

“We Will Also Reign with Him”

Happy Easter?

Christians mark Easter or Resurrection Day as a joyous occasion. We greet each other with “Happy Easter” or “Christ is risen” and we anticipate the response, “He is risen indeed.” Our joy is emphatic. This day and every Lord’s day we celebrate our Lord’s victory over death. He came back to life after death. He proved that his word is completely reliable. He validated all that he accomplished on the cross to remove our sin and restore us to fellowship with God. We mark this day not only as the first day of a new week but the first day of the new creation which will never end. For Christians, the first day is now the eternal last day, the eternal Sabbath, rest in Christ that lasts forever. Neither sin, nor death, nor Satan can disturb us because Jesus is our eternal resting place. Easter always falls in the Spring. Winter’s death has passed. New life springs from the earth. Expectation fills the air, inspiring poets like Robert Browning to write:

THE year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearl'd;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world!

Browning’s character does not see clearly enough. If we’re honest (despite the profound beauty in creation), all’s not right with the world. Headlines remain marked by violence and our hearts remain marked by fear. Sin still lurks like cancer within us and like a sniper around us. The curse continues. Death does not take a holiday. Suffering and sickness cycle as constantly as the seasons. Work in this world is too difficult. Relationships are too messy. Life is too painful. As soon as we live we begin to die. As we pass through this world, enemies oppose, obstacles impede, and distractions derail our best laid plans. Our physical ability weakens, our mental agility slows, our emotional stability falters, and our spiritual vitality drains.

Holy Calling, Hard Calling

Even more frustrating is that, if God is in his heaven and, therefore, there is a purpose to life, the world can seem more difficult. Those who are coasting seem to have it easy. Those with goals must swim upstream. Christians believe that life lived in God’s presence is a calling or set of callings. Every role or relationship defines a holy calling. Father, mother, son, daughter, spouse, teacher, student, friend, citizen, worker, church member, employee, manager, artist, and athlete – some of these and more describe how each Christian uniquely glorifies God. But just because a call comes from God does not make it easy to fulfill.

The Apostle Paul received a special call from the Lord and suffered under that call. When he came to die, Paul wrote a letter to a younger man with a similar call on his life. That man’s name is Timothy. He shared with Paul a call to preach the gospel and shepherd God’s people. He received the letter from Paul that we have in our Bible as 2 Timothy. Turn with me to 2 Timothy, where we will focus on the first half of chapter 2. You will find that on p. 995. of the Bibles provided. As he writes, Paul is concerned that, like so many others, Timothy may give up in the face of suffering.

Paul's purpose in this letter is to urge Timothy to endure to the end and to help Christians in his flock endure also. Enduring does not simply involve surviving until you run out the clock. It means pressing forward valiantly to the finish line – not giving up or going back. We live in a day in which many professing Christians, of various ages, have grown weary of the struggle. Like a ship in a storm, they throw their faith overboard thinking that it is too great a weight to survive the tempest. It will sink the ship. They may realize too late that what they threw away was the rudder necessary to steer the ship.

As we will see in a few moments, Paul is too invested in Timothy's life to let him make that mistake. He is unmistakably honest about how hard life is. But he assures Timothy that there are reasons for remaining faithful. There is strength to endure. That strength comes through what we celebrate today: Jesus Christ's victory over death in his resurrection. Follow as I read 2 Timothy 2:1-14a.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. 5 An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. 7 Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! 10 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. 11 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself. 14 Remind them of these things....

Entrust Yourself to Christ

Timothy, in himself, does not have what it takes to endure. If he is to fulfill his calling he must be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus (v. 1). This is a command. But it is a passive command. "Timothy entrust yourself to Jesus Christ so that, by his grace, he is your strength. Stop trying to find strength in yourself – in your youth, your abilities, your relationship with me, Paul. Rely only Jesus Christ." Where do you expect to find the strength to endure through life? Your health? It will fail. Your beauty? It will fade. Your physical strength? It will diminish. Your friends and family? They will disappoint you. Your cleverness? It will let you down. Your wealth? It will not give you what you really want. Jesus Christ alone is worthy of our trust. We do not offer him our strength but our weakness. He glorifies himself by giving grace (undeserved favor) to the helpless, those who admit their helplessness. Life is hard so that we will not try to live by our own resources.

Entrust the Gospel to Others

Yet relying on Jesus Christ does not mean doing nothing. In v. 2 there is an active command: entrust to faithful people. Our translation reads "men" but the word refers to human beings. Paul expects Timothy to serve by not merely teaching the gospel to others but entrusting it to them. They come to value it so much that they willingly and lovingly pass it on to others. Timothy's life is not about sharing good information, he is modeling and shepherding to hand down his greatest treasure to those in his care who inherit it. He loves them as family and cares for them as a good father. Paul entrusted the gospel to Timothy (see 1:13-14). Timothy must do the same.

Every Christian fulfills his or her call by entrusting others with the knowledge and skills and character necessary to glorify God through the gospel in a particular area of life. For example, if you are a Christian

teacher, your goal is that students come into a right relationship with the God by believing the gospel and then learn throughout life to the glory of God. You are entrusting the gospel through your work. If you are a mother, you are training your children to glorify God by first embracing the gospel and then applying it to all their responsibilities and relationships. Every believer is part of the chain of 2 Timothy 2:2.

Expect Suffering

Such a calling will not be easy. V. 3 adds another command: Share in suffering. Your calling requires suffering. Expect it. You will have to fight like a soldier (vv. 3-4). Fight against distractions that keep you from pleasing Jesus Christ, the commander who enlisted you in this calling. You will have to run like a marathon athlete (v. 5). Later in Ch. 2 we learn that this will mean running away from temptations that will destroy righteousness, faith, love and peace (v. 22). You will have to work hard like a farmer (v. 6) – long hours and messy chores – and then trust that the Lord will bring the harvest.

As Paul challenges Timothy and all of us, he says (v. 7) that we should “think” (another command). Count the cost. Consider what this will mean. But know that the Lord Jesus Christ will guide you as you rely on him to fulfill your calling. He will give you understanding. He will make you strong to face the difficulties. Here is a good reminder for us. We want to know God’s will. He wants to develop our minds so that we gain understanding. Parents should not do their son’s or daughter’s homework for them because the goal is not to get the right answer but to gain a better mind. When we face decisions, we want to know the right choice to make. God is far more concerned with maturing the one making the choice, you and me. Are you facing a decision? Use your mind and trust the Lord.

Endure by Remembering

So, we know that we have a calling and we know that the calling will be difficult. How do we endure? Paul answers the question in vv. 8-13. And he begins with another command: Remember. Remember Jesus Christ (v. 8). He cannot mean “remember” in the sense of “call to mind” as if Timothy may have forgotten who Jesus is. Paul has already mentioned Jesus Christ eleven times in this letter. He’s using “remember” as a synonym for “honor” or even “worship.” We take the bread and cup of communion in remembrance of Jesus and his death (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). We honor him by eating and drinking. We worship him. That’s what Paul commands Timothy. Honor Jesus Christ. Treasure him as so valuable that you entrust others to honor and worship him too. Paul’s emphasis here and throughout the letter is to honor Jesus Christ as risen from the dead. You can endure through suffering if you worship the living Jesus Christ.

If you were here last week, you may recall that the theme of the message was to focus on Christ’s glory in his death. So, which is it? Do we focus on Jesus’ death most of the time and then conveniently switch for Easter? Is there a contradiction here? I say “No” for this reason. Timothy traveled with Paul enough to know that he talked about Jesus’ death everywhere. He schooled Timothy in the gospel, the message that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. No one could accuse Paul of neglecting Christ’s crucifixion. But the crucifixion loses its effectiveness if Jesus is not alive. The sacrifice offered on the cross cannot be presented to God in the most holy place unless the high priest carries the blood there. If the high priest is dead, the offering is not acceptable to God. Sin and death have triumphed over God himself. Condemnation still rests on God’s people. Jesus lied when he promised to come back to life. Jesus died in vain. But none of this is true. Jesus is alive. He is Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. It is not simply that he came back to life and then died again like Lazarus. He took back his own life never to die again. Paul’s immediate concern is that Timothy, in the face of suffering, might forget to honor, worship and value Jesus in his resurrection. So, he

reminds Timothy what the resurrection means. Remember the resurrection so that you will not give up or give in but keep trusting the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Remember that:

- The Resurrection Means that Jesus Reigns Now and Forever

V. 8 declares that Jesus is David's offspring. Timothy knew the God's Old Testament promises that David (1000 years before Jesus) would have a faithful son to sit on his throne forever. This requires David having an endless line of descendants. Or, one of David's descendants must live forever. David left his throne when he died. His sons and grandsons failed to honor God. They died under God's discipline. Jesus, from David's family, had a legitimate claim to the throne. He lived a completely faithful life, unlike any of the others in his line. But Jesus had no children, no natural son. Jews are now scattered across the world. David's line has fizzled out. If Jesus is just another son of David sons who lived and died, then the ancient promise dies unfulfilled. Hopes for a coming kingdom are fantasy.

But Jesus rose from death and ascended, not to an earthly throne restricted to Jerusalem over a land in the middle east. He ascended to the throne of the universe with all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). Paul encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. In Acts 26 he described the light of Christ's glory as being brighter than the sun. He heard the voice of Jesus as king giving him the message that would turn people from Satan's kingdom to Christ's kingdom. This is the Jesus we worship this morning. This is the Jesus who reigns over the schemes of Scotland where Joe and Becca will see human beings come under his rule and form local churches as kingdom communities. This is the Jesus who reigns over Atchison and commissions us to represent him, living and proclaiming the gospel, calling our neighbors from eternal darkness into his marvelous light.

Christ's rule means that he has total control over the suffering of his people. V. 9 says that you can throw Paul into prison, but you cannot stop the gospel. The word of God is not bound. Paul has entrusted the gospel to so many. It continues to spread even as he is confined. His example of faithfulness through suffering is one means God is using to strengthen for faithfulness. The word of God is not bound. That word is a message of hope through the gospel. It is also a message of judgment. As David's Greater Son, Jesus will judge the whole world. Injustice will meet justice. Those who have inflicted suffering will suffer. Kingdoms that have opposed the gospel will crumble. Christians are waiting for Christ's kingdom to arrive in this enemy-occupied territory. One day this world will be restored. Pain and tears will be mere memories. But we are not waiting for Jesus to be crowned. He reigns now and forever because he is risen from the dead.

- The Resurrection Means that We Will Live and Reign with Jesus Forever

Vv. 11-13 comprise a poem or song circulating in the early church. Paul quotes it to affirm its central truth: Jesus Christ is alive. He will ensure that his suffering people are vindicated. Suffering is necessary but not permanent. Death is ahead, but it does not have the last word. The battle will rage but it will end. The race is long but there is a finish line. Farming is difficult, but the harvest will come. Yet, if Jesus is still dead, such promises are empty. Paul would be cruel to tell Timothy to share in suffering. For what? Paul is in prison with his wasted life about to end. If death is the last word for Jesus, then death is the last word for any who follow Jesus. Suffering is meaningless. But Paul assures Timothy that paradise has many thrones, enough for Christ's people to share in his eternal glory.

But who are Christ's people? Who can sing this hymn? V. 11 says that it is those who have died with Christ. They will live with him. This line of the song carries a double meaning. To die with Christ now is to believe that he died in your place. He died your death. Your sin and mine requires God's wrath so that God can

remain faithful to his holiness. As the song says in the last line, “He cannot deny himself.” God must punish sin.

And he has. The Bible describes Jesus death as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus endures the death sentence that rightly belongs to all who have committed treason against God, treating him as if he were not the true king. When a sinner places his hands on a sacrifice to be slaughtered, he is declaring, “I’m the one who deserves to die but this victim will give his life to spare mine.” To die with Christ is to place our hands of faith on Jesus and confess, “He died for me. He took my sins. He made them his own. He suffered hell in my place. I take my hands off my life and trust Jesus alone to give me new life and everlasting life.” Just as he kept his promise to come back to life, he will keep his promise to give life to all who believe in him. If you have never met this living Jesus Christ, talk with one of us after the service. We have a booklet called “Two Ways to Live” that reviews the message we proclaim about Jesus. Take a copy as our gift.

The second meaning of “die with Christ” applies when you fast forward to the end of life. You do not know when it will come. But you anticipate that, by his grace, you will endure. Because Jesus is praying for you, your faith will not fail. You will die with Jesus. You will still be holding his hand when you cross the river between this life and the life to come. True faith is sustained faith. It endures by grace.

- The Resurrection Means that You Cannot Dismiss Who Jesus Claims to Be

Our final word this morning is that Christ’s resurrection means that you must take him seriously. This hymn (or at least the section of it that Paul quotes) ends with two warnings (12b-14). Those who deny Jesus as the risen Lord will find that he denies them life after the coming judgment. Those who refuse to trust in him, who are faithless will not enjoy the blessings that will come to those who die with him. Jesus Christ cannot deny himself. He cannot deny that he has offered a sacrifice sufficient to wipe away any sin committed. He cannot deny that he rose again in triumph over all his enemies. He cannot deny that he holds all authority in heaven and earth and must judge sin if he is to remain faithful to his Father.

After quoting this hymn, Paul simply tells Timothy (beginning, v. 14), “Remind them of these things.” Paul reminded Timothy. He called his son in the faith to remember. He charges him to remind the people to whom he ministers of these truths. We celebrate today a long line of faithful proclaimers who, despite suffering, have continued to entrust the gospel to others across generations and cultures. Today, in this place of Christian worship, we have reminded you. We have reminded each other. Go and learn what this means, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.”