

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost ✠

October 21, 2007

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. 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.

2 Timothy 2:8-10

People who are about to die usually choose their words carefully. If they know their time on earth is short, why would they waste their time with chit-chat? People who are about to die know that they only have a limited time to tell people what they need to say, so they choose their words carefully.

I also think that people who know they are dying often have a better perspective of what is important in life. They understand that so many of the things we talk about and worry about and work for and live for – aren't as important as they seem.

I consider it a joy to spend time with people who are about to die. I love to share the message of the gospel with them – the good news that *because of* Jesus they will soon be *with* Jesus. But there is another thing I just love to do with people who are about to die. I like to listen to them. I love to hear often simple but profound confessions of faith.

I don't know if you've ever had an opportunity quite like that. But this morning, we do actually have something like that. We get to hear some of the apostle Paul's final words. You see, this second letter to Timothy is very likely the last words we have recorded by him before he died. And so I believe that these are words that Paul wanted Timothy to take very seriously and words that we would do well to take very seriously as well.

So let's pull up a chair, sit up close as the inspired apostle Paul gives us words of wisdom before he departs, and listen as he encourages us, "**REMEMBER JESUS**" for your own sake, and for the sake of others.

As far as we know, Paul wasn't sick or terminally ill. He wasn't writing this letter from a hospital bed. He wrote it from prison. Paul writes, "**Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.**"

Paul knew exactly why he was imprisoned. It was because of the gospel he was preaching. Just last week we read in our 2nd lesson: "**And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am.**" And Paul was writing to Timothy, who was preaching that same gospel. So Paul also knew what was coming to Timothy. That's why he told him in 1:8 of this letter: "**Join me in suffering for the gospel.**" It's not that they were looking for trouble, but Paul knew it was coming. Paul knew that those who follow Jesus also follow Jesus through suffering. Paul knew that Jesus told them it would be that way. And he wanted Timothy to be ready. He wanted Timothy to be ready to face it when it came and to endure it faithfully. So he gives Timothy some advice:

“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.” That’s interesting. He doesn’t say, “I want you to remember that Jesus suffered, too. In fact, Jesus suffered worse than you ever will. He was beaten and flogged and whipped and mocked and crucified and killed.” Paul doesn’t mention any of that, though it’s all true. Paul doesn’t remind Timothy that above and beyond the physical pain of his crucifixion and death was the torment of God’s punishment against sin and pangs of hell. He doesn’t tell Timothy that Jesus suffered more than you will ever know. He doesn’t tell him, “At least your suffering will never get that bad.” All of that stuff is true, but Paul doesn’t mention it.

Instead, **“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead.”** You see, Timothy, you’re going to suffer in your life, and it will be hard. In fact, you are going to suffer *like* Jesus, *with* Jesus, *for* Jesus. But Timothy, I want you to remember Jesus, raised from the dead.” Jesus suffered, yes. But Jesus won. And you are preaching for him. You’re on the side that wins.

Remember Jesus, descended from David. Right after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden God promised a Savior. The Savior God promised was to come from the seed of the woman, that is, he would be a descendant of Eve. Later on, God promised that the Savior was going to come from the descendants of David.

Did you know that almost all of the Old Testament is basically showing us how God kept this single promise? Take the OT lesson for today. In verse one we found out that this took place in the period of the judges. The book right before Ruth is actually called Judges. It describes that sad period in the history of the Israelites, where the people repeatedly fell away from God. In fact, the last verse of the book of Judges sums it up this way: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”

In the middle of all that, here you have Ruth and Naomi. Ruth is a foreigner, but she marries into Naomi’s family and then becomes a widow. Then she insists on moving back to Bethlehem with Naomi. If you read on in the book, you would read how Ruth gets married to a man named Boaz. Ruth and Boaz have kids, and grandkids, and great-grandkids, one of whom is named David, the king of Israel.

You see, in the middle of all of the turmoil of the time of the judges, a famine that turns Naomi’s family into refugees, the death of two sons – during all of that mess, God had a plan. His plan was to send a Savior through the line of David. God made the promise. God had a plan. So **“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.”**

Remember Jesus. I think that’s something that each of us needs to hear, too. We know just as surely as Paul did that our lives will not be perfect. Jesus said it wouldn’t. Jesus said **“in this world you will have trouble.”** And some of that trouble will come just because of the message that you and I believe and speak. We know it’s going to be that way. For many of us, it’s already here. We’re suffering. We’ve been knocked down by life. We been beaten up by the words and actions of others. And we know that some of those things would just go away if our faith wasn’t so important to us. We know that we could avoid some of it just by staying home from church or by keeping our mouths shut about what we believe. Sometimes we’ve done that.

But remember Jesus. Remember that it is in Jesus that God keeps his promises to you. Just as surely as Jesus was born the Son of David. Just as surely as God raised him from the dead. God keeps his promises in Jesus Christ. God forgives your sin in Jesus Christ. God makes you his own in Jesus Christ. God gives you life in Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus – for yourself, when you know that you will suffer because of him.

But not just for yourself. Remember Jesus also for the sake of others. Remember that Paul was in prison and very likely he was not getting out – not alive. As far as he could tell, nothing more

could be done for him. And he was okay with that, because Paul's concern was for others. **"This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's Word is not chained."** Paul was stuck in prison, but his letters were still proclaiming God's Word to congregations all over the place. Paul was in prison, but Timothy was not and Timothy was called to preach the Word to the people under his care.

It's as though Paul were saying to Timothy, "Really, it's okay that I'm here. I'm really fine with it. If...you remember Jesus." That's the key. **"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus."** "Timothy, if you remember Jesus, and if you preach the gospel I preached. If you preach Jesus Christ, raised from the dead and descended from David. If you're preaching that to people, they're going to be strengthened in their faith, they will be saved from sin and death and hell. They're going to grow stronger in their lives of faith, in their daily battles against sin and temptation. They will be obtaining the salvation that is theirs in Jesus Christ. Timothy, if that's happening, I'll endure anything. Then it's worth it. So remember Jesus."

I want you to imagine something for a minute. It's a little far-fetched, but think about it. Imagine that both of your pastors were suddenly imprisoned – for what we preached. We're gone and we're not coming back. And you can't just get another replacement pastor. You're on your own.

What would it take for me to be able to write to you as a congregation and say to you, "I'm okay with this. I endure everything for the sake of the elect. In fact, I think this will turn for your good."? What would it take for me to be able to write that?

If you remember Jesus. If you remember that whether your pastors are here or not you have God's Holy Word. It's not chained up. It's not some kind of museum piece that we bring out on Sunday mornings for you to look at and think about. If you remember that the message that you hear Sunday after Sunday is your message. If you remember Jesus for the sake of others – and you take that Word to people who need it; if you don't try to keep it for yourself, but you share it with your children and the children of others, with your friends and your neighbors, with your brothers and sisters as you come together **"that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus."**

If you do that: if you remember Jesus for the sake of others and pass it on to others, then it really doesn't matter where your pastors are. Whether they are here or not, you will remind each other about Jesus – about his promises, his plan, his peace. You will remind each other about Jesus in all kinds of suffering. And we, as long as we come together and are together, will remind each other of these things until the end does come, and we share eternal glory with each other and with Jesus.

Now that I think about, there's something else I like to listen to from people who are about to die. They like to reminisce. And if you had a shared experience with the person, you can say to each other, "Do you remember when..." We all have different experiences. We all have unique stories to tell, some sad, some happy. But we all share one memory, one experience that binds us all together as one. It's something that we can share with each other, when the end is near or when the end seems far away. We can say to each other, in our words, our songs, or our actions. We can say to each other: Remember Jesus Christ.