

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

2 Timothy | Finishing Well

North Center | Sept. 18, 2022

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We just finished singing “*Show Us Christ*”, and this is such an important song for the church to sing together because we live in a world where it’s easy to be discouraged by what we see around us.¹

- According to organizations like **Voice of the Martyrs** and **Open Doors**, we read that Christian persecution is higher today than at any other time in modern history.
 - E.g., Afghanistan. Northern Nigeria. China.
- We see the LGBTQ+ agenda being pushed into our faces almost everywhere we look.
 - The other day, Liz borrowed a children’s book from the library (**Tango Makes Three**). It looked like cute story about some penguins. As it turns out, the whole point of the book was to promote same-sex marriage...in a book that was written for children.
- If you follow the mainstream headlines, they are consistently depressing.
 - **Friday’s headlines**:
 - *Two officers stabbed in London. Fire engulfs 42-story building in China.*
 - *Flood in Italy kills at least 10. Woman bombs Children’s Hospital.*
- And then you think about all the things that we have seen in the Twin Cities in just the last few years that have generated all kinds of division and discouragement:
 - *Presidential election, the Covid pandemic and all the mandates and shutdowns that followed, the national news of the deaths of George Floyd & Daunte Wright, people taking radically different sides over the Black Lives Matter movement, a push to defund the police, overturning of Roe v. Wade, gender identity crisis that has infiltrated the education system in our public schools...*
- And this is to say nothing of the ongoing valleys that we walk through in our **everyday lives**:
 - Struggles in our *marriages*. Struggles in our *parenting*. Struggles with our *health*.
 - Struggles at *school*. Struggles in our *jobs*. Struggles in our *finances*.

If you don’t know where to look to find hope, it’s easy for Christians to get extremely discouraged by what they see around them. And this is true for everybody, *including pastors*.²

Earlier this week, Pastor Stan and I were at a meeting with some of the other pastors & church leaders from the SBC here in the Twin Cities, and we had the privilege of having **J.D. Greer** speak to us.³ During his talk, Greer mentioned something called “**The Great Resignation**” which is referring to a recent poll in which approximately **40%** of pastors said they were considering leaving the ministry.⁴ **Why?** In a word: *discouragement*.

If you don’t know where to look for hope and encouragement, this world will absolutely suffocate your joy. It will drain your energy. It will destroy your peace. And you will be tempted to call it quits. “*It’s too much. I can’t do this anymore. I’m out. I’m done. I quit.*”

¹ It has never been easy to be a follower of Jesus, and this is as true today as it was when this letter was written (c. AD 67).

² I find great comfort in the fact that Timothy can relate to our tears (2 Tim 1:4). As can Paul. And Peter. And Jesus...

³ J. D. Greer was the president of the SBC from 2018–2021. He is currently serving as the lead pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, North Carolina.

⁴ <https://religionnews.com/2022/03/18/is-a-great-resignation-brewing-for-pastors/>

However... although the world around us can be a very discouraging place (*depending on where we are looking*), but this shouldn't surprise us (for at least two reasons):

1. This world has been crippled by sin (and the effects of sin) ever since **Genesis 3**.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,
and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

~ Genesis 6:5

2. God already told us that this is what the world would look like “*in the last days*” – which we are living in now.⁵

Jesus inaugurated the last days with His victory on the cross, and so we have been living in “*the last days*” for almost 2,000 years. Take, for example, the beginning of Hebrews...

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets
has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things,
through whom also He made the worlds.

~ Hebrews 1:1–2

So, we are living in “the last days”, and in **2 Tim. 3:1–9**, Paul warns Timothy about what the world will be like in “the last days”:

But know this, that in the last days⁶ *perilous times*⁷ will come:
for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud
blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good...

~ 2 Tim 3:1–3

And then Paul continues to describe just how **harsh** people will be (*toward God, toward the Gospel, and toward one another*) in these last days.

So, it's **not** pessimistic to say that “*we live in perilous times*”. It's biblical.⁸

So we're not surprised when we look at the world around us because Paul warned us that it would be this way – just as Jesus warned His followers.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.
In the world you will have tribulation, but **be of good cheer**,
I have overcome the world.⁹

~ John 16:33

If you are looking **to the world** for encouragement, you will find yourself discouraged...often.

Q. So where do we look? **A.** We look to Christ (who overcame the world¹⁰).

Q. And where do we see Christ? **A.** Here in His Word.

⁵ Heb 1:1–2; 1 Cor 10:11; 1 Pet 4:7; James 5:8; Joel 2:28 (c.f., Acts 2:17).

⁶ ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις

⁷ καιροὶ χαλεποὶ (fierce, harsh, difficult).

⁸ But it **is** pessimistic to say, “*Well, this world is basically a lost cause*,” because it's not. God's plans for this world are not doom and gloom. On the contrary, His plans are more glorious than we could ever even begin to imagine (e.g., Hab 2:14).

⁹ Scripture commands like this (“*be of good cheer*”) are why our mission is to be making “**joyful**” followers of Jesus”.

¹⁰ [The Risen One has overcome](#). Death is overcome; [Jesus has already won](#). [He has already won!](#)

As we look at **2 Timothy** this morning, here is the question that I am asking:

- How do you and I **REMAIN faithful & joyful** followers of Jesus – *in a world that is as discouraging and dark and perilous as this* (which is how Paul describes it in **chapter 3**).
- **How do we STAY CHRISTIAN in a perilous world?**
- This is **the overarching question** that Paul is answering in his final letter to Timothy - because professing faith in Jesus today doesn't automatically guarantee anything.
 - Though our salvation is secure in Christ, our testimony is under attack until the day we die. Though Satan cannot take away my salvation, he can steal my joy, kill my faith, and destroy my testimony (**John 10:10**).
 - The Bible says that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (**1 Peter 5:8**), and Paul has already warned Timothy that there are many professing Christians whose lives end in shipwreck (**1 Tim 1:19**) instead of crossing the finish line with joy.

So, how do we **stay Christian** (in other words, how do we remain faithful and joyful followers of Jesus until the end)?

CONTEXT:

- **PAUL** was “*the chief of sinners*” who was rescued by God’s amazing grace and called by Jesus to be an apostle (**1:1**).¹¹
- **TIMOTHY** was Paul’s son in faith.¹²
 - Timothy was raised in the **Scriptures** by his mother & grandmother (**1:5; 3:15**).
 - And he became a **follower** of Jesus through the ministry of Paul.¹³
 - Timothy served as Paul’s **companion** during his 2nd & 3rd missionary journeys.¹⁴
 - Eventually, Paul left Timothy in **Ephesus** to serve as the lead elder-pastor of the local church.¹⁵
- Now, as Paul writes this **FINAL LETTER** to Timothy, he is writing from a cold Roman cell (**4:13**) where Paul is a prisoner in chains (**2:9**), regarded as “an evildoer” (**2:9**), abandoned by his companions (**1:15; 4:9**), and he knows that his life here on earth is almost over (**4:6–7**).

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

~ 2 Timothy 4:6–7

Paul had experienced all the incredible highs of following Jesus and all the incredible lows that come from following Jesus, and now that he has *fulfilled his ministry* (**4:5**) and *finished his race* (**4:7**), he writes one final letter to Timothy about how to **fight** *his own fight*, and how to **fulfill** *his own ministry*,

¹¹ 1 Tim 1:15; 2 Tim 1:1; Acts 9:1–22.

¹² 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2.

¹³ 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2. Timothy’s conversion likely took place when Paul was in Lystra on his first missionary journey (see Acts 14:8–20).

¹⁴ Acts 16–18; 1 Thess 3:1–2.

¹⁵ 1 Tim 1:3.

and how to **finish** *his own race* – especially when the world is so “perilous” (3:1) toward the Christian faith.¹⁶ *How does he do that?*

1. He reminds Timothy (and us) of who God is, **His character**. Like the fact that God is faithful to Himself, to His people, and to His promises – no matter what (2:13).ⁱ
2. He reminds us of **the power of the gospel** (1:7; 2:8).¹⁷
3. He reminds us of the **staggering reward** that is waiting for us when our journey of faith in Christ is finally over (4:8).
4. But mostly, Paul uses this letter to remind us of **how we are called to live** if we hope to fight this fight of faith & finish well.

IMPERATIVES in 2 TIMOTHY.

There are only 4 chapters in this letter, and I counted over **30 imperatives** (commands/instructions).

Paul uses this letter to say,

- *Christian, this is what God is calling you to do to “stay in the fight until the final round.”*
- *This is what it takes to run this race and finish strong.*
- *This is what it looks like to fulfill the ministry God has given to you.*

1. “Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord...” (1:8).¹⁸
2. “Endure hardships...” (2:3).¹⁹
3. “Shun profane and idles babblings...” (2:16).²⁰

¹⁶ 2 Timothy is like **the Deuteronomy of Moses!** In the book of *Deuteronomy*, Moses is at the end of his earthly life, and so he gives one final message to God’s people – where (1) he reminds them of God’s unwavering faithfulness in their lives; (2) he reminds them of what happens when people reject God’s Word and rebel against Him; (3) he reminds them of God’s good *promises* toward them; (4) he reminds them of the reward that’s waiting for them; and then (5) in light of all this, he instructs them on how they are to live – if they hope to fight the good fight of faith and finish well. Here, in this beautiful letter written at the end of Paul’s life, he encourages us in the same way.

¹⁷ The same power that rose Jesus from the dead lives inside of us (**Rom 8:11; Eph 1:19–23**).

¹⁸ Those who attempt to **conceal** their faith are the ones who end up losing their faith. The ones who try to fit in with “*the church crowd*” on Sunday and then hide their faith in order to fit in with “*the cool crowd*” on Monday are the ones who don’t finish well. Paul is saying, don’t **hide** your faith in Jesus. Don’t try to fit into the culture around you by **camouflaging** your faith. Don’t **apologize** for being a Christian. Jesus isn’t ashamed to be associated with me (**Heb 2:11**), so why would I be ashamed to be associated with Jesus?

¹⁹ Don’t try so hard to **protect** yourself from hardships. Jesus said that the ones who end up losing their lives are the ones who try so hard to save it (**Matt 16:25; 17:33**). So, what if, instead of working so hard to build a comfortable life and a safe life and a predictable life for ourselves...what if we put all that energy into “seeking first the kingdom of God” (**Matt 6:33**)? Instead of expending so much energy trying to **avoid** hardships, the call for faithful Christians is to **endure** hardships. This doesn’t mean we go looking for hardships. It means that we are looking to follow Jesus (in our homes, in our schools, in our workplace, to the very ends of the earth) *whether it’s hard or not*.

²⁰ Don’t be the kind of person who knows all the **Hollywood trivia** or all the **gossip on social media**, but who doesn’t have a clue what the book of 2 Timothy is about. Or what 1 Corinthians is about. Or what Mark is all about. As a culture, we spent countless time engaging in conversations that have no eternal value whatsoever while a person’s “religion” is seen as a private affair. If you spend more time on engaged with social media or with the news headlines than you do with what God is saying to you in His Word... your soul will not have what it needs to finish well.

4. “Flee youthful lust...” (2:22).²¹
5. Pursue Christian friendships (1:3–4; 4:9–11).²²
6. Devote your life to the Word of God (3:16–4:5).²³

This brings us back to where we started.

Q. How do you fight for joy in a world that is so full of discouragement?

A. By keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus (His character, His promises, His truths, His rewards)

Q. And where do we see Jesus? **A.** Here in His Word.

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.
 But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse,
 deceiving and being deceived.
But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of,
 knowing from whom you have learned them,
 and that from childhood you have known **the Holy Scriptures**
 which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable
 for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ,
 who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:
Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.
 Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

For the time will come when they will not endure **sound doctrine,**
 but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears,
 they will heap up for themselves teachers;
 and they will turn their ears away from the **truth,** and be turned aside to fables.

But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions,
 do the work of an evangelist,
fulfill your ministry.

~ 2 Timothy 3:12–4:5

²¹ Don't flirt with sexual temptation. God created us as sexual beings, which means we are divinely wired to pursue and to engage sexual relationships. Therefore, there is a unique power in sexual lust (since our hearts are naturally drawn in that direction already). It has damaged & destroyed more hearts, homes, churches, and testimonies throughout world history than maybe any other sin. Those who don't **run** from it inevitably end up **falling** to it.

²² We were not made to run this race alone. I was just reading last night **about a pastor friend of mine who just completed his first marathon** (a dream come true for him) through the constant help of a close companion. He said that he would have never made it without his help, and that's true for every single one of us in the Christian life. One of my greatest blessings here at North Center are those of you who reach out to me during the week to encourage me in my walk with Jesus! That's the beauty of being part of a church. And it's also the reason we are starting **small groups**.

²³ This is true for pastors, like Timothy. And this is true for every single Christian. This is where we find the gospel of our salvation. This is where we find truth. This is where we receive correction. This is where we get instruction. Only through the ongoing reading and studying of God's Word is a Christian made complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.

ⁱ “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

The promise of God’s unwavering faithfulness to Himself and to His promises is **glorious** beyond comprehension – and it is equally as **terrifying**.

It is **glorious** because of God’s commitment to **preserve** His children no matter how often we fail or how many stupid mistakes we make (e.g., John 10:28–30; Rom 8:28–39; 1 Cor. 1:8–9; Eph 1:13–14; 5:27; Phil 1:6; **2 Tim 1:12; 4:18**; Heb 12:2; 1 John 2:19; Jude 24–25). These promises are part of a doctrinal truth known as the “**Perseverance of the Saints**”.

If you have trusted in Jesus, God has promised that nothing in the universe could ever separate you from His love (**John 10:28–30; Rom 8:38–39**). No matter how deep your sin goes, His grace runs deeper still. Though you may squander your life in prodigal living, God will be faithful to preserve His children to the end. **This is glorious beyond comprehension.**

At the same time, God will remain forever faithful to judge those who reject Him. When you stand in the presence of God at the end of your life, there will be no leniency on that day. If you deny the grace of God toward you in Christ now, He will be faithful to deny you on that day (**2 Tim 2:12**). For the unbeliever, **this is terrifying beyond comprehension.**

He reminds us of the breathtaking promises that God has made to His children: promises in the midst of our tears (2 Tim 1:4) – and our darkness – and our loneliness – and our discouragement. Promises like...

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).