

## **Introduction**

I wonder how you would respond if I were to tell you that I have a beautiful garden, full of glorious flowers with no weeds in the beds, with smooth weed-free lawns ... and what's more that I never have to lift a finger to achieve it. Or that my house is tidy and spotlessly cleans .... Yet I never do anything to keep it that way. And no I don't have staff..... and yes I wouldn't be telling the truth.

I guess like me you are inundated with offers of free gifts, luxury cruises, beautiful items, useful tools - like this palm top organizer, for instance. That come to us completely free with nothing to pay. And of course there is always a hitch. The luxury cruise is nothing of the sort, the weekend in Amsterdam is for one person and if you bring a companion you have to pay high rates and if you offer to go on your own and share a room with a stranger lo and behold ... no rooms available. This smart little tool looked really promising and I was very pleased to have it. But it came as a reward for a trial subscription to a magazine, was almost impossible to use and stopped working after ten days.

The truth is that we don't get something for nothing and more than that nothing that is worthwhile is ever easy. We pay for what we get. A computing term which I like is GIGO – garbage in, garbage out. “If you put nothing in you get nothing out”. That is the message that Paul is trying to get across to his young colleague Timothy in this morning's epistle reading. Hard work pays but we won't achieve anything valuable without it. I won't get a stunning garden or a spotless house without thought, effort and energy going in to it and in

the same way if my Christian life is going to achieve anything I need to expect that it will cost me.

Paul begins chapter two with three examples of how effort is needed to achieve results. He draws on the images of the soldier who has to focus on the work in hand to achieve results and can't get side-tracked, the athlete who has to endure pain and concentrated hard work to receive the victor's crown and finally the farmer who gets a good crop only as the result of hard work. He then goes on to reinforce this argument by experience and he uses Christ's experience, His own experience as an apostle and the experience of ordinary Christian believers to show that none of us can expect an easy ride in the Christian life: which is why in the Baptism service we encourage the person being baptized to 'fight valiantly against sin the world and the devil'. Being a Christian is not an easy option.

### **1. The experience of Jesus Christ (v8)**

Paul begins by telling Timothy to remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. At first sight this is an extraordinary thing to say. How could we forget Jesus and what he has done for us? But the sad fact is that the human memory is fickle and Jesus himself knew that, which is why on the night before he died he instituted his supper as a feast of remembrance so that his followers would never forget him and what he achieved for them when he died on the cross. Even so the church has often forgotten him absorbing itself instead in barren theological debate, or in purely humanitarian activity or in petty parochial matters.

So how and why are we to remember Christ? Because he is the Gospel; the heart of our faith. When we forget Jesus and leave him out of our lives they become empty and purposeless because in forgetting him we are forgetting the heart of our faith.

Paul says "this is my Gospel". If Timothy is to guard what he has been given and hand it on to others he must remember Jesus Christ - as preached in the Gospel. In particular he is to remember him as "the one who is risen from the dead and descended from David." These eight words give a full account of the gospel. Jesus' birth, death, resurrection and ascension are all implicit in them. They remind us both of his divine person and of his saving work.

### **His person**

"descended from David" implies his humanity and speaks of his earthly descent. "risen from the dead" implies his divinity because he was powerfully proclaimed as God's son by his resurrection from the dead.

### **His work**

"risen from the dead" indicates that he died for our sins and was raised to prove the effectiveness of his sin-bearing sacrifice. "descended from David" indicates that he has established his kingdom as great David's greater son. Taken together these phrases allude to his double role as saviour and King.

There is another reason why Timothy must remember Jesus Christ "risen from the dead and descended from David". It is not just that these facts contain the whole gospel that he must preach but because they show

from Jesus' own experience that death is the gateway to life and suffering is the path to glory.

- he who died rose from the dead.

- he who was born in lowliness as David's offspring is now reigning in glory on David's throne. .. So Paul seems to be saying "Timothy, when you are tempted to avoid pain, humiliation, suffering or death in your ministry - remember Christ and think again.

## **2. The experience of the apostle (vv 9&10)**

Paul is suffering for the gospel. He is having to endure the painful indignity of wearing chains "like a common criminal", although he is a Roman citizen and an innocent man. But, he says, though he is chained, God's word is not. Even he at his first defence had been given the opportunity and the strength fully to proclaim God's word to the court, as he tells Timothy later in this letter (chapter 4:16f). In addition God's word could spread and was spreading through many others and in particular, Timothy himself, must share increasingly in this work.

The relationship between Paul's sufferings and the effectiveness of the gospel is not just one of contrast. "I am chained - God's word is not" but it is also one of cause and effect. Paul says, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation". Notice that the doctrine of election, (the idea that some have been chosen by God before time began, to believe in him) does not dispense with the necessity of preaching. On the contrary, it makes it essential. For Paul preaches and suffers for it literally, "**in order**, that they may obtain the salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory". Jesus's followers obtain

salvation in Christ, not apart from the preaching of Christ but by means of it.

Further - it is not just the preaching but also the resultant suffering which are the means of our salvation. This statement may at first astonish us. Not, of course, that Paul's sufferings have any redemptive effect like Jesus' do, but that people are saved through the gospel and that he could not preach the gospel without suffering for it. This is another case of glory through suffering. The eternal glory of the "elect" God's chosen people, is achieved through the sufferings of the apostle.

### **3. Our common Christian experience**

Paul now quotes what is thought to be part of an early Christian hymn, which he says is reliable. (He does this four other times in the letters to Timothy and Titus.) The extract consists of two pairs of epigrams (or pithy sayings) which contain accepted truths of Christian life and experience. They apply equally to all believers. The first pair applies to those who remain true to Christ and endure, the second two apply to those who become false and faithless.

First pair: *If we died with him, we will also live with him.*

*If we endure, we will also reign in him.*

From the context we can see that the death with Christ refers not to our death to sin through our union with Christ which Paul talks about elsewhere in his writings (Romans 6:3), but rather to our death to self and to safety as we take up our cross and follow Jesus as he exhorted his followers to do. So the Christian life is depicted as a life of dying, a life of enduring. Only if

we share in Christ's death on earth, shall we share his life in heaven. Only if we share his sufferings and endure shall we share his reign in the hereafter. For the road to life is death and the road to glory is suffering.

Second pair: *If we deny him, he also will deny us;  
If we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself.*

These lines envisage the possibility of our denying Christ and proving faithless. The first phrase, "*If we deny him, he will also deny us*" seems to be an echo of Jesus' own warning, "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father, who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:33)

So what about the second phrase *If we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself* It has often been taken as a comforting assurance that, even if we turn away from Christ, he will not turn away from us, for he will never be faithless as we are. And it is true, of course, that God never shows the fickleness or the faithlessness that human beings can. Yet the logic of this Christian hymn with its two pairs of balancing epigrams really demands a different interpretation. "If we deny him" and "if we are faithless" are parallels, which requires that "he will deny us" and "he remains faithful" should also be parallels. In this case his "faithfulness" when we are faithless will be faithfulness to his warnings. So faithfulness on God's part means carrying out his threats as well as his promises. So looking at this first part of the chapter it seems that Paul is hammering home a single lesson to Timothy. From secular analogy (soldiers, athletes and farmers)

and from spiritual experience (Christ's, his own, every Christian's ) he has been insisting that blessing comes through pain, fruit through toil, life through death, and glory through suffering. It is an invariable law of Christian life and service. So what can we learn from this passage for ourselves today. How does it apply to us and to our daily lives?

1. We can rejoice at the value God sets on us and fellowship with us.... Prepared to go through a great deal to secure relationship with us
2. Don't be surprised when things are difficult. It is to be expected as a "normal" part of Christian life
3. Don't give up when the going gets difficult. God has promised to be faithful to us and strengthen and support us and he is faithful.