

The Threshing floor

THE CALLING

"Thou, therefore, endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The farmer that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits." (2 Tim.2:3-6).

This letter to Timothy was probably Paul's last letter. It was written from prison towards the end of Nero's reign. He had been abandoned by nearly all his friends and it could have been a time of great depression and despair. However, such was not the case.

We can still feel the strength in his voice and see the flashes of fire in his eye. His passion is not diminished and his purpose is stronger than ever. He is now looking forward with keen anticipation to his coronation day, and he says triumphantly:

"For I am now ready to be offered, (as a sacrifice) and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day..." (2 Tim.4:6-8).

"I have fought a good fight...", he says confidently. He therefore encourages his son Timothy, "Fight the good fight of faith... Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

There are three disciplines mentioned in this portion of Scripture.

The first is the **DISCIPLINE OF OBEDIENCE** as a soldier of Jesus Christ.

The second is the **DISCIPLINE OF PERSONAL MASTERY AND SELF-CONTROL** as an athlete.

And the third is the **DISCIPLINE OF PATIENCE**.

I would like here to deal with the first discipline: **THE DISCIPLINE OF OBEDIENCE** as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

The picture Paul paints is of a devoted soldier, one who has thrown personal safety and comfort to the winds, and has willingly cast in his lot with a highly honored and distinguished Commander-in-Chief.

It is not the picture of a conscript soldier.

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It is not of forced or obligatory military duty,
But one of devoted allegiance to the Commander.

Paul serves because of love.

The motivation is "to please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

He is not therefore serving self-interests.

He is not taken up with the question of personal security or popularity.

He is not a MERCENARY who fights for reward --

But a soldier who fights because of allegiance and love and devotion to his Lord.

Notice also that Paul has been chosen -- "That he may please him who hath chosen him."

I see shining through Paul's words, a distinct sense of honour at having been chosen by the Lord. On many occasions he commenced his letters with the words: "Paul, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ."; "Paul, an apostle"; "an ambassador"; "a delegate of Jesus Christ". He spoke of his calling as a "high and holy vocation." He was grateful to God for having chosen and called him to the ministry. He had been apprehended by God, and knew the pride that comes from having been called and chosen. He knew he was one of the elect -- according to the foreknowledge of God.

To the Ephesians Paul wrote: "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him, in love..." (Eph.1:4). This same commission Timothy has received, and he reminds Timothy of this heavenly calling.

Paul has been honored by the commission, and now encourages Timothy to fulfil his calling and to honour his Lord by ENDURING the HARDSHIPS that may come by reason of this vocation.

Paul urges him to "war a good warfare - holding onto faith."

Not only do we see devotion to the heavenly Commander and Lord, but allegiance to the cause. We have espoused the highest calling possible to man. We have been called to be servants of righteousness. We WERE slaves of sin, but we have obeyed "from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being, then, made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness." (Rom.6:17-18).

The comprehension of this calling gives purpose and drive to life.

We are no longer victims of circumstances, no longer blown by the winds of chance, but consumed by a driving passion!

We are now ambassadors of Jesus Christ!

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We have been apprehended of God.

We are NOT our OWN.

We are bought with a price!

We are enjoined to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits.

Whether imprisoned or free, Paul still knew the dynamic drive of purpose. In this same chapter, he admonishes Timothy to: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim.2:15).

Even though he had been shamed and suffered as an evil doer, he could proclaim: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God ..." (Rom.1:16).

Therefore, as Christians,
elect ones,
called into the fellowship of God's dear Son,
partakers of the heavenly calling,
members of the household of faith,

We must remember that we are not to serve our own self-interests!

It is not our desire for peace or salvation, and comfort that must take the pre-eminence in our lives, but the interests of Him who has called us from darkness into His marvelous light!

Before we begin to make request for ourselves, we are taught in the "Lord's prayer" to pray: "THY Kingdom come; THY will be done; on earth as it is in heaven."

Before we are instructed to say "GIVE US", we are to seek GOD's interests. We are commanded to "SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU." (Mat. 6:33).

It is HIS KINGDOM, we are to seek, and to help build. It is HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS we are expected to acquire, not the righteousness of self effort, but the righteousness that comes by faith. All our other needs, our material needs and our need for strength and comfort, direction and peace, will be added.

Put God FIRST, and the spiritual results will be life and peace. If we sow to the flesh and self-interests and pleasure and self-comfort and self-gratification, we will reap corruption.

Nothing of eternal value can come from corruptible flesh, therefore, sowing to the flesh is destined to destruction.

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Immortality cannot spring from mortality.

Life does not come from matter!

Spiritual power will never come from affluence!

Paul admonished Timothy to ENDURE HARDNESS,

Not to seek personal comfort and live only to gratify the whims and fancies of personal lusts,

but to endure hardness, to be ready to suffer for His Name's sake.

Unless there is within us that confidence of a high and holy calling,

Unless we can see a definite purpose in adversity,

We shall attempt to flee anything that is distasteful,

For PERSONAL happiness and gain become the driving ambition of our lives.

But when we realize we have been called by our heavenly captain

to be a soldier,

and to fight in His army,

when our allegiance and commitment to HIM is complete, and our devotion to the Lord is the motivation of our heart, then suffering has meaning and becomes a sacrament. Pain then loses its venom and despair is turned into hope.

Vance Havner says: "There is a dreadful state among orthodox Christians whose doctrine is as sound as a dollar and who could not be called worldly by any stretch of the imagination, but who have become fed-up and heavy until they are harder to arouse than the grossest sinners. They have lost their capacity for being stirred. Their reaction to any sermon is: 'We've heard all this and got over it and so will you.' That sort of thing is hard on a young Timothy, and if he doesn't let God use him to get them out of their state, the devil will use them to get him out of his!"

A good football coach drives his men to the extreme limits of their endurance! He cajoles them, urges them, threatens them and disciplines them! What would you think of a coach who fed his men on ice-cream sundaes, gave them plenty of leisure time, and told them to come in once a week to memorize some of the play! He would be training them to lose!"

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GOD WANTS TO TRAIN US TO WIN !

HAVING TOO MUCH OF WHAT WE WANT USUALLY SPELLS NOT ENOUGH OF GOD !

"And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul!" (Psalm 106:15).

The Church is always endangered by a false sense of security,
but secure when in danger!
She is rich in faith, when poor,
and poor and naked and blind, when she esteems herself rich!
We are proud when we think we are humble,
and truly humble when we lament our pride!
When we weep over our hard hearts, we are truly repentant,
but very hard when we think we have repented, but others need to!
We live when we are willing to lose our lives for His sake,
and die when we would keep our lives!

In Psalm 119:67, David said:

"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy Word."

Make adversity your servant and not your master.

It is also important to note that when there is an **ULTIMATE GOAL**, there will be definite, **PRELIMINARY** goals. If we have no burning passion, it is unlikely we shall have much daily **COMPASSION**.

Unless there is an ultimate purpose for our lives, we will probably not set any daily goals.

When we can say, "For me to live is Christ", then we will be able to say "and to die is gain".

If we are living for Christ, and His glory, and to please Him who has laid hold upon us and chosen us for Himself, then we will have definite goals in life. Our energies will be channeled and directed into these avenues of service.

Then our assets, such as:

our **TIME**

our **WORDS**

and our **POSSESSIONS**

can all be directed into the war effort.

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For we are fighting for the right.
We are called upon to free the captives,
And no sacrifice is too great
When you catch a glimpse
Of souls in the prison house of sin,
Being tortured by the enemy of God
And chained by the chains of darkness,
And fear, and passion,
And hate, and lust!
We have been called upon to preach deliverance to the captives,
the OPENING OF PRISON doors to the bound,
to RELIEVE the oppressed,
to HELP the fatherless, to DEFEND the widow, to BIND the bruised and broken,
and to DIRECT the blind into the paths of peace.

ALL OTHER INTERESTS RECEDE BEFORE THE MAGNITUDE OF THAT CALLING !

When we catch a vision of our heavenly calling, then we begin to lay up treasures where thieves cannot break through and steal, nor moths corrupt, nor rust tarnish, nor economic depression devalue. Where our treasure is, our heart will be also. Maybe that is why so few Christians have any heart for the work,

because their hearts are NOT IN THE WORK but in the world!

They are in love with the world, and not with Christ! The work of saving souls does not thrill them, for they have never yielded to that restraining hand,

that constraining love

that royal commission!

they have never turned when they felt that tap on their shoulder!

A clear indication of our love for our Master is the way we serve Him, and lay His interests to heart. And no man can do a good job unless his heart is in his work. If he lives merely for his paycheck, he will seldom do his best.

More likely he will do the least necessary to retain his job.

If we merely worry about saving our own souls, and thinking of ourselves first, it is unlikely that we shall know the HOLY BOLDNESS, nor the DRIVING CHALLENGE, nor the THRILLING ECSTASY to win souls for Jesus.

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Then all Christian service becomes dull and listless. It lacks luster because the heart is not linked with the Lord. Our interests are miles apart, and our joys are not the same as HIS.

He has meat to eat that we know not of! It is expected of stewards that a man be found faithful.

Faithful in goods not his own,
Faithful under pressure,
Faithful in temptation,
Loyal and true,
One whose self-interests are sacrificed for the interests of his Master.

As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must remember that we have been given clear marching orders.

Those orders are

to make disciples,
to evangelize,
to spread the good news of Christ's death and resurrection,
to declare and to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ,
and to witness by our sacrificial lives, to the fact that we are pilgrims, and that we seek a city whose builder is God!

Driven from his throne by his rebel son Absalom, David gathered around him a ragtag army of discontented men. God has chosen today, the POOR, rich in faith. He has "chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are..." (1 Cor.1:27-28).

He has chosen those who search for truth, and those who are weary with the slavery of the world and the tyranny of things.

He invites them, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" (Matt.11:28).

When God calls us into His army to build His Church and to shake the foundation of hell, He expects TOTAL and IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE !

Obedience to the great commission becomes the driving force of our lives, and obedience to the Spirit's inner urgings are His daily guidance and direction.

Delayed obedience is disobedience!

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The sons of God are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14). We cannot choose our position, or our task. We are given an assignment, a commission, and He who knows us best assigns us a place in His Body that will bring us great joy, and that will ultimately bring the Body most benefit.

It will be a work that will bring us greater dependence upon Him and more devotion to our duty. It will bring death to self-interest and distaste for the praise of men.

"Father, where shall I work today?"
And my love flowed warm and free
Then he pointed me out a tiny spot
and said, "Tend that for me".
I answered quickly, "Oh, no, not that,
Why, no one would ever see,
No matter how well my work was done.
Not that little place for me.!"

And the word he spoke, it was not stern,
He answered me tenderly,
"Ah, little one, search that heart of thine.
Art thou working for them or me?
Nazareth was a little place,
And so was Galilee."

Author unknown. ⁽¹⁾

Ours is a lifetime commitment. There are so many people who fail because they have made a habit of quitting. In regards to our discipleship, it is ALWAYS TOO SOON TO QUIT !

We are in a warfare and quitting means turning traitor and denying the Lord who bought us with His blood. He has promised, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev.2:10).

When our conviction is deep, and our conversion is genuine, then our purpose will be steadfast. Holy boldness will be the result.

"The Lord knoweth them that are His." He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will keep pouring His strength into us and sufficient grace to meet every situation.

We will be MORE THAN CONQUERORS through Him who loves us!

The STAKES ARE HIGH in this game. We have life eternal if we persevere in well-doing and are not turned away from the hope of the Gospel, and everlasting shame and contempt, everlasting suffering and woe, if we fail the test! It is too soon to quit! Press on, faithful pilgrim. Our present trials and testing are not worthy to be compared with the joy that shall be revealed in us!

He is watching from the high balconies of heaven. May we walk before Him and be perfect.

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Be bold and brave,

and above all,

be faithful

"endure hardness as a good soldier...", for good soldiers never die.

As Enoch, they walk with God, and are translated!

Give us a watchword for the hour,
A thrilling word, a word of power;
A battle-cry, a flaming breath,
That calls to conquest or to death;
A word to rouse the Church from rest,
To heed her Master's high behest,
The call is given: Ye hosts arise,
Our watchword is Evangelize!

Henry Crocker ⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Poems that Preach compiled by John R. Rice

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⁽²⁾ *ibid.*