

2Timothy 24-09-29b

We're ready now to resume our study. In 2 Timothy 2, we have come to verses 3 and 4, dealing with enduring hardship as a good soldier. I found a wonderful description of the Roman soldier from Josephus, and pretty much a contemporary of the Apostle Paul.

Here is what Josephus said about the Roman soldier of his time. Each soldier every day throws all his energy into his drill, as though he were in action. Hence that perfect ease with which they sustain the shock of battle.

No confusion breaks their customary formation. No panic paralyzes. No fatigue exhausts them.

All their camp duties are performed with the same discipline, the same regard for security, the procuring of wood, food supplies, and water as required. Each party has its allotted task. Nothing is done without a word of command.

The same precision is maintained on the battlefield. Nothing is done unadvisedly or left to chance. This perfect discipline makes the army an ornament of peacetime, and in war, welds the whole into a single body.

So compact are their ranks, so alert their movements, so quick their ears for orders, their eyes for signals, their hands to act upon them. None are slower than they in succumbing to suffering. Note that last.

There is nobody as slow to succumb to suffering. They are the last ones who would give in to hardship. It's a wonderful description because Roman troops were a model of discipline, and because of that discipline, they dominated the world in their day.

They were virtually unbeatable. So these ideas are in Paul's mind when he alludes to soldiers in talking with Timothy here, endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life.

This entanglement you see in chapter 4 verse 20. Remember Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world and has departed to Thessalonica. Hopefully when he got there, he read the letter first and second to the Thessalonians and recovered.

Luke chapter 8, verse 14, the parable of the soils from the Lord Jesus. Remember that some of the seed falls among thorns and Jesus describes it in 8:14 of Luke. The ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life and bring no fruit to maturity.

That is what it means to be a soldier. It means to be entangled. 1 Corinthians 9, Paul uses the runner motif that he's about to shift to here.

1 Corinthians 9, 25, everyone who competes for the prize is temperate, self-controlled, moderate, thoughtful, wise in all things. They do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Same thing in verse 26 of that chapter, 1 Corinthians 9, 25, and 26.

Therefore, Paul says, I run this way, not with uncertainty. This is how I fight, not as one who beats the air. I'm not just shadow boxing.

I'm not swinging and missing. 1 Timothy chapter 6, verses 9 through 12. We saw this a few months back.

Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. Remember what perdition means in scripture. This is the appellation for Judas.

He is referred to as the son of perdition, son of perdition. This is apolia. This is unrecoverable loss.

Those who go into perdition in the lake of fire are irretrievably and unrecoverably destroyed. They are not coming back. So you, O man of God, again, 1 Timothy 6, 9 through 12.

You, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. This fighting the fight is back to the military motif.

It is an armed conflict and there are mortal dangers to our spiritual being. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called.

And you have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. The same witnesses that heard Paul conveying and teaching and exhorting these things that have been entrusted to Timothy, they also are aware that Timothy is one of the number. The verses to which we just referred for endurance are 2 Timothy 1, 8. 2 Timothy 1, 8. Share with me in the sufferings and endure as a good soldier.

No soldier that wars entangles himself in the affairs of this life. This goes back to Deuteronomy. You can go back to Deuteronomy chapter 20 verses 5 through 7. The law of Moses given by God says, The officers shall speak to the people saying, What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in battle and another man dedicate it.

Also, what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. What man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her. Separation of civilian

goals and pursuits from military service.

There has to be full on dedication. And in the area of service and function as a communicator, there has to be top priority for that function. This doesn't mean everyone is a soldier of Christ in the sense that Paul calls Timothy, but in the same way that the qualifications for an elder, the qualifications for a widow, and the other things that we've seen in 1 Timothy and Titus are principles that apply to everyone, whatever your station, whatever your circumstance, whatever your gift.

This exhortation applies to us. We know this from Ephesians 6, that not only is Paul exhorting Timothy to endure hardship as a good soldier, but brethren in Laodicea, Ephesus, and the other towns that received that circular letter called Ephesians, brethren are exhorted to be strengthened by the grace to put on the armor. So the military metaphor extends and is founded for those in Israel on Old Testament precedence.

The Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 9, verses 59 through 62, you'll remember this episode. Jesus says to a man, follow me. And he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father.

Jesus said to him, let the dead bury their own dead. You go and preach the kingdom of God. Notice this individual was given a communication commission.

Jesus said, let the dead bury their own dead. You go and preach the kingdom of God. Another said, Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.

Jesus said to him, no one having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God to reside in it, to serve in it, to preach about it, or to in any other way represent, embody, or anticipate the kingdom. You put your hand to the plow, it's time to plow. And this is true, whatever our assignment.

So being fit for the kingdom, this is looking ahead. This is planning on residence and function in the eternal future. So do not be entangled.

In 2nd Corinthians chapter 5, verse 9, Paul in talking about, is it, remember, I've mentioned this many times for me to live as Christ. And I am utterly and thoroughly convinced that that's not what Paul said. Christos and Christos are only off by one letter and the letters are even similarly shaped.

For me to live is good, to die is gain. It's great to live. It's even better to go and be with the Lord.

I'm torn between the two. To stay here and be a benefit to you is probably what's going to happen, but I would be happy to depart and be with the Lord. He says, we make it our aim in 2nd Corinthians 5, 9, whether present or absent, I want to be pleasing to him,

well-pleasing.

In the present, I can be well-pleasing. And what I do now is going to determine whether or not when I am present with him, will I be well-pleasing. 1st Thessalonians 2, 4, as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, Paul is talking about his apostolic reception of the message from the Lord Jesus.

You and I are walking epistles. We are walking embodiments, or we should be, of the gospel. You communicate it, whether you have the communication calling and gift and assignment or not.

You are a walking book of the Bible, an expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a testimony to salvation, to deliverance, to hope, to faith, and to love. Every time you spend any opportunity in conversation, in contact with one another, with neighbors, with the outer ring of those who are on the outside, even when you are dealing with enemies, we really have those four circles of love. Loving your enemy is not the same as loving one another.

There is a different set of rules. Loving your neighbor is not the same as loving one another, nor is it the same as loving those who are outside. Those who are outside, to the extent that it is up to you, live peaceably with all men.

Try not to have them go to the outer ring of being an enemy. Enemy love is different than outsider love. Outsider love is different than neighbor love, and neighbor love is different than one another love.

We study this in great detail. So, we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. Your life's effect on anyone in any of those circles is a witness.

It is a gospel of the kingdom testimony. So, we've been approved to be entrusted with it, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but as pleasing God, who examines our hearts, who tests our hearts. So, we are tested in this regard.

If anyone competes in athletics, verse 5, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. There is a shift here in metaphor, because there is a shift in the aspect of enduring hardship that is better illustrated with another reference. So, soldiers endure by remembering their fellow soldiers, the mission, the desire to please the one at the top of the organization who called and enlisted them.

They're part of a group. There is an individual to please at the top, and there are fellow soldiers to serve, to protect, to keep in mind, no matter what the hardship is. He also does not let himself be distracted, entangled by the affairs of this life.

So, the message to Timothy is, one, it is wholehearted devotion, and two, remembering the approval of the one at the top. Are you approved by that one and everyone else in

the chain? What is the difference, by the way? I have done some research on what other people think about this soldierly metaphor, and there are those who say that, well, it is a reference to concentrated service. Once soldiers have enlisted in a campaign, they no longer involve themselves in ordinary daily business.

They must concentrate on their service as soldiers. The Roman code of said, we forbid men engaged on military service to engage in civilian occupations. You can't moonlight with another job.

Even the Romans understood this. A soldier is a soldier and nothing else. Christians must concentrate on their Christianity.

And then the next observation by this commentator is soldiers are conditioned to obedience, and he's got a list of four or five of these. But I was thinking, in terms of complete dedication and concentration, why didn't Paul talk about being a slave? Because slaves concentrate on their assignment, and number two, conditioned to obedience, so are slaves. Slaves are conditioned to obey the voice of the master.

So if the emphasis here, and you put these as number one and number two, is complete dedication and fulsome obedience, why not use a slave as the example? A slave is often given individual instructions. He's an individual steward. The debt owed by the slave that is forgiven by the master, and he has an underslave.

They're very much functioning in a vertical relationship, and they seem to have individual responsibilities. It's not the group of slaves that is in view. And I think the thing that distinguishes soldiers is this corporate identity.

There's really no such thing as a soldier that's not a part of an army and doesn't have fellow soldiers, and he doesn't have others in his unit. Even the smallest unit in the military, which is a fire team, is three or four individuals, talking about in the infantry side. So I think the reason we are not told to endure hardship as a slave, it doesn't work the same, does it? You think about, well, endure hardship as a good slave.

Well, slaves are kind of slaves because they are in a life of hardship. But when you endure as a slave, you have a life of honor and purpose and mission and function and brotherly concern and camaraderie and esprit de corps that does not characterize slaves, even if you put them in a group. You put esprit de corps in a group of slaves, you're going to have a slave uprising.

We're going to get together, we're going to make a slave union, and we're really going to do beneficial things for the master? Probably not. So there's a reason for this. And when you think about what it is not said to be, we do not endure as slaves, we endure as soldiers.

We think outside ourselves. We think larger and the fellowship of our entire unit, our

entire organization. Another aspect that separates soldiers from slaves is the notion of self-sacrifice.

Slaves will serve because they fear the consequences of disobedience. They don't run away because if they're caught, there are severe consequences. But soldiers serve to the ultimate in the ideal, to the point of self-sacrifice.

There are those who will literally get killed endeavoring to accomplish the mission, to bring wounded back, to jump on a grenade to protect the rest of the unit. There is an element of self-sacrifice that is outward looking. Nobody is self-sacrificial because they're depressed and suicidal and so obsessed with their own problems that, well, let me go jump on a grenade.

Self-sacrificial soldierly service, military service is always outward looking. There is something more important than my wellbeing that is at stake. I will put myself out there and risk or sacrifice if necessary, everything I am, everything I have, my entire future, all of my relationships.

It's on the line here because this is more important than me. It's not all about me. And this is a worthy and a noble cause that is literally worth dying for.

And that is a second aspect that is unique to this metaphor, this figure, this illustration, sacrifice. And a third element that is unique to this is loyalty. Slaves over time may turn into friends.

You have the slave that does not desire to leave his master for whatever reason. You have the pierced ear idea. But when you think of slaves, you don't initially think of loyalty.

Loyalty to the master, loyalty to the cause, loyalty to fellow slaves, it can exist, but it isn't intrinsic to the figure, to the concept. Paul is a slave of Jesus Christ and he's intensely loyal. But when Paul identifies himself as a slave, he's not impressing on his listeners, look at how loyal I am.

Enduring hardship as a soldier is an expression of loyalty. And that's not a prominent feature of slavery. It is a prominent feature of proper military service.

Roman soldiers, when they were enlisted into the army, they took an oath called the sacramentum. You've heard of sacraments, these holy ordinances and ceremonies that are practiced in various kinds of churches. But the sacramentum was an oath of loyalty to the emperor.

The emperor is the one who enlisted him. He serves at the pleasure of the emperor. Whatever intermediaries, centurions and generals and whatnot, he has sworn his allegiance to the emperor and he will die for the emperor.

And the emperor is like, I pledge allegiance to the flag. When you pledge allegiance to the emperor, you're pledging allegiance to Rome and everything that Rome stands for. So there is an illustration I ran across in World War I. The French commander, Marshal Foch, F-O-C-H, he was high up in the French part.

And in World War I, he was talking to one of his subordinate officers and he said, you must not retire. You must hold on at all costs. Then the officer said, that means we're all going to die.

And Foch said, precisely, I need you to die in place at this location. That's your job. Your job is to hold at all costs.

If you die in the process, so be it. We're all going to die. Yep.

That's right. Remember when Paul says, I die daily in the service of the churches. He's putting it all out there.

He leaves nothing in reserve. Nothing's left on the table. He's all in.

It's all on the line. So the idea of loyalty, the idea of sacrifice and the idea of being confederated, of being in a brotherhood, part of an organization larger than yourself. For us, remembering that we are in the body.

That's what is in view. So then he turns to the metaphor in verse five. If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Notice the shift. Unless it's a relay race, unless it's a sports contest. Now in the Olympics, they have soccer and they have different team events.

But in the ancient Olympics, the games were largely individual. Put the shot, run a race of varying distances, throw the javelin, hurl the discus, do the high jump, do the long jump. It was a display of individual prowess, wrestling, where it is one wrestler against another, one individual contesting for the crown with another.

And the athletic metaphor now shifts to what do you do on your own as an individual, regardless of what everyone else is doing. What's the most important thing when you think of yourself in isolation from your fellow soldiers? An athlete, if he wants to be crowned, has to compete according to the rules. Pay attention to your conduct so that you don't step on the foul line.

You don't do something you're not supposed to that disqualifies you from reward. It doesn't say watch your fellow athletes and make sure they don't disqualify themselves. This is the individual side.

If I'm going to look at myself, I need to ensure that I am not engaging in disqualifying behavior. Remember the qualifications for an elder, if he is serving as an elder and wants

to remain as an elder, or the qualifications for a widow supported by the church above 60 years of age. Is she ministering to the needs of the saints? Is she down there doing everything she can with her abilities and at her age and in her situation to minister to others in that group? That is competing according to the rules.

Not turning into a gossip in a busy body. Not getting distracted and doing things you shouldn't. Not disqualifying yourself through being intemperate or giving too much wine or philandering with other women.

You think about those elder qualifications. Compete according to the rules. That's the point of the second illustration.

Many things you can say about athletic contest. Paul says, I have run my race. I finished my course.

And he's talking about endurance there rather than he doesn't say I never stepped on the sideline. Then you come to verse five. If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Immediately shifts with virtually no warning to the hard working farmer must be first to partake of the crops. The hard working farmer. In 1 Corinthians 9.23, Paul says, all of these things I am doing.

He's given a long list of what he endures and what he engages in. I do this for the gospel sake. That's my calling.

That's my mission. That's what I have been entrusted with by the Lord Jesus. That's what I'm passing on to other faithful men.

I do this for the gospel sake in order that I may be partaker of it with you. The good news is not just what Jesus has done for us in the past or even what he is doing for us in the present. The grace that he is providing, the sustenance, the guidance, the strengthening, but also the future, the future hope that I may be a partaker of it with you.

And you can't help but think of Hebrews 10.36. I quote it all the time. You have need of endurance and you have need of a promise. So that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

I haven't received the full promise yet. We have an earnest, we have a down payment. The Holy Spirit is here giving us a foretaste.

Remember the song, Blessed Assurance? Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. What the Lord Jesus does for us, his indwelling presence with us now is just a taste, an anticipation of what is to come.

This is mentioned throughout scripture. The farmer who toils and partakes, this is like

the ox treading out the grain and caring for animals. You often have the case where they drink of the milk of the flock, it says in another place.

So we have sustaining grace. We have blessing and benefit in the act of this service and this dedication, this self-sacrifice. And so looking at these three together, you have first of all, viewing ourselves in a larger context and being sensitive to others.

Secondly, paying attention to ourselves and ensuring that we don't disqualify ourselves. And third, watching for that which God gives us as encouragement, sustenance, and grace along the way. He blesses us.

He encourages us. And this is the partaking of the crops. You're working hard.

Farmer doesn't eat the entire crop. He's growing it ultimately for the benefit of others, but he gets to eat some of it himself. And God ensures that there is a reflexive quality to our service where our faithfulness, our love, and our hope will return to us a blessing.

Think of the teaching opportunity, the teaching calling, the teaching gift. Those of us who labor in the word and endeavor to come to a better understanding and share that understanding with others, but we get the first dip of the dipper into the cool water of the well. We get the first grain that is ground on the, and it is sometimes a millstone grinding thing.

You're like Samson pushing that thing around, but you're also the first, you get the first freshest ground grain. And a lot of that doesn't always make it all the way to the consumer. And there are special insights and blessings that come in the commission of your gift, in the fulfilling of your opportunities.

There is blessing built in. And this is the farmer partaking of his own crops, even as he grows them for the benefits of many, many others. So Paul says, and this is where we will close this morning.

Consider what I say. Don't just take this message and record it and then play the recording back for faithful men who can play it back for others. In the course of receiving these things, Paul says, consider them, you've got to partake.

As you're growing this crop, as you're ministering to your congregation and identifying faithful men who can do the same thing in the future, don't forget to consider it yourself. The first application should be personal. The first turning the corner from observation and interpretation should be for me, myself, and I. You be sure to remember that you have fellow soldiers.

You, Timothy, be sure to remember that you've got to compete according to the rules so that you're not disqualified. And you have to remember to feed yourself, to care for yourself, that your labors first and foremost fuel you and those in your immediate

periphery. So this sequence is intentional, it is meaningful, and it is profitable, whatever our calling, whatever our situation, to think outside of ourselves.

Paul says, look at soldiers, look at athletes, look at farmers. There are elements of each of our lives where we can learn something from that observation, put it into practice. And I love the fact that he starts with the self-sacrificial soldier, with the intentional and careful athlete, and then with the farmer who is reaping the crop, grinding the grain, getting the fine flour, mixing it with oil.

There's bread, there's food, there is benefit, there is celebration, the feast can be celebrated. And there is a flow to this that begins with dedication, extends through perseverance and carefulness, and ends in reward now and in the ages to come. And that's all of us.

Well, we will pick up here in verse seven. Next time we'll close here in a prayer. Father, thank you for the clear guidance from your Word in the hands of your Spirit.

We know that it can enable us, empower us, it can prune us so that we can bear more fruit. It is a judge of the thoughts and intents of our hearts. We pray that as we reflect, as we partake, even as we often think of others that we wish could hear, that we know would be benefited when they consider these truths, that we first and foremost apply them to ourselves, take them to heart, endeavor to live a life that is pleasing in your sight and glorifying to the Lord Jesus in these specific aspects.

We pray that that will take place. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified. We ask it in His name.

Amen.