

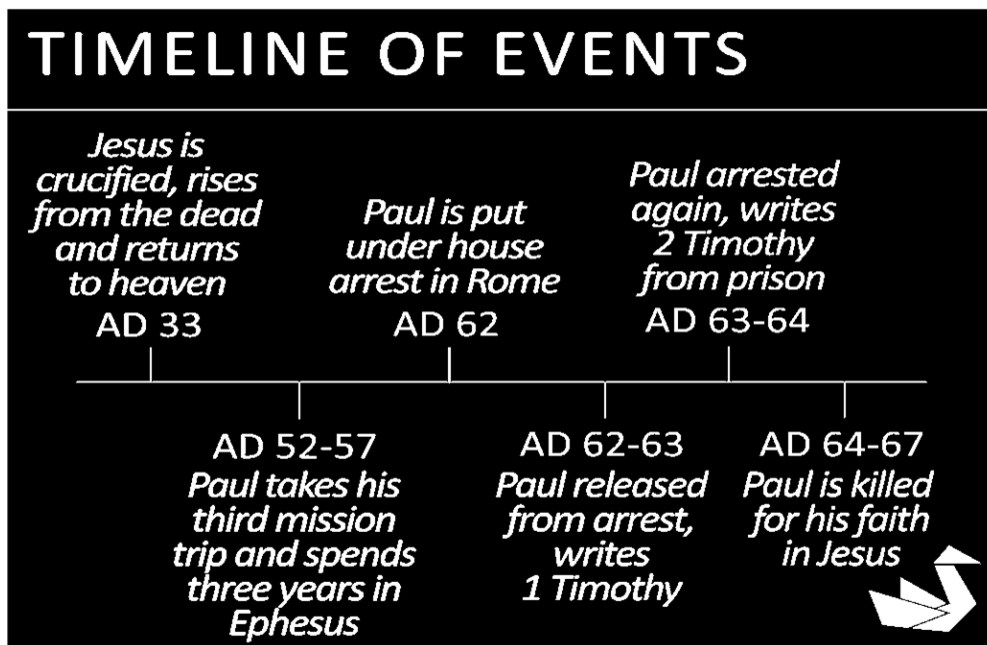
Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday , June 21, 2023 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



Serving Through Suffering
2 Timothy 1:8

“⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.” -2 Timothy 1:8 (NKJV)



Some Key Date in Paul's Challenging Life:

- [c. A.D. 52-57]- Paul takes his third mission trip and spends three years in Ephesus
- [c. A.D. 58]—Paul was apparently arrested in Jerusalem
- [c. A.D. 61]—This is the approximate time that Paul arrived in Rome. He had spent these three years in prison, going from one trial to another before different Roman rulers

- [c. A.D. 61–62]—Paul underwent his first Roman imprisonment. We do not have this recorded in the Book of Acts, which breaks off at the very beginning of Paul’s first Roman imprisonment
- [c. A.D. 62–63]—Paul was released from prison, and during this period he covered a great deal of territory. It was during this time that he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus from Macedonia
- [c. A.D. 63-64]—Paul was arrested again. Before his death he wrote 2 Timothy
- [c. A.D. 64-67]—Paul was beheaded in Rome.

For some 2 Timothy may nothing more than a continuation where 1 Timothy leaves off. But as you can see, it is so much more. The book is the Apostle Paul’s “Swan Song,” his warning shot, his encouragement in the face of great opposition and obstacle. It is so practical and relevant for 21st century Christians and the church... a needed word for what we face in our day.

With that let’s give the very basic background information for 2 Timothy... we’ll lay the background through a few question we ask of the book...

Background Questions for 2 Timothy:

- (1) **Who wrote the book?** = **The Apostle Paul** - By the time Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, the young pastor had been ministering to the church at Ephesus for four years, and it had been almost that long since he had received his first letter from Paul. Timothy had been a faithful servant to Paul since he had left home with the apostle more than a decade earlier. Since then, Timothy had ministered alongside Paul for the duration of both the second and third missionary journeys, in places such as Troas, Philippi, and Corinth. Timothy was not unfamiliar to the Ephesians when he settled in Ephesus to minister, having served there alongside Paul for a period of close to three years on Paul’s third missionary journey. Paul wrote again to this young leader in the church at Ephesus to provide him encouragement and fortitude in the face of difficulties and trials.
- (2) **Where are we?** = **A prison cell Rome** - Paul wrote 2 Timothy from a dark and damp Roman prison cell, just before his death in AD 67. The Roman emperor Nero had been slowly descending into madness since his ascent to the throne in AD 54, a process exacerbated by the great fire of Rome in AD 64 that burned half the city. With the residents of Rome in an uproar, Christians became a convenient target for Nero, who used believers as scapegoats for his city’s own lack of preparedness. Paul was one of those caught up in this persecution and was beheaded by Roman officials soon after writing this letter.
- (3) **Why is 2 Timothy so important?** = **Paul’s last letter (his last words)** - The second letter to Timothy offers a picture of Paul at the end of his ministry, just before his death. Certain personal details in the letter reveal a man settling his accounts and preparing for the inevitable. At the close of the letter, Paul mentioned a significant number of people—some who had wronged him and others who had served faithfully alongside him (2

Timothy 4:9–21). It is as if Paul were giving Timothy a “state of the church” address, updating Timothy on the current state of their acquaintances and friends so that the young pastor could carry on after Paul’s departure.

- (4) **What's the big idea? = Stay faithful to fight the good fight** - Paul understood that the ministry would only become more difficult for Timothy with the apostle’s impending death. (Indeed, at some point after this letter from Paul, Timothy was imprisoned for his faith [Hebrews 13:23]). Paul knew that Timothy’s task of keeping the church within the bounds of sound doctrine while encouraging believers to live their lives well for the sake of Christ would be an often thankless and difficult task. Though hardship would come, Paul wanted Timothy to continue in those things he had learned, drawing on the rich heritage of faith that had been passed down to the young pastor, not just from Paul but also from his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5–6; 3:14–15). The most striking feature of Paul’s encouragement comes when the aging apostle used a phrase that showed up prominently in his letter to Timothy four years prior. In that earlier letter, Paul exhorted Timothy to “fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12). But in this letter, Paul turned that phrase on himself, writing that he had “fought the good fight . . . finished the course . . . [and] kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). What a great encouragement it must have been to the young pastor of the church at Ephesus to know that his mentor boldly modeled his perseverance in the faith, even to the point of death.
- (5) **How do I apply this? = What kind of legacy of faith will you leave?** - Second Timothy brings us to the brink of death, forcing us to consider its reality and how we might react when faced with it. Paul’s response instructs us still today. His mind was not on himself, dwelling on the injustice that had befallen him. Instead, trusting that God had him right where He wanted him, the aging apostle turned his attention to others, specifically to the church and to his young protégé, Timothy. Where do you hope your thoughts linger as you come to the end of your days?

Some Key Characteristics of 2 Timothy:

- (1) **2 Timothy is Paul’s last will and testimony** – In our study we are referring to it as Paul’s “Swan Song.” The deathbed statement of any individual has an importance which is not attached to other remarks. This is what lends significance to 2 Timothy. It is the final communication of Paul. It has a note of sadness which is not detected in his other epistles. Nevertheless, there is the overtone of triumph. . . . *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,”* written by Paul as his own epitaph (2 Tim. 4:7). Also, because this was his last letter, Paul was very personal. In these four short chapters, there are approximately twenty–five references to individuals.
- (2) **2 Timothy is Paul’s warning of coming times of apostasy** - In this little book of 2 Timothy an ominous dark cloud is seen on the horizon. It is the coming apostasy. Today apostasy has broken like a storm, like a Texas tornado, on the world and in the church. What do we mean by apostasy? Webster defines apostasy as “total desertion of the principles of faith.” So apostasy is not due to ignorance; it is a heresy. Apostasy is

deliberate error. It is intentional departure from the faith. An apostate is one who knows the truths of the gospel and the doctrines of the faith, but has repudiated them.

- (3) **2 Timothy speaks of the ultimate outcome of gospel preaching** - The final fruition will not be the total conversion of mankind, nor will it usher in the Millennium. On the contrary, some will believe and for some there will come about a great turning away, not unlike what we are seeing today... even a watering down, compromise, and total perversion of the gospel. Don't think that what we see going on today has caught God off guard. God wrote about it and warned us about in 2 Timothy.
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There are many reasons that Christians do not serve the Lord. What are some of the reasons you might think of that Christians don't serve? _____

Some Common Reasons Christians Often Don't Serve:

- (1) **Half-hearted commitment** - Some don't serve because their commitment to Christ and His church is half-hearted. They attend church occasionally, but their real interests are in the world. Serving in the church would be an inconvenience for them.
- (2) **Lack of training and equipping** - Some have tried serving, but they lacked training and grew frustrated and quit. Let's face it... churches have a bad track record of filling position with bodies rather than filling positions with position people are gifted for, called to and equipped (trained) for. When we do this things are always going to turn out badly, and we are likely to get frustrated volunteers/servers who won't want to return to serving anytime soon. It is always a mistake to fill a position just to be filling a position.
- (3) **Criticism** - Some quit because other church members criticized them. If you are not willing to do a job, certainly don't criticize someone who is. Another reality in this vein is that often we ask people to do a job (serve), and when they don't do it "like we would," differently than we would, or not to our liking we criticize them. Let me say it, if you ask someone to serve and do a job, let them do it.
- (4) **Burn out** – Sometimes Christians won't serve because quite frankly they are burned out from trying to do too much. In my nearly 40 years of ministry, I've observed that if someone is willing to serve and is good at we will give them every possible job in the church and then some. Soon they will be serving in every capacity possible in the church, and by nature some are more than willing to do it all and always looking for something else to get involved with. This is a disastrous recipe for "burn-out" and disillusionment ultimately. Not only that, when we have those in the church who want to "do it all" they are not only doing themselves a great disservice by spreading themselves too thin (and destined to burn-out), they are also robbing others of opportunities to serve. Generally speaking, when we spread ourselves too thin trying to do too much we do a mediocre job at a lot of things rather than a Holy Spirit empowered job at a few things God has truly called us to. The Spirit's guidance is key to us discerning what few things we need to fully commit ourselves to.

(5) **Wrong motives** - Some quit serving because they were serving out of the wrong motivation. They were looking for commendation from people, not from God. When we serve for a “pat-on-the-back,” or an “atta-boy” we are likely to never get enough “atta-boys” to motivate us to keep going. At some point we will become hurt, feel unappreciated, or neglected because not enough recognition came our way and we weren’t thanked and praised enough. Check your motive. Why do you do what you do in the church? Is it for the praise of men or for the praise and honor and glory God alone? If it is the latter you won’t mind flying under the radar. Another wrong motive that can surely back fire is when our motive for service is power, position and control. When our motive is for position and power (control), we may feel satisfied to serve in certain position for a time, but I can promise you that in Christ’s Church the only Head is Christ and He will not share His glory or position for long. Eventually, the kingdom you are trying to build for yourself will fall and it will be damaging to both you and others, and you’ll be looking for someone to blame... and serving will take on a bad taste... “I tried to make a difference, and others rejected me!” No, it’s not about you! That was the problem.

But for whatever reason, many Christians grow weary of the hassle of serving the Lord and retreat to a more comfortable seat on the sidelines.

It seems that Timothy had a tendency to retreat from the front lines of serving Christ.

- *He was rather shy and timid*
- *And not in the best of health (1 Tim. 5:23)*
- *His relative youthfulness caused him problems*
- *Perhaps he had a tendency to be a bit unsure of himself when difficult issues required confident leadership (1 Tim. 4:12).*

Once Paul had to write to the Corinthians he had to say in **1 Corinthians 16:10**... listen to this, **“¹⁰ And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do.”** Paul knew that the rowdy Corinthians might run roughshod over this insecure man.

As Paul sat chained in a Roman dungeon, awaiting execution, he knew that he had to hand off the torch to Timothy. So he wrote this final letter (Paul’s Swan Song) to encourage Timothy to keep running the race in spite of difficulties and opposition. His words should encourage any of us who may be tempted to draw back from actively serving the Lord to persevere. And this book exhorts all who know Christ, but are not serving, to get into the race.

In 2 Timothy 1:6-11, Paul is encouraging Timothy to continue serving the Lord with all of his strength, in spite of opposition. His flow of thought goes like this...

Paul's Flow of Thought in 2 Timothy 1:6-18:

- (1) 2 Timothy 1:6-7 = Because you are saved, you must serve
- (2) 2 Timothy 1:8 = But when you serve, be prepared to suffer
- (3) 2 Timothy 1:9-11 = When you suffer, remember your salvation and God's call to preach the gospel
- (4) 2 Timothy 1:12-15 = Then Paul points to his own example of serving in spite of suffering (*Remember Paul was writing from prison cell, where he was about to give his life for... serving*)
- (5) 2 Timothy 1:16-18 = Paul also points to the example of Onesiphorus (and others) who served in spite of suffering
- (6) 2 Timothy 1:6-18 = Overall theme... the theme here is, even if you suffer for serving Christ, do not be ashamed of the gospel or of those who preach the gospel (1:8, 12, 16).

This evening we are going to be look at just the second section (2 Timothy 1:8):

When you serve, be prepared to suffer...

Application Questions

1. Why are we generally so fragile when it comes to any sort of criticism or hardship in serving the Lord? Would persecution be good for the American church?
2. Why is the cross an offense? Why can't we soften the difficult parts of the gospel in order to win people to Christ?
3. How does an understanding of God's sovereignty help us to endure hardship in the Christian life?
4. Which is more difficult to endure: persecution from without or attacks from within the church? Why?

After an extensive tour of the United States, the well known German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke was asked what he saw as the greatest defect among American Christians. He replied, "They have an inadequate view of suffering" (cited by Philip Yancey, *Where is God When it Hurts?* [Zondervan, 1977], p. 15).

Thielicke was right...

- I've heard many times of Christian psychologists who encourage their clients to rage at God because of tragedies that they have gone through.
- I've heard of pastors and missionaries who have left their ministries and sometimes left the faith because of burnout or other hardships.
- I've seen many in the local church quit their ministries and sometimes drop out of church altogether, because they were criticized or ran into conflict with other believers.
- We often have an inadequate view of suffering.

I confess at the outset that I am not qualified to preach on the subject of serving Christ through suffering. I have suffered very little in my service for Christ. Sure, I've been hit with criticism and verbal attacks. I've had people slander me and accuse me falsely and try to get me fired. But I've never had to go through what many of the Lord's servants in China, India, or most of the Muslim countries go through. They suffer beatings, imprisonment, rejection by their families, privation, and death because of Christ.

In writing about the life of the great Baptist missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson, **Pastor Dr. John Piper** states ([http://www. desiringgod.org/library/biographies/03judson.html](http://www.desiringgod.org/library/biographies/03judson.html)), "More and more I am persuaded from Scripture and from the history of missions that God's design for the evangelization of the world and the consummation of his purposes includes the suffering of his ministers and missionaries. To put it more plainly and specifically, God designs that the suffering of his ministers and missionaries is one essential means in the joyful triumphant spread of the gospel among all the peoples of the world."

★ Piper goes on soberly to say that, "If we are faithful to God's command to take the gospel to the remaining unreached peoples, some of us and some of our children will be killed in the process. But this is clearly God's design, as the Bible and church history repeatedly demonstrate. In fact, God has predetermined a specific number of martyrs (see Rev. 6:10-11)!"

Paul was in his final imprisonment, awaiting execution. Timothy, timid by nature, was not so sure that he wanted to follow in the great apostle's footsteps if it meant imprisonment and martyrdom. That didn't sound like a fun future! He may have been wondering if there might be a little safer, more pleasant line of work to get into. So Paul pleads with him not to be ashamed of the gospel or of Paul, the prisoner, but to join with him in suffering for the gospel. Paul mentions this in every chapter of this letter. In **2 Timothy 2:3** Paul writes, "*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" And in **2 Timothy 3:12**, he re-emphasizes, "*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" Again in **2 Timothy 4:5** Paul exhorts Timothy to "*endure affliction*" in his ministry.

"*Therefore*" in our verse (**2 Timothy 1:8**) points us back to 1:5-7: "Because you are saved, Timothy, and God has given you a spiritual gift to use in serving Him, therefore, join with me in suffering for the gospel." Paul is making the point,

When you serve Christ, be prepared to suffer for the gospel.

There are five things to note in this verse:

5 Things To Note in 2 Timothy 1:8:

(1) You must accept the reality of suffering up front

- (2) Be prepared to endure the shame of the cross
- (3) Be willing to suffer because the Lord and the gospel are worth suffering for
- (4) Be willing to suffer because of the caliber of men like Paul—they're worth joining in the cause
- (5) The strength to suffer comes from the power of God

Let's look at each of these individually as we unpack Paul's words of encouragement to Timothy in verse 8.

YOU MUST ACCEPT THE REALITY OF SUFFERING UP FRONT

On the first day that a recruit arrives for military boot camp, they issue your uniform and make you take all of your civilian clothes, including your underwear, and ship them back home. The shipment included your comb, shampoo, and all personal toiletries, except for a razor and shaving cream. You won't need your comb and shampoo after they gave you the boot camp haircut, which comes next, because you would have no hair! Also, they will take away all privileges. There were no TV sets, but there was one radio and they posted the front page of a newspaper on a bulletin board. But the catch was, you had to earn the privilege to have the radio on or to read that front page.

They could wake you up in the middle of the night and make you carry all of the bunk beds from the second floor down to the ground outside. Then you had to strip the floor of old wax and re-wax and polish it before carrying your bunks back, being careful not to mar your new wax job! Or, if they chose, they could make you go out and run or march in the middle of the night for a couple of hours. If you were lucky, you might get back to bed for an hour before they got you up at 5 a.m. for the day. And woe to you if you dozed off during the boring classes!

You see, they were trying to prepare you for real battle or rescue situations, where you could be called out in the night in extreme conditions and you have to work harmoniously as a team. They know that you would not be adequately prepared if we spent our time water-skiing or fishing or lounging around reading the newspaper. You needed to be ready to accept danger and hardship up front so that when it hits, you will not run from our duty or shirk your responsibilities as a good soldier.

- Not only this verse (2 Timothy 1:8), but also the entire Bible shows that serving God engages you in combat with the evil enemy, the devil, and that God does not promise to keep you from all suffering in the battle.
- Jesus sent out the disciples as sheep among wolves, warning that they would be persecuted because of the gospel (Matt. 10:16-17; Luke 21:12-19).
- Listen to Jesus' own words in Luke 21:10-19, *¹⁰ Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great*

signs from heaven. ¹² But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. ¹³ But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. ¹⁴ Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will ^[f]answer; ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or ^[g]resist. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head shall be lost. ¹⁹ By your patience possess your souls."

- **How do you think this passage might apply to us today?**
- **What warnings do you see specifically that might speak to us in our day?**
- **What surprises you in this passage?**

- Paul wrote in Romans 8:35-36, "³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."
- The implication is that God's people have to endure those sorts of trials.
- Hebrews 11:35b-38 tells of men of faith who "³⁵ ...Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth."
- Where did we ever get the idea that if we serve Jesus Christ, he will spare us from suffering and hardship?

So before you think, "It will be fun to serve the Lord," consider the cost. You're being deployed into enemy territory. There will be attacks and setbacks and even friendly fire from your own troops! You've got to accept the reality of suffering up front before you get involved in serving. Otherwise, you're going to be rather shocked when they send your water skis and fishing pole home!

BE PREPARED TO ENDURE THE SHAME OF THE CROSS

"⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord..." The testimony of our Lord is the message of the Savior who died on a shameful Roman cross. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." A few verses later in 1 Corinthians 1:22-23 he adds, "²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness."

- Although the Jews did not practice crucifixion, sometimes they would hang a dead body on a stake or a tree as a public object lesson of shame (Josh. 10:26; 1 Sam. 31:10; 2 Sam. 21:1-9).
- They considered such men accursed by God (Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:13).
- The Romans probably imported the practice of crucifying live victims from the Persians.
- The cross in the first century world was an abominable horror.
- Roman citizens, except in rare cases, were exempt from it.
- It was reserved for slaves, robbers, assassins, or rebellious provincials.
- Sometimes the Romans would crucify thousands in mass executions, leaving their bodies to rot as a warning to others not to step out of line against the dictates of the government or to rebel.
- Both the Romans and the Jews viewed crucifixion as so shameful and degrading that it shouldn't even be mentioned (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* [Zondervan], 1:1038, 1041).

A Key Thought: *Today we have seeker churches that are into marketing the gospel by making the message more acceptable to unbelievers. They downplay sin and judgment, because those aren't popular among their target audiences. They play up how Jesus can help you reach your full potential, or how He can give you a happier family life. But the gospel isn't about helping you fulfill your dreams for happiness and success. The testimony of our Lord is a testimony of a crucified Savior. He died to rescue sinners from the awful eternal judgment that they deserve. While that message may not "sell" in today's self-focused culture, that is our only message... Christ crucified and the cross.*

★ Pastor John MacArthur has observed that "God couldn't have created a worse way to market the gospel than by a crucified Savior. But if you eliminate or minimize the cross to make the gospel more marketable, you eliminate the gospel. That simple message of the crucified Savior is just as powerful to convert an intellectual at the university as it is to save a primitive tribesman in the jungle."

- *What do you think he means by, "God couldn't have created a worse way to market the gospel than by a crucified Savior"? Do you agree or disagree with that statement and why?*
- *Respond to the statement, "If you eliminate or minimize the cross to make the gospel more marketable, you eliminate the gospel." Explain. Do you agree or disagree? Why?*
- *What do you think he means by that last sentence, "That simple message of the crucified Savior is just as powerful to convert an intellectual at the university as it is to save a primitive tribesman in the jungle." Do you agree or disagree? Explain.*

Rather than being ashamed of the cross, Paul gloried in it (Gal. 6:14). So he is calling Timothy (and us) not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, which is the message of the cross. Proclaim it without compromise.

But, why would anyone choose to do something that inevitably leads to shame or suffering?

BE WILLING TO SUFFER BECAUSE THE LORD AND THE GOSPEL ARE WORTH SUFFERING FOR

If you're going to choose hardship or suffering, at least choose to suffer for a worthy cause. You'll lose all your money and possessions at death. But what could be more worthy than the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior?

Notice our verse again (2 Timothy 1:8), *⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.*

Paul tells Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord and appeals to him, *“join with me in suffering for the gospel.”* When we suffer for the gospel, we're suffering to take the greatest news in human history to those who are perishing, so that they can have eternal life!

READ: Matthew 13:44, 45-46

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

⁴⁴ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

⁴⁵ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

- *What do you think Jesus is telling us about the Kingdom of God?*
- *It's worth the sacrifice, the pain, the suffering.*

Jesus (Matt. 13:44) told the parable of the man who found a treasure hidden in a field. From joy over it, he went and sold all that he had to buy that field. Christ and the gospel are that treasure! He told a similar parable (Matt. 13:45-46) about the merchant who found a pearl of great value and he sold all that he had to buy it. Jesus and the gospel are that pearl of great price.

If you've found eternal life in Him, you've got everything that you need for time and eternity. Christ and the gospel are worth suffering for!

BE WILLING TO SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE CALIBER OF MEN LIKE PAUL—THEY'RE WORTH JOINING IN THE CAUSE

The apostle Paul is one of the most remarkable men in history. Paul's letters that God saw fit to put into our New Testament reveal the heart of this man, who counted everything else as rubbish so that he could know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil. 3:8-10) **I'm going to preach from this passage on Sunday*

In addition to Paul, when you serve Jesus Christ you are joining ranks with Peter and John and the other apostles, and with the long line of faithful saints who have handed the torch down to our day. It is the greatest cause in the history of the world, because we know that one day soon, the kingdom of this world will **"become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever"** (Rev. 11:15).

Key Thought: *Back to reality here... here's Paul, chained in a dark Roman dungeon, being criticized and attacked, even by his fellow Christians. Almost everyone has abandoned the frail old man. How can he maintain any hope in this gloomy situation? I want you to notice something I think is significant that may give us an indication of how... look at our passage again in verse 8, **"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God."** **How does this statement help?***

*I think one key is in his comment, **"me His prisoner"** is the key...*

- *It was Caesar's government that had arrested Paul.*
- *Certainly he was Caesar's prisoner!*
- *No, from Paul's perspective, he was the prisoner of the Lord, the King of kings, the sovereign of the universe.*
- *One key to enduring any criticism or suffering that you encounter in serving the Lord is to remember that He is sovereign over it. He has a purpose in allowing people to do wrong things to His servants.*

If you serve people, you will be their prisoner if they mistreat you. But if you serve the sovereign God, then you are His prisoner.

- ★ **Adoniram Judson**, who suffered incredible trials in taking the gospel to Burma, said, **"If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings"** (in John Piper, from "Giants of the Missionary Trail" [Scripture Press Foundation, 1954], p. 73).

But there is another factor in how Paul could endure such trials with hope in the Lord:

THE STRENGTH TO SUFFER COMES FROM THE POWER OF GOD

Notice our verse one more time... Paul writes to Timothy, *“⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.”*

“Share with me the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.” Paul had learned to rely on God’s power to endure trials.

READ: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

“⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to ^[L]buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

As he describes in 2 Corinthians 12, God had sent him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to keep him from exalting himself after his heavenly vision. Some think that it was an illness, perhaps a disease of the eyes. Others have suggested that the thorn was the leader of the Judaizers, who followed Paul everywhere that he went, perverting the gospel of grace that he preached. But whatever it was, it was a severe trial and Paul entreated the Lord three times to remove it. The Lord’s answer was (2 Cor. 12:9), *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”*

It is in our weakness that God’s strength is perfected in us and displayed to others. It is when you are overwhelmed by trials, setbacks, disappointments, and impossible situations in your service for the Lord that you’re forced to cast yourself on His power in ways that you’ve never done before. When you suffer in serving the Lord, endure by the power of Almighty God.

CONCLUSION

Whenever I am tempted to feel sorry for any difficulties that I have to endure in ministry, my mind goes back to a great hero of the faith from the 1800’s, Adoniram Judson. Born in 1788, and converted in his early twenties, Judson and his new bride Ann sailed in 1812 with a group of the first missionaries to go out from American soil. After a difficult four-month voyage, they arrived in India only to hear very discouraging reports about Burma, plus to learn that they could not stay in India. They spent the next year sailing from India to Mauritius (off the coast of South Africa) and back, to avoid deportation. Finally, against all

advice, they managed to get aboard a ship going to Burma. En route, Ann gave birth to a stillborn baby and almost died herself.

They finally arrived in Rangoon, Burma, a filthy, fly-infested town, and began the arduous task of learning Burmese. They found the Burmese people to be committed to Buddhism and totally uninterested in and opposed to Christianity. The only other English-speaking couple in Rangoon left, so the Judsons were alone as they struggled with the language and the mission. The birth of a son brightened their lives, but at eight months, he grew ill. With no doctors or medicine in Rangoon, the baby died. They buried him in their yard and continued with the work through their tears.

After six years, they finally baptized their first Burmese convert. A handful more trickled in over the next few years. Then, in 1824, the British went to war against the Burmese. The Judsons were in the capital city, Ava, and Adoniram was imprisoned, falsely accused of being a British spy.

His arrest was by a “Spotted Face,” a criminal whose face bore a spot tattoo on each cheek. Some of these vicious men had the name of their crime branded into their foreheads or chests. The ears and/or noses of some had been cut off. Some had only one eye. They delighted to inflict similar tortures on their captives. To arrest a man, they slipped a small, hard cord behind the back and around a man’s arms, just above the elbow. They could yank this cord so tight that it often dislocated the arms, it could cut off the breath, and could even make blood spurt from the nose and mouth of the prisoner. After hauling Judson to the prison, they secured his feet with three sets of iron fetters that cut into his ankles.

The prison was a sweltering bamboo room, with an overwhelming stench. There were no windows, but a little light filtered through the cracks. At night, the prison ruler, with “murderer” tattooed on his chest, who insisted on being called Father, would come in with an assistant. They slid a long bamboo pole through the fetters on each man’s legs and hoisted it up with a block and tackle until only the prisoner’s shoulders and heads rested on the floor. They left them suspended in this position all night, while the rats ran around them on the filthy floor.

Ann was pregnant, but had to walk two miles each way to bring him food each day. After 17 months of this terrible torture, including a move to a farther location, where he had to walk barefoot over sharp, hot rocks and nearly died, Judson was released. The Burmese government needed his translation skills to negotiate with the British. Eleven months later, Ann, who had delivered their third child during Adoniram’s imprisonment, died. Six months after that, their little daughter died.

For a period of time, Judson almost went crazy. He moved out into the tiger-infested jungle and lived as a recluse. It took him almost three years to recover and regain the right

perspective. But even during those difficult years, he continued working on his translation of the Bible and on some evangelistic materials. It took him 21 years from his arrival in Burma to complete the translation of the Bible, plus six more years to revise it.

Eight years after Ann's death, he married Sarah Boardman, a widow of another missionary. They had eight children, five of whom survived childhood. Eleven years later, Sarah died as the Judsons sailed to America. After 33 years in Burma with no furlough, Adoniram arrived in America. While there, he met and married a young woman, Emily Chubbuck, who was a famous writer. She was 29, he was 57. She went back to Burma with him and they had four happy years together before Judson died at age 61. She returned to America and died at age 37 of tuberculosis.

I haven't begun to describe many of the other hardships that he and his wives and children had to endure over the years. He left behind a Burmese Bible, a Burmese-English dictionary, and a small number of Burmese Christians. Today in Burma (Myanmar), according to *Operation World* (Patrick Johnstone & Jason Mandryk, 21st Century Edition, p. 462), there are over 3,700 Baptist churches with a total membership of over 600,000, plus many other evangelical churches. The Burmese church today, although under frequent persecution, sends out many missionaries of their own.

I would like to think that the Lord has Adoniram Judson heading up the official "Welcome to Heaven committee" when Burmese believers die. After reading about what Judson endured to take the gospel to Burma, how can I complain when I suffer a little criticism or hardship in my service for the Lord? Read his life and the lives of other missionaries for yourself and join with Paul in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.