



Remember Jesus Christ

2 Timothy 2:8

Grace Waco | 3.31.24

Jesus Christ is, without a doubt, the most notable personality in human history. I think it is safe to say that. 32% of the world is Christian—which I take to mean at least nominal. 26% is Muslim, which I take to mean they have at least heard of Jesus who is a great prophet in their religion. That is at least 58% that we can count. There are certainly those alive who have never heard the name of Jesus: but less than those who have no real knowledge of Mohammed, Confucious, or Buddha.

2 Timothy is Paul's last words to his friend Timothy, who he has painstakingly and personally led to follow Jesus, before his execution by Rome. There is no earthly future ahead for Paul—just a heavenly one. His contribution towards earthly things is focused squarely on the past. Like a man on his deathbed, it is natural for him to look backward, to offer an exhortation to look backward, to tell Timothy in 2:8 to *remember*. This is the only time in this letter he uses that word. In other epistles he asks his audience to “remember him in prison” (Col 4:18), to “remember the poor” (Gal 2:10) and also to “remember your former sinful life” (Eph 2:11). Both of those remembrances make sense, because it's easy to forget someone's suffering when you are far away from them, and easy to forget your former life when you have been changed.

But at the end of his life, Paul isn't asking Timothy to remember him or his actions. He isn't urging him to reflect on Timothy's past life. He isn't urging him to remember those who are less fortunate than him or those who suffer and need help. His final urging to Timothy is to *remember Jesus Christ*.

What kind of last advice is that? How can Timothy forget the most notable person in human history?

I would submit to you today that it is the greatest advice ever uttered.

And so that is my sermon. I have two points. 1) Remember Jesus Christ; 2) Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.



Remember Jesus Christ

Behind Timothy's exhortation to "remember" is Paul's emphasis on what he calls the "good deposit" of faith in **1:14**. As the older man headed towards his last days, his goal is to pass onto Timothy his ministry, like an heir to what he has built. But there are no trade secrets, no practical tips. He doesn't pass on the company passcodes. What he is passing on is, **1:13**, a "pattern of sound words", and **1:8**, "the testimony about our Lord".

The good deposit of faith is what Christians call *the gospel*, literally "good news", and Paul himself has so identified with this good news that he calls it "my gospel" in **2:8**. Not that it is the gospel *about* him, but it is the gospel which he has made his very life to defend, proclaim, and pass on—and which he tells Timothy in **2:2** to pass on to other faithful men and women.

Why is this gospel good news and worth guarding? We find the reason in **1:9-10**. The purpose of Jesus, the news he brought, was the news of salvation *from* sin, death, and Satan and calling, or salvation *to* holiness—that is, a pure, joyful, full, eternal life (what Paul means by "life and immortality"—not because we deserved it but because God decided in underserved grace before time and before we had done anything worthy or unworthy.

Why does the gospel need guarding? Wouldn't everyone be happy to receive this news? Who is "the attacker" Timothy is called to guard against? The answer is not immediately clear. Obviously, Paul has in mind those who would come and twist the good news to fit their personal agenda—false teachers who would deny Jesus' resurrection, or his divinity, or his coming again, or his call to personal holiness—in order to gain fame or notoriety. But he also has in mind the cultural and political enemies of the church, the folly of the world, symbolized by the culture of Rome, who currently holds him captive, ready to execute him. Five times in 1-2 he mentions his "chains", his "suffering", and his "imprisonment". Clearly not *everyone* is happy to hear the news of the gospel, because they have thrown Paul in prison for it and sentenced him to death as a disturbance of the peace!

But the most curious enemy of the gospel is the one Paul mentions by name, two men: Phygelus and Hermogenes, in **1:15**. They have "turned away" from Paul. And we find the reason in contrast with Onesiphorus in **1:16**. Onesiphorus was "not ashamed of Paul's chains", implying that these other men were.

The reason that the gospel is offensive, the reason it creates enemies, the reason it must be guarded, is because it starts with suffering. It must be bad news before it can be good. In our creed today, we confessed, alongside thousands of other Christians in the world, that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate", meaning that in real, physical time he was unjustly tried and suffered imprisonment and excruciating execution.

Paul knows that the gospel requires not just the acceptance of the abstract grace of God, but the



acceptance of identification with Jesus, the one who suffered and died and calls us to die to self to follow him. It's why in **2:3** he calls Timothy to "share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ", and why in **2:11** he summarizes his teaching to Timothy as "if we have *died* with him, we will also live with him".

A poll by Gallup that is taken every 10 years, last taken in 2005, said that 60% of Americans will attend church on Easter Sunday. My guess is that number is more like 45% now. But a poll released just a few weeks ago showed that less than 30% of Americans attend any religious service on a regular basis, Christian or otherwise.¹ More people attend on Easter Sunday. What keeps them from commitment to Christ the other weeks of the year?

My best guess is that, like Phygelus and Hermogenes, they are ashamed of the chains. The good news that Christianity offers sounds nice, but the cost is too high. And that might be you—but lest we single you out—this is the problem of discipleship for *all* of us. When suffering comes, when hardship comes, when that lust or that addiction or that stress or that anxiety comes, it's easier to distract ourselves from the pain, to bury the hardship, to grin and bear it, to give into that sin, than to "share in suffering".

Let me tell you the bad news of the Christian gospel. Because of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, the whole world, natural and personal, was plunged into sin. Death came into the world—and suffering and pain and tears. Like Alfred Tennyson, writing as reflection on the death of his 22 year old friend, wrote: nature is "red in tooth and claw". It's bloody. When a child comes into the world, it is not in bliss and painless smiles. It's through screams and blood. Fruit comes through suffering and hardship—this is the first curse of the fall of man.

And really there are only three ways to deal with this. One is to embrace it, like the Roman citizens at the Colosseum—to spill more blood as a way to mask the fear of your own death. This is the way of power, war-mongering, abuse, violence, senseless pleasure, addiction, sexual gratification, love of money, rage online or in person. It's a dark way that many of us know too well—the way of lust, exploitation. But obviously, while giving into the violence and pleasure of blood may mask it's pain for a while—since as we dish out suffering we may feel less of it—in the end we cannot escape our final enemy of death and suffering.

The other way is to ignore it, to sterilize the world. To suburbanize hardship, where every funeral is simply a celebration of life, where we believe the best about people and trust everyone will get along. As the author Samuel James says, it's a kind of American Universalism that is baked into our bones. 72% of Americans believe in heaven; 58% believe in hell. But without blood, there is no life—only a facade, only a metaphor for life. It's like "The Truman Show": a curated reality may

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/15376/six-americans-attend-church-easter.aspx>



lessen the sting of suffering, but at the cost of life itself. The old English writer Thomas Browne described it best when he said: “I am not so much afraid of death, but ashamed of it.”²

The third way to deal with suffering is by enduring it as the necessary drama before the joyous reveal, the flying lessons before the freedom of the air, the storm before the calm, the plummet before the heights. The most incredible thing about Jesus is he neither fights violence with violence or sterilizes violence through easy-believism.

In every other mention of the person of Jesus in 2 Timothy, Paul uses the construct “Christ Jesus”. You see this, for example, in **1:2, 1:9-10, 1:13, 2:1, 2:3, and 2:10**. If he is not using “Christ Jesus”, then he is using “Lord”. Both of these titles of Jesus emphasize his authority and divinity. Putting “Christ” before Jesus is a way to remind that Jesus is the anointed one, the chosen one of God, that he is King. But in **2:8**, Paul uses a different construct: Jesus Christ. By putting his humanity first—he is *Jesus*—Paul is frontloading his suffering. Jesus means “God is salvation”. The very name “Jesus” is an embrace of the bloody nature of the cross, where in his humanity Jesus really, actually died. There was nothing sterile about the cross—but neither was it a spilling of other’s blood. At the cross, Jesus spilt his own blood—not masking or running from but *embracing* suffering.

When we remember Jesus Christ, then, we remember his suffering. We remember that we too, are called to suffer with him as the necessary death to our old life in order to receive the new one.

It’s time I mention that the word “remember” in **2:8** is not passive, but active in the original language. Meaning, it’s not “call to mind the details” but more like “mull over what I say”. It’s an active remembering, a mental exercise. When we talked about “remembering” in 2 Peter we called it an “imaginative” effort. It’s putting real pictures in your mind.

And so the question you must answer if you are to endure the hardship of the world is not “do I know the details about Jesus Christ”, but rather “what looms larger in my imagination than Jesus Christ”? What takes up space in your awe, your wonder, your memories? What do you dream about, smile about, shout about? What fills your heart when you are alone and quiet? Perhaps your imagination has dulled, your senses sterilized. Or perhaps your imagination has been hijacked, given over to sensual desires that offer instant visual stimulation but leave you empty when you are all alone. Perhaps you avoid being quiet and alone at all for fear of your own thoughts, or fear you will begin to dwell on the inevitable suffering of the world you desperately want to escape?

Remember Jesus Christ. Let God who became man fill your imagination. He is the hope for the hopeless, the cure for the sick, the strength for the weary, the embrace of the exhausted. His is for men and women, children and parents, old and young. He is for students, for mothers, for workers. He is before all things and created all things and holds all things together, and he is also near, close,

² I am not so much afraid of death, as ashamed thereof. 'Tis the very disgrace and ignominy of our natures, that in a moment can so disfigure us, that our nearest friends, wife, and children, stand afraid and start at us.



accessible, by his Spirit. He is as powerful as the Sun and gentle as a breeze, as glorious as Everest and as humble as a seed, as sacrificial as a warrior and as beautiful as a lover, as inspiring as a master orator and as captivating as a master poet. He is pure perfection, who has saved us and called us to a holy calling. *Remember Jesus Christ.*

But even this is not enough. We are not just called to remember Jesus Christ, but to remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.

Remember Jesus Christ, **Risen From the Dead.**

Let's go back to the advice of Paul to remember Jesus Christ. How can Jesus be forgotten? It's a preposterous idea, akin to forgetting your own Father or Mother who raised you, or forgetting your own self. Timothy and us are in no danger of forgetting the natural reality of Jesus—that he existed, that he is important in some way, that he is perhaps to be respected or acknowledged or at least a nice guy—but we are in serious and continual danger of forgetting what really makes Jesus unprecedented.

Every other time in history a human being died—they stayed dead. Perhaps they lived again and were resuscitated—by a supernatural or medical miracle—but eventually they died again. And they stayed dead. And 99% of them were forgotten.

Which, by the way, Jesus would have been too. He didn't form an empire. He didn't write any books or epic poems. His own culture rejected him. He didn't have a long and lasting personal life. The way he died—crucifixion—was so shameful and gruesome that it was meant to act as a personal eraser. There is not a single other historically verifiable, witnessed and named account of someone crucified by the Romans. We know notable people who were crucified, but no one wrote accounts of it. Why would they? To be crucified was to be unworthy of biography.

What makes Jesus completely unprecedented, unforgettable, mysteriously novel, and gloriously unique, is not that he lived and died. It's not that he had a name and a background and a few followers. It's not even that he performed miracles or claimed divinity or taught with authority. What makes Jesus Jesus is that fact we are often in danger of downplaying, dismissing, and assuming, that is so full of that deep magic of divinity that we have no symbol for it, we cannot hang it around our necks, picture it in our mind's eye, or do it justice with words were all the poems of time poured into one.

What makes this man worth remembering? It's because he did what Muhammed, Buddha, Joseph Smith, Zeus, or any emperor, king, caesar, could never do. He is only remembered and worth remembering because he is Jesus Christ, *risen from the dead*. Without the resurrection, Jesus is not worth following, death has won, Satan is victor, sin is inescapable, and all Paul says in 1 Corinthians, the only thing reasonable to do in response to that is to throw a big pity party and distract ourselves to death with as much pleasure as we can get before it's all over.



The resurrection is necessary, because to the scribes and the pharisees, and even to disciples, the fact that Jesus was crucified was proof that he was not the Messiah, that everything had gone poorly. It was such a shameful death. The disciples on the road to Emmaus said “we *had hoped* that he would be the Messiah” implying that now clearly he was not. Bummer, but moving on!

Or, in other words: if Jesus is not raised, not only will he be forgotten and meaningless, so will you. But if he is raised, and if in turn you might be raised with him, then your future can be bright and full of eternal significance and meaning in him.

Which means that if you want to live not in self-pity but in faithful confidence, not in empty pleasure but lasting joy, not in despair but steadfast peace—who doesn’t want that?—then you better make sure that you do not forget the singular truth that confirms the possibility of everything sad coming untrue. You must *remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead*.

But why are we to remember the resurrection and not simply the cross? Because while we must count the cost of following Jesus, we will never take on the cost without a true realization of the gain. If the reward is great enough, any cost is worth it. If we forget the reward, we will be too ashamed to take on the cost of suffering.

Resurrection is the great reward of the cost of suffering. We endure the bloody world by plunging with Jesus into a bloody death of self—but we will only make that plunge if we remember what is on the other side.

By God’s providence I have been reading *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis to my 4 year old for the first time, culminating just last night in the breaking of the stone table and the triumph of Aslan. If you have read the story, of course you will remember that the evil white witch has made it “always winter and never Christmas”. And then you will be right to note that Easter Sunday does not come in winter like the Advent, but comes at the early Spring. Of course this is not an accident. Spring is the time of fruit, leading to Summer—the time of enjoyment of fruit.

The problem with fruit is that it cannot last forever. Nothing is worse than rotten fruit. You ever had a fruit that looked amazing on the outside but rotten on the inside? But you see, we were meant for that forever Spring and Summer. We were meant for Eden, a place of incorruptible bodies and souls. The new heavens and new earth will be a place with only perfect, fresh fruit, of deeds, thoughts, ideas, and feelings. No spoiling. As Athanasius said, Jesus died and rose so “That as human beings had turned towards corruption he might turn them again to incorruptibility and give them life from death.”

The great benefit of the resurrection is clear: it’s the benefit of Spring leading to the eternal sunshine of summer. It’s the dawning of the season of eternal fruit. If there is no resurrection, it’s always winter and never Christmas. If resurrection, then all is bright. If Christ is risen, it means we can rise too and have incorruptible, eternal life with him.



Romans 6:4

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

1 Corinthians 15:20

Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

So what are we left with? We live in a world that is not yet raised with bodies that are not yet raised. But remember—we have a savior who was raised. Remember, Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. The reward is just around the corner, and it is available to all who would turn from sin and trust Christ, to follow him into his death by truly trusting him. How can we be content living in the fruitless winter, forgetting the invitation of the resurrection is one to remember, wonder, imagine, and hope for the joys that are coming right around the bend?

Let me leave you with this reflection from C.S. Lewis:

That is why I think this Grand Miracle (the resurrection) is the missing chapter in this novel, the chapter on which the whole plot turns; that is why I believe that God really has dived down into the bottom of creation, and has come up bringing the whole redeemed Nature on His shoulder. The miracles that have already happened are, of course, as Scripture so often says, the first fruits of that cosmic summer which is presently coming on. Christ has risen, and so we shall rise.

To be sure, it feels wintry enough still: but often in the very early spring it feels like that. Two thousand years are only a day or two by this scale. A man really ought to say, 'The Resurrection happened two thousand years ago' in the same spirit in which he says, 'I saw a crocus yesterday.' Because we know what is coming behind the crocus. The spring comes slowly down this way; but the great thing is that the corner has been turned. There is, of course, this difference, that in the natural spring the crocus cannot choose whether it will respond or not. We can. We have the power either of withstanding the spring, and sinking back into the cosmic winter, or of going on into those 'high mid-summer pomps' in which our leader, the Son of man, already dwells, and to which He is calling us. It remains with us to follow or not, to die in this winter, or to go on into that spring and that summer.³

³ C.S. Lewis, "The Grand Miracle" in *God in the Dock*.

