

Title: Picture This  
Date: April 29, 2018  
Subject: The call to be strengthened as followers of Jesus Christ  
Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1-13

Let's set the backdrop. Last week I mentioned the world's hostility toward Biblical Christianity. Larry Osborne wrote *Thriving in Babylon* based on the book of Daniel. He spoke at the recent District Conference for C&MA churches in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. Cliff and I appreciated his insights into the world in which we live. He said this about cultural hostility. "They've gone from celebrating us to acknowledging us to tolerating us to hating us."

Ravi Zacharias provides this analysis, "The Judeo-Christian worldview has become the pariah stepchild of worldviews and is being attacked, while other worldviews are respected, revered and recognized as part of history and the culture of other nations."

What are we to do against the swelling tide against Christ and his followers? The Apostle Paul continues the contrast started in chapter one between those who were unfaithful and those who prove faithful.

READ 2 Timothy 2:1.

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." It could be and probably should be worded "Be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Strength doesn't come from us. Though people can commandeer guts and willpower and drive to do impressive things, they fail at the vital thing of providing spiritual strength.

You may have heard of Avicii who was born Tim Bergling. He was one of the most popular deejays and producers of electronic dance music. He played at concerts for hundreds of thousands of people and had numerous hits. He had fame, money, a large following. He was found dead on April 20. His family wrote about him. "Our beloved Tim was a seeker, a fragile artistic soul searching for answers to existential questions. An over-achieving perfectionist who travelled and worked hard at a pace that led to extreme stress. When he stopped touring, he wanted to find a balance in life to be happy and be able to do what he loved most – music. He really struggled with thoughts about Meaning, Life, Happiness. He could not go on any longer. He wanted to find peace." They strongly implied he couldn't find a solution and just ended it all.

Strength comes from the grace found in Christ. Grace is God's love, mercy, good will and kindness that rips through all human barriers to convey the heart of God Himself to us. It's God smiling on us when we don't deserve it. It's his provision for us – forgiveness, redemption from sin, restoration to right relationship

with him, provision of a place of perfection, beauty and wonder in heaven. Grace informs us as to who we are and our connection to God.

Skip ahead to verse 3 where we find the first of three word pictures that describe how followers of Christ can be strong in grace. READ 3, 4.

A soldier is dedicated to someone or something else. He no longer seeks his desires, to please himself. He's no longer consumed with the "normal" things of life -- the pursuit of money, fame, happiness in the usual understanding of those ventures. He's detached from those things. The soldier's priorities have shifted as he has a higher calling on his/her life. He's devoted to pleasing the one who is in command. And is willing to go through hardship -- lack of sleep, little food, harsh elements -- to accomplish whatever the objective.

A bunch of raw recruits are welcomed into the military on their first day of boot camp by a grizzled veteran drill sergeant. He informs them that he's the only person in their lives that matters. He's now their daddy and mommy. What he says goes. There are to be no questions just immediate, unquestioning obedience. "When I say 'jump,' you jump...and don't come down till I say so."

A soldier was home from war and visited the church in which he grew up. The church leader thought it'd be a nice touch to sing, "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross" and "Like a mighty army moves the church of God." A sharing time followed the songs and the pastor asked the soldier to share about how the church was like an army. The soldier stood and haltingly shared how he didn't see many similarities. He saw the church as people who were concerned for themselves, offered lots of excuses, showed up when they wanted and did as they pleased in contrast to the army where it's about the team, no excuse is accepted, show up no matter what and obey the commanding officer.

As soldiers of Christ we no longer seek our own desires or to please ourselves. We're no longer consumed with the "normal" things of life -- money, fame, happiness as chief pursuits. Our priorities have shifted as we have a higher calling on our lives. We're to be devoted to pleasing the one who is in command and be willing to go through hardship to accomplish his objectives. Adoniram Judson, pioneering missionary to Burma, linked suffering and success: "If you succeed without suffering, it is because someone else has suffered in order that you might succeed. If you suffer without succeeding, it is in order that someone behind you might succeed without suffering." We're to be dedicated soldiers.

The second word picture is an athlete. READ v. 5. Athletes are disciplined and compete according to the rules and there can be lots of rules. There are rules for training and getting in shape. There are rules of the game even if it is running which has two simple rules -- watch where you're going and run as fast as you can over the distance of the race. And there are the rules of the coach.

Danny Amendola played for the New England Patriots before signing with the Miami Dolphins this spring. Sports writers eagerly picked up his comments about former Coach Bill Belichick with headlines like “The things Amendola hated about Belichick.” Amendola is quoted, “There were a lot of things I didn't like about playing for him, but I must say, the things I didn't like were in regards to getting the team better, and I respected him. I didn't like practicing in the snow, I didn't like practicing in the rain, but that was going to make us a better football team and that was going to make me a better football player. It wasn't easy, and he'd be the first to admit, at the [Super Bowl] ring ceremony, that it wasn't easy playing for him. The silver lining was that we were at the ring ceremony.” He went on to describe Belichick as the “best coach to ever coach the game.”

Followers of Christ are disciplined athletes. We're to know the rules, instructions, standards, expectations and goals of the Coach as given in his Word, not add to them or delete some. There are things we have to say “No” to, things that are harmful, that are sinful, that aren't beneficial. It can be tough playing for Christ but it will be worth it at his version of the Super Bowl ring ceremony. The crown comes after the cross. Too many people want a crown without any cross.

The third picture is a diligent farmer. READ v. 6. A lot of farmers are getting mighty antsy to get into their fields this spring. The cold and the snow have lingered. The fields aren't drying up. The ground isn't warming up. But when conditions finally get right, there'll be a flurry of activity. Farmers will burn the midnight oil as they prepare the ground for planting and do the planting. Their bodies will be tired. Their minds will be tired. Their souls will be tired. But they know the only way for the harvest to come is if they do the heavy lifting in the spring and get those crops in the ground. And then they have to care for the growing crops, get rid of weeds and pests, pray and hope.

Followers of Christ are to be diligent, hard-working farmers. Paul frequently praised people who worked hard for the Lord and he talked about his labor and effort. We're to be farmers who prepare the soil of people's hearts to listen to God by our love for them and building relationships. We plant the seed of God's truth. We water the soil. Then reap the reward of lives changed as well as the eternal reward.

Paul didn't say everything that could be said about Christ followers as dedicated soldiers, disciplined athletes and diligent farmers. We expounded a little more but there's still a vast treasure to be unearthed. That's why Paul gives a homework assignment. READ V. 7. He's saying, “Take time to think, reflect, meditate because I haven't given you the full scoop. There's more for you to get from the Lord if you invest the time and you're teachable.”

We move from the charge to motivation. READ vv. 8, 9. The rally cry has two components. The first is “Remember Jesus Christ!” Sounds like a battle cry (Remember the Alamo!) or in today's world, a hashtag.

The call is to continually remember. It sounds like the words used during communion services as we remember Christ's sacrifice for us, his payment for our sins. Remembering Jesus Christ usually points back to the cross.

Not so at this point. The call is to remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead. Think about his triumphal victory. He didn't just die. He's alive. Since he's alive, there are profound ramifications. We too can live forever and live now in a position of conquering death.

The phrases of the verse are out of order chronologically for it mentions Jesus as descended from David after the resurrection. Obviously, Christ's birth preceded his death. The order is intentional. It shows that the resurrection proved Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Christ. He is fully deity and human. This is the Good news Paul was privileged to communicate – Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins and is alive.

The second motivational component is the power of God's Word. It's not chained. Paul was and couldn't get loose. The Word of God is on the loose. Let God's Word speak for itself. "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isa 55:10, 11). "The gospel...is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).

READ v. 10. Paul's reaction to God's grace and his Word is that they enable him to endure and suffer. He does so for spiritual and moral purposes for the elect. So people can hear about Jesus and become part of the elect. So those in the family of God (the church, the elect) can grow and be strengthened in the faith. Paul's endurance is also for the sake of the elect so they can be encouraged. "If he can endure all the things he's had to suffer, we can endure when someone makes fun of me or ....."

The truth is that some things are only learned by suffering. We gain a fuller experience of salvation, of its meaning, a closeness to God that we wouldn't otherwise. So, what's our attitude during suffering – moaning, groaning and complaining about every little thing that goes wrong in our lives or facing it as a part of this fallen world and believing God has a purpose though we may not know what it is?

Here's the promise that can take to the bank. READ vv. 11- 13. Rephrase. "If we died with him, whether it be spiritually in association with his death on the cross or physically of natural causes or as a martyr, we'll live with him because he lives. If we endure this life with its pain and suffering we'll be rewarded. If a person persistently and permanently doesn't want to have anything to do with Jesus, Christ won't have anything

to do with them -- permanently. If a person doesn't have faith, it doesn't affect Christ. He will be true to his word. He will claim as his own those who owned him and he will deny those who denied him."

Many Christ-followers in America may not like it that we may not win the "culture wars." The truth is that isn't where our main battle is. We're engaged in a spiritual war. Jesus didn't say, "Come, follow me and I'll make you culture changers." He said "fishers of men," "you shall be witnesses," "go and make disciples." There is the possibility that as people come to really know Christ as Savior that culture will be changed. Or it could get worse as it did in China and Vietnam.

For too long the church in America has depended on a cultural Christianity, a weakened form that only scratches the surface of people instead of radically transforming them. Cultural Christians find it easy to change with the wind. This pseudo-Christianity talks about Jesus loving everyone no matter who they are (which is true) but not the call to radical followership and changed lives.

Bob Paulson, "we must understand exactly what we mean by the Christian worldview. Put simply, it sees and interprets the world through the lens of Scripture which is God's revelation to us. It affirms that God created the universe. That humans sinned against God, breaking their relationship with Him. That God made a way for people to have their guilt forgiven and to be reconciled to Him and one another, through faith in Jesus' atoning death resurrection. That as new creations in Christ, we are to live as salt and light in the world, proclaiming the Good News of salvation to all. And that one day, Jesus will return to judge all of humanity. Those found righteous in Christ will worship and serve the Lord forever, while those who refused God's offer of salvation will suffer eternal punishment in hell" (Decision, March 2018, p. 11).

Osborne, "Admittedly, the American Church has lost much of its cultural influence. We are no longer the religion of power. We no longer determine cultural values or political correctness. But does that mean that today's Christians are any less godly or faithful? I don't think so. Cultural impact has far more to do with who's in political power than whether or not the church is living up to its calling....Culture is not and never has been an accurate scorecard of the church's faithfulness...Fact is: Sometimes culture responds to Godly living and truth – sometimes it doesn't." Of current and future leaders, "Will they win the culture wars? I have no idea. But I do know that I won't judge their faithfulness by the response of those they are trying to reach. Instead, I'll let God judge it by the only thing that He's ever held his people responsible for, their faithfulness, not their cultural impact" ([larryosbornelive.com/why-culture-is-not-an-accurate-scorecard](http://larryosbornelive.com/why-culture-is-not-an-accurate-scorecard)).