

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
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Remember the Risen Jesus

“Remember.” How often we use this word in the company of old friends. The joy we derive from reminiscing with others is a joy like no other. But how easy it is to forget - great people, great events, great truths. We live in perilous times in which we are sinfully inclined to forgetfulness...and with forgetfulness comes unfaithfulness (c.f. Jeremiah 2:32; Isaiah 57:11; Psalms 78:11, 42; 106:7). The opening verses of the second chapter of II Timothy are in essence a comprehensive exhortation to faithfulness, and the temptations to unfaithfulness by which Timothy was assailed, like today, were very numerous and very specious. Paul was not seeking to involve his young disciple unwittingly in the difficulties and dangers that surround the Christian in this world. He bids Timothy to first of all count the cost. And then he points him to a source of strength which will supply all his needs. “We call the passage an exhortation,” writes Warfield. “We might better call it, more specifically, an encouragement. And the encouragement culminates in a very remarkable sentence. This sentence is pregnant enough to reveal at once the central thought of Paul’s Gospel and the citadel of his own strength.”¹

I. PAUL’S CONDITION

This is the Apostle’s last epistle. He was in prison and facing death. The infant church had fallen upon perilous times. Not only did the church face open persecution, she had to contend with false teachers. Defection had invaded even the innermost circle of Paul’s companions (II Timothy 4:10). Now in his old age, the apostle is alone; at his first defense, all his companions forsook him (4:16). He was charged with a serious crime: mark the significance of his own words; “...chained like a criminal.”² It seemed, at least to human eyes, that the whole fabric which the Apostle had built up at such cost of labor and pain was about to collapse. What was the old man thinking as he shivered in his cold damp dungeon cell? Now he writes to timid Timothy (1:7) “not to be ashamed to testify about our Lord or ashamed of me his prisoner” (1:8). How could young Timothy face the difficulties and trials that Paul knew would come?

II. TIMOTHY’S SITUATION

Timothy almost certainly received this letter in Ephesus.³ What was Ephesus like? It was the capital of Pro-Consula Asia. It had Athenian culture and Asiatic paganism. It was the center of the worship of the goddess Diana (or Artemis).⁴ Ephesus was also a commercial center. Sir Wm. M. Ramsey tells us that Ephesus was a center for magical arts and practices.⁵ Ephesus was wealthy, superstitious and corrupt. It was a city of vice and a place of grave peril to the infant church that Paul had left young Timothy to pastor. “The struggle,” said Campbell-Morgan, “against almost overwhelming odds must have been fierce.”⁶ What would the old man, in the darkest hour when all the reward of fidelity to Christ seemed to be the dungeon and death, tell Timothy whose situation at Ephesus was so bleak?

III. PAUL’S CHARGE

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David.” The word “remember” is MNĒMONEUŌ (from which we get our word MNEMONIC, to help the memory by use of certain formulas), to call to mind, to give consideration and perceive. Note how this is stated in Matthew 16:9: “Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember (MNĒMONĒUTE)...?” (c.f. also Mark 8:18 and II Peter

1:15; II Timothy 1:6). “In the case of Matthew 16:9, parallel Mark 8:17, 18, memory of Jesus’ past actions should have sustained the disciple’s faith in present difficulties. And in the other two passages cited, remembering plays an important part in sustaining the life of faith.”⁷ What is Timothy to remember?

A. Jesus: His Person

Note the word order “Jesus Christ.” The emphasis falls on the first name. Paul is speaking of the actual man who was a descendant of David, and this highlights the Messianic dignity of Jesus. Remember the Person, not some mystical, ethereal concept so popular in New Age thinking. He is Jesus (the One who saves His people from their sins [c.f. Matthew 1:21]).

B. Jesus: His Work

“Remember Jesus Christ *risen...!*” Timothy must see the Cross, the death of Jesus, in order to think of Jesus risen. Why was Jesus slain? Acts 2:23 tells us that “wicked men put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross” - *but* it was according to “God’s set purpose and foreknowledge.” But note: apart from the resurrection, the cross is a tragedy of major proportion. Without the resurrection, the cross is the place where all hope goes out in hellish darkness, and all faith is eclipsed. “But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him.” (Acts 2:24). The resurrection is God the Father’s “Amen” to God the Son’s “It is finished” (John 19:30).

IV. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE CHARGE

Timothy is to draw strength from this. How so? It is not so much the resurrection itself that Paul has in mind; it is the RISEN JESUS. It is not the act of His rising, but the fact that this Jesus is *now* risen. He is alive and lives forevermore. “From this great fact,” Warfield declares, “he derives, therefore, the very phraseology with which he exhorts Timothy, with rich reference to all that is involved in Christ our Forerunner, to die with his Lord that he might also live with him, to endure with Him that he might also reign with Him.”⁸ One of my professors at Westminster was Robert Strimple. He not only was an outstanding theologian, but one of the best preachers at the seminary. In his sermon on our text, he declared that the truth of Christ’s resurrection, “will carry you through the toughest times in your service of the Savior. Why? You know why, but let me simply remind you by way of four points quickly made. (1) The resurrection set a seal upon the truth of all Christ’s claims and all Christ’s promises. Upon his claim of equality with God the Father, upon his claim to be able to save to the uttermost all who come to him in repentant faith. When asked for a validating sign, this was the one sign he offered. The One who could claim power to lay down his life and take it again, and then make good that claim, is worthy of your complete trust. You can trust him to be the Way, the Truth and the Life - if ‘he is risen as he said!’

“(2) The resurrection of Jesus Christ was his deliverance from the power and curse of death to which he had become subject as the representative covenant head of his people and the bearer of their sins. As long as our head remained under the power of death, sin and Satan remained triumphant. But now is Christ risen from the dead. The sentence of condemnation has been annulled. God’s justification has been pronounced upon the second Adam, and yes - praise God - upon all those united to him by faith.

“By raising Jesus from the dead and exalting him to his right hand, God the Father has declared that the penalty due your sins has been fully paid and the power of death forever broken. By the resurrection, God the Father added his ‘Amen!’ to the words of Christ on the cross, ‘It is finished!’ As the apostle Paul rejoiced earlier in our letter (1:10): ‘our Savior, Christ Jesus, has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.’

“And this brings us quickly to the next point. (3) The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee - no, more than the guarantee, it is the beginning of the resurrection of those that are Christ’s. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ‘Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.’ The firstfruits were not merely a pledge but the actual beginning of the harvest - with the certainty of much more to follow. And just like Christ’s, yours too will be a resurrection to an utterly new, transformed existence, your lowly body made like his glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

“This is what your Lord promised: ‘Because I live, you also will live.’ No one can be in any way dead who is united with the risen Christ.

“And this brings us to the final point. (4) You who are in Christ Jesus have *already* been raised with him (Eph. 2:5, 6). While the resurrection of your outer man is yet future, the resurrection of the inner man is a past event and present reality. Christ - his life living in you - that you are to live the Christian life right here and now.”⁹

CONCLUSION: In the midst of the wicked world that Timothy had to confront, with all its surrounding temptations, with all the encompassing dangers, Paul charges Timothy to bear in mind in the most pressing way possible this central doctrine: “Jesus Christ has risen from the dead of the seed of David.” This is the sufficing source of abounding strength.

1 B.B. Warfield, *The Savior of the World* (rpt. Mack Publishing, 1972), p. 130.

2 The KJV translates this “malefactor.” The word is KAKOURGOS, a compound of KAKON, “evil” and ERGŌ, “worker.” The word issued here and in Luke 23:32 ff. of the criminals who were crucified alongside Jesus. In technical legal parlance, it was reserved for burglars, murderers, traitors and the like, cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Adams and Charles Black, 1972).

3 I Timothy 1:3 tells us that Paul left Timothy as his delegate or representative in Ephesus. This is the church that Paul warned would have to contend with “savage wolves” who would not spare the flock. “Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29-31).

4 “Diana” is the Latinized form of the Greek word “Artemis”. She was also known as Cybele, Ma, Mylitta, and Ishtar, from which the word “Easter” is derived! Her statue was a many-breasted figure, rather than the gracefully draped Greek or Roman figure. She personified the reproductive powers of all life. Interestingly enough, she was referred to as the “mother of life” and this in turn became synonymous with “Mother Nature”. For a detailed analysis of her temple and worship, cf. R.L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 90-91 and C.F. Pfeiffer and H.F. Vos, *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands* (Moody, 1974), pp. 257-364.

5 Wm. M. Ramsey, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (rpt. Baker, 1962), p. 271.

6 G. Campbell-Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit* IX (Pickering & Inglis LTD), p. 205.

7 *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* III, ed. C. Brown (Zondervan, 1982), p. 240. This nuance has been captured by Arthur S. Way, who translated this verse, “Keep ever before you Jesus the Messiah - think of Him as He who was raised from the dead; think of Him as the prophetically indicated King of the seed of David.” *The Letters of St. Paul* (Macmillan, 1906), p. 218.

8 Warfield, op. cit., p. 132.

9 Robert Strimple, preached at the opening worship service of the Fifty-fourth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, June 11, 1987, at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.