

### **Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times Part 3**

Turn to 2 Timothy 2 as we continue our series. Paul reminded Timothy that “everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me”, indicating they had given in to pressure and had abandoned the faith and the apostle himself. With that in mind, Paul writes, **“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 2:1** “Since people are abandoning the faith, you Timothy, be strengthened in the grace of the Lord Jesus. Never mind what others do, never mind how you are feeling or how timid you might be by nature or disposition, you stay strong in the Lord.” Paul appropriately reminds Timothy, and us, that it’s not a call to be strong in your own power or strength, but be strong in the grace that is found only in Christ Jesus.

Paul encourages Timothy to keep discipling and teaching others. **“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” 2 Timothy 2:2** He wants Timothy to join him in Rome, but he also wants to make sure there are qualified and capable teachers to continue making disciples in Ephesus. Notice he refers to the “things you heard me say in the presence of many witnesses.” The gnostic heresy would grow in influence. Part of their deception was their claim to have secret traditions and revelations passed down to them from the apostles. Paul makes it clear there were no secret revelations or hidden teachings, but simply the gospel that was preached before many witnesses! Take this gospel, this good deposit given to you and teach it to others. That’s what making disciples is all about. Paul then encourages Timothy in taking this strong stand for the Lord by using three different metaphors: soldier, athlete, farmer.

**“Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer.” 2 Timothy 2:3-4**

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier. Paul lets him know, living for Jesus won’t be easy. It’s no picnic. Sacrifice is called for but we’re all in this together. Most of us are too young to remember the sacrifices of Americans during WWII. Ration books, shortages, everyone sacrificing for the war effort because, “there is a war on.” Everyone understood. Everyone had to sacrifice because there was a war on. Church, there is a war on and we are all soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are in a spiritual battle, a spiritual war, and we are in the midst of a physical pandemic and we are all in this together and sacrifices will have to be made. After all, there is a war on and we are soldiers. Here are three things you need to remember.

**Soldiers are under orders.** You are not your own. You don't get to do as you please, go where you want, act as you want, you're under orders. We all have a mission, an assignment, instructions from Jesus our commanding officer and our response needs to be, "aye, aye sir."

I remember about 40 years ago saying to Dale Wilkerson, "I know one thing for sure, I won't just stay here and become the pastor." That was my thought, but I'm a soldier you see and my heavenly commanding officer sent word that I had been assigned to Carbondale A/G. I'm going to tell you, I believe you have been assigned here by the CO. You're not here by accident. You are a soldier of Christ Jesus and he's given you an assignment to be here, so dig in, figure out your particular assignment and together let's carry out his orders and please our CO!

I know it's difficult right now. I read an obituary this week of a woman who married her college sweetheart and a couple of months after their marriage he was shipped to the Pacific Theater and they didn't see each other for four years! We've had to battle the restrictions and sacrifices called for in this pandemic for almost 11 months, but we haven't been separated for four years. But I know this is hard because it's war time. I've wanted to quit and walk away more times than I can count and I think the other pastors have felt that way, but you know why we are here? Because we are soldiers and we live under orders and so do you. I'll say it again, I believe you're called to Carbondale, just like we are and we all need to be faithful and prayerfully carry out our orders. Don't go AWOL. There is too much to do. You are needed!

Let me quickly say a word about the way we've handled the pandemic. Everyone in the world in leadership has had to make difficult decisions during this time. I've made hard decisions as pastor, trying to walk through this and do my best, (our best) to keep everyone as safe as we could and still be able for those who choose to gather in person to worship and serve the Lord. I know other churches are more open and I know churches in town that have not met in person since last March so there are churches all along the spectrum. What I have to say is, I'm not assigned to their church, I'm not their pastor. The CO assigned me here. All of us as citizens of Tulsa were placed under an ordinance and the churches were asked to submit a safety plan to show the steps we were taking to keep people safe and be in compliance and we did that. We said we were taking those steps and we are trying to keep our word. We don't have to like it, but here is what I know. The same guy that wrote this letter to Timothy under the anointing and direction of the Holy Spirit wrote this to another group of Jesus followers that were living under some harsh edicts of their government. **"Everyone must submit himself to the governing**

**authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established...consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves...Therefore it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience....give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect, if honor, then honor.” Romans 13:1-7** This is about conscience. Mine, not other pastors, not yours, but mine as the pastor of the church at Carbondale. As much as possible, I feel we are to obey the laws of the land, however, ultimately, and make sure you hear this, ultimately, my allegiance, our allegiance, is to Jesus our king, our CO and we are soldiers of Jesus Christ!

He has assigned us, all of us here. I'm glad you are in this company with us and we've been given orders, to storm the gates of hell, to proclaim liberty to captives, to bring salvation and hope and healing and the good news of Jesus to everyone we can reach. We have a mission to be the church in this community, in this city, to let our light shine as good citizens and as servants of Jesus so that it will bring honor to the Lord and not reproach. We are serving in war time, conditions maybe a little extreme right now, but the mission is still the same!

It's been difficult, but I know we are going to come through this. The five pastors met last Monday at my house and prayed and talked and strategized and we are planning for an exciting reboot of some things and we will have more to say about Sunday School and some new things that are coming in the next few weeks as we are able to safely move ahead, but we've got a mission and I need everyone to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and keep praying and believing and serving as good soldiers through all of this.

**Soldiers must stay focused.** Paul said don't get entangled in civilian affairs. He isn't suggesting Christian soldiers shouldn't work a job or run for office or engage in hobbies, he is saying stay focused on Jesus, on the mission to make disciples, to serve God, serve others and serve his church. Don't lose your focus or you might lose your weapon and maybe lose your life. That phrase "don't get entangled" bore the image of a soldier getting his sword tangled up in his garment. Don't get distracted. Carry out the mission. Obey the orders.

**Soldiers please their Commanding Officer.** This is our goal, to please our CO, Jesus. Whatever else we do, are we pleasing Jesus? With our words, actions, our choices? We want to please others but are we pleasing Jesus? I hate disappointing people, I wish I could make

everyone in the church happy, but ultimately, I have to give an account to Jesus! Above all, I want to please him. Let's be good soldiers, even enduring suffering and sacrifice so that someday we will hear our commanding officer say "well done, good and faithful soldier!"

**"Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown, unless he competes according to the rules." 2 Timothy 2:5** Paul switches metaphors now to refer to the athlete, a metaphor he uses quite often in his letters.

Today is Superbowl Sunday and those athletes have to play by the rules in order to win the game. (Someone should probably check to see who is airing up the footballs in Tampa). I'm not thinking so much of the rules of the game or the rules of the NFL, but simply that the athlete can't receive the victor's crown unless the individual athlete plays by the rules of training and self-discipline. You won't win if you don't exercise discipline and train and prepare to win. Paul told Timothy in his first letter, **"...train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." 1 Timothy 4:7-8**

If we are going to win the victor's crown, to win this game of life, we must train to be godly. Study the word of God, pray, surrender your life to Jesus and live a life of obedience, as a good soldier, as a disciplined athlete. You'll have to say no to some things. You'll sacrifice short term pleasure for long term, eternal gain. You'll have to persevere. Athletes play through pain and so do Christians. You can't quit because it gets difficult. If it was easy, everyone would do it. It takes energy and effort and because it's about eternity, you'll want to leave it all on the field. Paul wrote, **"So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well." 2 Corinthians 12:15** Give it all! You'll have to go above and beyond to win the victor's crown. Paul wrote, **"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." 1 Corinthians 9:25** This is about the kingdom. It's not about the Lombardi trophy, it's about the crown of victory given to everyone who overcomes, who remains faithful, who loves Jesus and lives for him. It may cost you everything, but it will be worth more than everything. It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus. Endure hardship as a good soldier and you get the approval of the CO. Persevere as an athlete and you win the prize, the victor's crown. Finally, Paul tells Timothy, **"The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops." 2 Timothy 2:6**

Soldiers and athletes, heroes in front of a cheering crowd. You can name famous soldiers and athletes but famous farmers? Old MacDonald? The soldier gets the medal, the athlete wins the trophy but the farmer, what does he get? The hardworking farmer gets the satisfaction of seeing the crop grow, reaping the harvest and the sweet fruit of his labor. We are soldiers, we are athletes and (get ready for it), we are farmers, (bump tada bump bump...)

If you are going to be a hardworking farmer, if you are going to enjoy the fruit and receive a share of the crops, you'll have to be patient. It takes hard work, perseverance, sowing and planting, weeding the garden, guarding against animals and pests that want to destroy the plants and eat the fruit. You'll get frustrated. "I don't understand why we aren't seeing corn! I planted, watered, kept the weeds away. Why isn't something happening?" Patience. It takes time. Farmers have to be committed to the long haul, to the long game. We're farmers.

Parents, you're raising a crop of children. Teachers, you're raising students. Preachers are growing disciples, but when is the harvest? You plant and sow but it takes times. We are tempted to grow impatient. "Not seeing much progress. This kid just isn't getting it. Let's make another one." We can't do that. Instead we keep sowing, keep working, keep running off the predators and remain vigilant. Paul says, **"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."** Galatians 6:9 Don't stop, don't quit. Endure suffering, keep training, keep persevering in godliness, keep sowing and planting and working because it all pays off in the end. All the sacrifice, all the 2 a days, all the back breaking weeding and planting, all the frustration will be worth it all when we see Jesus, when we hear him say "well done good and faithful servant," and when we see the fruit of our labor. (John said "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 4 Parents, teachers and preachers, that's the fruit of your labor.) Paul tells Timothy, **"Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this."** 2 Timothy 2:7

Take a minute to reflect on what I'm saying to you today and allow the Lord to give you insight. Are you obeying the orders from your CO? Are you disciplining yourself and living so you can win the race as an athlete? Are you patiently working and sowing good seed so you can reap that good harvest? May the Lord give you insight as you look to him!

May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.