

October 21, 2007
Pentecost 21

"Be Confident! The Lord Is Faithful!"

2 TIMOTHY 2:8-13

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹ Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Some of you can remember growing up with Walt Disney on Sunday evenings and the Musketeers during the late afternoons during the week. Disney was a master at producing shows that filled kids with confidence in themselves. There was the upbeat music, stories of kids overcoming adversity in summer camp, and the ever smiling faces of the Musketeers. There was even a theme song with the words, "When you wish upon a star makes no difference who you are anything your heart desires will come to you."

In the words just read to you the Apostle Paul is writing from a prison in Rome to a young pastor named Timothy to encourage him and build up his confidence, not in himself but in the Lord. He wrote earlier in this letter, "But God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." Today we want to take a closer look at these words to build up our confidence, not in ourselves but in the Lord. Let's look at three powerful confidence builders: The resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the power of God's Word and the faithfulness of our Lord.

Be confident in Jesus' resurrection

It seems that the early Christians were more confident in their faith than we are today. They were always witnessing to Jesus resurrection from the dead. Should it surprise us then that Paul encourages Timothy to greater confidence with these words? "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal." The heart of the Christian faith is so simple, yet so profound and life changing. "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David." No religion in the world teaches what we believe.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth and was known by his friends and neighbors as the carpenter's son. Yet he was Lord and God from all eternity. That is the heart and core of the Christian faith that distinguishes it from all other religions of the world. If you had grown up with Jesus you saw him tired, hungry, thirsty, sick from a cold, and even tempted to sin as we are but always perfect. The blood that flowed from Jesus body when he died was real human blood and yet it was also the blood of God himself that made the perfect ransom payment for us. Again, I say, No other religion in the world teaches anything like this.

We know this is real because Jesus rose from the dead just as he said he would. He appeared to his disciples and said, "Peace be to you." He let them put their fingers in the nail marks of his hands and put their hands into the gaping spear wound that was in his side. This morning if you believe with your eyes of faith that Jesus physically rose from the dead with a real body and rules the world from the right hand of the Father, you have something in your life that gives you great confidence. You believe in something more real and more lasting and more permanent than anything you own or possess in this life, greater and more real than any problems or troubles you may possess.

The Apostle Paul did not lose his confidence even when he found himself a prisoner in Rome, chained to a wall, and facing the certainty of death. He said in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes." The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only hope by which people can have eternal life and this is a message worth confessing and suffering and even dying for.

How much do we need Jesus? Let me illustrate with this credit card I am holding in my hand. Recently I heard of someone who has over \$200,000 in credit card debt. Imagine the sinking feeling of trying to pay off credit cards by taking out more credit cards and borrowing even more money on more credit cards. That is what happens to all people because of sin. We are born in debt, without hope and without God. We accumulate a massive debt of sin in life by continually falling short of God's glory, his perfection and his holiness. We foolishly think we can pay off the debt by trying to do some good here and there, never realizing that even our goodness is marred by sinful thinking. The death of Jesus made the ransom or debt payment for all sin. We are told in Isaiah 53, "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." To prove that this payment was complete the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Romans 4:25 says of Jesus, "He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification." The message of the resurrection fills us with confidence.

Be confident in God's Word

The Apostle Paul has more to offer Timothy to fill him with greater confidence. Listen to what he says about the power of God's Word. "But God's Word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for sake of God's elect that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory." Look at Paul in prison in Rome, chained to the wall of the prison, unable to even go out on the streets and talk to people about Jesus. He was chained, but the Word of God that he proclaimed was not chained. It was reaching more and more people every day. Several times in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, it simple says, "The word of the Lord grew." Even as we are sitting here this morning, the Word of God which has been planted into the lives of people is growing just as seed grows in the ground.

Paul had seen first hand the power of God's Word during his first imprisonment in Rome. At that time he was under house arrest and guarded around the clock by four soldiers who would rotate every six hours. He was given the freedom to talk to other Christians during that time. As Paul shared the Word, the Roman soldiers who guarded him with their lives listened to what he had to say about Jesus, his resurrection, and the way to be saved through him. He wrote to the Philippians, "As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ." He also wrote

that because of his chains and the way God's word was growth other Christians were encouraged to speak the word of God "more courageously and fearlessly."

To illustrate the power that is in God's Word let me tell you the story of a boy who was born blind and living in Afghanistan during the 1960's. At the age of 14 Zia Nordat attended a school for the blind in Kabul where he graduated in three years when it normally took six years to complete the course. By the time he was 14 he had already memorized the Koran in Arabic which was not his native language. He wanted to teach himself English so he used a little transistor radio to access English stations. One of these was a station called "The Voice of the Bible." He listened to the Word of God and it changed his life. He began confessing his faith in Christ, was persecuted for his faith. He spent time in prison as Paul had done. Eventually he was put to death trying to witness to other poor people in Pakistan. God's Word had changed his life and he died to bring that Word of God courageously to anyone who would listen even in the face of persecution and death.

Paul had no regrets as he writes, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." God has his elect. He knows the exact number of people who will be called into his kingdom before the end comes. Our job is to bring the Word into their lives so they can obtain the salvation we have in Christ. One night when Paul was in Corinth, he started losing confidence because of the wickedness of the city. Would it do any good to bring God's Word to such a place of sin and iniquity? The Lord told him in a dream: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, for I have many people in this city." God's Word is not chained. It accomplishes what the Lord pleases. This is our confidence.

Be confident in the Lord's faithfulness

Here is another reason yet to be confident in the Lord. Paul writes, "Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself." Why can you be confident in the Lord? Just look at your past life, even your lowest moments, and remember how faithful the Lord has been to you. Psalm 23 tells us that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives. It does not say that this goodness and mercy might perhaps follow us some of the days of our lives. The Lord Jesus Christ who died for you, and rose from the dead for you, is also living and reigning for you.

We died with Jesus. His death became our death. His resurrection became our resurrection. Romans 6 speaks about how our baptism buried us with Christ. "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Furthermore if we endure, we will also reign with him. Look at what Jesus endured for you. Hebrews 12 tells us, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The torments of hell and the suffering Jesus went

through for us give us the strength to endure and ultimate the joy of reigning with him. We can never exhaust the peace and comfort in Revelation 20 where it says we shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years, simply meaning all the time. Just as he reigns forever, we reign forever with him. However if we disown him, turn our back on him, spit on him as the Roman soldiers once did, then he will disown us and tell us to depart from him on the day of judgment.

I close this morning to take one more look at the last words about being faithful. "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself." Have you ever found yourself crying out to the Lord as the man was calling out for help for his sick son, "Lord I believe help my unbelief?" The Lord knows when our faith is weak. He hears us when we cry to him for help. He remains faithful. He will never turn his back on the promises he has made for you to hold you tight in his loving arms. Amen.