

The Faithfulness and Mission of God

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I'm trying to do a couple of things at the same time with this series of messages I'm sharing with you in preparation of our move into the new facilities. The first thing I'm wanting to do together is celebrate and remember the faithfulness of God. Let's not move so quickly that we forget how God has been faithful to us here. Let's not forget the good work that God has done and he still wants to do with even just a month left in this place. Some of my fondest memories of ministry, memories with you, have been in this space. I know you have your own memories. Let's celebrate that. That's why next week our theme is *What would they say?* Let's spend a Sunday imagining what our forefathers and mothers in the faith would tell us. And then after that we're going to respond to this question: *What did God do?* I'm really looking forward to that Sunday.

But the second thing I'm wanting to do during this time is have our celebration of God's faithfulness inspire a renewed effort of ministry and service. Let's not get so focused, so preoccupied on "the move" or on "the building" or even "the memories" that we forget the vision; that we forget the goal. The goal, of course, is more people hearing about the good news of Jesus Christ; our hope is more people coming to know the great love of our God seen in Jesus. Jesus is due more worshipers; his grace is so utterly amazing and glorious that he deserves new song after new song sung by new worshipers in Taylor County. That's why we are building the new facility.

I think I found a passage that wonderfully ties these two things together. And that passage is 2 Timothy 2 so why don't you turn there with me. This 2nd letter to Timothy is one of Paul's last letters. He's an older man now showing on his body, on his heart and soul, the battle scars of the spiritual war he's fought in so more people could know Jesus Christ. When he writes this letter he is in prison awaiting his execution, which sadly is just around the corner. And why is he in prison? Because of the gospel of Jesus; because he believed and taught and spread the message that the only way to know God and to be apart of God's family was through Jesus Christ.

If you had a young protege like Paul had in Timothy, what might you say to him or her if you were in Paul's shoes? If you were in prison facing execution? If you lost your freedom for Jesus? Might you say, "Hey Timothy, just keep quiet about Jesus; you don't want to end up in here like me." Or maybe you would say, "Timothy, this Jesus-stuff isn't worth it. Go back home, Timothy, and enjoy the rest of your life in peace and quiet; don't make the same mistake I made." It's not hard for me to imagine that's exactly the kind of advice that many would give. The road of following Jesus is hard; he told us that himself. He said to Paul, "Through many tribulations (trials, sufferings) you must inherit the kingdom of God."

But get this: Paul doesn't tell Timothy to run for the hills. Look at vs. 3, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Can you believe that? Paul says, "Hey Timothy, come and join me." Are you serious? "Keep going," Paul says. "Don't stop, Timothy!" It's important for us to acknowledge and see this because it's so abnormal. We only voluntarily suffer for something that's

really, really important. We just don't do that often, do we? We don't often willingly take on pain. I thought of childbirth; for the joy of having a baby you ladies are willing to go through some pain. Some of you have or are going through chemotherapy; that can be painful. But you endure those challenges because of the joy and preciousness of life. So, it's not like we don't do this sometimes, but most of the time when something is painful, when something is difficult, it's natural to run. Paul looks at his sufferings and says, "Timothy, join me." Remember this when you face some difficulties for the faith. Tell yourself right now before it gets hard that sacrifice, all suffering for Jesus is worth it. If you don't do it now, when the sufferings come you'll be more likely to compromise your faith. The next important question for us to ask is: What was this suffering for? That's where we are going next. Let's read it (READ vs. 8-13).

This life, this ministry, this calling is all about Jesus. You can't forget that. Remembering Jesus in it all and through it all will guide you well. When Korby and I got engaged, the wedding planning commenced. I didn't have many demands: I cared about what I wore (I wanted to be comfortable) and I cared about what I ate at the reception (I like to eat). After that, I was happy to yield to my soon to be wife. But as many of you know, there are so many details to cover with a wedding that you need a lot of help and some ideas from other people. One of the ideas that Korby received was that we give every invitee a sugar, cutout cookie as a party favor. But not just any cutout cookie, a cookie in the shape, texture, and design of our wedding cake. So, this was going to be some work; this was going to be all custom made.

Korby and I have a rule in our family: it's only a good idea if the person who came up with the idea is willing to do the work to make it happen. I think that rule was implemented because of this event because the weekend Korby was planning on tackling this project she learned that this good idea was only good enough for Korby to do it herself (to her surprise). Now, if you know my lovely wife, you know she is a planner and with an unexpected change of plans things were getting pretty stressful. She found a friend or two to help, but she needed another pair of hands. Hands with the kind of finesse and skill to frost over 200 cutout cookies. Those hands turned out to be mine. I remember the conversation: "You want me to do what?" So, there I was on a Saturday frosting sugar cutout cookies with the same kind of texture and design of our wedding cake. I've often thought, "I was such an immature man back then; so selfish and impatient. Why did I do that?" I can only come up with one answer. I remembered Korby. There were all kinds of things lost on me. Maturity. Service. Gratitude. Christ-likeness. Humility. I didn't have much of any of those things... I know I didn't help for those reasons. Remembering Korby, my love, my life, compelled me to do the right thing.

Friends, you can get a lot wrong, you can be a long ways away from who you want to be, but if remember Jesus you've got a good chance to do the right thing. When you keep Jesus at the center, it has a way of guiding you. Jesus is the one risen from the dead (don't forget that he was resurrected. He's not a dead Savior; a dead Lord. He's the Living Christ and Lord. He's risen from the dead.). Jesus is the offspring of David; what does that mean? God made a promise to King David; you will have a son that will reign over my people forever; his rule will have no end. Do you know when God made that promise to David? About 1000 BC. Jesus lived between about 6 BC to

28 AD. You do the math -- about 1000 years. And during those 1000 years the people waited and waited for this promised King. Would you lose hope after 1000? I just might. But now he's here; he's arrived. And all of God's promises will be fulfilled. Would that get you a little excited? I think so. And this is the Jesus and the gospel that was preached; that was the message that got Paul thrown into jail. Don't forget Jesus.

Now I love this next part in vs. 9. He says, "while I'm locked up in prison by these chains, the word of God is not bound!" I'm under lock and key; I'm boxed in this prison cell. But not the Word of God; the Word of God can't be held in captivity, it can't be stopped. Don't ever forget, my good friends, that God's word will always accomplish the purpose of God. While we have limitations, while we have weaknesses, God's word has none. So, yeah, you are weak, you don't always know what to say, you fumble your words, you have limitations... don't let those stop you from bringing the word of God into a person's life because the strength of God's word will compensate for your weaknesses. I'd would say even this: every time you take God's word (a favorite verse, a passage that encourages you) and share it with someone else, God will use that word for his good purposes. I don't know how and I don't know when and sometimes, yes, I get discouraged waiting to see more. But God's word is working; it is not bound, it can not be stopped.

Now, here's the big answer to our question: what was he suffering for? Look at vs. 10: Paul says, "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." Paul is saying, "The mission to tell more people about Jesus Christ so they might be saved is worth everything. It's worth all of my sacrifice; it's worth all of my pain. It's worth me being in prison; and Timothy, it's worth you being in prison, too."

I hope you believe that, FBC. Not just up here where it stays just an idea, but in your heart where your actions come from. And I think you many of you do. You wouldn't have given so much to the RB campaign if you didn't. You wouldn't give so much of your time and your energy, so much of your emotional investment in areas of ministry and service if you didn't believe more people worshiping God was worth it. I'm praising God for that, FBC. Way to go! But also use this to encourage you. When you are tired; when you're discouraged; when you're tempted to give up or hold your resources selfishly for you remember 2 Tim. 2; it's worth enduring everything for Jesus and for the mission.

And notice what holds all of this up. Notice where Paul draws the strength for everything he's said and everything he's encouraging Timothy to do. It's the faithfulness of God. It's the truth, the conviction, the reality that God will always come through on his promises; he will always do what he's said. And what has he promised? He will save the nations! He will rescue people from their sins. You can count on it because God is faithful. We get that from vs. 11-13 (READ).

The first, obvious, reference to God's faithfulness is vs. 13; "if we are faithless, he remains faithful - (why?) because he cannot deny himself," which means, "he can't contradict his own words, his own character. He said it; he will do it. He can't lie; he can't deny who he is and what he's said."

The second reference to God's faithfulness are the "we will" statements in those first few verses. *We will* live with him, *we will* reign with him. How could Paul be so sure? Because God is faithful; he's made these promises and like we learned last week, God is a god who keeps covenant and steadfast love with all those who love him.

Do you see how God's faithfulness and our sacrificial service and ministry to others goes together? That's been my burden today; to try and help you see how celebrating and remembering the faithfulness of God encourages and strengthens our gospel ministry to others. We can give it our all, we can sacrifice time, money, energy because there's a great reward coming. More people worshipping Jesus. Finding life in his name. He's promised it.

Here's one of the ways I like to bring this together for me personally where I'm reminded of God's faithfulness and grace, but I'm motivated to help others. Here's what I remind myself: God saved me. He rescued me. I wasn't worthy of God's rescue; I didn't deserve it. But because of his mercy and grace, he opened my eyes to see how much I need his help; he opened my eyes to show me that I really am a sinner -- and that's a really big deal! None of this, "Yeah, I'm a sinner, but aren't we all, so what's the big deal?" Yes, we are all sinners, but it is a really big deal. So big that it required the death of Jesus Christ on the cross to forgive me of my sins. But because of this forgiveness, I can have new life with God. God has given me a purpose on this earth, he's given me a hope for a future with him. He did that for me! And if he did that for me, he can and will do this for others (this is where the faithfulness of God comes in). God was faithful to me; he has kept every word that he promised to me. And if he did that for me, he will do that for others. So go, Brian! Work so others might know. Be confident that as God was kind to you he will be kind to others.

This is one of the ways I find motivation for the work. I preach myself the truth that God was and is good to me and the evidence of that faithfulness encourages me to work for the salvation of others because it's worth all of my sacrifice. And friends, it's worth all of your sacrifice, too.

Key vs. 2 Tim 2.10

Questions for the week

1. What are some things in your life that are worthy of sacrifice? Where does sharing the good news of Jesus fit on your list?
2. How does remembering God's faithfulness to you encourage your outreach to others? How did Pastor Brian say this works?
3. Who are you planning to invite to church? Pray for that person and ask God for courage.