

Faithful to the Gospel

2 Timothy 2:3-13

19 August 2018 | Grace Bible Church Corinda

Big Question: What does a faithful Christian look like?

Big Idea: A faithful Christian is totally committed to Jesus, even when it's hard.

Introduction

Imagine what it'd be like if one Saturday night, our government passed a law to say that what we're doing here wasn't allowed anymore.

What would it look like here the following Sunday morning?

Would you still turn up?

Would you stay at home and worship there?

Would you go and worship in an "authorised" church, even if they teach a different gospel?

What would it look like to be faithful to Jesus under those circumstances?

In 1685, the French king Louis XIV wound back a law that allowed the French Calvinist Protestants – called Huguenots – to worship publicly.¹

The Roman Catholic Church became the only recognised church.

Protestants had to join the Catholic Church or worship in secret.

Even reading their Bibles had to be done in secret.

Marie Durand was a Huguenot.

Growing up, her family worshipped in secret because they believed that they could only be saved by faith in Christ alone.

When she was 7 years old, her mother and a number of her uncles were arrested at a Protestant wedding. Her mother died in gaol.

Her father continued to teach her the Scriptures until he was also denounced by a neighbour when she was 18 years old.

At the age of 19, she was married and her husband was soon gaoled for being Protestant.²

Soon after that, her brother was arrested and shot for being a Protestant pastor.

One month later, Marie was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of Constance.

She was locked in a room with a number of other women.

It was hot in summer and cold in winter.

There was just a small hole in the roof for light, which also let in the rain and snow.

There was a priest on duty at the prison 24/7, ready to hear their confession should Durand or one of her fellow prisoners change their mind.

All they had to do was say, "I recant" and they'd be freed from gaol.

Marie Durand refused.

She was determined to be faithful to her Lord.

She carved the word "Resist" into the stone of her cell wall, which you can still see today.

And so for the next 38 years, she remained confined in those poor conditions because of her convictions.

Hearing about Marie Durand's, what's your response?

"You go girl" or "you idiot"?

Do you feel inspired or intimidated by her story?

Was she incredibly foolhardy or unbelievably faithful?

Outline

As the apostle Paul writes this second letter for Timothy, he's writing as a man who's no stranger to what it can cost to follow Jesus.

He also knows that his young friend Timothy – who he's entrusting with the gospel – is going to face many of the same pressures.

Tim will feel the very real pressure to compromise and perhaps even renounce Jesus.

He's going to have to fight and battle to remain faithful.

Last week, we saw that the gospel needs to be protected and guarded.

One of the main ways that's done is by passing it onto others.

Just as Timothy was himself was entrusted with the gospel because he was a faithful man, 1:5, his job is to protect the gospel by passing it onto other faithful men, 2:2.

What exactly, then, does it mean to be faithful to Jesus?

What does a faithful Christian look like?

A faithful Christian is someone who endures and perseveres.

Whether it's good times or tough times, ease or hardship, face with joys or sorrows, being faithful means sticking with Jesus.

A faithful Christian is totally committed to Jesus, even when it's hard.

To put it another way, being faithful means persevering when it's tough.

Faithful people are:

- Dedicated (vv3-7)
- Concerned for others (vv8-10)
- Persistent (vv11-13)

Dedicated (vv3-7)

Firstly, being faithful to the gospel means being dedicated, verses 3-7.

Following Jesus takes courage, commitment and sacrifice.

Sticking with him requires determination.

In verse 3, Paul gives Tim his second invitation to suffer.

The first one was in 1:8, where he was called to suffer for the gospel.

This time he's being invited to suffer as a good soldier of Christ.

The Bible uses lots of metaphors to describe Christians: as sheep, as a family, even a house.

Out of all the metaphors that the Bible uses, the one that probably makes me most uncomfortable is when we're described as soldiers.

In times past – especially two or three generations ago – people were proud of being called a soldier.

Even as a five- or six-year-old, I remember being in our little wooden church for Sunday School and singing the words:

*I may never march in the infantry,
ride in the cavalry, shoot the artillery,
I may never fly over land and sea,
but I'm in the Lord's army. Yes Sir!*

But times have changed.

I doubt that many Sunday School kids sing "I'm in the Lord's Army" anymore.

The church is meant to be about peace but there's a common perception that the church has caused lots of wars.

The crusaders weren't exactly a high point in the history of the Christian church.

Although in the twentieth century, more people were killed in the name of the atheism than have been killed in the name of religion in all of history.

And so we distance ourselves from the idea of being an army.

Paul describes Christians as soldiers without any hint of embarrassment though.

He wrote the letter of Philemon – not surprisingly – to Philemon, but also to a bloke called Archippus who he describes as “our fellow soldier.”³

When he wrote to the Philippians, Epaphroditus was described in the same way.⁴

What makes a good soldier of Christ?

Being a good soldier could mean that you’re handy with a gun, although seeing as guns weren’t invented yet, it’s fair to assume that wasn’t at the front of Paul’s mind.

A good male Australian soldier can do 15 push-ups and 45 sit-ups, unlike the wusses in the Air Force who only need to do 10 and 20.

We could read any number of things into the metaphor, but fortunately, Paul tells us what he’s got in mind.

A good soldier is dedicated to the task of soldiering.

She can’t get distracted by other things that will impede the mission.

That doesn’t mean that she doesn’t need to care for her family and can’t have a life outside the army.

But it means that the army has to come first.

Many in our defence forces are on constant standby; they’ve got to be ready to deploy at just a few hours’ notice.

“I just need to wash my hair” doesn’t quite cut it as an excuse when the order comes.

They’ve got to be dedicated to doing what their CO says.

Jesus Christ is our commanding officer.

He’s not just our Saviour, he’s also our Lord.

He’s saved us and called us to a holy life, 1:9.

Jesus isn’t just a coach who’s there to offer you some good ideas on how to live that you can choose to either accept or reject.

Following Jesus means living in a way that pleases him, looking forward to that day, when our CO says, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Yet it's just so easy to be distracted from being dedicated to him.

There are so many things – good things – that battle for our attention: work, family, friends.

None of these things are bad on their own, when they're in their rightful place.

When they become lethal is when they become more important to us than the Lord himself and get in the way of completing his mission.

He makes exactly the same point about dedication – just coming at it from different angles – with the next two metaphors.

Notice that the metaphor of an athlete is introduced with, "similarly".

The point of the metaphor isn't that you've got to be first athlete across the line to win the race.

If you want to win the race, you've got to be dedicated to playing by the rules. That's the point.

In the ancient Olympiad, it was compulsory to train for at least 10 months.

Any less and you weren't allowed to compete.

Today, athletes train seven days a week, their whole lives they prepare to win.

All that training doesn't count for anything if you don't play by the rules though.

If you cheat, it doesn't matter whether you crossed the line first, you'll be disqualified from getting the prize.

Lance Armstrong overcame cancer to have a very successful cycling career.

He won a whopping 7 Tours, but that was almost instantly forgotten the moment people found out he was cheating.

All of his wins were wiped away.

If an athlete wants to reach their goal, they've got to play by the rules.

There's no short-cuts in the Christian life either.

There's no cheat's track and that means that sometimes it's going to be a hard slog.

If anything's been clear from 2 Timothy, I hope it's that God doesn't promise that we're going to have an easy life.

There will be trials and challenges.

You can't circumvent them; there's no shortcut to heaven.

The last metaphor is a farmer in verse 6.

He's not just any farmer though.

He's a hardworking farmer, dedicated to his task.

We're not meant to think of some land-owning fat cat who lives on the spoils of his minion's labours.

He gets his hands dirty, doing the work.

The farmer's dedication is rewarded.

When he goes out, along with his workers, and picks the produce that's been growing, he gets first dibs on the produce that the land has produced under his care.

No one else has a greater entitlement.

He puts in the hard yards and so he gets the first share in the spoils.

The same is true of Christian faithfulness.

Dedication to Jesus is rewarded with eternal life.

You have to persevere.

The prize is heaven where we'll dwell with our glorious God forever, freed from the sin of others and free from our own sin.

That's the prize and the reward for being faithful to Jesus.

Paul gives Timothy these three metaphors to show that being faithful takes dedication.

The soldier is dedicated to pleasing his commanding officer, the athlete is dedicated to playing by the rules to get the prize and the dedicated father gets the first share of the produce.

Concerned for others (vv8-10)

The second mark of being faithful is being concerned for others.

All Christian ministry is other-person centred.

The reason Paul's suffering isn't just because of the gospel, it's also for the sake of others.

When Paul says that he's in chains, in verse 9, it's likely that he was literally in chains. This isn't just a metaphor.

Within Roman gaols in the first century, prisoners were commonly made to wear metal manacles.

Their arms and legs would be joined with chains and sometimes a band around their necks too.

At night time a number of prisoners would be chained together so that they couldn't escape.

We talked two weeks ago about the shame that Paul would've experienced because he was in chains.

Being carried off in chains and put in prison was deeply shameful.

The shame was so great, in fact, that it probably wouldn't be forgotten in a lifetime.

That's why so many people abandoned him – because of the shame.

As well as shame, there was also physical pain to be endured because of the chains too.

I've got a bucket of metal chain at home.

It's not very big, but when I go to lift it, it always surprises me how heavy it is.

The sheer weight of the metal that was being used to restrain them would've weighed down every movement.

Remember these were prisoners, so they weren't given much comfort.

The chains weren't padded and over time the metal would rub their skin red-raw.

It was incredibly painful and they would be prone to infection.

That's what Paul was experiencing for the sake of the gospel.

Rather than being bitter and consumed with his own troubles though, Paul reflects on the Word of God, comparing it to his own situation.

As he points out, God's word can't be chained.

He's probably got three things in mind here.

Firstly, that God's Word isn't shameful.

Secondly, that God's Word isn't painful.

And finally, that God's Word can't be restrained, contained and held back by the physical barriers of a prison.

God's word can't be stopped by locking it up.

After all, we know from elsewhere in the Bible that's exactly what people throughout history have tried to do.

Peter was put in gaol and God miraculously allowed him to escape.

People were saved through those events.

Paul was put in gaol more times than we can count.

And yet the gospel message wasn't stopped – it continued to go forward.

There's nothing you can do to physically stop God's word.

I almost pity the other prisoners around Paul.

At least, I would if it wasn't the fact that he was sharing truth and life with them.

I bet Paul couldn't shut up about the gospel.

When we get to heaven, I imagine running into someone one day and finding out that he was chained to Paul in prison.

Paul willingly endures all this pain and shame, he suffers for the sake of the gospel, but also for the sake of others, verse 10.

Even in the midst of his troubles, you could almost say that he doesn't care about his own welfare.

His focus is on other people finding salvation.

Verse 10:

2 Timothy 2:10 (NIV11) 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.

He describes the people he's concerned about as the elect.

It's a strange word, isn't it?

"Elect" means "chosen".

He's talking about the people who've been chosen by God for salvation.

Paul is suffering for the sake of those that God has chosen to save.

There's a theological position called hyper-Calvinism.

There's a logic to it and it goes like this.

God is the one who saves, not us.

And he will save people regardless of what we do.

Therefore, we don't have to do anything and he'll save those he's chosen.

There's a logic to that, but it seriously misrepresents everything the Bible has to say about evangelism.

Yes, only God saves. He chooses who'll be saved.

How does he do that?

Well, he's chosen to send Christians to take the gospel out to all the corners of the earth so that people will be saved.

If we believe in the doctrine of election, it shouldn't be accompanied with lots self-congratulatory pats on the back for standing back and doing nothing.

Paul was faithful and he shows us what it means to be faithful too.

He won't give up, he'll stand for the gospel, willing to suffer for the sake of the elect.

Rather than kicking up his heels, his example is suffering.

Because it's through proclaiming the true gospel that they might hear the words of life.

God can achieve his purposes completely independently from us, but he's chosen to use us.

Because of this, he tells Timothy to remember the gospel in verse 8.

There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, because Jesus is the example of what it means to suffer for the sake of others.

As Paul argues in Romans:

Romans 15:3 (NIV11) ³ *For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."*

His purpose in coming to earth was to serve.

Mark 10:45 (NIV11) ⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Jesus – the one who enjoyed perfect fellowship in the Godhead – was willing to humble himself by coming to earth as a man.

Not only that, he suffered death on the cross... for our benefit.

Philippians 2:5–8 (NIV11) ⁵ *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*

The cross is both the reason and the motivation.

Secondly, because the gospel saves.

Paul stands by the message of the gospel because only it has the power for salvation.

Jesus died for our sins so that we can be forgiven.

Not only that, he rose again, conquering and defeating death.

Jesus was God's promised servant.

He's the one that God promised.

The descendant of David who will sit and reign on God's throne forever, ruling justly and fairly.

Being faithful means not only living for ourselves, but for others too.

That others might also be faithful to this same message.

Persistent (vv11-13)

Finally, being faithful means persevering and enduring.

Christians have a privileged status in Christ, including the promised privilege of reigning with him.

In verses 11-13, we get a picture painted for us of the believer's life.

Paul closes with faithful words

This means that they're trustworthy word, but there's also an irony that they're about faithfulness.

Perhaps these words were penned by Paul, but it's quite possible that this was a snippet from an early Christian hymn.

It uses 'we' language, as if it's meant to be said together.

It summaries what it means to be faithful to the gospel.

There are four "if", "then" phrases.

He starts with the past.

2 Timothy 2:11b (NIV11) If we died with him, we will also live with him;

Getting our heads around what Paul is saying here can be tricky.

As far as I can tell, I'm still alive, I still have a pulse.

How then can I say that I've died?

Nor is he talking about dying as a martyr – that if we die a martyr's death then we'll get to live with him.

He's talking about our spiritual union with Jesus and the legal status that gives us.

A Christian is someone who's united with Christ.

Which means that because Jesus died, paying the penalty for sin, the penalty for our sin was paid by him at the cross.

When he died, we died to sin.

When we're united with Jesus, when we place our trust in him, we're freed from the power of sin.

We're able to not sin.

It's the same as the argument he makes in Romans 6.

If we've died with Jesus, then we will also live with him.

It means that we're alive to God now.

We're not cut off any longer. The relationship has been restored.

He hears our prayers and we have hope of life in heaven with him forever.

That's a pearler. What a precious promise!

Then, moves onto the present.

2 Timothy 2:12 (NIV11) ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him.

It's not just enough to believe Jesus once though.

We need to, persevere, endure, keep believing in him.

We need to be faithful even through persecution, hatred, suffering and temptation.

Jesus doesn't ask us to go through anything he hasn't already.

Going to the cross was hardly a picnic for him.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked if there was any other way.

Yet he prayed, "Not my will, but yours" because only by going to the cross could he be shown to be right and just.

If we endure to the end, the reward is that we will also reign with him.

Sometimes that means enduring through difficulty.

What's just as hard – if not harder – is enduring through banality.

The boring, day-by-day monotony of living in this world.

Often, the hardest times to be faithful can be when life's just normal.

When we're struggling, we have laser-focused vision on Jesus.

It's much, much harder when we're in the ease of normal life.

We need to endure in those times too.

The third line looks towards the future.

There is a warning though, and it's a serious one.

One that Paul still thinks fits okay, even though he seems to affirm the doctrine of election just a few verses earlier.

2 Timothy 2:12b (NIV11) If we disown him, he will also disown us;

Paul isn't talking about someone who makes a flippant comment on the spur of the moment.

This's someone who firmly, wilfully and defiantly denies Christ.

He's referring to someone who's in outright apostasy.

The denial might not be spoken.

It can also be by our actions.

Or even by what we don't do – failing to be faithful.

The consequence of disowning Jesus is that he will disown you.

He will deny you at the most decisive time – in the final judgment.

Instead of saying, "Well done good and faithful servant", he will say, "I never knew you."

Not being faithful to Jesus has the most significant consequence that there is.

I've got a short video that I'd like you to watch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzqLiLWSSgo>

What a choice those two women had to make.

Yet they understood something that didn't make sense to those judging them – Jesus is the ultimate judge and so what he thinks matters infinitely more.

We finish on a high point in the last line though.

It's one of the most encouraging in the list because there are times when all of us aren't faithful.

What happens when we're not faithful?

2 Timothy 2:13 (NIV11) ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

We all have times when we're unfaithful.

Being unfaithful is different to disowning Jesus.

When I was confessing my sins to the Lord the other day, it was almost overwhelming because there are so many of them.

Selfishness, greed, impatience.

Unfaithfulness.

When we're faithless though, he remains faithful.

There are so many times when we're faithless, when we fail to do what we should do.

And yet he won't walk away from us.

Because his love for us isn't built on our performance.

It's not what we've done.

If we rely on what we're able to do, then we're stuffed.

It's not our faithfulness that saves us, it's Jesus' faithfulness.

Jesus' love for us is built on his own kindness towards us.

The gospel teaches us that the only thing that saves us is Jesus.

All we need, the only thing that we can rely on, is Jesus.

In the words of the all hymn:

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea:
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

I'm going to make a suggestion.

Who's ever learned this as a memory verse?

It doesn't strike as a typical memory verse.

I reckon it's worth learning off by heart though.

It's the kind of verse that you turn to when you're in a tough situation.

It teaches us to stand firm even when life gets tough.

Being faithful to Jesus means enduring, even when it gets tough.

And we when fail, knowing that we can and must trust him then as well.

Conclusion

When it comes to the Christian life, some of us want to be the people who do great things for the Lord.

We want to change the world and leave a lasting impact by making the world a better place.

We want to be the impressive people who see hundreds come to Christ through our ministry.

To be able to stand there and say – “Look, that’s what the Lord’s done through me.”

Others of us – and I suspect this is most of us here – are happy to sit quietly in the background.

We don’t want to be the impressive person.

We just want to quietly go about our business in this life, simply satisfied that we’ll get to heaven one day.

And happily our family too.

Which one is more faithful?

Potentially neither.

God doesn’t call us to be impressive. He calls us to be faithfully pointing people to him.

God doesn’t want us to be just quietly in the background.

He wants us to be faithfully concerned about others and committed to his mission.

Jesus calls us to be faithful.

Often, that’s much more difficult.

But Jesus is our example, as well as being the one who gives us the strength, courage and desire to endure.

I like the words from the Sovereign Grace album *Be Like Jesus*.

These are some of the words from the song on faithfulness:

*I too must be a servant,
Today and all my days
To use the gifts You’ve given
To bring You joy and praise
Though I am sure to fail You
You are so faithful
And though I stumble
You will pick me up again*

*I want to be like You are
I want to be faithful
Help me to be like You are
Oh make me faithful.⁵*

May those words be echoed in our own lives.

Let's pray.

¹ In October 1685, King Louis XIV promulgated the Edict of Fontainebleau which revoked the earlier Edict of Nantes which his grandfather King Henry IV instituted, which allowed Calvinists to worship freely.

² Although it might have been at age 14 – dates vary between a baptismal record and her gravestone.

³ Philemon 2

⁴ Philippians 2:25

⁵ Mark Altrogge, *Make Me Faithful*, (Sovereign Grace Praise, 2009)

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Big Idea: A faithful Christian is totally committed to Jesus, even when it's hard.

Discussion Questions

1. If one Saturday night, our government passed a law saying that our church meetings are illegal, what do you think you'd do on Sunday morning?
2. Paul uses three metaphors in verses 3-6. What point do they all make? What do they have in common?
3. Do you aspire to be a "good soldier of Christ" (v.3)? Why/why not?
4. The farmer's reward is his produce. What's the reward for a faithful Christian?
5. What does Paul mean when he says, "but God's word is not chained"? How is that compare to his own situation?
6. How can his suffering possibly have any effect on the elect when only God can choose to save them?
7. What's the difference between disowning Jesus and being faithless?
8. We heard the stories of Marie Durand and "Maryam & Marziyeh". How do stories like these make you feel?
9. Christians often say, "Just be faithful". Do you think that's easy?