

Matthew 21-05-30b

Let's continue our study now. And as I said, the call that we have from the Lord Jesus is to follow him and he gives us how to do it. And we reviewed that extensively in the first session.

What does it mean to be a follower of Christ? What does it mean to be a good soldier of the cross? I'm gonna take just a couple of minutes here to review some very familiar passages, beginning with 2 Timothy 2. So you can put a sticky on Matthew 17 and turn to 2 Timothy 2. Interesting thing about the pastoral epistles is that we sometimes overlook them and say, well, I'm not a pastor. I don't need to read Timothy's letters or the letter that Paul sent to Titus. They were pastors and I'm not.

But if you think about it, to understand what the pastor's goal is in performing his function and service, this is what we all need to know. This is the purpose and mission for the group. And the instructions to the leader are helpful for everyone to understand.

This is why in the Marine Corps, when the five paragraph order is issued and the officers get it up in the command tent, they come down and share the elements of that with their people so that everybody understands the mission, everybody understands the plan. So even though these instructions were given to Timothy as a pastor and as a minister, they pertain and define what the ecclesia should be and should do founded on that rock of Jesus Christ. So in chapter two, in keeping with the theme of the morning, you therefore my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And I love how scripture not only tells us what to do, be strong, but how to do it. We're not strong by gritting our teeth and really, really imagining ourselves visualizing strength or somehow generating strength of our own. We're strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

God's grace and the power to be strong is in Christ himself. The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Associated with the strength and the grace is the message.

The things you have heard among many witnesses. And remember, there's not just one pastor, there's not just one orphaned messenger of God. There are many strong groups of Christians.

We may not know where they are or who they are. You may not hear anything about them, but there are 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal and we can take comfort and we can pray for even those that we do not know. As I've told you many times, I used to pray for Patty 15, 12, 10, eight, six, four, two years before I ever met her.

I knew she was out there somewhere and I thought she's having to face trials and difficulties. She's most likely a believer in the Lord Jesus. And I would say, Lord, I don't know who she is.

I know she's out there somewhere and I pray that you'll be with her, give her strength and encouragement and meaning in her life. You don't have to know people in certain categories to pray for them. Now I'm a strong advocate to pray intelligently, but you can pray for fellow believers because you know what they're facing.

It's just like scripture says, knowing that Peter says, these trials are faced by your brethren in the world. All of us are facing a common enemy, a common threat, common pressures. And we can pray for those believers who are trying to live their lives as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, just as we hope to do.

So many witnesses, you've heard these things from me among many witnesses, commit these not to everybody, but to faithful men. Circle faithful men. There is no point in trying to commit these things to just anybody.

It's only worthwhile communicating these things to the faithful. The faithful communicate to the faithful. Paul says it in another place.

These things come from faith to faith, from faith to faith. There is a inner circle. There's a community of faith.

We look for and treasure fellow believers of faith. Commit these truths to the faithful and they can share them with others also. You therefore must endure hardship.

You therefore must take up your cross, Timothy, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life. Why? Getting entangled in the affairs of this life.

Now, are we supposed to handle the affairs of this life? Should you make sure you pay your bills on time, that you owe no man anything, that you look out for the needs of others, that you, we all have to engage in the affairs of this life. If you've got a job, you've got to be good at it and good for it and reliable and trustworthy and someone who can be counted on. That's the affairs of this life.

When somebody says, who's the steady hand, who's the level head? They should think of us. That's the affairs of this life. Notice it doesn't say, should disregard the affairs of this life.

Do not become entangled, snared, tripped up by the affairs of this life. No one engaged in warfare can afford to become entangled because that represents self-interest. That represents loss of focus.

You've forgotten the mission. You've gotten distracted. That cartoon movie that the kids watch and there's these dogs trying to go somewhere or do something and, but then somebody will yell squirrel and they're all immediately distracted.

We can't be that. We can't be frozen in place and lose our focus every time somebody yells squirrel. That's entanglement in the affairs of this life.

Why? He doesn't get entangled because he wants to please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Who enlisted you as a soldier of Jesus Christ? God, the father. God, the father determined that we would be born in this age at this time and be church and not Israel, not patriarchs, not millennial.

There are some true millennials and nobody living right now is it. The millennials are old Testament Israel who are gonna come back and live in the millennial kingdom. That's the true millennials.

But we are assigned this. God, the father has enlisted us, recruited us, commissioned us to be soldiers of Jesus Christ and we live to please him. Same thing if anyone competes in athletics.

Verse five, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Not only is there commitment, not only is there motivation, not only is there dedication, not only is there focus and elimination of distraction, but don't step out of bounds. Don't commit a foul.

Don't incur a penalty. Play by the rules. There are ways to do this that are legitimate and there are ways that are illegitimate.

Know the rules, stick to them, play by them. His third analogy, he uses a soldier, he uses an athlete, now he uses a farmer. The hard working farmer must be first to partake of the crops.

Even though Patty's maiden name is Bauer, which means farmer, in German, I feel like I am the farmer because when we come to the wonderful truth of God's word, I am the first to partake and it's a wonderful privilege. But farmers grow crops for the benefit of, not just themselves, it's not a garden, it's a field. And you feed many people.

You produce a large and hopefully healthy crop, nutritious, beneficial, plentiful. But the hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say and may the Lord give you understanding in all these things.

Skip down to verse 10. I endure all things for the sake of others, for the sake of the called, Paul says. I endure for the sake of others.

Why did Jesus endure the cross and despise the shame? For us, for his father, love for

God, love for one another. The Lord Jesus is the capstone of the arch in that regard. He is our example.

And Paul does the same. I endure all things for the sake of the called, that they also may obtain the deliverance, which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Endure hardship with a view toward eternal glory.

Momentary light affliction, eternal weight of glory. That's 2nd Timothy. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter six.

Many of you will find this already resident in your memory. It was in our memory verse stack. Ephesians chapter six, verse 10.

Finally, ultimately, my brethren, having already talked about marriages, families and employment, masters and servants. Finally, my brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Same thing he told Timothy, be strong in the grace, which is in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 6.10, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. We're not wrestling against flesh and blood.

Don't become entangled in the affairs of this life. Solving problems in this life, as much as we may love to do it and be gratified by doing it, is not the goal. We're in a spiritual conflict.

Principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. Spiritual wickedness, something bigger than us, something more important than our momentary afflictions or our momentary desires. Therefore, verse 13, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand after the evil day, to stand up tall at the judgment, to be in line for overcomer blessings and rewards, not denial and distance.

Stand therefore, I love that threefold standing, withstand in the evil day, having done all, stand. You complete the mission, everything is done. Don't you love it when you've got a checklist and you get every single thing done? Nothing left out, nothing partial, nothing incomplete, nothing done in a tacky way.

It's done, it's done well. Having done all, we stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth.

Truth is the belt that holds your pants up. You can't walk with your pants around your ankle. In those days, you couldn't do much if your robe was flapping in the breeze and untamed, unable to serve.

You know, they didn't have pockets on those robes. When you wanted to carry something, you carried it in your robe above your belt. So if you want to carry things along with you that are important like bread or a flask of water or whatever else you need, your purse, your wallet, your carrying place was formed by your belt.

And you would put things inside your garment, inside your outer robe, between your outer and your inner robe for easy access, for quick access. You had no pockets, you couldn't carry anything with you if you didn't have your belt. And that belt is truth.

God's truth, not truth self-defined, not truth defined by the world, God's truth. Having put on the breastplate of righteousness, this protects our heart, protects our chest. It's our most vulnerable area.

If the enemy wants to kill you, they're going to go for the head or for the chest. So your chest is protected with righteousness. Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

You don't travel on rocky, rough roads without shoes on. You put your shoes on first, says the preparation of the gospel, but really the good news of God's word in its fullness prepares us for the journey. It puts shoes on our feet, it puts boots on the ground with which we can walk.

Above all, taking the shield of faith. We trust when bad stuff is flung at us, it doesn't penetrate, doesn't hit us in the face, doesn't gouge us in the neck, doesn't open up a femoral artery in our thigh, doesn't puncture our aorta by getting past our breastplate of righteousness. We fend it off with faith.

I may not know a lot of things, but I know whom I have believed. I know the promises. I know the principles.

I know the doctrines. I know the conditions for the fulfillment of God's promises. And I am trusting God for the outcome.

God knows what he's doing. It may not make sense to me. Troops don't always know why they're being sent into particular areas or theaters or arenas of combat, but you trust that the leadership knows what it's doing.

Now in the human realm, that trust is sometimes misplaced, not in ours. God knows what he's doing. Shield of faith.

Quench the fiery darts of the wicked one and taking the helmet of salvation. You can't get inside my head because I'm saved. And I know that I am.

I am delivered by God, not by your ideas, not by your machinations, not by your agendas, not by your programs, not by your legislation, not by your rule changes. I am

saved by God's grace and the work of Jesus Christ. None of your earworm ideas are going to get into my head.

I've got the helmet of salvation and my offensive weapon. When I go on the attack, when I need to fend somebody off and keep them at a distance or dispatch them and get them out of my face and out of my way, it's the word of God. That's the sword.

And these are things that you put on. Remember the heiress that we saw in the first session? Deny self, take up the cross. That's the preparatory phase.

That's the command of preparation. And then here's the command of execution. Follow.

Same thing here. You take up and put on the whole armor of God. Here's what you keep on doing after it's on.

Praying always with all prayer. If you withstand, having done all, you stand, and then you keep on standing. Here you pray with all prayer and prayer, supplication, petition in the spirit.

The sword of the spirit is the word of God and you're praying in the spirit. So what does that tell you about prayer? If you're praying in the spirit, you're praying in the word of God. You're citing, claiming, declaring the word of God in prayer.

We don't just fire off any old, oh God, please. Document it, cite it. It's like a court case.

There's precedent here. There's law here. There's a foundation for this request.

Being alert, watchful, careful to this end. Being diligent to pray always with all prayer and supplication. It requires diligence.

It requires dedication. It requires revisiting. Make it a habit, make it a feature of each day with perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Notice, all the saints. We can pray for those we don't know as groups, as believers who love God and are seeking to live in these difficult times in the light of God's word, make good decisions, stand up against opposition that is demonically inspired. We can pray for each other, praying with supplication for all the saints and for those who give utterance.

Pray for those who communicate that they will know when to speak, to whom to speak, what to say, how to say it. Paul makes that personal request. It's true for all communicators of God's word that utterance may be given to open my mouth boldly to make known the hidden things of the gospel.

Things that aren't widely known. A mystery is something that's not widely known. It's not exactly a secret, but it's not out there in the public domain.

The hidden things of the gospel, to speak boldly as I ought to speak. So as a result, turn to Hebrews chapter 12. As you know, I'm a firm believer that Paul wrote Hebrews.

So we have our third Pauline passage in my estimation. Hebrews chapter 12, verse one, having reviewed the great heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. All these, verse 39, having obtained a good testimony through faith are still waiting for the fulfillment of the promise because it comes in the kingdom.

Matthew 17 is a view of the kingdom and its king. Did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us that they should not be made complete apart from us. God's plan is going to be fulfilled.

Their promises will be fulfilled. Our promises will be fulfilled. And it will happen with the uniting of these groups, Israel and the church.

Therefore, chapter 12, verse one, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, I hear people quote this as, you know, believers who have passed away are watching and looking over our shoulders. And you can say, hi there, grandma or whatever. No, this cloud of witnesses has just been named and described in the preceding chapter.

Therefore, chapter 11, these who obtained a good testimony through faith. Now you could certainly add people that we've known in the past that have gone to glory. All of these that are described in chapter 11 were passed on saints.

But we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of examples of witnesses of those who testify to the worthiness of the life of faith, despite trials, looking ahead to the fulfillment of the promises of God. That's the cloud of witnesses. Let us lay aside every weight.

Do not become entangled in the affairs of this life. Lay aside the sin, which so easily ensnares us. The sin that so easily entangles us.

Push it aside, get it out of contact. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. We take up our particular cross.

We run our particular race. What is the durative element here? For Paul, putting on the armor, you do that in preparation, and then you pray. And you do that mission.

You perform those tasks. You conduct that assault in the power of the spirit. That's the ongoing thing.

Here, the ongoing thing is looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Back to Matthew chapter 17. So what does

this tell us? If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and keep on following me.

There are some of you standing here, Jesus said, who will not taste death. You could see this and most do as the personal death of these disciples. I think the taste of death is the upcoming death of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

But before that happens, before they taste that death, they will see the son of man coming in his kingdom. After six days, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves. Now, every word.

Why didn't he just go off behind a building? Why didn't he go off a short distance into a copse of trees? Why didn't he take them to the garden of Gethsemane or to some little isolated spot where he would spend time in prayer to his father? Where does he take them? Climbed a low hill, found a valley, found a isolated little cleft like where Petra is built, a great big canyon. Where does he take them? Not just a mountain, a high mountain. This is a climb.

This is difficulty arriving at the destination. Do you want to see the glory? You got to climb the mountain. Done any climbing? How does it feel after the first hundred yards? And you look up and you say, I don't think I'm any closer to the top than I was when I was down in the parking lot.

How does it feel? What does it take to get to the mountaintop? Everybody loves a mountaintop experience, but what does it take to get there? There were no asphalt roads and golf carts or drive here and park. This is a climb. Jesus took them, led them up on a high mountain, and they are by themselves.

Narrow is the way and straight is the gate that leads to life. And there's only a few people that find that road. Don't expect a whole shelf of books on this topic at the Christian bookstore.

Don't expect to find a lot of people on this journey. Out of his 12 disciples, Jesus takes 25%, 25%, three out of 12 are qualified for this journey. Before the break, I had you look at verse 19.

Do you want to know the answer before we even get there to the question in verse 19? The disciples at the bottom, this man comes and says, here's a problem. Here is principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age afflicting this little boy, ruining our lives, distressing parents, creating a huge problem in the community. I bring him to the people who represent God and are companions of Christ.

Verse 16, I brought my son to your disciples, but they could not get rid of this problem. They couldn't address it. They couldn't handle it.

The demon did not leave. They could not cast it out. Here's my suggestion.

The reason that those other nine disciples could not cast out this demon is the same reason they're not on top of the mountain. These two things are inextricably linked in the gospel accounts. All of these things flow in exactly the same sequence with exactly the same material.

Why could we not cast it out? For the same reason Jesus says, I could not take you to the top of the mountain. I promise you, if Peter or James or John had been down there, they could have. But one accompanies the other.

If you cannot address the problems of this life that are satanically inspired, you're not going to be on the mountaintop either. It's one or the other. There's failure at the bottom of the mountain or there is glory at the top.

There's nobody halfway up. The reason they could not cast out the demon is the reason Jesus couldn't take them to the top. They didn't do what Jesus said.

Deny yourself, take up your cross, keep on following me. Not qualified. If you can't handle life on this earth in the power of God, in the name of Christ, you're not going to be on the mountaintop.

It's one or the other. You're one of the three or you're one of the nine. Nobody's in between.

You notice that? It's a high mountain and they are isolated by themselves. It kind of reminds you of a great gulf fixed, doesn't it? But instead of a chasm and fire at the bottom and Abraham's bosom at the top, you have Jesus and Moses and Elijah and kingdom revealed glory at the top. And you've got failure and demons and heartache down at the bottom.

Verse two, he was transfigured before them. His face shown like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. I'll talk a little more about this next time, but the face is significant in scripture.

Clothes are significant in scripture. It is Jesus' face and Jesus' clothes. Don't have time to turn there.

Go back and read Revelation chapter one. What does this same John see again? Reminds you of Peter. Keep your finger here and just turn over to 2 Peter chapter one.

We looked at this before, but it's worth looking at again. 2 Peter chapter one, verse 16. We did not follow cunningly devised fables, which is what virtually everybody thinks the Bible is today.

We were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power

and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, power and coming. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty for he received from God the father, honor and glory. When such a voice came to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. Who is qualified to communicate? What did Paul tell Timothy? The faithful, faithful men who can teach others also. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

Be strong in the grace, which is in Christ Jesus. Be strong, commit what you have heard from me among witnesses to others of faith who can teach and pass it on. We heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

Verse 19, so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed. As a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. It is the prophetic word, Peter says here, and we've translated this.

You remember when we did first and second Peter? It doesn't mean we have the prophetic word confirmed. We have a more certain prophetic word. He says, look, I wasn't following a fable when I saw the Lord Jesus glorified and heard the voice from the excellent glory say, this is my beloved son.

But the prophetic word is even more sure. The word that I, Peter, am giving to you now is a better witness than being an eyewitness on the Mount of Transfiguration. Isn't that something? Peter says, you're better off having a copy of my letter than standing on the mountain and seeing and hearing.

17 of Matthew, he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun. Again, John's gonna see this.

Peter heard the voice twice, we think. There's some debate. I was reminded that it's not a firm observation that Peter was there when Jesus was baptized.

It seems like maybe his brother came and got him. But Peter answers, when Moses and Elijah appeared to him, appeared to them talking with him. Now, why the transfiguration? We've talked about why it's on the mountaintop.

There's meaning there. You have got to do some work. You've got to climb.

There is effort involved, just like bearing a cross, taking up a cross. Jesus doesn't say, okay, Peter, James, John, see this mountain. I want you to use your faith and tell this mountain to be lifted up and cast into the sea.

Faith can move mountains, right? Jesus said so. If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you can pluck up mulberry trees. You can say to mountains, be removed and cast

into the sea and they'll go.

As we learn in Ecclesiastes, there is a time for mountain moving and there is a time for mountain climbing. Who decides which time it is? Who decides when it is crown time and when it is cross time? Obviously, this is our heavenly father. It becomes clear to us from the word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, when we use our faith to tell a mountain to get out of the way and when we climb it.

Jesus led them up the mountain. When we are following the example of Jesus, do you notice Jesus did an awful lot of things, did many wonderful miracles. We've covered them under a list of 36 a couple of times in the past.

One miracle Jesus never did is he never moved a mountain with his faith. How many times did Jesus climb a mountain? Over and over and over. Golgotha is a mountain.

Transfiguration is a mountain. When Jesus calls the 12 and formally commissions the disciples, he goes up into a mountain and calls them to himself. And then you get the list, right? Jesus does a lot more mountain climbing and his disciples follow him up the mountain.

Most of our mountain negotiation is going to be climbing, not faithing it away into the sea. But there is a time for both. Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with him.

What are they talking about? Well, first of all, what is this whole thing for? What's the purpose of the transfiguration? Or maybe to put a finer point on it, who is the transfiguration for? Is the transfiguration for Jesus? Is God giving Jesus a foretaste of glory divine to encourage and motivate his hope so that he'll endure the cross and despise the shame? Here's some of the joy that's set before you. Here's Moses and Elijah. They'll encourage you.

You get the clue here in verse three. Moses and Elijah appeared to whom? What does your verse say? Moses and Elijah appeared to them. Jesus leads them up the mountain for their benefit.

Moses and Elijah appear to Peter, James and John talking with Jesus. Well, we know what they were talking about from Luke. And we'll look at that next time.

It's fascinating. The word is Exodus. The word is Exodus.

We'll see why that is the topic. We'll see a fascinating thing from the book of Deuteronomy in connection with this next time. But just remember, you have the means given in the preceding context, 16, 24 and following.

If you want to be one who arrives at the top of the mountain, following Jesus. If Jesus led

Peter, James and John up the mountain, what are they doing? They are following. Why do they get to go and the other nine do not? Faith.

Why can the disciples at the bottom of the mountain not cast out the demon? Oh ye of little faith. We'll see it. There's so much in this chapter.

It's such a wonderful encouragement to us. God has given us every good and perfect gift. God has given us strength in grace.

God has given us power. God has given us guidance. God has given us an example.

There is no reason why we cannot be good soldiers of the cross. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for how powerfully it motivates and encourages us. We pray that as we reflect on these things that your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, that we will find the motivation as the Lord Jesus did in the joy that is set before us and that we will be able in him and through him to accomplish our goal, to fulfill our mission, to take up our cross and not only to follow the Lord Jesus, but to arrive with him in that place of future blessing, opportunity and service that he represents at your right hand. We pray it in the Lord Jesus name, amen.