As we begin this morning I want us to consider a quote from John Piper’s book *Desiring God*. “How many Christians do you know who could say, ‘The lifestyle I have chosen as a Christian would be utterly foolish and pitiable if there is no resurrection’?” ¹

Have you ever contemplated the question, “What if my faith was a sham?” Many have asked this question before and some have concluded that if the Christian faith ended up being false that it wouldn’t really matter because the Christian life is a “good life” anyway.

Paul finds this type of thinking ridiculous because he knows the Christian life involves enduring suffering for the sake of the gospel. As Paul writes to Timothy he is sitting in a Roman prison at the very end of his life. He has endured suffering for the gospel. And his imprisonment will ultimately lead to his death at the hand of Nero. Paul has suffered and will die for the sake of the gospel. And now he is calling Timothy to endure suffering in gospel ministry as well. And he bases this call to endure suffering for the gospel on the truths of the gospel; especially the implications of the resurrection.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says that one of the implications of Christ’s resurrection is the promise that we, like Christ, will be raised when Christ returns. In verse 19 he says, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” In other words, if our faith in the promise of our future resurrection proves to be a sham, then we’re idiots for choosing to endure a life of suffering for the sake of the gospel. The Christian life, as it is intended to be lived, is not a “good life” if we do not have eternal glory to look forward to because the Christian life involves choosing to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel.

“How many Christians do you know who could say, ‘The lifestyle I have chosen as a Christian would be utterly foolish and pitiable if there is no resurrection’?”

**2 Timothy 2:8–13 (ESV)**

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.

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 231.
**ENDURE SUFFERING IN GOSPEL MINISTRY**

What is this passage about? What does Paul want to accomplish in writing these words to Timothy and what does God want to accomplish in speaking this Word to us (cf. Isa. 55:10-11; 2 Tim. 3:16)? Or in other words, what is the greatly desired effect of this inspired Word? I think it is this. **God wants us to endure suffering in gospel ministry.**

This point comes out clearly our text. In verse 8 Paul talks about his gospel ministry. In verse 9 he talks about suffering because of his gospel ministry. In verse 10 he begins to talk about enduring all things in his gospel ministry and in verses 11-13 the implication is clear that Timothy too should endure suffering in gospel ministry.

This point is clear not only in this text, but also in the whole letter.

2 Timothy 1:8 (ESV)
*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,*

2 Timothy 1:11–12 (ESV)
*I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher [of the gospel – cf. v. 10], 12 which is why I suffer as I do…*

2 Timothy 2:2–3 (ESV)
*and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses [viz. the gospel – cf. 1:8-14] entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.*

2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)
*preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

2 Timothy 4:5 (ESV)
*As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

Enduring suffering in gospel ministry is the main burden of our passage this morning and a main emphasis in the entire book of 2 Timothy.

One of the challenges in preaching through a book like 2 Timothy is to show its relevance to the whole church in the 21st Century. After all, Timothy was in a very different situation than most of us, right?

Timothy was an apostolic assistant to Paul, entrusted with the gospel; charged to protect it from false teaching, preserve it through faithful preaching, and pass it on to future generations. A few of us are pastors, but none of us are apostolic assistants, right? And Timothy was facing serious persecution, like his spiritual father Paul. None of us are in a situation like that either, right?

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2 All Scripture is relevant; the preacher’s job is to show its relevance, not make it relevant.
While it is true that none of us are apostles or apostolic assistants and none of us face the type of persecution that Paul and Timothy faced in the 1st Century, I will say that we have some things in common with Paul and Timothy. And this letter is highly relevant for us. I want to take a little more time than I usually would to show you how this passage is relevant to us before we start digging into the text. Let me list two ways our passage is relevant.

We are all called to gospel ministry

First of all, we are all called to gospel ministry. This is not just ministry given to professionals like Timothy. What I mean by this is we are all called to prayerfully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those in the church and those outside of the church (evangelism). In other words, we are all called to make disciples as the gospel goes deep into the lives of God’s people and wide to all peoples for the glory of God. Our call to gospel ministry is bound up in the Great Commission. 3

We will all suffer for the sake of the gospel

Secondly, we will all suffer for the sake of the gospel, if we are faithful to gospel ministry. Paul makes this clear in 2 Timothy 3:12. “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

Suffering for the gospel may look different for us than it did for Paul and Timothy, but suffering will come for those who make a choice to be public evangelical Christians. 4

In our culture, if you simply say you’re a Christian you may not receive overt opposition, but if you make the gospel known – which is what it means to be evangelical – and actually urge people to believe the gospel then you should be ready for opposition (cf. v. 9).

Why do I say this? The good news (the gospel) that Jesus Christ died for our sins only makes sense if people also understand the bad news. And the bad news can be quite offensive to many people.

- People don’t like to hear that as our creator God demands perfect allegiance and obedience.
- People don’t like to hear we are sinners by nature and by choice and therefore under the wrath of God. 6
- People don’t like to hear that God in his holiness must punish sin.
- People don’t like to hear that God’s just punishment for sin is an eternal conscious punishment.
- People don’t like to hear that Jesus is the only way to God and that we must repent of our sins and believe on Jesus to be saved. 7

But if the gospel is to be good news, a person must also understand the bad news. And when people hear the bad news from us we are in danger of being opposed.

3 Cf. Marshall and Payne, The Trellis and the Vine, chapter 4 “Is Every Christian a Vine Worker.” I would highly recommend this chapter, where they make a very compelling argument that all Christians are ministers of the gospel to some degree.
4 John Piper, Desiring God, p. 215.
5 To be an evangelical means to be a gospel person. For more see my previous sermon “Deep and Wide,” November 6, 2011.
6 Evangelical Convictions
7 For more on what we believe and how that informs the gospel and flows out of the gospel see Evangelical Convictions.
Have you made a choice to be a public evangelical Christian? Do the people you know – those in your neighborhood, at work, in your extended family, etc. – know what you believe, or do they only know that you are a Christian in a generic sense? And have you actually shared the good news with people and urged them to believe it?

Generic Christianity will not likely be met with opposition, but a Christianity that puts a bloody cross at its center will be met with opposition. And that’s why I think most of us like to keep things pretty generic when it comes to our faith. Many don’t give full disclosure of who we are in Christ and don’t give full disclosure of the gospel we believe.

I think one of the main reasons we don’t do this is we are afraid, like Timothy (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6-7). We’re afraid of suffering and so we don’t endure in the gospel ministry we’re called to. Now I don’t mean that we’re afraid of being beaten for our faith, or imprisoned, or put to death. But we’re afraid of a different kind of suffering. We’re afraid of two things.

1) We’re afraid of our reputation being tarnished. We don’t want people to think we are weird or stupid, and we don’t want to be made fun of. 2) And we’re afraid of failure. We’re afraid we’ll fall flat on our face when we share the gospel.

And so we keep our faith to ourselves, or when we do let people know we’re Christians, it’s only in a very generic sense.

One of the burdens as a preacher is to stare texts like this in the face for seven days straight and be convicted by them every day, knowing that I’m not living my life in conformity to God’s Word. I’ve said it before and I will probably say it again. When it comes to evangelism, I’m a chicken. Sure, I’m bold behind this humongous pulpit, but when it comes to the people I meet I often fail to initiate spiritual conversations. So before we go on, I want you to know I’m in the same boat with many of you this morning. The Word of God has convicted me and now I pray it will motivate us to faithfulness.

If we’re called to enduring suffering for the sake of the gospel, but we’re afraid to do so what should we do? What should we do about this fear that keeps us from enduring suffering for the sake of the gospel ministry we’re all called to? What will motivate us?

If you’ve grown up in church you have doubtlessly been made to feel guilty at some point about sharing the gospel. Some of you may be feeling guilty right now. But guilt is not the method Paul uses to motivate Timothy to be faithful in gospel ministry. No, instead, Paul reminds Timothy of the truths of the gospel. And those truths are what motivate faithfulness.

**Sermon in a Sentence:** Remember the truths of the gospel in order to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel.

**REMEMBER THE TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL**

Timothy has been given a command to endure suffering for the sake of gospel ministry. And, as I hope I have made clear, we too have been given a command to endure suffering for the sake of gospel ministry. Motivation for this command comes from focusing on the gospel itself, nothing else.
Our work for the Lord must never be disconnected from the gospel. As we have said many times before, a failure to put the gospel at the center of our lives will result in one of two extremes. We’ll either be driven to despair as we fail to meet God’s expectations or we’ll be driven to pride thinking that we’ve done so well. Both of these extremes focus on what we have done. But our focus needs to be on Christ and what he has done. The gospel is all about what God has done in Christ. This is the basis of our salvation and the basis of our ongoing Christian living. That’s why motivation to endure suffering for the gospel must come from remembering the truths of the gospel.

**Functional Centrality of the Gospel**

This is my favorite illustration to communicate what I’m trying to say. It comes from Mike Bullmore. He calls this the functional centrality of the Gospel. At the center is the gospel itself, the message that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures. In the middle circle are the truths that flow out of the gospel; for example, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). And on the outer ring is the conduct that flows out of the truths of the gospel.

The command to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel is a perfect example of gospel conduct, because, as we’ll see, the command to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel is actually connected with the gospel itself.

Instead of making Timothy feel guilty about his fear and failures, Paul appeals to the gospel itself in verse 8. “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.”

**Gospel:** Jesus Christ suffered and died for our sins. Then he was raised from the dead. Jesus Christ was the offspring of David. There are two points of significance here. First of all, while Jesus was fully God, he also became a man; he is the offspring of David. Secondly, he was the fulfillment of the covenant God made with David. God promised David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne, ruling over God’s people forever (2 Sam. 7:16). Jesus was the fulfillment of this promise; he is the offspring of David. After his resurrection Jesus ascended to the Father and now sits enthroned as King. And he shall reign forever and ever. So, while Jesus suffered to the point of death, he was raised from the dead and now reigns eternally.

This is the gospel that Paul preached and that he suffered for, for verse 9 says; “for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal...” But why was Paul willing to suffer for this gospel? It is because of the truths of the gospel. And Paul wants to remind Timothy of the truths of the gospel so that he too can endure suffering for the sake of the gospel. There are many truths of the gospel. I’ll list the two that are obvious in this passage.

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8 Mike Bullmore, “The Functional Centrality of the Gospel in the Life of the Local Church.”
9 Philip Towner, The Letters to Timothy and Titus.
**Remember that we will be raised and reign with him.**

**Gospel Truth:** The first gospel truth we must remember is that we will be raised and reign with him. Look again at verses 11-12a. “The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.”

If we are in Christ we will go the same way that he went. If we have faith in Christ we have been crucified with Christ and we no longer live (Gal. 2:20); the old sinful self has died and released us from the bondage of sin (cf. Rom. 6:8). And we will also be raised with Christ; “we will also live with him.”

**Gospel Conduct:** Although we may suffer to the point of death in gospel ministry, that should be of little significance compared with the glorious truth that we will be raised with him and reign with him. Suffering is a temporal reality for all who are faithful to gospel ministry. But resurrection and reigning with Christ are greater eternal realities. We need to remember this gospel truth to endure.

Our endurance in suffering for the sake of the gospel is not in vain. No, we can endure suffering for the sake of the gospel in the same way that Christ did, with the joy that was set before him, knowing that we will be raised and will reign with him. That is called gospel conduct because it is conduct that is in keeping with the gospel itself and the truths of the gospel. Paul says that we must remember this if we are to endure in gospel ministry. This is the perspective and motivation that we need.

**Fight or flight**

Some have said that when we are afraid we can go into a fight or flight mode. And when this happens our reasoning faculties break down – the part of our brain where our most well thought out beliefs reside. I wonder if this happens to us in some measure when it comes to evangelism. Does our fear of suffering opposition become so intense that our reasoning faculties break down? In the face of rejection, do we forget our well thought out beliefs in the gospel that those of us who are in Christ will be raised with him and will reign with him? We cannot forget. When we are facing hardship in gospel ministry the things we need most are our well thought out beliefs in the gospel.

When we fear that our reputation might be on the line we’re called to endure, not to flee. Therefore, we need to remember that while men may reject us and our message, God has accepted us in Christ. We need to remember the truths of the gospel that we will be raised with him and will reign with him. Failure to remember these truths will cause us to flee the call to endure in suffering for the sake of the gospel. Jesus and Paul were able to endure suffering for the joy that was set before them, knowing that they would be raised and would reign. We must remember this truth as well.

**Remember the gospel is mighty to save.**

**Gospel Truth:** The second gospel truth we must remember is that the gospel is mighty to save. Look at verses 9c-10. “…But the word of God is not bound!”

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10 Cf. George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles.*
the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

As Paul writes to Timothy he is bound in chains for the gospel, but the truth about the gospel is that it is not bound. No, it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Rom. 1:16).

**Gospel Conduct:** We may suffer to the point of death in our gospel ministry. But those who believe in the gospel because of our gospel ministry will not die eternally. No, they will obtain salvation and the same eternal glory that we will receive. They too will be raised with him and will reign with him. Again, suffering is a temporal reality for those who are faithful in gospel ministry. But salvation for sinners is a greater eternal reality. We need this perspective to endure in gospel ministry.

We can endure suffering for the sake of the gospel because of this truth. Our temporal suffering for the gospel is worth it so that those who will believe – the elect – will not suffer eternally.

When we’re afraid of being rejected, when we’re afraid of failing and falling on our face we must know that the gospel will not fail. It will accomplish the purposes for which it was given – to save sinners. This truth should motivate faithfulness to gospel ministry. If we know God will use his gospel, prayerfully proclaimed, to save sinners that should embolden us to share it even though we will endure suffering for it.

**Faith, by definition, perseveres.**

One of my favorite quotes from one of my favorite professors at Trinity is this. “Faith, by definition, perseveres” (Don Carson). Another way to say it would be faith, by definition, endures. Those who have true God-given faith in Christ will endure to the end (cf. Phil. 1:6). Those who don’t endure to the end, show by their lives that they didn’t actually have genuine faith in the gospel.

Paul seems to be teaching in this passage that if we actually believe the gospel we will also endure in gospel ministry. And if we actually believe the gospel is mighty to save then we will proclaim the gospel to the lost. In other words, if we actually believe the gospel and the truths that flow out of the gospel then we will be faithful in gospel ministry; we will endure suffering for the sake of the gospel all the way until the end, like Jesus and like Paul.

The opposite of a faith that leads to endurance is a denial that leads to retreat. That is covered in verses 12b-13. “If we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.”

While there is a positive truth that those who believe the gospel in such a way that leads to endurance there is a corresponding negative truth. These verses serve as a warning to us.

If our lives are not faithful to gospel ministry then it shows that we may not actually believe the gospel and in effect have denied the gospel. If that is the case then God will deny us. He must stay faithful to his character.11

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We must endure in gospel ministry even though it will inevitably result in suffering. The reason we must endure is because the stakes are so high. It is a matter of life and death both for us and for those to whom we prayerfully proclaim the gospel. And the way we are motivated to faithfulness in gospel ministry is actually through the truths of the gospel.

**Orthodoxy fuels orthopraxy.**

There are some who think theology has very little practical implications. Many people in the church today do not want to be bothered with the hard work of Bible study or theology or doctrine. But Paul seems to think that theological reflection is critical to practical Christian living. Sharing the gospel is practical Christian living. But understanding the theological truths of the gospel is what fuels that practice. Paul seeks to motivate faithful Christian practice with Christian theology. Orthodoxy (right belief) is the fuel for orthopraxy (right living).

By way of application we must also go deeper into the truths of the gospel if we want to go further in our obedience to Christ and his commandments. Our gospel conduct must flow out of the gospel itself and gospel truths.

**Spiritual dementia**

Our spiritual state has frequently been likened to medical conditions. The most common is calling our sin a spiritual cancer that ultimately leads to spiritual death. Salvation then has been likened to healing or removal of the cancer which gives eternal life. But for those who have salvation we face another problem. Spiritual dementia may me one of the most detrimental conditions in the church today.

Now I confess that I don’t know much about dementia or Alzheimer’s, but what I do know is that it is a significant problem and the number of people with this disease seems to be growing. You may have noticed a number of memory care facilities popping up all over town. I also know it is a disease that leads to death. And it is a disease that requires proper care. Without proper care those who suffer from the disease will be in danger. These memory care facilities can’t cure dementia or Alzheimer’s patients, but they can help them function and keep them safe.

We too face a significant problem with memory loss in the church at large today which is placing us in danger of failing to endure in gospel ministry. We are slowly forgetting the truths of the gospel. We have put the serious study of the Word and doctrine on the backburner. This has always been a problem in the church. Consider this quote from Charles H. Spurgeon.

> “Forget him who never forgot us! Forget him who poured his blood forth for our sins! Forget him who loved us even to the death! Can it be possible? Yes, it is not only possible, but conscience confesses that it is too sadly a fault with all of us, that we can remember anything except Christ. The object which we should make the monarch of our hearts, is the very thing we are most inclined to forget.”

When we forget the gospel we are in danger, like someone who has suffered memory loss. What we believe actually impacts how we live. But unlike those in memory care facilities, we can

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12 Quoted in Eric Simmons, “Enduring Loyalty.”
actually help people remember. The church can serve as a memory care facility. And your home can serve as a memory care facility. We can remember the gospel by keeping it ever before us.

That’s why we’re committed to preaching it faithfully every week and teaching it in our Sunday School classes. That’s why we’re committed to regularly observe baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which remind us of it. The church needs to be a memory care facility. Our homes need to be memory care facilities. When we forget the gospel we’re in grave danger – it’s a matter of life and death for us and for those we are called to preach it to.

The Christian life is not a “good life” if what we believe proves to be false. But if what we believe is actually true, and I believe and know that it is, then the Christian life is a good life. It is not a life free from suffering. No, we’re called to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel. But it is a life full of joy as we suffer for the gospel in anticipation of receiving the promises of the gospel – that we will be raised with him, that we will reign with him, and that our gospel ministry will be used by God to save others. Do these gospel truths impact the way you live?

Are you the type of Christian who can say, “The lifestyle I have chosen as a Christian would be utterly foolish and pitiable if there is no resurrection”?

I pray this church will be filled with these types of Christians. Keep the gospel in front of you always. And may it be fuel for your faithful endurance in gospel ministry.

**Benediction**

**Jude 1:24-25** (ESV)

24Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.
References


