

Soldier, Athlete, Farmer

by J. Glyn Owen

The Christian's calling is to be a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer, with the goal of passing on the gospel intact through ongoing, long-term ministry.

Duration: 50:20

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of perseverance and dedication in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. He compares the work of sharing the gospel to that of a farmer, soldier, and athlete. The speaker emphasizes that it is not enough to simply start the work, but one must continue and endure through the challenges and monotony. He also discusses the motives that should drive believers in their mission, highlighting the need to be focused and not entangled in worldly affairs.

Transcript

Let us turn together to the Word of God that was read for us by Mr. Lowe, echoes of which we heard in the duet sung for us. We turn to 2 Timothy chapter 2, and we're going to read once again verses 1 to 6. I would like these words to be fairly clear in our minds tonight as we come to the message before us. They embody some very important practical principles for the people of God in the outworking of God's purpose for us as members of his church.

Paul writes to Timothy, and these are his words. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Endure hardship. I'm sorry. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs. He wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. May the Spirit of God help us as we reflect upon these words, and may we be given that promised insight.

Soldiers, athletes, farmers. Now, in the previous chapter, the Apostle Paul has been stressing the greatness of the gospel that was committed to him, or entrusted to him by God as a kind of deposit. That is a word that is used here.

It is rightly translated, it's like a deposit you put in the bank, the money you place to your account. And the gospel has been given by God, it has been entrusted to us. He has deposited with us the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

That is not our gospel in the first place. We may make it our own by faith in Jesus, by acceptance of it. But it is the gospel of God.

This is very important. It did not originate with man or in man, it came from God. God thought it out in the first place.

He loved it into being. He sent his Son. And when the Son of God had finished what was given him to do, he returned and the Father and the Son sent forth the Holy Spirit to apply the finished work of Christ to men in need.

It is all of God. It is God who began it. It was he who conceived it.

It is he who imparts it. It is he who sustains it. It is all of God.

And this gospel of God was entrusted to this once arch enemy of the Christian church. God entrusted to him this good news of salvation, with all that is involved in it. And here the Apostle Paul has much to say about it.

But now moving into chapter 2, he reminds his young son, as he calls him, Timothy, of the privilege that is his. Because Paul the Father has now in turn transmitted the same gospel, the deposit that God gave Paul, he has now handed on intact, unmodified, unqualified, in all its pristine glory. The Apostle says, I've handed it over to you, Timothy, and now I want you to be very careful what you do with it.

I want you to hold on to it in one sense, in another sense I want you to hand it over to some other people. I've handed it over to you and you must in turn hand it over to other people, other people who in their turn will likewise discover faithful, reliable, teachable men and women to whom they can give it. And thus the gospel pass down through the generations of time and the church of Jesus Christ extend into ever new territory and be strengthened in the process of its advancement.

Paul stresses two things here. He stresses the importance of Christian character, the strength of character that is necessary for this kind of ministry. Timothy was a very young fellow and he was very timid.

There is evidence here that he was quite a nervous young man. I don't want to go into the details. But Paul starts, as it were, this aspect of his teaching by telling him to be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

He doesn't say to him, look Timothy, you can do it. He wasn't teaching the kind of semi-paganism that is taught today. You can do it.

Think you can do it. Believe you can do it. And therefore you will do it.

That is a humanistic psychology based on a humanistic and pagan philosophy. It is contrary to the word of God. That's not what Paul told Timothy.

He knew that Timothy could not do it. Nevertheless, he knew that Timothy could do it. That sounds Irish, doesn't it? Well, Irish it is.

He knew that Timothy could do what Timothy by nature could not do. You ask how? For this reason. Because the young, immature Timothy could be strengthened in the grace which is in Christ who is in him.

That is not the emphasis to which I want to come tonight. I want to come to the strategy of the Christian in passing on the gospel, in the spread of the gospel to this amazing and unchanging principle which is here enunciated. You notice what it is.

It's a very simple one, but it has never been withdrawn. And I don't think we can ever better it. First of all, God gave us the gospel.

He gave the gospel to the apostles. The apostles handed the gospel to others. And those in turn have handed the gospel down until it has come into the 20th century to Europe, to the Americas, and here we are in the heart of Moxtonite The gospel has been handed down from generation to generation by Christian men and Christian maid and we have it intact.

In all its apostolic glory and in all its divine excellence we have the gospel of God in our hands and I trust in our hearts. But now, we in turn must, according to the apostle here and elsewhere, we must discover men, reliable men, teachable men and women, humble people to whom we can transmit the gospel who will in their day and generation, in their circumstances be able to do exactly the same thing. And this is how the apostle envisaged the growth of the gospel.

Men passing on the deposit intact. Men and women first receiving it from God not trying to change it, modify it, qualify it, add to it or take away from it but passing it on. You can never pass this gospel on in its glory, in its fullness, without something happening.

Sooner or later men and women will come to a knowledge of the Saviour and of God in Christ and the church of Christ will come into existence and will be strengthened and will expand as this principle is followed. Now before I come to what we really have in our text let me just remind you that this really is what has been happening throughout Christian history. This has been the main strategy of the Christian church throughout the centuries and it happens in many ways.

If I were to devote my time to giving you many examples we could be here for a very long time but just let me give you one that I came across only yesterday as I was browsing over this theme I came across a passage in one of the a writer of a former age and he was speaking, he was writing about some such theme as this in the midst of which he breaks out and he says this he writes in these terms and I quote Richard Sibbes, the old Puritan he says wrote a little book called The Bruised Reed one day that book fell into the hands of a tin peddler who gave it to a boy called Richard Baxter who through reading it became in time the saintly believer and minister of the word Richard Baxter of Kidderminster in process of time Baxter wrote a book called A Call to the Unconverted and by doing so he

kindled the flame in the heart of Philip Doddridge who in turn wrote a book called The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul this latter book fell into the hands of William Wilberforce changed that man's life and led the great emancipator of the slaves to write his own book A Practical View of Christianity by reading

this the heart of Lee Richmond underwent a strange blossoming and as one result he wrote The Dairyman's Daughter which besides being the most powerful religious influence in the life of Queen Elizabeth had a good deal to do with the transformation of the great Thomas Chalmers who in his turn touched the whole world for God can you see it? pass it on says the apostle you received the deposit it's the dynamic of God it's the word of life it's the seed that brings forth

eternal life in the soul you've got it, you've been given it pass it on now let us turn to what the apostle has to say in the words before us there are three main things I would like us to note Paul uses three metaphors which we have brought together in our title he sees the Christian in terms of a soldier an athlete and a farmer and he brings the three together here in order to give a measure of completeness to the picture of the Christian man or woman involved in the outworking of the purposes of God in the gospel now first of all I want us to look at the manifold nature of our calling you see no one metaphor no one image or metaphor will suffice to convey the full nature of the Christian's duty in terms of spreading the gospel if we continually harp upon one metaphor, one image we'll

probably go astray we need all the images and we need them all together and it is only when we are constantly reading the word of God and bringing together all the several strands that belong to this theme that we can have a wholesome portrait and picture in our minds of what a Christian man ought to be the soldier image endure hardships says Paul in verse 3 endure hardship along with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ the Christian needs to see himself as a soldier on active duty for his divine Lord now all that is involved in what Paul said I can't go into detailed exposition but it is all involved a Christian man needs to see himself as involved in warfare and he's involved in it whether he likes it or not and he is on one side against the other he's not neutral, he's involved in a

war now this simple image is of course self-explanatory and yet we have to say something about it haven't we there is a war on you know do I need to say that? there is a war on a spiritual war you and I are not called into a school of philosophy or theology for that matter your calling to be a Christian was a call into warfare and there is no such thing as coming to Christ without being involved in the warfare that he has initiated and he will culminate it is an idle dream for us to imagine that becoming Christians is coming into an easy chair where nothing happens only singing and joying all the day and all the night brothers and sisters if we've heard the Christian call it is to make war with sin and Satan for our Lord is at war the comfort that characterizes the lives of so many of us

belies the reality of our Christian profession we are men and women without wounds and we are without wounds because we've rarely skirted the scenes of battle there is a war on and the believer whether he likes it or not by his very association with Jesus Christ is involved in war you're in trouble, you're in war neither is the Christian a mere toy soldier nor a reserved soldier to be called into the battle when things go difficult every Christian by his very calling and constitution is at war with sin and Satan and is on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ and is member of his body limbs of his body through whom he performs the tasks of his choice and his task is a warring task being a Christian you and I are the custodians of the truth that constitute the gospel and as such we simply

cannot be neutral to be neutral is to deny our Lord having the truth we have to oppose the forces that oppose the truth and we have to seek by the grace of God to conquer men and women for Christ to persuade men and women of the gospel and its truth and its glory and of our Christ are you seriously enlisted in battle? there is a false notion of the gospel abroad and it misses out this concept of Christian truth entirely it suggests that you can be with the Lord Jesus and live with him and even serve him and yet

you never get into battle I suggest to you in all seriousness that that is not found in the New Testament a Christian is a soldier in battle then there is the athlete metaphor if anyone competes as an athlete says the apostle Paul and I don't need to finish his sentence I simply

want to refer to the metaphor an athlete whereas the soldier image helpfully points to the existence of an objective foe whom we must first identify then resist and then overcome this athletic image calls attention more specifically to our own personal fitness for battle and whatever our Lord requires of us we are to be athletes we are to be in the pink of condition spiritually we are to be men and women who are fit for Christ Paul has much more to say about this in this very chapter you follow it through to be prepared unto every good work to have every muscle attuned and every part of our spiritual body as it were attuned by the will of God exercised ready to do exactly what he wants us to do ready for anything in the peak of condition the Christian life is regularly likened in the New

Testament to a race takes us into the athletic field not in the sense that we are competing against each other though we are as the writer as Paul in Romans is it not tells us we are to outdo one another in showing honor but the idea here is not that we are competing with one another but rather we are running the race and we are to run it the picture in the New Testament is that we are to be athletes in the sense that we are to be devoted to training and to strenuous training like the athlete you read a passage like 1 Corinthians 9 beginning with verse 24 and you will see what the apostle is after indeed let me turn to it it's a passage which describes the the kind of thing that he has in mind do you not know he says that in a race all the runners run but only one gets the prize run in

such a way as to get the prize everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training they do it to get a crown that will not last but we do it to get a crown that will last forever now listen to this that's general therefore says the apostle I do not run like a man running aimlessly I do not fight like a man beating the air have you seen boxers shadow boxing that's what Paul says here I'm not shadow boxing I'm not using my energy to fight the air he says I have an enemy and I aim my blows at the real enemies and then he goes on to say this no no he says I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others I myself will not be disqualified for the prize how many of us find that we are slaves to our bodies Paul says I make my body my slave to do what I wanted

to do I am the master the body is the slave and in order to do this he says I have to be an athlete I have to go through my paces I have to go through my exercises in an earlier day some of our fathers used to speak about spiritual exercises by which they meant if you were asked have you been through your spiritual exercises today they would mean have you really been in prayer with God have you read his word have you worshipped him have you been in conversation with him have you obeyed him have you been out on obedience are you involved in the deeds and the activities of your master have you gone through your exercises and need I remind you that in the epistle to the Hebrews chapter 12 we have the very concept of God's gymnasium the very word gymnasium is there in the Greek language we

are trained very much in the way that an athlete is trained and we need to be in peak condition to serve our Lord you cannot pass on the truth of God intact in all its glory and adorn the doctrine of Christ that you are passing on unless you are in peak condition you know this is very relevant with the Olympics coming I am amazed I am amazed at the extent to which some of our athletes go in order to aim at the gold and of course only one person gets the gold I don't need to enlarge upon this you know it as well as I do what they do the way they train the way they fast the way they look after their bodies their timing for sleep and waking everything is arranged and they live according to the plan and the pattern and it's all for a bit of

gold that they may never get Paul says if you are to

hand this on intact in a manner that is worthy and will gain acceptance by men see that you are in peak condition be an athlete spiritually the third metaphor is the farmer metaphor the hard working farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops verse 6 now this image helps maintain the delicate balance of truth taught in scripture oh yes every believer needs to see himself as a soldier engaged in battle and as an athlete who cannot achieve his goal unless he is in peak spiritual condition yes but he needs also to see that there are aspects of his God given duty which more realistically resemble those of the hard pressed farmer than the soldier or the athlete Canon Guy King in a little commentary that was very much used of God some years ago in England because it is so simple

it's a commentary I believe on 1 and 2 Timothy at any rate it includes 2 Timothy there he says that some people he calls them some misguided innocents imagine the farmer's life to be a beautiful easy going existence with plenty of eggs, pork, honey and fresh air living in the lap of luxury and you know there are people who think that way of farmers they know nothing about the truth they are absolutely ignorant of the realities of the situation the farmer's day begins before dawn and it ends after dusk if he is a real farmer and especially before the days of mechanization but even today it is very much the case the farmer's day begins early and it ends late if he is to succeed it's a matter of unremitting ceaseless, endless toil and he can never say that his work is fully done because when

he's finished one round there's another round of duty waiting there is a rhythm to the affairs of the farmer and when he's completed the one there's always the other waiting and when he's come to the end of the cycle there is another cycle and he goes through it again and so it is there is no end if you want to be a farmer you need to be a stickler not a quitter you have to be ready for the long distance race to change the metaphor not for the sprint you need to be a man or a woman who's prepared to face it day in, day out cows have to be milked on Sunday pigs have to be fed on Sunday you and your five-day week and they're crying for four-day week now listen my friend the farmer has a seven-day week and a seven-night week cows have their calves at night oh don't let me start on this all of

which boils down to this, you see there's an excitement in talking about being an athlete and a soldier but there's very little excitement in real farming it's a humdrum ongoing day after day night after night week after week month after month year after year and the same old things have to be done oh there are changes but you go on repeating the same old things and the tedium of it has to be faced you're ready for this do you know anything of this? if you and I are going to pass on the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ I tell you it's not enough to start with our Sunday school class and keep on going for a couple of Sundays and think that you've done a great work for God and say goodbye you've got to keep on going it's not enough to move into the territory and throw out a few tracks and

say I've done something wonderful for God you need to keep on going it's an ongoing long term business and there are cycles and you've got to keep on, keep on, keep on that's the work the manifold nature of our calling you people are listening so well tonight that you're really putting me off step let me turn to the next thing the lofty motives that control and perhaps we'll not be able to do much else if these are the metaphors that describe us or ought to be descriptive of us what have they to say about the motives that should control us well take a good look at this look at the soldier's motive now I'm not able to expound everything that this passage says about this subject please let me make that clear but I want to say the things that are relevant to the points I'm wanting to stress

the soldier's motive, verse 4 no one serving as a soldier gets involved now a better translation of that is found I believe in the RSV, I'm not sure entangled in civilian affairs he wants to please his commanding officer I don't know whether it is always appreciated that in Palestine, ancient Palestine they did not generally have much of a standing army as we speak of a standing army that is always ready, always practicing always in training they may have had a little nucleus of an army but it was very small, very tiny remnant generally speaking when there was trouble the horn, the trumpet would sound calling men to battle and it was at that point that men became soldiers at that point the man behind the plow would leave the plow in his furrow somebody else would see to the oxen he would

go the loom was silenced somebody else would put things together he must go there's no time to waste the young man recently married will leave his wife away he goes somebody else must comfort her and look after her the mourner will leave his mourning household somebody else must bury the dead he must go that's what Paul has in mind those of us who are to serve our Lord as soldiers must be so ready to obey His command and to please Him, our commander-in-chief we must be so ready and so available at His calling that we are not entangled in anything that will hold us back we can leave the plow there we can leave the loom there we can leave our wife there we can leave anybody, leave anything that's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians, you know that if you are single it is better for you not to be

married not that he was against marriage as an institution but he says you must be ready to go when the Lord calls you and nothing must entangle you nothing must hold you back you must be free to go with Him who has called you oh how many Christians there are up and down our country that have lost the joy and the beauty of salvation because they've been unable to go they've been entangled they've been enmeshed in some relationship or other and when the Lord has called their feet have been in the mud and they've been unable to get out of the mire says the Apostle don't get entangled don't get enmeshed don't get into a relationship for the kind of which you can't leave and He calls my friend, are you free to go where God calls you tonight? or are you so entangled that you cannot go if He

calls?

I say to you every single thing a man is called upon to do in this life he should be able to leave if God calls and those who can't do it are not in the will of God you and I should be entangled by nothing I'm convinced of that we have made our businesses we have made so much of the things of this world the end of life and living not the means to an end I can't go because of my business I wasn't given life for my business sake I wasn't saved to be a businessman but I'm a teacher and I got my school I can't go because they won't let me go I wasn't born again for that I wasn't brought into this life for that I was brought into this life for God for His calling everything must give way to that now we don't have this conception we serve God if it suits us, you see and my business comes first

and everything else comes first God comes if I can go if my boss will let me off, I'll go poor God, He's got to wait that's not the concept we have in the scriptures don't be entangled with anything, says Paul so that you may please Him who's calling you oh how Paul knew the pleasure of God and was concerned for it do you know what it is when God looks down upon you and smiles upon you? do you know the smile of God? there is nothing in this earth of ours there is nothing in this life of ours this is heaven upon earth, there is nothing like it but to know that God smiles upon what you do difficult, hurtful though it is you do it for Him and He smiles approvingly that's the athletic motive sorry, that is the soldier's motive it is to be free from all entanglements in order to please the one

who called Him the athletic's motive is different you have it in verse 5 anyone who competes as an athlete he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules now, the athlete's motive is to win the crown and in order to win the crown, to keep the rules but to win the crown, to succeed as he trained untiringly and eventually took part in this particular sport the athlete's eye was inevitably set on one thing winning he ran, he jumped, he swam, he did whatever he did with his eye on the garland or on the gold, whatever the case may have been now how concerned are you to succeed am I to succeed now granted, we need to see that this is the second in importance to defeating the foe this is the second in importance, not the first but it is necessary to see that

this is here we need to be concerned to win an athlete that is not eager to win the prize is a misnomer his place is elsewhere he lacks the necessary ambition and the necessary qualification now, let me pose the question therefore do you really want to win in the task to which you have been called are you out to win do you come to church and do you go before God in worship as a man or a woman who is concerned to be qualified to win the race each day and to win the battle success must not be our primary aim our primary aim, notice, is the one we've dealt with it's to please him who called us that's the first thing it's to bring pleasure to the heart of God but having said that, the apostle brings this in look, he says, insofar as you're already attuned to bring pleasure to the heart of God

now, he says, if you're going to be involved in passing on the gospel in spreading the gospel and enlarging the church and saving the lost you must be determined to win you must want to win you must have the passion for souls brothers and sisters, what do we know of this our first motive, let me repeat is to be like the soldier whose desire was to please his master that said, however we may and we must be concerned to do and to be our very best for God to achieve for him and when we don't, it should worry us the athlete's motive the farmer's motive and with this, we'll have to conclude what is this? well, verse 6 reads it is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops if the soldier's motive is to please the one who called him and the athlete's is to perfect the

gift in order that he may win when he's involved in the race the farmer's is to produce as much ripe fruit as possible as much ripe fruit as possible now notice, not as much fruit as possible but as much ripe fruit as much ripe fruit as possible this too is a desire for success but it is now in the field of the production of fruit and not simply in the perfection of spiritual fitness or sanctification now those of you who have any farming background will not need me to tell you of the farmer's constant dilemma people say the farmer is a very difficult one to please when it's wet, he wants sunshine when it's sunny, he wants the rain when it's cold, he wants the heat when it's hot, he wants the cold you know, you can't please him well, there's a reason for that, you see in order to provide

the best crop he wants a balance of cold and heat dry sunshine and soft refreshing rain and he wants the right balance and that's why he's a little bit impatient and you say he's very difficult to please well, he's very difficult to please only because he's concerned with the quality of the crop if he was only concerned to have a crop well, it doesn't matter very much whether they're weeds but if he's concerned with the quality of the crop then he's not going to be easy to please you know, it's the same spiritually if you and I are seeking for the kind of men and women as our converts who will be able and capable under God of receiving the whole truth and imbibing it and believing it and practicing it and then handing it on and speaking it and living it out before men then we need to be

careful and to wait for the sunshine and the frost it doesn't happen overnight saintly men and women, faithful men and women spiritually mature men and women who are capable of passing on the gospel

intact are not made in one season they need to go through the winter and they need to face the heat they need the night and they need the light they need the day and they need the night all the seasons of the year and all the spiritual seasons that God seems fit and wise to send you remember the cry in the song of Solomon blow thou east wind blow thou north wind I'm sorry, north wind and then the south wind blow upon my garden in order that the fragrance of it and the scent of it shall go out into the outermost parts you need the north wind as well as the south you need the storm as well as

the sunshine men and women of character are not made overnight you and I by the grace of God you and I have to be looking for crops you and I have to be looking for men and women that are not the product of a moment but to pass through the fires and in process have been molded by a divine hand to be of such sterling character that they can pass on the truth of God so persuasively and so effectively that nothing is lost in transmission oh holy wonder that our God has committed his gospel to men and women like you and me but he's done it I sense my own frailty and feebleness and I bemoan my failures but no and only God and myself will ever know I don't know what about you but here it is as we stand we pause beneath the continuing wonder of it God can call a young Timothy nervous, timid,

afraid to go forward give him a responsibility that was infinitely too great for him leading new churches on this young fellow and Paul was afraid that they'd laugh at his youthfulness possibly because he looked younger than he was even but he was young anyway no don't worry says Paul be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus there's all sufficiency here for you and this is the way to do it look at the soldier, look at the athlete, look at the farmer and there are lessons to learn from them all now he says get on with the job and he entrusts the saints of God and the gospel to him and blessed be the name of God the God and father of our Lord Jesus honored him we are here tonight in part at any rate because a boy like Timothy became the man of God that he was made like his father

Paul before him oh the grace of God brothers and sisters what's this got to say to us?

I don't know it is not for me to apply this but I believe that the spirit of God is among us tonight to apply it to every one of us and the only danger I want to refer to is this the danger of any one of us thinking it has nothing for me don't you believe it? it's got something for me it's got something to say to you and I would say to you what Mary said to the disciples or rather not to the disciples but to the waiters in Cana of Galilee the occasion of the marriage there she said to them whatever he that is Jesus whatever he says to you do it let us pray our heavenly father and our God with awesome an awesome sense of our being unworthy and unfruitful servants we bow now before you our Lord Jesus did say that when you have done all these things say to yourselves we are unprofitable servants we are aware of that and we acknowledge it before you and yet our father we say to you we would be profitable for you oh God who has blessed us with eternal blessings who has given us yourself and all the privileges of daily fellowship as well as an oasis on a day such as this separated from the days of the week when without having to run hither and thither we can come apart and remain apart and be alone with you for the whole day long oh God we thank you we pray that you will make us worthier teach us the lessons we need to learn just now for the things that await us tomorrow and this week and during the rest of our days and grant that we like young Timothy may find that when the moment to strike has arrived we shall be able to stand in the grace which is in Jesus Christ our Lord and having done all things stand we ask it in his ever precious name Amen

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