

He Cannot Deny Himself

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the relevance of Paul's words to Timothy for all believers, highlighting the importance of embracing suffering in ministry, moving forward with boldness, and having confidence in God's promises. The sermon provides five foundation stones for courage: 1) Remembering Christ's resurrection and reign, 2) Understanding that the Word of God is unstoppable, 3) Recognizing God's election of a people for eternal glory, 4) Trusting in God's faithfulness and warning against denial, and 5) Acknowledging God's knowledge of His own and the call to depart from iniquity.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:8, 2 Timothy 2:9, 2 Timothy 2:10, 2 Timothy 2:11, 2 Timothy 2:19

Topics: "Embracing Suffering", "Confidence in God's Promises"

Description

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Transcript

The reason that Paul's words to a young, male, constitutionally timid pastor are relevant for you, though you may not be young or male or timid or a pastor, is that the reasons, the arguments that he gives for why Timothy should embrace the suffering that is coming to him in the path of his ministry and why he should move forward in the work God's given him to do with boldness and confidence and courage are the same arguments and the same reasons that he gives to you for why you should embrace the suffering that is coming to you in your path of obedience and why you should move forward in what God has called you to do, though it may be embattled with great confidence. So, if you're not young and you're not male and you're not a pastor and you're not timid, don't shut me down. Without the least fear of contradiction, I say to you, you need this message.

You need these verses from God's Word and I think that will become plain to you before you are done and I would like now to pray that God would make this word to all of us powerful. So, Father, male and female, old and young, timid and bold, clergy and not, come, speak. This is a crucial word for us and I pray that you would make it a saving word, a strengthening word, a healing word, an empowering word, that every need brought into this room would be touched in ways that neither I nor anyone else but you has thought

of.

I ask this in Jesus' name, amen. So, we're in the middle of a nine-part summer series on 2 Timothy, titled, To Him Be Glory Forever, Unashamed of Christ and Ready to Suffer. And the reason for the title will become increasingly clear as the weeks go by or as the minutes go by in this service.

Tom will bring the message next week and then I'll be back from my last leg of vacation and finish the last four messages in August and I'm eager to do it. I love and need the message of 2 Timothy. So, our focus is on verses 8 to 19 of chapter 2. Let me tell you what I think Paul is doing and then we'll follow him do it.

I think he's giving Timothy and you five reasons, five foundation stones, arguments for why Timothy should embrace suffering in the ministry of the gospel and why he should press on in his embattled life with confidence and with courage. That's what I think he's doing in these verses, giving five reasons for him in his unique situation which also apply to you in yours if you have ears to hear. Now, remember verse 1 of this chapter Paul had said, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

So, he wants him to be strong. He's not constitutionally strong. And then in verse 2, entrust what I'm giving you to others.

Ken brought that message last week. And then in verse 3, share in sufferings. Take your share of sufferings as a good soldier.

So, be strong, get on with the ministry of transmitting this word and when suffering comes, embrace it. Don't run away. Timothy, the overarching burden of this chapter and this book is to help this young man and you and me be willing to suffer, not run away, and to be courageous and to be bold and confident in the work God has called us to do, whatever it is.

Now, verses 8 to 19, five foundations for that courage. God wants to build them into you and I pray that the way you listen to this, we'll be praying, Lord, where in my life do I have need that foundation stones be put in at the bottom of my life to hold me up when the waves crash over me that Pastor John says are coming in my effort to be obedient as a Christian. So, if I need any support for the future bullet, please put that stone in the foundation of my life tonight.

Foundation stone number one, there are five of these. Verse 8, remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the offspring of David as preached in my gospel. So, Timothy, Bethlehem, never go long without thinking of Jesus.

In specific, Timothy, two things about Jesus. He's risen and he's the son of David. Why those two? He could have said a hundred things, right? Remember Jesus risen, remember Jesus seed of David.

Why? Because he's alive, Timothy. If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal body also through the spirit that dwells in you. Timothy, if he is alive and you're in him, you're going to be alive, Timothy, forever.

Whatever opposition may come against you, if it takes you all the way to the ultimate that they can do, namely death, you're alive, because Jesus is alive. And why seed of David? Every Jew knew what that meant. It meant he's the Messiah.

This is not a random resurrection, like there's somebody I can raise. This is Messiah sent into the world to die with a view to triumphing over death. Let me read you what the angel said to Mary, so you can get a feel for what Messiah meant to her and to others, and to you, I hope.

This is what the angel said to Mary, Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son. You shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.

And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end.

So Timothy, timid, young, insecure, frightened, Timothy, remember Jesus. He is raised from the dead, not in a random way, but as Son of David, sitting on the throne forever as your King, and your Savior, and your Lord, and your Friend. Remember that, Timothy.

That's number one. Stone number one, put in place in your life, at the bottom of your life, this stone to hold you up when it comes. Number two, verse nine, Paul says that according to his Gospel, that is true, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.

But the Word of God is not bound, Timothy. Now here, he just pulls no punches at all. He's not going to whitewash the ministry for Timothy.

I'm in jail. I am suffering. Let's make it three things, because he mentions them.

I am suffering. That means it hurts. It's not real glorious.

It hurts. That's what suffering means. It hurts.

Number two, I'm in chains. I'm not just in a cell. There are chains.

I don't know if they're on his hands or his feet, but he's got chains. Rusty, heavy, wearing down, it hurts. Timothy, get ready.

Third, the accusation of being a criminal. This is not glorious. The Word is evildoer.

Timothy, the Word is, Paul is evil. Sound familiar, 21st century Christian? This is not pretty. It's not noble.

It's not noble, chivalrous. It hurts, and everybody that's accusing me says he's evil, he's a criminal. Timothy, so he's not whitewashing anything to help this man be courageous and to embrace suffering.

No buttering up the person or smoothing up the gospel. Just hurts. And then, the foundation.

But the Word of God, see at the end of verse 9? The Word of God is not bound. I'm bound. The Word of God is not bound, Timothy.

I sit in prison. Timothy, if the day comes when you sit in prison, if the day comes when you feel beaten down and alone, and you wonder if the cause for which you have lived your life is defeated, know this, the Word is not bound. You're bound.

You will die. The Word will not die. The Word will not be imprisoned.

It will run. In fact, Timothy, if we could jump over to Philippians, when you think the very moment has arrived for your defeat, God will be using your defeat for His victory. Let me read that to you.

This is Philippians 1.12. I want you to know, brothers, this is the same imprisonment, probably. I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. Most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, they are much more bold to speak the Word without fear.

All things work together for the advancement of the gospel, including the defeat of the gospel. Briefly. Jesus is risen.

Jesus is reigning. Build that in, and now build the second stone in, Timothy. This Word cannot be defeated.

This Word is not bound. You will be bound. I will be bound.

This Word will not be bound. Build that one in. Be confident.

Number three, verse ten. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Now, you might think at this point in the flow of the argument, he's not giving foundation stones anymore, but beginning to build on them.

I don't think so. Because if you attend carefully to the words he chooses, he's still trying to help Timothy here be bold and be courageous. I endure, because of what I've just said, I endure everything for the sake of, and he could have said the church.

He could have said, I endure everything for the sake of the lost. He didn't. He said, I endure everything for the sake of the elect.

Why did he say that? Why did he bring that doctrine in? Because the spirit of this text is massively confident. It's massively certain. These are stones that cannot fail.

And so he reaches for the Word to describe the church that is rooted in eternity, and is absolutely certain. Christians are the elect from before the foundation of the world, Timothy. Now, we must be careful whenever handling weighty doctrines like election.

And Paul shows us how to be careful here. This is so helpful. I love this passage.

So helpful for how to be careful in handling such a delicate, crucial, controversial doctrine as election. The way Paul talks here protects us from two mistakes that we often make about election. Here's one of them.

Well, if there are people who are chosen before the foundation of the world, then we certainly don't need to risk our lives to get them saved and to eternal glory, for goodness sakes. Wrong. Paul says the opposite.

Let's read it. I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they may obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus. The certainty that there are elect ones doesn't make me stop preaching, stop risking my life.

It gives me confidence I'm not wasting my preaching. I'm not wasting my life. It's going to happen.

I will be victorious with my word being spoken. God has the people. They will hear.

It doesn't incline him away from preaching, and suffering, and praying, and laboring for the salvation of the elect. And he doesn't have a clue who they are until they believe. Here's the second mistake we often make.

Well, if Paul must preach, and suffer, and persuade lost people to believe in Jesus to be saved, then there can be no such thing as eternal election, but only choice. Wrong. He says the opposite.

I endure everything for the sake of the elect. They exist. That they may obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

So my commitment to suffer for the gospel, Timothy, doesn't mean no one is chosen. It means that God has appointed me to be the instrument of their salvation. And you don't ever, ever think that election makes your witness or your prayer superfluous.

It is essential. Stake it on this verse. I endure everything that they may be saved.

Is that clear? And then, one more phrase to make sure Timothy feels the wonder of this. Namely, the last phrase in the verse. That they may obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Remember, Timothy, as an elect one, you are bringing elect ones to eternal glory. You and they will have eternal glory. Eternal glory.

So whatever you endure now, remember what I said in 2 Corinthians? This light, momentary affliction is working for us. Annie, I wonder how many of you can finish it. Eternal weight of glory.

This is about suffering. That's what your suffering is doing. You and the elect walk through hell to get to heaven.

That's the way I'm getting it out of you. Take heart. It will be eternal and it will be glorious.

It's a very brief life we're living. And eternity is very long. That's number three.

So, number one, Christ is risen and reigning as eternal King and you'll rise and reign with Him. Number two, the Word of God is not bound. It will triumph whether you're bound or I'm bound.

It won't be bound. And number three, from all the untold numbers of undeserving sinners in the world, God has chosen a people for eternal glory. Endure everything to save them.

Number four, verses 11 through 13. The saying is trustworthy, Timothy. The saying is trustworthy.

For if we have died with Him, we will also live with Him. If we endure, we will reign with Him. But if we deny Him, Timothy, He will deny us.

And if we are faithless, He remains faithful because He cannot deny Himself. Now, you can tell that Paul is still giving foundation stones for confidence because he says, the saying is trustworthy. What I'm about to tell you, bank on it.

Stand on it. This is trustworthy. This is rock solid truth that I'm about to give you.

So, be strong in it. Put it underneath your life and build a life of courage on it. That's what's going on with that word trustworthy in verse 11.

So, what is he saying? What kind of confidence? He is saying, this is what's sure. God's promises of triumph through suffering are sure. And God's warnings of lostness through unbelief are sure.

Follow me here because this text is often misused. Here are the promises of triumph. Middle of verse 11.

If we have died with Him, we're going to live with Him. Meaning, if you've been identified with Jesus by faith in His death, if you've embraced death, the death of Jesus and your death in Jesus, you're going to live. That saying is trustworthy.

And secondly, paralleling it, if we endure, we will reign with Him. So, Jesus said in Mark 13, he who endures to the end will be saved. Mark 13, 13.

So, Jesus is risen. If you die with Him, you'll live. Jesus is son of David.

You're going to reign with Him. See the correlation? If you are united to Him in His death, you will live. And that is sure.

Endure, Timothy. Endure. Don't walk away from Jesus to avoid suffering.

Now, he tells him why. Verse 12, middle of verse. If we deny Him, He will deny us.

You will be lost, Timothy. If you bail on Jesus, if you throw Him away, if you walk away from this King and this Savior, this Friend, have nothing to do with Him the rest of your life, you're damned. He will renounce you at the last day, and he's quoting Jesus.

You remember the text, right? Matthew 10, 33, Jesus said, whoever denies Me before men, I will deny before My Father who is in heaven. You do not want to hear those words. I don't know you, Timothy.

Got a good start in the Christian life. Got a few kudos from the apostle, then you bailed. I don't even know you.

You weren't mine. You weren't ever mine. You don't want to hear that word.

That's a serious word. He's not playing games here. And so, when the parallel happens in verse 13, you can't make it be positive.

If we are faithless, He remains faithful. Does not mean faithful to you. Otherwise, the previous word meant nothing.

You deny Him, He denies you. You are faithless, you throw it away, you reject Jesus, you're not a believer. He is faithful to Himself.

And the way He vindicates Himself is by throwing you out, Timothy. God supremely values His trustworthiness. If you blackball His trustworthiness by saying, I'm not going to trust Him anymore.

I'm going to trust money. I'm going a new way. I'm done with that stuff.

That old Christian stuff. You stay there, He's faithful to the worth of His name. To the worth of His trustworthiness.

And the way God vindicates His trustworthiness to those who will not have it is called hell. So, don't congratulate your unbelief by saying, God's still faithful to me. He is faithful.

He cannot deny Himself. That's what He's faithful to. Therefore, underneath the promises is, He cannot deny Himself.

If you hold to Jesus and say, you mean everything to me. You are trustworthy. I'm just a hopeless sinner and you're everything.

He cannot deny you. Your security is as firm as His allegiance to His name. But if you, if you bail on Him.

If you turn on Him. If you say, I want nothing more to do with that. You're not my Savior.

Probably a myth anyway. Just messed me up with all my relationships. I'm out of here forever.

He will deny you in all faithfulness. To His infinite worth. So, Timothy, we're not playing games.

I love Paul. He's not playing around. Everything is at stake in serving Jesus.

Everything is at stake in knowing Jesus. I'm not going to whitewash this, Timothy. That's number four.

If you trust Him, Timothy. If you don't throw it all away. You don't run away from suffering.

But embrace it and endure to the end. Just trusting your Savior as a helpless sinner. He will not deny you because He cannot deny Himself.

Be strong. Finally, number five. When I got to verse 14, I thought, my first impression was, well, I think Paul is done now in giving foundation stones for confidence.

And he's starting to spell out more fully what verse 2, entrust to faithful men what I've given you. He's just going to talk about the ministry now and what Timothy should be doing as a confident minister. And then I got to verse 19.

I said, nope, nope, nope. Missed that one. He's still there.

So here's verse 19. Then we'll go back. God's firm foundation stands bearing this seal.

The Lord knows those who are His. And let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. So it seems to me that verses 14 to 19 describe for Timothy how embattled and messy his work is going to be.

And then he calls Timothy to be a faithful handler of the Word in the midst of all that embattled mess. And then he gives him one last foundation stone, number five, to put underneath his life, namely verse 19. So let me just walk through these verses briefly.

And we'll wrap it up. Now remember, chapter 2, verse 2, Timothy is to entrust God's Word to faithful men who will teach others also. And now he's telling Timothy some things to tell them.

Verse 14, remind them. Remind them of these things and charge them before God not to quarrel about words which does no good but only ruins the hearers. Now, we're going to see in just a minute this does not mean words are unimportant.

Rather, it means some of them are so important you shouldn't wrangle about them but cut them off like gangrene. Don't constantly be fighting about these words that are killing people. It's the gangrene.

Verse 15, do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth. This is going to be costly, Timothy. There can be a lot of people, chapter 4, verse 3, there can be a lot of people who do not want to hear what you have to say.

It will not be comfortable. But do your best to be a faithful handler of this precious Word. No whitewashing, no sugarcoating.

Just love people with it. Tell them what's here. Verse 16, avoid irreverent babble for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.

Their talk, now notice, talk is words. So, I'm thinking don't fight about words. What should you do with words? Their talk will spread like gangrene.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have swerved from the truth expressed in words. Saying, saying, that's words, and they're matters of life and death here, that the resurrection has already happened. Meaning the resurrection of believers.

And they are upsetting the faith of some. Now that word upsetting, I don't like that translation. It's literally right, but we, the connotation of upset in my vocabulary is bothered, annoyed.

This means upset like a boat, and people are drowning. So, upsetting faith doesn't mean annoying people. It means killing people.

Like gangrene, if you don't cut off gangrene, it kills people. So, don't fight about these words, cut them off. Now, at this point, if I were Timothy, you know, I am a lot like Timothy.

I would feel daunted again. How in the world can I handle this? You got false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus. You got these weird false doctrines like the resurrection has already happened, and you've got gangrene that's ruining people's lives, and I don't know what to do, Paul.

I'm just, I feel very inadequate, Paul. And so he says in verse 19, But, Timothy, take heart, God's firm foundation stands bearing this seal. Lord knows those who are his, and that everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

So, Timothy, if you start fretting that there's so much sin in the church, and so much false teaching threatening everywhere, Keep in mind this double-sided seal. It's got a divine side and a human side. On the divine side, the seal stamp says, the Lord knows those who are his.

You may not, he does. Take heart. And the human side says, let everyone who names the name of the Lord, in other words, if you are his, depart from evil.

You'll know them by their fruits, Timothy. I summarize. Five foundation stones given to a young, male, constitutionally timid pastor and me preaching to people who are not all young and not all male and not all constitutionally timid and certainly not all pastors, because these foundation stones are yours in Christ.

And oh God wants you to be there standing on them. So let me name them and we'll be done. Number one, this is not a random resurrection.

Christ is risen, son of David, alive, reigning forever. Number two, preachers may be bound, the word is never bound. Number three, of all the undeserving sinners in the world, God has an elect people and your ministry is meant to bring them to salvation.

Number four, God cannot deny himself. You trust him, he will not deny you, but don't go the other way. And number five, the Lord knows those who are his.

If you want to know, if you're his, let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from evil. So Father in heaven, thank you for serving us so well by serving Timothy through the Apostle. I need every one of these stones to be adjusted and fixed in my life, and so do my friends, my family here at Bethlehem.

And so would you come now, and if any is without Christ, may these promises, may these stones feel like what they need, because they are. And for all who are believers, make us strong and bold, I pray. Don't let us run away from Christ.

Don't let us run away from suffering. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

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