

The Twentieth Sunday of Pentecost

October 2, 2016

**Prayer of the Day:** Almighty God, in your bountiful goodness keep us safe from every evil of body and soul. Make us ready, with cheerful hearts, to do whatever pleases you; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! I will proclaim your name to my people; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you. Alleluia! (Hebrews 2:12)

**Sermon Text:** 2 Timothy 1:8-14

The sound of dripping water echoes off the stone walls of his cell. Ice-cold cuffs cling tightly around his wrists. A short chain links the shackles together. A small window some ten feet off the ground allows a few rays of daylight to pierce through the darkness. Somewhere off in the distance rats squeak. The musty smell of damp clothing saturates the air. Outside his cell door stand two men, each one clasping a pointed spear. Razor-sharp daggers hang from their hips. Their bodies hide beneath a shell of armor. A bronze helmet covers their head; the blood-red plume dances with each wisp of air.

As he sits on the cold, damp floor of his cell, his trial vividly replays in his mind. He stands alone in front of the emperor. His eyes lock onto the sight of the mightiest man in the ancient world perched high on his throne, peering down at him. Accusations echo throughout the great hall. Yet, this grand trial is not set up because he committed treason. He did not incite a riot. He pays his taxes. He respects the government. His crime? He proclaims victory over death. His sentence? "Death!"

Those five letters still ring in the ears of the apostle Paul. This is the man who emphasizes God's free gift of eternal life to the Romans and Ephesians. This man commends the Philippian congregation for their acts of Christian love and encourages them to continue pouring forth Christian love. He steers the Colossians away from false

**2 Timothy 1:8-14**

<sup>8</sup> So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, <sup>9</sup> who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, <sup>10</sup> but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. <sup>11</sup> And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. <sup>12</sup> That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

<sup>13</sup> What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup> Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

teaching. He seeks peace with slave-owner Philemon. This man, who corrects faith-damaging chaos twice in the same Corinthian congregation, is going to die. Just outside his prison window a stone grinds metal to a fine edge. It will take only one sharp swing to cut off Paul's life.

Is it worth it? Is it worth suffering for what you believe? Is it worth spending your Sunday mornings to be here? Is it worth bending the thoughts of your heart to embrace the words God gives you? To answer those questions, you must first *Know what you have* and *Know where it leads*. Only then are you able to **GUARD THE GOOD DEPOSIT!**

Quite honestly, these words are where the rubber meets the road. For years Paul confesses his complete dedication to the teachings of God. He makes it clear that even the sword of death will never separate him from these teachings ([Romans 8:38-39](#)). His confession is noble and pious; this is a good promise he is making. Yet, when the sword is literally at your neck, you begin carefully evaluating if what you believe is really worth the suffering you face.

Paul warns you, a believer, that you can expect suffering. He says in verse 8: **[[Join with me in suffering for the gospel.** Notice what suffering Paul is talking about. He is not randomly jailed; he did not break the law. He is a law-abiding citizen—like you and me. He lives on death-row because he shapes his life around the Word of God. His suffering comes because of the “gospel.”

Remember what the “gospel” is? ...what the word means? ... what the word refers to? The word “gospel” means “good news.” In a very general [wide] sense, it refers to the good news that Jesus entered your world, exposed your sins, and won forgiveness. (Our third Scripture reading, the ‘gospel reading,’ reveals the ‘good news’ that Jesus came and taught). In a very specific [narrow] sense, the “gospel” is the “good news” that Jesus died on the cross to remove your sins. Paul knew that Jesus declares him “not guilty” for sin—and not just him, but the entire world! ([Romans 3:23-24](#)) That is the gospel message.

Still, that gospel may bring suffering to your life. Just consider, you shape your life around the promises and commands of your God— not because you must earn his love, but because your love for God moves you to do this. This is good. As much as you love your God and serve him with your life, it also may be the point of where suffering appears.

Your God urges you to remain in the Word— to worship regularly, to read your Bible, to read devotions to you children. Yet, you may feel your heart claim that you have no time for worship— you may have time to watch a three-hour movie without planning for it, but you have no time to schedule meeting for an hour-long worship service once a week. Your Savior has called you to live a holy life. Yet, “holy” may not be the word you use when describing your time with friends. Your God tells you to *call on him in the day of trouble* ([Psalm 50:15](#)) and to *watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation* ([Matthew 26:41](#)). You may feel that tug-of-war raging inside you. You know the good you ought to do, but the evil you want to do feels so much better to do.

Yes, you may not fear suffering in jail because you believe in Jesus. Still, a sinful heart works overtime to convince you that it is not worth listening to God. It tries to

convince you that life will be more fun without God. If you believe ending your relationship with God will result in a better life, it will only lead to eternal suffering.

Paul knows that. He pleads with you: **Join with me in suffering for the gospel.** Understand, (1) he is not holding up persecution (or martyrdom) as some noble goal you should pursue— as if this proves you are a “real” believer. Paul highlights the fact that you may suffer for your faith, but he (2) starts by pointing out the value of your faith. In other words, what could possibly leave such a lasting impact on a person’s life that he would rather die with it than to live without it? Only something that outweighs the approaching death.

Paul tells you to *know what you have*. **But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life— not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.** Paul points out what the gospel, the “good news,” has already done in your life.

Your Father in heaven looked down in this world and he sees your suffering. Not suffering for the sake of his Word, but the suffering which comes whenever we turn from the Word. He knows our sin-streaked lives leave us galloping towards hell. So, he sends Jesus to rescue you from that eternal suffering.

In order to rescue you, it means Jesus suffers. Religious leaders hate his teachings. Still Jesus knows only God’s Word allows him to remain in heaven. The devil tempts Jesus to reject the Word of God. Still Jesus knows life thrives in the Word ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)). Jesus does suffer because his heart latches on to the Word. Yet, he suffers for you.

He gives you his perfect life— literally. Only his life makes God at peace with you. Now, you stand before God and God sees you with Jesus’ pure thoughts, with Jesus’ Word-guided actions, with Jesus’ heart that delights in following the Word! This is *what you have*—forgiveness of sins! You *know it*.

So, continue to **GUARD THE GOOD DEPOSIT!** You see its priceless value. *Know where it leads*. Paul unveils where the gospel—the “good news”—leads. **This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.** Jesus has destroyed death. Not only do you know now that God stands at peace with you, but you know that you will stand with God forever in heaven. Believers who have died centuries ago, those whose bodies are nothing but dust and ashes, will be raised to life, re-created perfectly, and ushered into heaven— never to die again! It means your loved ones— spouses, children, friends— those who have been called by God through the waters of baptism, will rise from the dead and live immortally— body and soul united! You *know* the forgiveness *you have* because God has given you his Word. You *know where it leads* because God tells you in the same Word.

That is why Paul, who lives on death-row, could say: **I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.** Paul could feel disgrace that he suffers for someone who

no longer lives on earth. If only Paul denied Christ, then he would have been let out of prison. Yet, to deny Christ would lock him in hell's prison! Paul knew his earthly life was unpleasant, but he knew that heaven's riches far outweighed whatever sufferings he encountered on earth. His suffering was momentary, but heaven's lack of suffering is eternal.

That is why he pleads with you in verse 14: **Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you— guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.** Imagine your grandmother giving you a jewel-encrusted ring as an heirloom or your grandfather giving you the baseball Babe Ruth signed for him. These items are incredibly precious. Yes, they may be worth money, but the personal memories and significance of these items are priceless. How would you treat these objects? You guard them like something sacred. Your hands cling to them; you place them in a display case or a safe. You keep them close to you; you keep these things in sight.

The knowledge that Jesus came to die for your sins is the "good deposit" already made in you. So, **GUARD THE GOOD DEPOSIT** because you *know where it leads*. Spend time in the Word every single day. Hear the promises God makes you— and trust them. Yes, your own heart may read what God says about prayer, marriage, pregnancy, leadership, and might asks: "Is God really right about this?" You reply: "Yes." Not because you are too brainwashed to say anything different. The Holy Spirit at work in you strengthens to say "No" to sin and "Yes" to the things pleasing to God. **GUARD THE GOOD DEPOSIT.** *Know where it leads.*

As you reflect on this, you will know the answer to the question: Is it really worth it? Is it worth suffering for what you believe? Is it worth your Sunday mornings? Is it worth bending the thoughts of your heart to the words God gives you?

Yes, because your faith clings to the perfect life of Jesus. His death has washed away your sins. You stand innocent in the sight of God. You have the guarantee of eternal peace. Yes, you may feel pressure to ignore what God calls "pleasing." Yet, turn to the Word; be strengthened to stand up against temptation which seeks to lead you astray. Turn to the Word, *Know what you have. Know where it leads.* **GUARD THE GOOD DEPOSIT!**