

Title: Start at the throne and walk back
Text: 2 Timothy 2.1-13
Theme: Encouragement to endure
Series: 2 Timothy
Prop Stmtnt: Live for that which will outlive and out give you.

It's the season for graduations. The formal name for a graduation is called "commencement" which literally means "beginning". The time of formal learning is now; it is now time to begin a new phase of living. This final letter of Paul to Timothy has a commencement feel to it. Paul is about to graduate and he anticipates how his graduation will be the occasion for him to really live.

Read Text:

Do you have any goals? If so, are actively pursuing them? Having goals does not accomplish anything unless you make plans to achieve them. For example, a year and a half ago, I challenged us to set a goal of paying off our building loan by 2020. The reason for this goal was so that we could significantly increase our investment in international missions and help plant and/or re-plant 10 churches in SE Michigan by 2025. But, setting the goal and having good reasons for the goal do not matter unless we take specific steps to accomplish it.

If you are a follower of Christ God has a goal for your life to live with him and enjoy him forever. Now, we can set a goal, but that doesn't mean it will happen. It's different when God sets a goal. When God makes a goal, he not only establishes the end, he oversees the process that gets to that end. So, think of it like this: One day, you are going to be like Christ. One day you are going to be standing shoulder to shoulder with the redeemed of the ages, arm in arm, celebrating, adoring, worshipping and enjoying our God. On that day, everything that is out of place in life will be made right. That day is guaranteed from God and that day is what Paul keeps talking about in this text as motivation for this day. In other words, start at the throne and walk back to where you are today. If you start at the throne and walk back to where you are today, it will put where you are today in its proper perspective.

In 1.12, and 1.18 Paul talks about "that Day". In 2.10 he speaks of "eternal glory." In 2.11 and 12 he speaks of living with and reigning with Christ and in 4.8 he speaks of "that Day" again. "That Day" is when we are with Christ and that informs, shapes and motivates this day. For Paul, this day was being in prison for the sake of the gospel. His being in prison while not pleasant, did not own him nor define him. He lived this day, in view of "that Day."

Today is Mother's Day. For many of you, this is a nice time for the family to get together. But for many of you, this day has heaviness to it. Some of you have lost your mother, or you do not have children, or your children are estranged from you, or each other. This is a present grief, but if you will start at the throne and walk back to where you are today, this grief, while real, will not last. On "that day" it will be forgotten. On that day, it will be overwhelmed by Him who makes all things new. When you start at the throne and walk back, you live this day in view of that day.

The theme of 2 Timothy is a call to endure suffering for the sake of the gospel. As followers of Christ, we are out of step with this world and will receive some blowback because of the gospel. How that plays out in your life is going to vary based on when and where you live. I have a friend who just accepted a call to be a pastor in Iraq. I have another friend who recently became a pastor in Abu Dhabi. I have a friend who has planted a church in Lincoln Park. The settings vary. Each one will experience resistance, but the expressions of resistance will be different. In each situation and in your life, whenever you face resistance for the sake of the gospel, start at the throne and work back. It will put your life in a better perspective.

Our text has 4 commands (v.1, v.2, v.3 and v.8), so the sermon has 4 points. But these commands are to be followed in view of the throne. For example...

I. **Be strengthened by the gospel** (1)

Verse 1 begins with “you then” which is connected to the end of chapter 1. Paul is grieved by Phygelus and Hermogenes who were unwilling to endure the cost of following Jesus. At the same time, he was blessed by the sacrificial friendship of Onesiphorus. Some will deeply disappoint you and others will deeply encourage you. But ultimately you cannot depend on how others respond in order to remain faithful you have to depend on God's grace.

"My child" is the language of deep affection. Paul is asking Timothy to follow his lead in a life of joy-driven and joy-pursuing sacrifice. This calling to "my child" is from a heart that truly desires what is best for Timothy and what will be worth it.

Look at the next phrase. “*be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*” There are several things to note about this. 1) It is a command. 2) It is a continual command. This is not a one and done command, but is a command that you are to do all of the time. But, there is something unusual about this command. 3) It is a passive verb. In other words, while you are given the command, the command is to allow something to be done to you. For example, you may say to your 7-year-old child, “tie your shoes.” But, you may say to your 3-year old child, “Let me tie your shoes.” Both are commands, but the first is active and the second is passive. Passive means you are the recipient of the actions of another. So, our text is saying, that we are live continually being acted upon. We are to live in such a way that the grace that is in Christ Jesus is continually empowering us to be faithful and to endure suffering if need be.

“*The grace that is in Christ Jesus*” is speaking of the fact that Christ did for you what you could not do for yourself. Christ died on the cross to forgive you of your sin, to satisfy the wrath of God's justice against your sin and to secure your salvation. That is grace! Be strengthened by that grace. Be reminded of the fact that God, who has saved you, keeps you and is preparing you for glory! The passive voice reminds you that this has been done, is being done and will be done for you because you could not do it for yourself. You cannot save yourself. In the ultimate sense you cannot keep yourself in Christ and you cannot guarantee your safe arrival in heaven. God can and God does. So, let the knowledge of that motivate you to stay in a place where that truth is continually washing over you and refreshing you and humbling you. That is what sustains you. Knowing that God has saved you and why he has saved you is high-octane fuel for our engine of endurance, joy and hope, particularly when you face the ebb and flow of life.

Beloved, you never get to the point in life where "you've got this." You are one decision away from blowing up your life. What guarantee do you have that you aren't going to say something really stupid? What guarantee do you have that you aren't going to respond very sinfully to a hurtful comment someone makes to you? What guarantee do you have that you aren't going to go into a season of depression? What guarantee do you have that you are going to go on a spending spree and blow your budget? What guarantee do you have that you aren't going to go home and find that bottle of vodka that you hid for "just in case" and inexplicably pound down a few shots or go home and wipe out an entire bag of potato chips until you feel like a complete loser? It is embarrassing to realize how little self control so many of us have. If we cannot keep ourselves from potato chips, what makes us think that we can keep our souls? We can't! We need to rely daily upon God's grace because we do not have what it takes.

Paul knows from his own life how true this is. He knew he was a "disappointment" to some in the Corinthian church. He did not wow them, like the advance promos said he would. After he spoke, some of them were not very impressed. They were expecting more polish, or more sophisticated oratorical skills. Paul's delivery may have not been that compelling. He had to accept that and he knows that Timothy is going to face the same thing. How does a minister stay faithful even when his skills are average? He stays faithful the same way all of us stay faithful. We continually remind ourselves of the gospel. So, how do you continually remind yourself of the gospel? Put yourself into a position where you are reminding others and they in turn are reminding you of the gospel. One way is by intentionally investing yourself into others.

II. Invest into others. (2)

The second command is in verse 2. "Entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Let's start with the "what". What do we entrust or invest in to others? Paul says, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses." Timothy, what you have heard me preach and teach time and time again are the same truths that you are to preach, teach, disciple, impart to others. Teach them the gospel. Examine and explain the gospel. But, do it to faithful men (and women). Anthropos is the word for humankind.

We were reminded last week that the world is one generation away from losing the gospel. Is this a real concern? Yes! So, what are you to do about it? You are to invest in others. Our life as believers and members of this church is more than attending an event once a week. We are called to invest into others. We are to invest our lives that are being changed by the gospel into others. Look again at this verse. Paul is telling Timothy to do more than simply find some guys who can talk in front of others without stuttering and tell them stuff to say. He is saying, look at my life. Look at how I taught others, how I disciplined others, how I witnessed to others, how I spent time with others. You heard me teach the gospel in the presence of many witnesses. Timothy, all that you have heard me teach you and teach others, you go and do the same.

Cornerstone, we need faithful teachers. We need to be constantly raising up, developing and sharpening men and women who will faithfully teach the Bible. This text is both a formal charge to the leadership of the church to intentionally pursue this; it is also a general charge to the congregation. Our interns are a great way to help us carry out this mission, which is why we want to do more of them. But, investing in the spiritual development of others is a mission that

the entire church shares in. That means that you are to invest in helping people follow Jesus better. You are here this morning to receive and give. You are to help invest into the lives of others to help them follow Jesus better. And the people you invest in, end up investing in you. The people that you encourage encourage you. The people that you teach, teach you. This summer and fall, every Adult Bible Fellowship class is going to be doing a series on this topic of discipleship because, according to Jesus, this is part of what it means to follow Jesus.

There are younger believers in this church who need you to invest into their lives and there are younger believers you need. A couple of years ago, I began meeting with a young man who wanted to start a church. Every week we talked and even though we lived over an hour away, we would find time to get together. This brother has become a dear friend. I care for him and his family and his church. This summer he and I are swapping pulpits. He is going to preach here and I am going to preach for him. My investment into his life would be of negligible impact if it were not for you. Your life and faithfulness give credibility to what I say to him. But, the things that I tell him, he not only does, but in his pursuit of being a faithful pastor, he is a rich blessing to me. And I think he likes me. If you want to say unkind things about me, there are plenty of people who will listen to you. But, he is not one of them.

Here is my point. I long to see you taking a deep and personal interest in the spiritual development of other believers. I would love to see you regularly have spiritual conversations with one another, especially people in your own family. It isn't hard. For example, how difficult is it to ask someone, what did you learn from the sermon today? Let's practice...

Some of you experience this in your small group. Someone will talk about an aspect of the sermon, you completely missed because you were thinking about something else, or it connected with them at a deeper level. God has designed life together as believers that the truths we share with one another reverberate among us and come back to bless us. When you come to gather as a church family, come with the purpose of encouraging another believer in their walk with Christ. You can help others follow Jesus. It is part of the reason why the Lord is keeping you alive here on earth. But, if you are a follower of Christ, you need to know that...

III. Passing on the faith will cost you. (3-7)

The third command is at the beginning of v.3. "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Paul then uses two more examples; that of an athlete and a farmer to illustrate his point. These three positions have something in common. In fact in verse 7 he says, "Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." So, I thought this over. What is it about being a soldier, an athlete and a farmer that they share in common? What is it about these three positions that faithfulness now and discipline now leads to victory later.

A. **You are a soldier** - stay focused

When our daughter was sworn in into the U.S. Army and graduated from Basic Training and from Officer Candidate School, we heard her group of soldiers repeat the Soldier's Creed. But this creed was not done simply for the public events. The soldiers repeated it every morning at Basic Training and before every meal during Officer Candidate School. If they did not say it

with enough enthusiasm (it was first thing in the morning) or did not say it together, that they had to do it again and again. I thought we ought to try that with our church covenant at our Member's Meetings. But this creed is more than a series of sentences soldiers have to memorize. The training is designed to instill this creed into their lives. All of this is done so the soldier will stay focused on his mission and that is Paul's point here. A good soldier stays focused on his mission. Staying focused on the mission is not easy. Staying focused on the mission is not automatic. Staying focused on the mission will put you in harm's way. But, if you stay focused on the mission and complete the mission, then there will be reward. Faithfulness now and discipline now leads to victory later. The same thing is true about an athlete.

B. You are an athlete - stay disciplined

An athlete not only has to stay focused, but an athlete has to stay disciplined and compete within the rules. Professional sports, the Tour de France and Olympic competitions have all been marred by doping scandals. It is difficult for an athlete who is clean to compete with those who are doping. But, the very essence of athleticism and competition is destroyed by those who cheat. If you ever won something by cheating, you will realize that it really is a curse. There is no true enjoyment of the victory, because you know that the victory really doesn't belong to you and in order to celebrate the victory you have to keep telling a lie. As a follower of Christ, we do the hard stuff. We are called to lead lives of discipline in all matters. We do not tell little lies. We do not use vulgar language. We watch what we say. We watch what we do. We watch what we look at. We watch how we live. We care about the little things. We care about being dependable at work. We care about Christianity is not a matter of appearance or impression. It is a matter of truth. Like a true athlete what we do is according to truth. That means that we pay the price now for victory later. We put in the hard work now, knowing that it will pay off later. The same thing is true about a farmer.

C. You are a farmer. - stay at it

Farming is the opposite of instant gratification. There is so much work that is front loaded with farming. Preparing the ground is arduous. Buying the seed, planting the seed, watering the seed, and protecting the seed is a constant battle, and it is a battle. Nothing good ever happens fast for a farmer. Bad things, like hail, flooding, infestations, and frost can happen overnight, but tilling, planting, watering, and harvesting take a very long time. I have farmers in my family and they are not easily impressed. They don't care what kind of clothes you wear, what kind of car you drive, how big the city is you live in and generally they are never in a hurry. As a follower of Christ, we are like farmers. We are called to stay at it. Even when we can't see it, growth is taking place. Even though it takes a long time, it is worth staying at it. You are a farmer. You have some seed to plant. Just like the farmer, we work today in view of the harvest to come. Start at the throne and walk back.

Living as a follower of Christ is living at odds with this present age. We feel the wind of the culture in our face. We feel a sense of dislocation and unease, knowing that we are never really at home, yet. Even when things are good, we are still unsettled. There is more and we know it. And what is more, is good. Not every soldier who sacrifices contributes to a victory. Some die and their army is destroyed and their cause is defeated. Some athletes, who work really hard, still

lose and have nothing to really show for their efforts. Some farmers are devastated by disasters and never recover, no matter how hard they may work. Our cause is different. This we know; it will be worth it. Choosing to share in suffering, and calling on others to walk this life with us, is not easy, but it is worth it. And that is the focus of verses 8-13.