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II Timothy 2:1-13:

## **“Endure-Strain-Run”**

- I. Endure - Our Text.
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## 2 Timothy 2:1-13

Dear Friends in Christ,

The introduction to 2 Timothy in our ESV pew Bible states, "Paul wrote this letter as he awaited persecution. Despite all that Paul was facing - death, the end of his ministry, abandonment by most of his friends for fear of persecution - he faithfully directed his spiritual son Timothy to the hope that is in Christ Jesus (p.1267)."

The words that hit are "abandonment by most of his friends for fear of persecution." Instead of expressing fear, frustration, or sadness Paul writes to Timothy, "As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first with your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure dwells with you (2:4-5)."

And here we are watching as much of the church, step-by-step, alters the Gospel of Christ to the Gospel of "whatever." Over the years we've sent money to foreign missions and prayers to our Lord for those under fire for Christ. The question might be, "Will there be anyone there for us?" In light of the shaking and quaking of this world it would be easy to crawl into a comfortable place from the past, wouldn't it? It would, unless we understand what it means to . . .

### ENDURE-STRAIN-RUN

#### I. Endure - Our Text.

In our text for this morning, Paul encourages Timothy to take the Word he had taught him and "entrust (it) to faithful men who will be able to teach others...the grace that is in Christ Jesus (vv.1b, 2b)." Think about it: This is the concern and hope the Holy Spirit worked in Paul while he was waiting to be executed for the Gospel. Paul would endure the suffering.

And so, Paul goes on to encourage Timothy and us: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound (vv.9,10)." We proclaim that same Word when given the opportunity; proclaim the good news of God's love, forgiveness of sin and eternal life through faith in Christ!

The world hates Christ because humans, we, are by nature self-righteous and by nature will deny sin and reject God's condemnation of sin. Nevertheless, the Scriptures are clear: "whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn.3:18)."

Paul then says, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect (for God's people in Christ), that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (v.10)." **Endure**, because the issue is **eternal life**, not this world or what we can get out of this world! We must **endure**, **persist** in all circumstances, even in suffering, which hits us as scary. And then come the words that call each one of us into serious self-examination:

The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we **endure**, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself (vv.11-13).

So, the word that can cause discomfort is "endure." We must endure if we are to live and reign eternally. For a lot of church people **endure** easily gets in the way of this world's wants and pursuits. The pressures and distractions of this world pull the flesh and tear into the soul of childhood years, parenting, middle age, old age. Yet we all quickly end this world as dust! Lutheran commentator Harlyn Kuschel writes, "By virtue of their union with Christ in Baptism, God regarded Christ's death, burial and resurrection as if they were each individual believers' own death, burial and resurrection." (Harlyn

Kuschel, "Philippians, Colossians, Philemon," The People's Bible, p. 152). There's a reason why Scripture call us to seek and to set our minds on things above (Col. 3:1-3).

## II. Philippians 3:8-14 -Strain.

But look at what else Paul says concerning our journey with Christ through this world; this is from Philippians 3:8-14:

"...I count everything a loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead... I press on to make it my own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Connected to endure is straining forward to what lies ahead. Straining - to exert one's self to the maximum.

I've wondered, many times, how much time and effort we spend trying to crawl back to something familiar and comfortable. I recall a conversation from around four years ago with a Pilgrim brother who is now in eternal life. We talked about life from the late 1940's into the late 1950's. We spent our childhood years in what I call *the post World War II moving forward time*. We talked about how evil didn't seem to be as threatening and corrupting as now. But it was simply not as exposed. Of course, we recognized that in those years the world had entered the Cold War, and the world was still the same fallen world. If only we could get our act together! The point? Well, it's what the Lord says to us through Paul: "forgetting what lies behind and straining for what lies ahead, I press on..."; presses on for entrance into eternal and life.

But there's another aspect to the "forgetting." It's God's forgetting our sin. Everyone has troubles in life. Many of our troubles start with thoughts that grow into words, and words that grow into deeds, and deeds that grow into consequences, and the consequence that we wonder if God will forgive. It has been stated, "In the day of prosperity we have many refuges to resort to (places of comfort and happiness); in the day of adversity, only one." That one is Jesus, and Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden (heavy laden with sin, guilt and the fear God won't forgive), and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you... For my yoke (grace and mercy) is easy, and my burden is light (Mt. 11:28-30)." The past will never be again. God's love and eternal life are forever.

## III. Hebrews 12:1-4 - Run.

But one more word: **Run**. In Hebrews 12:1-4 we are given these very familiar words the Lord gave to the writer of the Hebrews:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also run with endurance (as they did) the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

So, we're in a race that involves endurance, straining, and running. The "cloud of witness" are God's people from the past. Hebrews 11 gives a great list of God's people who endured and strained to the point of death starting with Abel (v.4) and ultimately stating, "Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted mistreated... (Heb. 11:36,37)."

We've discussed the following in Bible classes in the past. I ask you to listen to commentator, Richard E. Lauersdorf, on running the race:

"The race" he calls it, using the Greek word from which our word "agony" comes. He's talking about a contest involving exertion and struggle. He's also talking about a constant contest, for in the Greek he wrote, "Let us keep on running." And he's talking about an extremely difficult contest, one which requires perseverance. Perseverance means holding out under stress, not slowing down or stopping for any reason. The race of faith is not some hundred-meter dash, but a life long marathon. On faith's track the runner dare not slow down after a lap or two, but needs to run full out all the time." (Richard E Lauersdorf, Hebrews, *People's Bible Commentary*, CPH, St. Louis, 1992, p.152)

There's no doubt in my mind that for much of the church in this country God's people do not take God's Word seriously. The fact is, most don't know and don't necessarily want to know the Word. We've watched the preachers of earthly happiness sell the Jesus who accepts the thinking of the day and ignores sin, death and hell. God's Word calls us to Jesus, God in the flesh, who calls us to **endure-strain-run** for the heaven He earned for you and me.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott