

Ready! Set! Go!
The Ultimate Motivation for Perseverance
2 Timothy 2:8-13

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Text Introduction: We are going through this wonderful book called 2 Timothy which is actually a letter from Paul to Timothy. Paul writes from prison. He is preparing Timothy to take the mantle of leadership. His general theme is a call to perseverance. I am calling this series: Ready, Set, Go. We have learned of a basic foundation of perseverance. We said you must know what you believe, build upon what you believe, and guard what you believe. We learned how that faith is passed on from one generation to another. In fact, we said that it is life's highest calling. We have spoken about some not so obvious keys to perseverance including listening to reliable teachers, leaning on those who refresh us, and learning to reproduce in others what we have learned. Last week we saw 3 pictures of perseverance. I think what we are seeing is Paul's crescendo-like encouragement to Timothy to persevere in the midst of whatever it is that he is suffering through specifically, but also a general call to persevere in the calling upon his life. Both this specific appeal and general appeal are important to us.

Many see in this text before us today the climax of his Paul's appeal. That is why I am calling this message today, "The Ultimate Motivation for Perseverance."

Text: Keep your attention on Jesus Christ as risen from the dead and descended from David. This is according to my gospel.⁹ I suffer for it to the point of being bound like a criminal, but God's message is not bound. ¹⁰This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹This 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 will also deny us;
¹³ if we are faithless, He remains faithful,
for He cannot deny Himself.

Introduction: During the Civil War, the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, was forced to close for the indefinite future. Most of its students went off to war, the faculty went unpaid, no classes were taught, and the buildings fell into disrepair. The future of the school looked bleak. However, every day President Benjamin Ewell walked from his home to the college chapel and rang the steeple bell loudly and defiantly. In the face of overwhelming challenges, he wanted the college to survive and someday open its doors again. It did, and over a century later, it is one of the colleges with the best academic reputations in America. He had a motivation, and that motivation kept him persevering.

We have said that this is a letter of perseverance. Things are not good. Paul is in prison, the church is under persecution, false teachers are prevailing, some of the church had deserted, and Timothy is

vulnerable. Paul writes this letter of encouragement to Timothy to hang on. His letter to Timothy stands as a strong reminder to us.

We have reached a major point in this letter. Paul has outlined a basic foundation for perseverance, has warned of those who have already fallen away, has offered some analogies of perseverance, but now he drops the exclamation point. Remember Jesus! Here in these few verses starting with Jesus, we find the ultimate motivation to persevere.

The Preeminence, Person, and Passion of Jesus

Paul exhorts Timothy, “Keep your attention on Jesus Christ.” Other translations might render this, “Remember Jesus!” The literal rendering is probably a combination of both of these translations. A good translation from the original language would be something like “Keep on remembering.” Paul is not so much calling Timothy to remember the past event of the resurrection, but to keep on remembering, thus keep your attention on Jesus Christ.

What should we keep on remembering? Well, first, we are to remember that He is risen from the dead. Again, this is more than just the past historical event of the resurrection, but we are to remember the power of the resurrection. We are to remember that in His resurrection, we live. We are to remember that because of His resurrection, He is forever with us. This is His preeminence!

William Barclay said of this text:

Here is the great Christian inspiration. We do not depend on a memory, however great. We enjoy the power of a presence. When a Christian is summoned to a great task that he cannot but feel is beyond him, he must go to it in the certainty that he does not go alone, but that there is with him forever the presence and the power of his risen Lord. When fears threaten, when doubts assail, when inadequacy depresses, remember the presence of the risen Lord. (The Daily Bible Study Series, 164.)

But not only the resurrection, we are to remember the person of Jesus. The phrase here is “and descended from David.” Paul is calling us to remember that Jesus while God, was very much human. The suffering that He endured, was very much real. His deity did not keep Him from feeling the pain and agony of life and death. This is what motivates us in our own suffering. This is what motivates us to endure in our lives. We remember Jesus.

We are also to remember His passion—the Gospel. Remember that the Gospel means “good news.” Why did Jesus endure? He endured for our good. He endured for our salvation. He endured so that we could overcome. He endured so that we could be reconciled to God. This is His passion. He endured ultimately so that we might have eternal life with Him. This is the good news, and this good news serves as our ultimate motivation.

The Power of the Word of God

In verse 8, the motivating factor is Jesus; in verse 9, the motivating factor is the Word of God. Paul starts by indicating his being bound, but then this quickly moves him to referencing the fact that the Word of God is never bound. Though his ministry may be hindered for the moment, the ministry of the Word is

never hindered. This ought to motivate us. This ought to remind us that our work of evangelism and witness is not dependent upon us.

Some years ago a missionary friend of mine wrote about the power of the Word of God this way.

On Thursday the team discussed the impact the stories have had on their lives in the last twelve months. Mawa said, "When a problem came on me I used to groan and complain and cry 'what can I do?' But now when something difficult happens I go to be alone and I pray and God answers. God has been giving me dreams of providing for me. He is teaching me to trust. Even the things he showed me in the dreams are coming true." Grace said, "Although I have been a Christian for many years I am very different from last year. Formerly I could go on sinning but my prayers were not being answered. But now when temptation comes the stories come into my mind and help me stand firm. If my child is sick or if there is no medicine and no money I just pray and the sickness can leave. Sometimes I have had no food to feed my family but after prayer God does a miracle and brings us what we need." As the group discussed a close friendship with God we were able to conclude that some common things are happening in their lives by learning the Word of God and obeying it. 1) their ability to face temptation has grown 2) their ability to trust God has grown 3) their prayers are being answered. It is interesting we have not done any specific teaching about prayer or temptation or trusting God. However, collectively the stories are doing this. We praise the Lord that He uses His Word in wonderful ways to transform lives. (Newsletter from Stan Wafler on January 8, 2007)

The Purpose of the Work

In verse 10, we learn a third reason that motivates us toward endurance. We are reminded here of the purpose of our work. Our purpose is eternal. Once we realize the full scope of the eternal nature of our work, we cannot quit.

There is no work that is greater. Your purpose at work is good, but not greater than eternity. Your purpose in civic life is good, but not eternal. Your work might be important, but it is not eternal. As a believer, our work is eternal, and this must serve as our motivation to never quit.

The Promise of Reward

Then, we come to verses 11-13. These verses are believed to be something of a hymn of the first century church. The hymn speaks of the judgment and reward to come. This also compels us to finish strong.

Like President Ewell, we have come to ring the bell again this morning. It is stubbornly ringing hope in the midst of despair. No matter how evil this world seems, no matter how bleak things appear, we still have hope because of Christ. We look forward to His coming back for us and to our enjoying eternity with Him in heaven. *OUR RINGING HOPE* is a reminder that the way things are now is not the way they will always be. (Steve Lemke, from an E-Thoughts devotional) And so we fight on! As the writer of Hebrews declared, we keep our eyes on Jesus. We keep our eyes on the ball of knowing Him and making Him known.