

**Leaving a Legacy of Faith
(Week 4)
2 Timothy 1:16-2:13
"Unshackled"**

Introduction

I have been in the ministry for many years now. The ministry is dependent upon many "volunteers" in order to have success. This is simply the way that Christ intended for The Church to function. While we do rely upon a few paid staff members to organize and lead, the bulk of the load is carried by those who simply serve from their devotion for Christ. They receive very little in the form of "earthly rewards", but instead they are satisfied by laying up "treasures in heaven" (**Matthew 6:19-21**). This is the way that it has been from the very beginning of the church in the book of Acts. As a pastor, I am fully aware of my responsibilities to **"prepare God's people for works of service..." (Ephesians 4:12)**. Every pastor knows that he must teach and encourage others to carry on the work of the gospel, all the while being fully aware of the tremendous sacrifice that work can require. As a dear friend of mine once said, "the ministry ain't for pansies". Jesus even warned those who would follow Him to first stop and count the cost (**Luke 14:25-33**). He stated that anyone who was not willing to give up everything to follow Him could not be His disciples (**Luke 14:33**). Wow! That is pretty much an all or nothing statement, if there ever was one.

Over the years, I, like every other pastor, have asked many people to serve in the body of Christ. I'm happy to report that there are a great number of believers out there who will jump at the chance to serve our Savior. Of course there are many who refuse, while offering a plethora of excuses. One thing that I have learned about The Church, it will continue with, or without, my service. God doesn't need me to carry out His redemptive work in this world. But rather, I find that it is an honor to serve Him, to be included in His glorious mission. Every morning when I wake up I try to remember to pray, "Lord USE me today for your honor and glory." I want to be a part of His kingdom work. I have never really understood anyone who claims to be His, and yet has neither the desire, nor the faithfulness, needed to serve Him. In fact, I am convinced that those who do not have within themselves an earnest desire to please Him, do not really know Him at all, regardless of their boisterous claims to the contrary. To know Christ is to love Christ. And to love Christ is to be consumed with a passion to serve Him. Period. I make no apologies for this statement.

Although I have encouraged many to serve for the sake of the gospel, there is one thing that I have never done as a pastor. I have never picked up the phone and asked someone to risk their life for the cause of Christ. Oh, I've led some mission teams into some pretty scary places but I have always taken every precaution to keep them safe. But not once have I ever said to someone, "There is a real possibility of you getting killed for this, but I want you to do it anyway." I just wonder what the response would have been if I had? *What would the people sitting in the pews of the modern day church say, if their pastor asked them to risk their lives for the sake of the gospel?* I imagine that many would form search committees in the effort to find a new pastor! Make no mistake, when the apostle Paul wrote his letter to Timothy from Nero's dungeon, both he and young Timothy knew what Paul was requesting. He was asking Timothy to be willing to risk his life for the sake of the gospel! He made no apology for it. He simply encouraged his "son in the faith" to do what was expected of him. He expected Timothy to give his all for Christ, to place his very life in the hands of The Savior and entrust Him to guard it until the final day of judgement (**1:12**). Kind of makes all the excuses we come up with not to serve seem really pitiful doesn't it? When we all stand before the judgement seat of Christ upon that day, do you really think He is going to give us a pass for not passionately serving, when saints like Paul and Timothy were willing to die for the sake of the gospel? I think not.

The apostle Paul does not soften his requirements of Timothy as his letter continues, but rather, he doubles down on them. He encourages Timothy to **"be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (vs. 2:1)**. He realizes that he is asking Timothy to place his very life in peril, but he wants him to do it regardless, all the while relying on the power of Christ to enable him to endure. I don't know about you this morning, but I want to have that kind of resolve. I want to be the kind of Christian that Paul wanted Timothy to become, a true soldier of the cross, Unrelenting, Undivided, and Unstoppable for the cause of Christ.

Unrelenting

Paul tells Timothy that he must entrust the message of the gospel with “faithful men” (**2:2**), who would in turn teach others. Think about that for a moment. It is the responsibility of every pastor to teach others to become teachers, who will in turn teach more teachers! And the cycle continues. It has been said that every one who teaches the word of God is a link in a long chain that goes all the way back to Christ Himself, who taught twelve men to go and teach others. This chain has to remain unbroken, for when no one is left to carry on the teaching tradition, then there will be no more disciples being made to carry on the message of the gospel. Oh how Satan would love to break this chain! But God is faithful, and He will always raise up faithful men to carry on the work. Men like Onesiphorus (pronounced O-Nay-Siph’-Or-Us)

Onesiphorus was from Ephesus and was undoubtedly a member of Timothy’s congregation there. When hearing of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, he traveled there to diligently search for the aging Apostle in order to comfort and encourage him in any way that he could. Most people today do not understand the risk that he was taking. This was no ordinary “prison ministry”. Onesiphorus was risking his life to see Paul. While many were distancing themselves from Paul in the hopes that they would not share in his fate, Onesiphorus was actually seeking Paul out! He searched hard until he found Paul, not willing to give up until he was able to minister to him in his prison cell. Onesiphorus was UNRELENTING. He set aside his own selfish interest, because he wanted to serve for a greater purpose. I am reminded here of our soldiers, police, and other first responders in this country who run toward danger while others are running away. Not to be put off by hardship or sacrifice, it is these kinds of people who are so desperately needed in The Church today. They are unrelenting and, as Paul calls them, “faithful men”. These are just the type of folks who are to be taught so that they can teach others. By the way ladies, just because Paul uses a masculine pronoun here doesn’t mean that the Church doesn’t need some unrelenting faithful “women” to carry on the work of the gospel as well. Faithfulness knows no gender. Timothy owed a great deal to the women of faith in his own life, and Paul makes a point to credit them for instilling their faithfulness into his young heart (**vs. 1:5**).

I want to be an Onesiphorus kind of Christian, one who does not shy away from the difficult task, but rather, with a dogged determination, carries out the mission of the cross. Onesiphorus knew all too well that “ministry ain’t for pansies”. When everyone else was running away, he raced forward. I even wonder, if he might have been the only one from Ephesus who did. Possibly, it was this “layman” who was willing to take action on Paul’s behalf while Timothy, his PASTOR, remained behind from a safer distance. Perhaps this is why Paul felt the need to send Timothy a “dose of courage” to get him to step out of the shadows and onto the battlefield as it were. Paul, just like any one of us in his position, was in need of some encouragement himself. Luke had remained faithfully by his side (**vs. 4:11**), but Paul desperately longed to see his beloved “son in the faith” one last time before he died.

Can you imagine how much further the gospel would be spread in our world today if we had the same kind of unrelenting spirit that was in Onesiphorus? Why, we would stop at nothing to reach those who were hurting and forgotten. Onesiphorus wasn’t about to let Paul languish in that wretched place without coming to his aid. What if we searched to find the lost and dying with similar purpose and determination. You know what this lost world needs? It needs more Christians like Onesiphorus, who are not willing to let the lost slip away without a fight. Who are you fighting for this morning? Are you willing to be unrelenting in your pursuit of them for the sake of the gospel? This is what God requires of each of us. Be UNRELENTING for the gospel of Christ. The ministry ain’t for pansies!

Undivided

Paul goes on to admonish Timothy to serve Christ not only as a teacher, but as a good soldier, a victorious athlete, and a hardworking farmer (**vs. 2:4-7**). What exactly is Paul saying? He is comparing the service of Christ with other professions that require an “all or nothing” kind of dedication in order to be successful. He is telling young Timothy that in order to be effective for the kingdom of heaven, he must have an UNDIVIDED heart. The first comparison that Paul uses is that of a “**soldier of Christ Jesus**”. Those of you who have served in the armed forces will understand the analogy. When you join the army, for instance, you must say goodbye to your former civilian life. You exchange your “street clothes” for a uniform. You exchange your home and soft warm bed, for an army barracks and a cot. You can no

longer come and go as you please, but rather you are under the command your commanding officer. A soldier can't refuse a direct order. A soldier can't decide to retreat when he deems the battle is overwhelming. He lives, and often dies, at the commands of others.

Paul wanted Timothy to fully grasp that when he surrendered his life to Christ, he had at that moment in time placed himself under the authority of Christ. He was now a soldier in The Lord's army to be sent into battle at any time by the Lord Himself. He would be led into spiritual warfare under a commander who knows no surrender, who knows no defeat. This is exactly what it means to say, **"I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." (vs. 1:12).** Paul had never shirked his "soldiers duty" for a minute of his life following his conversion upon the Damascus road. His intent was for young Timothy to follow in the footprints of his legacy. To be a soldier of Christ means to walk away from your earthly life and exchange it for a life of undivided service to the Lord. Double-mindedness (living for two masters) is not an option of the child of God. The Bible says that a double-minded man is unstable, and therefore, undependable (**James 1:8**). To be an effective citizen of the kingdom of God, you must have a single focus in mind; to please your commanding officer, Jesus Christ.

The second analogy is much the same as the first. Paul exhorts Timothy to compete as an athlete competing for a victors crown (**vs. 5**). The book of Revelation tells us that those believers who endure faithfully until the end will receive a "victors crown" of life (*stefanos* in the Greek - **Revelation 2:10**). These were the type of crowns made of ivy leaves that were awarded to Olympic athletes who were victorious in the games. Have you ever been curious about just how much dedication it takes for an Olympic figure skater (for example) to even qualify for the Olympic Games? They start when they are children, practicing for several hours a day. They are unable to attend public school for that would consume too much of their time. Rather, they have special tutors that help to educate them, while working around their rigorous training schedule. And what about a "social life"? Forget it. There is absolutely no time for such things in the life of an Olympic champion. No one has ever made the Olympics without this type of sacrifice. Doesn't sound like much of a life does it? Now listen to this verse, **"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20).** You see, just like an Olympic athlete who competes for a victors crown, we have surrendered our lives in order to win a "victors crown of life" awarded to us by none other than Christ himself! We are to be completely undivided in our loyalty to the cause of Christ!

The third analogy is that of a hardworking farmer. Paul likens those who would serve Christ to a farmer, who must give his everything to reap a successful harvest. Farming is labor intensive. The farmers season begins in early spring, several months before harvest time. First there is plowing, planting, then comes weeding and irrigation, followed by other countless toils and tribulations, such as drought and floods, along with insects who will do their level best to destroy the fields of a farmer's labor. After he has endured these many hardships, then, and only then, can he reap the rewards of a bountiful harvest. If we are to bear "fruit" for Christ, then we too must endure the hardship and toil that is required of us. Many "Christians" today believe that they only need to pray a prayer, get dipped into a baptismal pool, and then go and live selfishly for their own pleasure, as they await the bountiful rewards of heaven. I do not know what you have been told in the past, but this has never been, nor will it ever be, true for a born again believer. Jesus wants your undivided loyalty. He will settle for nothing less. If you want to receive the rewards at harvest time, you had better be willing to labor for the kingdom. Salvation is a free gift, but it will cost you everything! Do you believe in Jesus? Or do you BELONG to Jesus?

Unstoppable

I LOVE what Paul says in **verses 8-9: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is MY gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's Word IS NOT CHAINED."** What is Paul saying? He is reminding Timothy that even though this world may try and put all the Christians in chains, they CANNOT chain The Word of God! Paul calls the gospel of Christ "MY Gospel" (**vs. 8**). He is so sold out for Jesus that the gospel of Christ has become part of who he is. He could no easier be separated from the gospel than he could any of his other vital organs. For him, **to live IS Christ!** Paul knows that even when they execute

him, the WORD will still continue, thanks to the power of God and the faithful ones who will carry on the teachings of Christ. We are still teaching the words of Paul written in this letter some two thousand years later, which is living proof of the faithfulness of God! The man who truly "sells out" for this gospel and is willing to become a soldier for Christ will indeed be an UNSTOPPABLE force for the kingdom of God. **The grass withers, and the flowers fade, but the word of The LORD endures forever (Isaiah 40:8).** I wonder if Paul realized when he penned this short letter to Timothy, it would become a part of enduring scripture that would stand for all eternity? Paul's preaching was silenced many years ago, when he was executed by the Roman emperor Nero, but The Word that The Spirit spoke through him is unstoppable.

The old apostle reassures Timothy with the words to what many believe is an ancient hymn:

If we died with Him, we will also live with Him.
If we endure, we will also reign with Him.
If we disown Him, He will disown us.
If we are faithless, He will remain faithful,
for He cannot disown Himself.

2 Timothy 2:11-13

The first three lines are easy enough to understand. Jesus death on the Cross has given us eternal life and has delivered us from sin. If we surrender our lives to Him and die to sin and self, then we will live and reign with Him. He will give us a victors (*stephanos*) crown of life. However, if we are ashamed of Him and His gospel, then He will be ashamed of us before His Father in heaven (**Luke 9:26**). This is the message of the first three lines of the old hymn.

The last line: **If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for he cannot disown Himself.** This statement is a little more complex. It means that no matter what we choose, whether we be faithful or unbelieving, Christ will still be who He is. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and He will be faithful, whether we will be or not. He can never separate Himself from His own divine nature. He is God, and as such, He is infinitely perfect. We can either chose to trust Him with our very lives, or reject His wonderful grace, but neither choice will change His reality. Even when we fail Him, He is still faithful. This is a terrifying truth for the non-believer, but a comforting reality to the Child of God, for no matter how faithful we strive to become, there will be times when we let Him down. Can I get a witness?

I am reminded here of Simon Peter, who loved Jesus with all his heart, but in a moment of weakness and fear, he denied even knowing him (**Matthew 26:69-74**). This betrayal of his Lord broke Peter's heart, and he wept bitterly (**Matthew 26:75**). What a failure he must have felt like in that terrible moment! But, after Christ rose from the dead, He made a special effort to find Peter and bring him back to forgiveness and restoration! Peter's failures didn't keep Jesus from being who He was. He had made a commitment to Peter, and He saw to it that the crusty old fisherman would never be left behind. Sometimes we fail. Sometimes we are faithless, but Jesus will never turn away from us, if we truly belong to Him. **"Now if we are God's children, then we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory."(Romans 8:17).** If we are truly co-heirs with Him, then He will never disown us, because to do so would be to disown his very self. Do you have the complete confidence that you are His child this morning? If so, then through the power of The Holy Spirit, set your heart to be an Unrelenting, Unwavering, and Unstoppable witness for His glory. He is coming soon. Share His gospel with any who will listen. Teach the faithful to teach other teachers, who will teach others still. Go and make disciples. Even though the world may try to put us in chains to hinder our message, the Word of God will forever remain UNSHACKLED!! All we need now, are a few more good teachers.

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!