

We Shall Live with Him

2 Timothy 2:8-15

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is sure: 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.

¹⁴ Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Have you ever been down and discouraged? You want to walk and live by faith, but the difficulties of life seem to weigh you down? You feel you have done all you can to live right before God, but still things and situations seem so unfair. You are not alone! The writer of our scripture had been trying to encourage his young protégé from the distance of a prison cell. Seeing your mentor arrested would tax anyone's hope! At the time of this writing there were no great church sanctuaries, or libraries with Christian books, or even the four Gospels, let alone the many other resources we now have to turn to; so the writer began this section of his letter with something to cling to in such times. Perhaps it was a well-known line from a creed or a hymn. It summed things up so well that he was even able to refer to it as "my gospel." He wrote, "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David" (v. 1). The writer did not have all the answers, as none of us do, yet he believed that if we can get this one thing right, the rest will follow: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David." It was like giving his protégé the answer to 1-across and 1-down in the great crossword puzzle of life.

The protégé's ministry was growing more complex. In the verses leading up to this statement the mentor had been trying to convey to his protégé that it was good for him to receive a salary for his ministry. There was also a hint that there may even have been

a family to look after. The mentor was probably concerned that this young minister was trying to do everything and to be all things to all people, which is still a temptation for ministers and other church workers today. So the advice to the young protégé becomes God's word to the church here and now: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David." In the church we get busy with so many seemingly important things, as we try to balance budgets and events and personalities, that we forget what is central.

So we are to remember. The word "remember" is rich in biblical meaning. "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy" (Exod. 20:8). "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24). Remembering in Scripture is often a call back to the sacred and, ultimately, a call to "re-member" Christ's body and become Christ in this world. We find the language of remembering again in verse 14: "Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening." Some were wasting time and energy arguing and fighting over semantics. So he wrote, "Remember Jesus Christ." When we forget to listen to the living Word, we can be given to wrangling over words. We can lose sight of what matters, which is not simply achieving a goal—be it the Angel Tree program, Carriage Town Ministries or better infrastructure, more faithful stewardship of financial resources or a better Web site—but the real goal is gaining a Christ like character.

When the mentor wrote in verse 11, "If we have died with him, we will also live with him," he had upped the ante! Dying and living are the what's most important, not the color of the chairs or carpet. The mentor was calling for an end of petty arguments and proud posturing, so that we may come alive to the love and compassion of Jesus.

This is easier said than done! Discouragement threatened. Discouragement can come because of illness. Discouragement can come because of a relationship gone bad. Discouragement can come because of financial challenges. In this case the thought of his mentor in chains was upsetting, and the temptation to quit must have been real. Fully aware of the discouraging image of his chains, the mentor wrote, "But the word of God

is not chained" (v. 9). The protégé was to remember the risen Christ, living in and with Him and, therefore, in the midst of life's setbacks to know that God's love always has the last word. Regardless of circumstances, God is always doing something greater.

In the clarity of this light, even the most passionate rivalries may turn out to have been petty. Canadian missionaries serving in Kenya during the postelection violence of 2008 tell the story of a church that sought to provide refuge and sanctuary in the aftermath of several weeks of terrible violence. They experienced a church that seemed to have no end of compassion, welcoming thousands of refugees, always with room for one more. One woman who had suffered the violence arrived at the church absolutely overwrought by the evil she had witnessed at the hand of her neighbors of a different tribe. She said, "They didn't love us. They will never love us!" She did not yet know that those who were preparing her meal and a place for her to stay were from her enemy tribe, for this church was multi-tribal. By remembering the risen Christ and living with Him, they allowed God's love to prevail over anger and hatred. **J. Peter Holmes**

We all have disappointment and face limitations—be it the death of a near one or a failure in life or just plain stress—we experience renewal through the proclamation of the good news and living with Christ. We are not alone in this world; in fact, we are saved from this misery of our own humanity. Paul's situation in jail is an example of facing death while proclaiming life through faith in Christ. He refocuses our thoughts on Jesus Christ, who is not bound by worldly standards, our standards, or even our church's standards. Paul's reminder sounds as single-minded as the Barmen Declaration. In 1934 the leaders of the German Confessing Church were facing powers who wanted to use the church in service to the nation of Germany, instead of Christ. In their desire to remind others that Christ would have none of this, that the church should not bow to another authority, they wrote, "Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death."

In the midst of Timothy's discouragement Paul reminded Timothy of a baptism hymn: "For in our baptism we die to Christ and will be raised to live with him" Next comes the mystery. If we endure in this lifetime, we will receive closeness with God, now and in the heavenly life. Then the third line challenges us boldly, "If we deny him, he will also deny us" Quickly our minds recall occasions when we have denied God. Was it at lunch when coworkers were making fun of Christians? Was it when we refused to give to a stranger? Guilt crops up with that feeling that we have denied him. But before we start to exit the practice of faith—the church membership, the prayer we are hearing—the good news comes: "If we are faithless, God remains faithful—for God cannot deny himself." Thankfully, we are swept up in the wondrous love and grace that Christ provides in his resurrection life. **Olive Elaine Hinnant**

Some of us will recognize the power of the risen Christ but may still hold ourselves back out of humility, recognizing that in our human frailty we can never be Jesus in this world. To those who would hold back for reasons of inadequacy, the mentor wrote, "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David." Some say that Paul included "descendant of David" simply because it was part of the sentence that had been taken from an early creed or hymn; but if nothing else, it speaks to the humanity of Jesus. In a longer version, Paul said that Jesus Christ "was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power ... by resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:3-4). If nothing else, the mentor reminded Timothy and us that Jesus came from a long line of humans. He knows what it is to struggle as we do. He was tempted in all manners as we are. His victory over temptation and sin upon the cross was not just his, but somehow also ours. Remember him. He gave his life to free us from sin, and he lives with us always to strengthen and encourage. **J. Peter Holmes**

We have heard how Paul encouraged Timothy by reminding him that we suffer now, but we shall live with him. But what if Paul lived today with cell phones and text messaging, this is a message he would send us, "Remember, remind, and be diligent for the sake of the gospel." An instant message on our computer screen or our iPhone or

10/13/19

2 Tim 2:8-15

We Shall Live With Him

Android with a text message while we sit deep in traffic on the way home could be just the thing we need to hear to lift us out of the human predicament and point us toward heavenly hope. When we are faithless, complaining, and self-absorbed, God is faithful! We can continue on because we do and shall live with Him! **Olive Elaine Hinnant**

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