Adam was killed and we will live. But that is incorrect here because a past tense is not clear in the context and the context is suffering persecution under Nero. So, it's talking about physical death, **If we die with Him,** meaning in connection with Him, as Paul was about to do in prison, then **we will also live with Him.** We will be raised to live with Him, the resurrection. So, the first couplet is discussing the fact that if we come under persecution and we die as martyrs, we will be raised to live with Him. That is an encouragement to endure persecution even until death. The second one, **if we endure, we will also reign with Him.** So here's a situation where we **endure** the persecution, meaning we remain faithful through it and we are not killed, then **we will also reign with Him.** Obviously our reward for enduring will be reigning with Him when He comes in His kingdom. That is another encouragement to endure persecution. The third couplet **if we deny Him, He also will deny us** is the most difficult for people. This is where some people say "loss of salvation." But, not only does that contradict what Paul said earlier in 1:12 that "I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day," but it doesn't fit the other passages that talk about denying Him. The first one in the NT is Matt 10:32ff. This is Jesus instructing His disciples. There He was sending them out on a missionary journey where they would face rejection. He says, "everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." He goes on to talk about the high cost of discipleship and ends the section by discussing the rewards for enduring hardship for Him. So, it's the same kind of context as here, believers enduring hardship for Him and gaining reward. Confessing Him results in gaining reward and denying Him results in loss of reward. This is confirmed by Peter's example. Peter denied Him not just three times, but at least six times, and possibly nine. But I think it's six times by comparing the accounts. These were all opportunities for Peter to confess Jesus, but He denied Him. Because he denied Him he lost out on the opportunity to confess Him and gain reward. Therefore, Peter would be denied rewards for that opportunity. It was an opportunity lost. What the "deny Me, deny you" passages are talking about are the opportunities He gives us to confess Him and gain reward. But if we deny Him we lose reward. There are many of these opportunities in our lives. So all verse 12 means is that If we deny Him when given the opportunity to confess Him, He will deny us reward at the judgment seat of Christ for that lost potential. And the last couplet, verse 13, **if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.** Even if we turn away from the truth, as men like those in verse 17, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had gone astray from the truth and said that the resurrection was already past, upsetting people's faith, nevertheless, **He remains faithful.** Justified people can live **faithless** lives, but that's not going to change their status as justified. He remains **faithful** to us. It's not us who keep ourselves justified, It's Him. He is faithful. Why? **For He cannot deny Himself.** How would He deny Himself if He denied us? He would be denying His own righteousness that He credited to our account. So to deny us would be a denial of His own righteousness. That's not a license to live

faithless lives, for if we belong to Him He will discipline us. But it is assurance that no matter what happens, He is faithful. And that too is encouraging.

In summary, in 2:8 Paul says to Timothy, "Remember Jesus Christ." Remember that His sufferings gave way to the victorious resurrection from the dead and His future reign as the descendant of David, according to the gospel Paul received from Him on the Damascus Road. The very gospel which in verse 9 Paul says I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal under Rome. But even though he was imprisoned, the word of God is not imprisoned, it can't be stopped! Verse 10, for this reason, the reason that the word of God cannot be stopped, Paul endured all things for the sake of those who were distinguished, so that they may hit the mark of salvation in Christ Jesus by gaining eternal glory, rewards accruing to heightened status of eternal glory, which is a trustworthy statement as proven by the saying in verses 11-13, For if we die as martyrs in connection with Him, we will also be raised to live with Him. If we endure persecution, we will reign with Him in the kingdom. If we deny Him when opportunities arise, He will deny us rewards on those occasions, but even if we are entirely faithless, He remains faithful to us, He cannot deny Himself. The picture is that we should persevere when we suffer hardship for Christ. The results will be reward if we do.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, enduring hardship results in future reward. Christ is the pre-eminent example of one who endured hardship. His reward is resurrection and the future millennial reign on David's throne. Second, enduring hardship for other believers. Paul suffered for the sake of other believers. Why? To spur them on to endure hardship as well so they too can gain rewards. Third, there are degrees of reward in the resurrection. Not everyone will have the same opportunities or the same reward. We have opportunity and we need to capitalize on those opportunities so we can receive maximum reward. Fourth, even if we fail and lose reward. He is faithful to us because He is faithful to Himself. We cannot be lost.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 2 Tim 2:8.