

MBC – 1/24/2020 Pastor Doug Thompson preaching
 2 TIMOTHY – THE LAST WORDS OF PAUL
“The Keys to Keeping On”
 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Turn with me this morning in your Bible to 2 Timothy 2. Paul is on death row in Rome, writing his last known letter, to Timothy in Ephesus. It’s an urgent, intense letter. Final instructions to make sure that the Gospel continues to go forth in a world that was hostile to Jesus Christ.

Don’t we need to hear this? Right here, right now? The world is crumbling around us, people are desperate and fearful – and the church of Jesus Christ has the only answer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can’t take a break. We can’t check out. We must to what Paul said in—

- Philippians 1:27 . . . stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving (agonizing) side by side for the faith of the gospel,

Our passage this morning tells us how we can keep going in this struggle. Let’s read it seriously—

- 2 Timothy 2:1–7 ¹You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ²and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. ³Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. ⁵An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. ⁷Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

*Several years ago I had a friend who pastored a growing church in the Bay area. He was one of the best preachers I have ever known, and wrote the best book on preaching that I own. The church seemed healthy on the outside – I preached there – but inside, things were falling apart. The pastor preached on discipleship, and on eldership, but in reality it was a one-man show. He didn’t reproduce himself, he had one elder, and when the cracks began to show, that elder resigned, people began to leave, the giving went down, and one Sunday the pastor announced that Christmas Sunday would be their last service. The church would just cease to exist. What? Yes, “God bless you and, good luck!”-

Janice and I knew several people there who felt like sheep who were just turned loose and left on their own. It was devastating. Some of them *never* found another church. One of the families was once part of MBC, they found a new, upstart church and were just beginning to feel like it was home where their leadership announced that they were disbanding too!

Beloved, that *will* happen to any church that isn’t intentional about looking forward, training up future leaders and constantly checking its spiritual health. In his final days, Paul was concerned that it wouldn’t happen in Ephesus, so in these first 7 verses of chapter two he gives us keys to keeping on in the ministry of the Gospel—

I. Strengthen yourself in the Lord (v.1).

- ¹You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,

Now what is Paul's tone here? He's very warm and loving toward Timothy, his child in the faith. But he also doesn't cut Timothy any slack: "Timothy, I'm leaving this world soon, and you must, get over your fears, and your shyness and follow my message and my example. It's not optional, Timothy. This is God's calling on your life. *You must guard the Gospel*. So many in Asia have defected or drifted away out of laziness or cowardice – you can't. Failure is not an option.

So first and foremost, you must strengthen yourself by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

This is one of those interesting *present passive imperatives* that Paul likes to use: it's a command, but it's a passive command – to let something happen: "Continue to *allow* yourself to be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

Like Eph.5:18: "Be constantly allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you."

Like Rom.12:2: "Be constantly allowing God to transform you by the renewing of your minds."

But it is a *strong* a command – allow God to strengthen you in the grace that is in Christ. What does this mean? It simply means to fix your mind on all that God has promised you in Christ: forgiveness, peace, hope, power – all the fruit of the Spirit – until it becomes true and personal in your own heart. Do this until you again walk by faith in God's Word instead of your own feelings. It's just what Jesus meant when He said to His Disciples—

- John 15:4–5 ⁴Abide in me, (rest, remain, stay in Me) and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Now, you can't strengthen yourself, but you are responsible to allow God to strengthen you. To put yourself in the place where it can happen. How do you do that? 3 ways—

1.) You do it intentionally.

You make up your mind to "be strengthened in His grace." You prioritize it. You put it in your schedule. It won't happen by accident. Matter of fact, good things don't generally happen by accident, right? People don't say "*I had an accident!*" when something good happens.

No, you must intentionally discipline yourself to "*be strengthened in His grace.*"

2.) You do it quietly – you wait for the Lord.

You don't do it on the run, you don't do it while you are multi-tasking. You must quiet your heart, be still and know that He is God. The Holy Spirit does this work and He will not compete with the other noise in your life. Remove distractions, turn off your notifications and be ready to *think*.

The passage that comes to my mind is when the Amalekites had plundered David's village, carried off the women and children, including his own family, and then burned it down—

- 1Sam.30.6: And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. *But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.*

We know how he did this because we have his own devotional journal – the Psalms. Listen—

- Psalm 27:14 ¹⁴Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!
- Psalm 40:1–2 ¹I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. ²He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.
- Psalm 62:1 ¹For God alone my soul waits in *silence* (the Heb. Is literally, “his cell phone was off”)

Waiting for the Lord isn’t passivity. It’s disciplining your mind to “*be still and know that He is God.*” It’s called *waiting* because it you don’t go *on* and you don’t go *anywhere else*, until your heart and mind are once again at peace with God, and His power and promises are once again, bigger than your fears and anxieties—“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength”(Isa. 40:31).

3.) You do it (only) through the Word of God.

You strengthen yourself in God’s grace through meditating on God’s Word. Andrew Murray said: “The mind gathers knowledge from God’s Word and prepares the food by which the heart with the inner life is to be nourished.” That’s it!

You get in a quiet place with your Bible, you have a plan for what you will read – then you read, you meditate on what you are reading, you pray to God about you are reading – and you wait until God is bigger than your circumstances. Then do it again tomorrow.

So keeping on in the Gospel begins in that quiet place with God and His Word. Second—

II. Train others to pass along the Gospel.

- 2 Timothy 2:2 ²and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Many people had turned away from the Gospel – “all who are in Asia turned away from me” – unless replacements are trained up, literally, the light of the Gospel will go out. Look at what it is Timothy must pass it on, and to whom—

What?

The Gospel; the message that saved him, what had been entrusted to him – what he is to guard with his life, “*the pattern of sound words*” (1:13): Paul says that he heard it from him “*in the presence of many witnesses.*” This is important: it wasn’t a secret message or tradition, and there was a lot of that going on at that time—

- Gnosticism was a Gk. religion that infected Christianity early on. It had some teachings that were for everyone, but some teachings that were just for a few: “the *gnosis* – the secret knowledge” – today, Freemasonry is pretty close. Paul says, “No secrets here! You heard it in public, and you are to make it known in public” – and the implication is that if he deviates from the message, others will hold him accountable.

And beloved, you and I have every right to hold any person accountable who claims to teach God's Word! We have one Bible, and one faith! Teach what is in this Book, and get it right! If you don't – repent! Or shut up.

To whom?

Take this precious *stewardship* of the Gospel, and put it in the hands of *faithful men*. What did Paul say in Corinthians about how to regard him?

- 1 Corinthians 4:1–2 ¹This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards (caretakers) of the mysteries of God. ²Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

A steward is a caretaker – he is handling something that belongs to another. Preachers and teachers are especially entrusted with the message of the Gospel, and their #1 task is just to be faithful – faithful to proclaim it, faithful to keep it free from distortions, and faithful to pass it on to other faithful men. He doesn't say, "Look for gifted men, or charismatic men." Paul says, "*Timothy, look for faithful men.*" When you look at their lives do you see a long obedience in the same direction? Do their lives demonstrate a consistent track record of godly character and humble service?

- Some of the resume's I've seen of men seeking pastoral ministry make me dizzy: "a few months here, a few months there, then I hopped over there for awhile. . ." I just read that The average stay at a church for a senior pastor is about four years. Youth pastors only last about three. From some of the youth pastors I've known, even that's too long! I think a church wants to know that a man can stay put for awhile – so that, when the wolves come creeping in, or times get tough, their shepherd doesn't head for the hills.

And he is to look for "faithful men who will be able to teach others also." I.e., they must have the ability to pass along the message, and they must also have the *vision* to do so. It has to be in their blood to pass it on, to always be raising up the next generation.

*Years ago, we got this vision from our friends at CBC under Pastor Steve Fernandez. I don't know how many pastors, church planters, and missionaries they have sent out from their church – I know that we support several of them. But I know that every person they have sent out has it in their blood to train up and send out others who will do the same, rinse and repeat.

- Our missions priority here at MBC is to send out or support those who are involved in ministries that do *multiplication*, not simply *addition*.

*When I was still a baby Christian I read *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, by Robert Coleman. What was Jesus' Master Plan for reaching the world with the Gospel? Listen—

- "It all comes back to His disciples. They were the vanguard of His enveloping movement. "Through their word" He expected others to believe on Him (Jn.17.20) and these in turn to pass the word along to others, until in time the world might know who He was and what He came to do. His whole evangelistic strategy – indeed, the fulfillment of His very purpose in coming into the world, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave – depended upon the faithfulness of His chosen disciples to this task. It did not matter how small the group was to start with so long as they reproduced and taught their disciples to reproduce. This was the way the Church was to win – through the dedicated lives of those who knew the Savior so well that His Spirit and method constrained them to tell others. As simple as it may seem, this was the way the Gospel

would conquer. He had no other plan.”

Do you see that there are 4 generations here in this passage: It started with Paul who entrusted the Gospel to Timothy who was to entrust it to faithful men who would entrust to others – who would keep it going. And this actually happened with Jesus, who discipled John, who discipled Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna who was martyred for his faith. Polycarp discipled another church father name Irenaeus, who discipled Hippolytus who wrote 10 volumes on refuting heresy before dying in the 3rd century!

And we know that faithful Christian men and women kept passing the Gospel from one generation to the next for over 2,000 years – because, we’re here this morning, praising Jesus!

- Someone said this: ***“I have precisely one lifetime to make certain the Gospel survives and thrives in another generation – I must labor faithfully and invest wisely.”***

Next, Paul gives Timothy 3 pictures of what faithful Gospel ministry looks like; he must lock these pictures in his mind to keep going and not drop out. So do we—

III. Three pictures of the Gospel ministry.

A. The Soldier - dedication.

- 2 Timothy 2:3–4 ³Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

“Timothy, see yourself as a soldier in this intense spiritual battle that is raging around us.” Back in Ephesians 6 Paulo said that every Christian is in hand-to-hand combat against “the rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”

Do you see yourself as a soldier, engaged in spiritual warfare? Now you may never march in the infantry, Ride in the cavalry, Shoot the artillery. . . but you’re still in the Lord's army! And if you are not *fighting*, you will be a casualty.

Paul wrote about some of these casualties – all in Asia who turned against him, Phygelus and Hermogenes – *Demas*. Many churches have seen defections since this pandemic began. People who didn’t realize that there is a cost in coming to Christ. Not a cost for salvation, but a cost to being His disciple. Many eagerly sign up for heaven and forgiveness, but not for discipleship and the narrow path. And Jesus said you don’t get one without the other—

- Matthew 13:20–22 ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

What does it mean to be a soldier? Paul says, *“suffering.”* You don’t sign on to be a soldier to see the world and have adventures – maybe that’s what the recruiter promised, but that’s not the reality. Soldiers sacrifice comfort, family, good food – they suffer these things for the goal of victory over their enemy.

God says to you and me: Have the mindset of a soldier for Christ. You surrender your expectations of comfort and a normal life – you surrender your expectation of life itself, for the Gospel cause. I.e., you are completely dedicated. You are all in. He goes on—

- ⁴No soldier gets entangled (distracted – preoccupied) in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

Now God calls a few people to full-time Gospel ministry, but He calls most Christians to serve the cause of the Gospel in “*civilian pursuits*,” at their jobs, or in their homes – even in government: remember how God used William Wilburforce in the British Parliament to end slavery?

- The issue isn’t your *occupation*, but your *preoccupation* which is to please the Lord Jesus in everything you do, wherever God has placed you. You ask, “How can I be used right here for the sake of the Gospel?” Paul dealt with this question in detail in 1 Cor.7.

What we all have to guard against is getting entangled – distracted – all wrapped up and preoccupied with – the things of this world, while we live in it. For you and me in 2021, that might mean slavishly following the news, and putting way too much importance on politics.

- When I was in the Philippines back in 2011, I remember Nilo pulling me aside. He said, Pastor Doug I want your opinion: Can a pastor be involved in politics? I didn’t know what he was talking about, but he told me that one of the pastors he had trained up and sent out was pastoring in a town that needed a mayor, and he wanted to run for office. He thought he could be a witness and he could also use some extra money! I was thinking it over, but he jumped in and said, “I say no! Absolutely not! A pastor is called to preach the Word and shepherd the flock and cannot do anything else! If any of our pastors takes any other job he will be cut off from our support!” Okay.

Is there anything in your life that is weakening your total dedication to Christ and the Gospel? Anything that has you tangled up? Earthbound? Extricate yourself! Cut the cords. Re-dedicate yourself to Christ.

- Luke 9:61–62 Someone said to Jesus: “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” ⁶²Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

B. The Athlete - discipline.

- 2 Timothy 2:5 ⁵An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Timothy was in Ephesus, which had a huge gymnasium, an athletic field, and a stadium all within several hundred feet of each other. Everyone in that day knew about the Olympic games in Greece, the Isthmian Games in Corinth. Star athletes were as famous then as they are now, so Paul drew on that cultural connection and used sports illustrations at least 14 times.

His point here is that an athlete had to be disciplined to keep the rules of the game in order to win the prize—

- Everyone competing in the ancient Olympic games had to swear an oath to Zeus to observe a rigorous 10 month training before they could compete. And then every game had its own strict

rules. It didn't matter how strong or fast you were, if you violated one of the rules, you were disqualified.

- Some of you remember Ben Johnson, the Jamaican runner who set the world record for the 100 meter, and won a gold medal at the 1988 Olympics. He was given the title, "The World's Fastest Man," but it was all erased and his medal lost because he was caught doping.
- Lance Armstrong lost 7 Tour de France titles due to his doping.
- Barry Bonds broke all sorts of records when he played for the SF Giants. Why isn't he in the Baseball Hall of Fame? He was a dooper.

Great athletes, but they broke the rules. As disciplined as they were in exercising their bodies, they lacked discipline in their own character. The whole point of sports is to win, to cross the finish line – and to do it according to the rules, because if you don't, you *lose* even if you win.

- 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 ²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Many commentators say that Paul is saying here: "Be careful to follow the rules of the race, or you might be disqualified—you will still go to heaven, but without the rewards." But the wreath we strive for is imperishable – he is talking about salvation! And to be disqualified is to miss salvation in Christ.

This is sobering stuff! Paul said that even if he flaked out, stopped running – it would prove that he was never really saved. If Paul had to keep up his discipline, beloved, so do we. "So," Paul says, "I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my *body* and keep it under control."

- How many names and faces come to my mind right now? – of people who were part of this church family, served here, taught here – I'm thinking of people who preached here, taught at MCS – and they are no longer walking with the Lord, some don't even claim to be Christians. Maybe some of them will come back, but others never were believers.

The only way to know that's not you is to keep the rules – keep loving Jesus, keep killing sin. "*Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness!*" Paul told Timothy.

Finally, Paul says, see yourself like a hardworking, patient farmer.

C. The farmer – diligence (and patience).

- 2 Timothy 2:6 ⁶It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

"Hard-working" is one of Paul's favorite words – it means to labor to the point of exhaustion. Every farmer knows: no hard work – no harvest. There might be some glory or excitement associated with being a soldier or an athlete, but not with being a farmer! You get up early, you work hard, you go to bed early, and you do that day after day. I was brought up in the farmlands of Indiana. All my neighbors were farmers – not a glamorous bunch. But the reward for their hard work is the harvest.

Paul's point to Timothy here is what he says over in Gal.6.7: "*Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap!*" "Work hard for the Gospel, Timothy, because the harvest you reap will be in proportion to the work you put into it." Who brings the harvest? Only God. But He works through our work, and in proportion to our work to bring about the harvest—

- 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the *growth*. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Farmers can plow, and plant, and water, and pull the weeds, but they can't make one bean *grow* – only God the Creator can do that – right? Only God can save people, and cause Christians to grow – that's supernatural. You and I can't do either one. But God doesn't do either one apart from our efforts – our hard work is the means through which He has chosen to work in saving people, and growing them once they're saved. That's amazing!

- Old Ed Breazeale used to say, "There's nothing good in this world that comes without a lot of hard work." Amen.

So work hard for the Gospel, and expect God to produce the harvest, but also, *be patient*: Trust God to do His work in His own timing. Jesus told a little parable that is only found in Mark—

- Mark 4:26–29 ²⁶And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸The earth produces by itself (automate_), first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

We labor to the point of exhaustion, and we pray, and then we go to bed and get a good night's sleep! What? We don't fret and worry? No – there is a hidden, supernatural power at work, a hidden energy – *God* is at work, causing the growth. So we work, and then, we wait, and while we wait we go on with life. We can't judge what God is doing by what we observe, amen?

- *How many times have you seen God answer prayer in astounding ways, when it looked like nothing was happening? And then you kick yourself for being surprised!

Farmers work hard and then they wait patiently. They are at the mercy of God, aren't they? So are we. And isn't that a good place to be? I love what James said—

- James 5:7–8 ⁷Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. (He works, then he waits for what God will do.) ⁸You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, *for the coming of the Lord is at hand*.

Wait – he just jumped the fence – the coming of Jesus puts us into the next life. That's right: sometimes we see the harvest from our work in this life. But not always. The truth is, we're not going to see or know all of the harvest that God brought about from our work *until heaven*.

Years ago, someone in our church here used to sing a song about a person who died and went to heaven and saw a friend there—

Then someone called your name, You turned and saw this young man.
And he was smiling as he came, And he said friend you may not know me now

And then he said but wait, You used to teach my Sunday School, When I was only eight.
 And every week you would say a prayer, Before the class would start.
 And one day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus in my heart—
 Thank you for giving to the Lord, I am a life that was changed
 Thank you for giving to the Lord, I am so glad you gave

Then another man stood before you, And said remember the time
 A missionary came to your church, And his pictures made you cry
 You didn't have much money, But you gave it anyway
 Jesus took the gift you gave, And that's why I'm here today.
 Thank you for giving to the Lord, I am a life that was changed
 Thank you for giving to the Lord, I am so glad you gave.

Don't get discouraged and all bogged down by what you see in this life – or what you don't see: set your eyes on the prize that will be ours when Jesus comes back – and beloved, He is coming back!—

Beyond your warfare there is victory; beyond your sacrifices and discipline for the race, there is a crown; beyond all the hard work and waiting, there is a harvest. And Gods know us so well, look at what the Spirit inspired Paul to write in—

➤ 2 Timothy 2:7 ⁷Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

“Stop right now – this is a command – and meditate on what I've just said.” So that's how we are going to close this morning. Let' bow our heads and ask God to give us understanding—

*How are you going to be intentional to strengthen yourself by the grace that is in Christ Jesus?

*How are you intentionally passing the baton of faith to others? Who are you training, mentoring, discipling? Who will keep the Gospel going forth after you are gone?

*Are you completely dedicated to Christ and the Gospel like a good soldier?

*Are you disciplined – are you keeping the rules – like an athlete?

*Are you working hard – and waiting patiently, like a farmer?