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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

A Cause Worth Suffering For

2 Timothy 2:1-13

INI

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and our Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is able to make us wise unto salvation. Today our attention is drawn to the Apostle Paul's second letter to Pastor Timothy. This letter strikes a personal note, in which we find the Apostle bound in Rome, a prisoner, on death's roe, as he says, "the time of my departure has come." We read today from chapter 2, those God-breathed farewell words of Paul,

2 Timothy 2:1–13 ¹ You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. ³ You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. ⁵ And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. ⁷ Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. ⁸ Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹ This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. ¹² If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. ¹³ If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

A Cause Worth Suffering For

1. Because the God who enlisted you is faithful
2. Because the word of the gospel is unbounded
3. Because God's chosen people will obtain
salvation by His grace

Let us PRAY: Oh Lord, sanctify us by Your Truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.

In Jesus name, dear fellow redeemed,

Is it really all worth it? Maybe these words have been your words. Maybe these words were the words of Naomi and Ruth (see Old Testament lesson: Ruth 1). The loss of a husband. The loss of two sons. Why go on. In the words of the psalmist David, "How long, O Lord? How long?"

The French have a phrase for it: *Esprit de corps* (is-,prē-də-'kòr) – lit., the spirit of the body. We refer to it as "morale." It is the spirit which drives the body. It is the morale which motivates a person or group in the midst of opposition and hardship.

There are several reasons why low morale creeps into a soldier's mindset. One possibility is that he doesn't trust the leadership of the person who enlisted him. Another is that he's convinced the strategy is doomed. And a third is that he doesn't see progress being made and the end goal seems out of reach. Whatever the case, an army that doesn't believe in its cause is bound to fail.

The question which the Holy Spirit seeks to answer today: Is this cause of God's gospel mission really a cause worth suffering for?

1. Because the God who enlisted you is faithful

One possible reason that low morale would affect a soldier's mindset is that he doesn't trust the leadership of the person who enlisted him. It could also be that the leader who enlisted him is corrupt and untrustworthy. He's the type of guy who abandons ship, takes the only life boat, and leaves the crew for dead. Is this the God who enlisted you?

What was it that led Peter to the tragic point of defection? You'll recall Peter sure and certain confidence. He stood bold in Garden of Gethsemene. "If all should stumble, I will not. If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"

Peter was walking the plank of pride. Because where was his morale based. It was within. Peter's *esprit de corps* was a morale based in a cause that was hopeless. Who was it that abandoned ship? Who was it that saved his own neck, taking the last life boat, and leaving Jesus for dead? As His Lord passes through in chains, Peter says it: "I do not know the man."

And are you and I so much different? When things are going good – we think we could do anything. Nice cushion in the bank account; kids are healthy; job is secure; I'm fit as a fiddle. See how our morale has become entangled in the affairs of this life? See how

to our confidence and happiness rest in what we're able to accomplish? "Lord if all should stumble, I will not."

Suddenly tragedy strikes. Your finances are hit by an unforeseen disaster. Your son contracts a disease with little hope of recovery. That job that was so secure is gone. Or you are diagnosed with a chronic illness. So quickly that morale is zapped. We've been entangled in this life. Sin has twisted the circumstances. We are ready to abandon ship.

v.12 If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

We've forgotten the cause. We've lost sight of the one who enlisted us. What was it that kept Naomi and Ruth going?

8 Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel,

This is our *esprit de corps* – Remembering Jesus. Remember Jesus, who did not abandon ship. Of the seed of David, He was born of a human mother, born under the curse and suffering that we experience. In chains, He was led forth to the front lines for us; every step; every sorrow; every moment of suffering. On the cross, God entangled Himself in the twisted sins and guilt of each little defection of our sinful flesh. On the cross, Jesus proved God's cause to be worth suffering for; He proved you to be a cause worth dying for.

8 Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel,

Remember Jesus raised from the dead. God did not abandon His Son to the grave. He did not abandon Naomi or Ruth. He will not leave you for dead either. The resurrection of Jesus gave birth to a new hope; a living hope. Your sins are forgiven. This is the Spirit which drives your body in times of suffering.

⁴ No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

God's gospel mission is to keep you in strong in His grace, trusting that the One who enlisted you is faithful.

2. Because the word of the gospel is unbounded

Another reason a soldier might defect is that he's convinced the strategy is doomed. He doesn't see progress being made.

Should he give up? As the Apostle Paul dictates these words, a Roman soldier patrols past his door. He's a captive. He's accused of evildoing, stirring up the crowds, leading a cause that threatened the *pax Romana*. What sort of death awaits him? The lions of the coliseum? Tied to a post and turned to death? Crucifixion? Perhaps it slips into Paul's thinking ... Is it all worth it? What will become of this mission of the gospel after I'm gone? What will become of Timothy as he faces the same persecution I am facing? But Paul recognized God's cause does not rest in him ...

v.9 I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.

You might feel that there are many limitations in your own abilities to tell someone else about Jesus. You might even feel chained to your weaknesses and insecurities. What will the ramifications be? What about the embarrassment if they don't want to listen? The risk ... the risk of saying something wrong, a question I can't answer? What about if they make fun of me? Well, in Paul's case, the risks went much further – to the point of chains.

Even after all this ... After spending countless hours on evangelism, in outreach meetings, sending out pamphlets, holding seminars, inviting others to church, risking ourselves by telling someone about Jesus – Even after all this we might see no results.

But that is not where our morale lies. It is not in earthly, visible results.

God had to remind His people through the prophet Isaiah,

Isaiah 55:9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Our *esprit de corps* is a matter of faith. The chains that held Paul behind locked doors could not restrain the message that he had written, spoken, and that he was living even while dying. It was unchained as went with Pastor Timothy. It is unchained as it goes with you, accomplishing the thing which God purposes. It goes forth from God's mouth, it fills our hope, it touches our tongue, it echoes in our actions ...

The gospel is unbounded. This is a cause worth suffering for.

3. Because God's chosen people will obtain salvation by His grace

Yet a third reason for depleted morale is that the soldier loses sight of the end goal. He loses sight of the people and the cause he is serving. Will God see it through? That is the real question. Not just "is it worth it" but "will this mission really reach its intended goal?"

10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

This is the mission of God's gospel. That the elect, the chosen people of God obtain salvation. It is the cause for which God gave His only Son. It is God's intended goal that you and all who believe might obtain salvation by His grace.

To be elect is to be chosen.

Ephesians 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Maybe you've lost sight of the end goal, because you just don't see the progress in your own life. Your marriage is a daily lesson in miscommunication. Some addiction, some habit never seems to go away as much as you try. Anger flares up again; You're frustrated because you as you face problems you can't solve. You're bombarded by the chains of responsibility, kids, home, work, you name it – and it seems you rather than heading toward God's goals, you're simply heading wherever the hardship takes you.

v.1 be strong in His grace. It this election to God's eternal goal rested in you or me or how happy and polished our life looked – we would truly have reason to give up. We could never do it. We could never unshackle ourselves from the chains this world places on us. But the word is not chained. God's cause and the morale we need to remain in it is driven by a grace that cannot be restrained. It will meet its destined goal. You will meet your destined goal – obtaining salvation.

To be among the elect is not to be complacent or self-assured. It is to rely solely on the grace of God. *v.1 Be strong in His grace.* It is to struggle, to suffer, to pray, to be confused, to repent, to trust. It is to join Ruth and Naomi in the next journey and to do

so hand in hand, for the sake of the elect. Your election and salvation is not a choice that we make, it is a choice that God makes. And God is faithful.

And so we remember the words of the hymn we're about to sing: *Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus, going on before.* This is our *esprit de corps*. "The Spirit of the body." For in Christ's death and resurrection, this body of believers is given God's Spirit. It boosts your morale as you remember that hidden away in your own sufferings – God is working, God is unchaining His word, God is obtaining salvation for His people.

v.3 endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

This is a cause worth suffering for –

1. Because the God who enlisted you is faithful
2. Because the word of the gospel is unbounded
3. Because God's chosen people will obtain salvation by His grace

Amen.