

## Remember Jesus

Our Old Testament and Gospel readings today include miraculous healings. The first is the healing of the Aramean commander, Naaman, as he washed himself seven times in the Jordan river. The second is Jesus' healing of the ten lepers, and the return of one.

One thing that these two stories share in common with the reading from 2 Timothy, is the idea of 'remembering': Naaman, the commander, could have immediately left for home following his healing, but instead he remembered and returned to Elisha and gave thanks to God; and of the ten lepers Jesus' healed, only one remembered to return to Jesus and give praise to God.

Together with these stories, Paul instructs Timothy to 'remember' Jesus. The context in 2 Timothy is that of suffering, specifically Paul's suffering in prison. It appears that Timothy had begun to feel ashamed that his mentor and father in the faith was imprisoned, and he may have been reluctant to share the same suffering – maybe due to fear, or maybe because of a mistaken belief that suffering for Christ would discredit the gospel message and bring shame to Jesus.

To correct and comfort Timothy, Paul instructs – in fact, commands – him to 'remember' Jesus "raised from the dead, a descendant of David."<sup>1</sup> This was the essence of Paul's gospel.

To remember that Jesus was raised from the dead, was a reminder, firstly, that Jesus himself suffered, and His sufferings culminated in His death. Even Jesus had to walk the way of the cross and taste death before being exalted.<sup>2</sup>

Suffering, therefore, was not something Timothy needed to be ashamed of; nor was it only the experience of Jesus' followers – Jesus' experienced suffering as well. But Jesus was 'raised from the dead'. Death did not defeat the Son of God, so Timothy need not fear if suffering approached,<sup>3</sup> for even if suffering resulted in death, victory would await him on the other side.

To remember that Jesus was a descendant of David was probably a reminder of several things. Firstly, just as Jesus' resurrection proved He was the Son of God,<sup>4</sup> so the fact He was descended from David proved He was fully human. (Go and read the genealogies of Jesus at the beginning of Matthew and Luke.<sup>5</sup>) Secondly, being a descendant of

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 2:8

<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 376

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 377

<sup>4</sup> See Romans 1:4

<sup>5</sup> See Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; Romans 1:3

David ‘qualified’ Jesus’ to be the Christ, for according to the Old Testament, the Christ would be a descendant of David.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, just as David had been a conquering warrior and king, so Jesus is king over all, and conqueror of death.

Combined, these things – what Paul calls his gospel – are a strong comfort to Timothy, and to all who suffer as Jesus suffered.

And it is for this Jesus – the One who suffered, died, and was raised – that Paul now suffers, ‘even to the point of being chained like a criminal.’<sup>7</sup> Paul suffers in chains unjustly, but the irony is that once-upon-a-time, Paul himself had bound believers in Jesus and thrown them in prison; now he suffers the same fate.<sup>8</sup>

But even though Paul is chained, the word of God is not chained. The Word of God cannot be contained; it cannot be rendered powerless. In Isaiah 55:11 God testifies of His word:

*so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

In another place, the word of God is described as ‘alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.’<sup>9</sup>

And because Paul knows these things, he endures.

*“Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect.” (10)*

*Therefore...* because Paul knows the word of God cannot be chained, it cannot be rendered powerless, he endures everything.

To endure means “to stay one’s ground” or “to hold out.”<sup>10</sup> It refers to perseverance, especially in the face of persecution.<sup>11</sup> And Paul had suffered significant persecution. He listed his persecutions in 2 Corinthians 11: imprisonments, countless floggings, five

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<sup>6</sup> See 2 Samuel 7:12-13 and Isaiah 9:6-7

<sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 2:9

<sup>8</sup> See Acts 9. Aída Besançon Spencer, 2 Timothy and Titus: A New Covenant Commentary, ed. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 101

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 4:12

<sup>10</sup> I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 737

<sup>11</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000)

times he received forty lashes minus one; three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned.

And yet, in Romans, Paul would write, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.”<sup>12</sup>

Who, however, are the ‘elect’ for whose sake Paul endures?

The word ‘elect’ means *chosen*, so Paul endures suffering for *the chosen*. That’s also the name of a television series about the life of Jesus, but in this context, the ‘chosen’ are those whom God has appointed to become believers in Jesus Christ.

Can we know who the chosen are? No, we can’t. This is knowledge known only to God. However, we need not fear whether God has chosen us or not, for in one sense everyone is chosen, for God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.<sup>13</sup> The question is not whether we are chosen, but whether we believe. What is our response to the knowledge we have about Jesus? We, all of us in this room, are privileged to have heard the name of Jesus; most of us have heard the gospel story many times; the question is what we do with this knowledge.

But Paul’s suffering has a purpose: “... that [the elect] may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” Bear in mind Paul is not saying his imprisonment itself is the cause of salvation for the elect. Paul is not saying that his life has any salvific effect. Paul’s suffering, his imprisonment, does not bring about salvation for anyone.

Rather it is the cause of Paul’s suffering that brings salvation – Paul’s preaching of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who brings salvation, and Paul willingly preaches Christ, and suffers the consequences of doing so, that the elect – those chosen by God – might ‘obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.’

Paul tells Timothy all of this to encourage him to continue to preach the gospel, even if it results in persecution, for he need not be concerned that suffering for Christ brings shame to Christ. For Jesus suffered, and now Paul suffers, and Timothy too must be prepared to suffer for the sake of the gospel of Jesus; he must be prepared to endure, to stand his ground.

The passage began with the words “Remember Jesus Christ.”

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:18

<sup>13</sup> 1 Timothy 2:3-4

I wonder if we're sometimes guilty of not remembering Jesus. We come to church on Sunday morning, but by Sunday afternoon, Jesus is a distant memory, and His claim on our lives a faint echo.

The late, great John Stott, once wrote:

"... the human memory is notoriously fickle: it is possible to forget even one's own name! The epitaph over Israel's grave was 'they soon forgot', and it was to overcome our forgetfulness of Christ crucified that [Jesus] deliberately instituted his supper as a feast of remembrance, a fragrant 'forget-me-not'. Even so the church has often forgotten Jesus Christ, absorbing itself instead now in barren theological debate, now in purely humanitarian activity, now in its own petty, parochial business.

How and why, then, are we to remember Christ? Essentially because he is the gospel."<sup>14</sup>

We need to remember Jesus, because He is the gospel. He is the good news, of God's love come down. He is the good news of a Saviour who seeks and saves the lost. He is the good news of hope in this life and beyond; he is the good news that peace is possible – even if it comes through suffering, sacrifice, and forgiveness. He is the good news that there is enough for everyone, if only we will rid ourselves of selfishness and greed, and follow His way of radical generosity. Jesus is the gospel; He is the good news.

But so often, we forget. We forget Whose we are. We forget the extravagant love of God, and we forget our purpose for living. So, we need to be told to remember. Maybe, we need to be commanded to remember – that is what Paul did to Timothy.

We need to remember that Jesus was raised from the dead – the implication being that Jesus Christ died for us – and paid the terrible, beautiful, price that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God; and not only us, but all the elect – all those whom God in his mercy and wisdom has chosen for salvation. This need to remember, includes us – that God desires that we be saved.

So, I implore you today, remember Jesus. Not just right now, not just this afternoon, but tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day, and the next.

Remember Jesus.

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<sup>14</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 61