

# THE SONG THAT NEVER ENDS

2 TIMOTHY 2:11-13 JUNE 13, 2018

Second Timothy, chapter 2, verses 11 through 13 will be our focus this evening. Paul's fourth of five faithful sayings, delivered as a sort of last will and testament to his dearly loved sons in the faith, Timothy and Titus.

It seems like companies don't utilize jingles as much as they used to. They really should, because those messages gets burned into our memories, even if we don't use the product. Sometimes the little song just promotes the product. *Gillette...the BEST a man can get!* Sometimes it gives a call to action. *Let's all go to the lobby!* Sometimes the jingle gives helpful information about how to use a product. *You should never put bananas....in the refrigerator!*

I still remember the Roy G. Biv song that my high school science teacher taught us to remember the order of colors in visible light. If you have little ones in the house, you probably make use of some of the great songs taught by shows like *Daniel Tiger* to help the kids out. *If you have to go potty, STOP, and go right away. Flush and wash and be on your way!*

What does any of this have to do with our text? Well, take a look at your Bible and you'll likely notice that tonight's faithful saying is formatted differently there on the page. It's positioned like poetry is in the Bible. That's because this was an ancient hymn, or at least a portion of one. It was possibly used as part of baptism services, or it may have been one of the "spiritual songs" that Paul refers to in Ephesians and Colossians. In fact, some believe the song was written by Paul himself.

Either way, it seems these would've been familiar lyrics to Timothy. A *theme* song meant to embed certain ideas and understandings into his mind. And here, at the the end of his life, Paul wanted to sing it one final time to his son, to remind him, encourage him, and strengthen Timothy's weak heart.

As we'll see, this is a *wonderful* song, full of outstanding promises. But sometimes the extraordinary *guarantees* of this song are overshadowed by the *warning* that's in it. The text is made up of 4 if/then promises. 3 of them are great guarantees, 1 of them is a severe warning. A warning that should *terrify* those who have not been born again. But should it terrify those of us who are Christians?

Well, what we'll find is that there is a point of application for us in that warning, but we need not be afraid or insecure. In fact, the whole purpose of Paul's letter to Timothy was to stabilize him, strengthen him, build him up so that he could live out his faith *boldly*, experiencing the power and the peace that God wanted to provide.

Think of it this way: We've traveled to Colombia a number of times. When you look on the US government websites (the State department site or the US Embassy site) there are *warnings* there, drawing your attention to some hazards in Colombia. One of them is the danger of Yellow Fever. Once you contract it, there is no medicine or treatment to cure the infection. But if you're *vaccinated*, then it's no longer an issue. There may be *other* travel warning, but I don't need to wring my hands over Yellow Fever, because I've had the shot.

I say this not to make light of the warning that we'll see, but to help us not be overwhelmed by the strong language. Paul's goal is to encourage us and excite us. His goal is *not* to cause us to call our own eternal security into question, and that's what happens to folks sometimes when they get to this passage and *that* concern can drown out the other incredible promises we receive here.

**2 Timothy 2:11-13 - <sup>11</sup> This is a faithful saying: For if we died with *Him*, We shall also live with *Him*. <sup>12</sup>If we endure, We shall also reign with *Him*. If we deny *Him*, He also will deny us. <sup>13</sup>If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.**

You see it there, 4 times we have an if/then formula. If *this* happens, then *that* happens. The first is “If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.” Note *died* is in the past and *shall live* is in the future.

If you are a Christian, the Bible explains that Jesus did not just *pay* your debt, but that, as far as heaven is concerned, you died *with* Him there on the cross. Paul says in Romans 6 that when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into His death. Not the outward *ritual* of baptism, because it’s clear that water baptism has no part in the process of salvation, which is by grace alone through faith alone, but the baptism of the *Spirit* that we read about in 1 Corinthians 12 and Galatians 3, when we become born again. If you are a Christian, the Bible says this about you:

**Galatians 2:20a - <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;**

Because you died with Christ, it is promised and guaranteed that you will *live* with Him. Paul explains earlier that it’s not *just* unending life, but that it is life *in eternal glory*. In movies there will sometimes be an immortal character and they’re usually bummed out. They don’t really *want* to live forever anymore, because they still live in the same broken world, full of pain and suffering and disappointment. But that’s not the kind of immortality Paul is talking about. He’s talking about eternal glory. Where all sadness is gone and replaced with joy. Where all *weakness* is gone and replaced with power. Where there is no more pain or failure. Where we have perfect understanding and perfect peace. Where we are no longer sinning or even *tempted* to sin. Where all that’s wrong about us has been put away and we live forever in the presence of our Savior. In fact, I think Paul might say that we will really be *alive* for the first time. We will be made perfectly glorified, as God intended our lives to be. What a wonderful promise!

What’s the ticket to this promise? It’s very simple: We must die with Christ. Meaning we must trust Him as Savior, believe on Him and be covered by His sacrifice on the cross. That, and that *alone*, grants us an entrance into heaven after our physical death. Not *only* an entrance, but the Bible explains we get much more than that: We get a full share in Christ’s *inheritance*.

**Galatians 3:29 - <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

Part of that promise is referenced in the next part of our song. “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.”

These days, in hipster Christianity, it’s popular to operate under the idea that “we bring heaven to earth now” (whatever that means), and to deny the coming, literal Kingdom of Jesus Christ on this earth. Rather, we’re to sort of just mystically “experience the Kingdom” in the midst of this broken world. Now, while we *are* already citizens of the Kingdom, and while we do God’s work *in* the here and now, *this is not the Kingdom*. I mean, this world is a dump! It’s in serious need of a remodel. Luckily, that’s exactly what the Bible says is going to happen. Jesus will return after the 7 year Great Tribulation and He will establish a real, literal, global Kingdom. And this coming Kingdom is *part* of our inheritance. We’re told that we will rule and reign *with* the Lord in that thousand year Kingdom.

Now, here in Second Timothy, we're specifically reminded of this promise. Paul says, "If we endure, we shall also reign." Let's talk about these 2 terms for a minute. What does it mean to "reign" and what does it mean to "endure?" First to reign. This is not some phony, ceremonial, powerless, fake position. It's not like when people get knighted by the Queen today, which doesn't mean anything. This is a real, significant, meaningful place in the Kingdom. It's like being appointed to the Cabinet or to the Supreme Court. We may rule over multiple cities.<sup>1</sup> We *will* be judges over angels.<sup>2</sup> This is a wonderful promise and a good reminder, especially if you feel *insignificant* in this life.

But what does it mean to "endure?" Well, in the immediate context, it meant to faithfully endure *persecution* for the sake of Jesus Christ. Paul was in chains for his Christianity. Timothy would face oppression as well. Paul was writing to strengthen Timothy and bolster his resolve to hold on in the midst of those trials. He reminds Timothy that martyrdom is *not* defeat. In fact, those that go through it find themselves in a special class of victory.

But is persecution and martyrdom all that Paul means here? Do we need to move out of the freedom of America and relocate to Iran so that we can be assured our place in the Kingdom? The answer is no. Because, not only does God not command us to seek out this sort of suffering, the command to endure has a wider application than *just* professing Christ under penalty of death.

A couple of ways that scholars define this term (endure) are "to stay alive" and "to stand your ground." Those are *great* ways for us to take this command to heart. First, *stay alive*. What does that mean? Well, it means to stay vigorous and awake and *stirred up* in our Christianity. Paul would tell Timothy elsewhere in the book, "Stir up your spiritual gifts." Peter writes to "stir up [our] minds." The writer to the Hebrews instructs us to "stir up love and good deeds." A variety of Parables teach us to stay spiritually alert and awake, that we might be ready. We endure by staying *alive* in these senses.

But we also endure by *standing our ground* where God has placed us. Where has God positioned you? In the Bible it's *clear* that God specifically positions people in certain times and places in for His good purpose. Think of the Demoniac of the Gadarenes. He wanted to follow after the Lord, Jesus said, "No, *here's* where I'm stationing you." Think of Philip the Evangelist, sent to specific locations at specific times in order to accomplish great spiritual tasks. Think of the Apostles and how God led them. *You* were created by God at a certain point in time and scattered to a certain place on the earth in order to be a specific part of His will. We are called to *discover* the good works that God has prepared for us and to walk in them. One of the images Paul gave Timothy earlier in the chapter is that of a soldier under orders. If you are a Christian your life is not your own, but it belongs to your King. And *He* is the one who has the authority to decide the course of your life. We may think we have great ideas about where we should go and what we should do, but *He's* the one with the perfect plan, and we are to stand our ground wherever He has led us and, by doing that, we faithfully endure.

Now to the third couplet, the one that often seems the loudest: "If we deny Him, He also will deny us." Just as our understanding of endurance had two parallel applications, this warning does as well. First, this is a severe, deliberate warning to the unbeliever. If you refuse to accept Christ, you *will not be received by Him*. Instead, after you die you will be sent to conscious, eternal torment in the Lake of Fire. Hell is real and there *is no escape* except through Jesus Christ. All who deny Him, meaning all who refuse His offer of salvation, will be there forever. That's not what you want *and* it's not what *God* wants. He doesn't want you to perish. That's why He's put up warnings like this one all over the

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 19:11-27

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:3

Bible. So that unbelievers can realize the reality that the wages of sin is death but that there is eternal salvation in Jesus Christ. It's a free gift! But if you deny Him, He *will* deny you.

If you are born again, this aspect of the warning does not apply to you. Verse 13 itself should be enough to assure us of that. But there is a parallel application we can take to heart. And that is that when we give in to *temporary* denials in our walk with the Lord, we will suffer loss with regard to our relationship with Him. This is what Paul wanted to drive home to Timothy. Because, at this point, Timothy was frightened, he was drawing back, he was moving toward spiritual failure and denial. So Paul wrote to get him back on track. And I'm so glad he did, because *all* of us go through times when we make mistakes or withdraw from the Lord or give in to denial in some area or other. When we choose not to obey the Lord's commands or when we hold back from sharing the Gospel when we're being prompted to or when we give up on prayer or when we cultivate bitterness rather than love. These are ways in which we *refuse* our Lord. And when we do that, though we're not in danger of hell's fire, we *will* be denied certain things the Lord wants us to have. One pastor put these losses on his list: The forfeiture of future reward (2 Timothy 2:5). The loss of heavenly joy and peace. Timothy wasn't experiencing those things. His mind was a tempest of anxiety and fear and doubt. The loss of effectiveness in our prayer lives.

When we refuse the Lord by failing to obey Him or trust Him, there will be a *denial* of things that God wants us to have. Don't do it, don't do it, don't do it!

Finally, in verse 13, Paul closes the song with this beautiful promise: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." Some Bible commentators believe that this is actually an extension of the *warning*, that Paul is saying, "That's right, if you're faithless, God will be faithful *to judge* you." But that's out of the context of how Paul has been speaking to Timothy. Timothy, who Paul said, had a *genuine* faith, despite his imperfections and stumblings. When we read the book, there's no indication that Paul thought Timothy was going to 'lose' his salvation. No, it is much more consistent to see this closing verse as a final, hopeful encouragement. And that's great because *all* of us have moments of faithlessness. But, in verse 8, Paul said this was his *Gospel*. This is *good* news. It's not some bleak decree. No, Paul ends this saying by reminding his friend (and all of us) that God is *faithful*. Jesus Christ is *always* reliable, always loving, always acting with allegiance toward His people. Even when we fail, our Lord *never* fails. He who began a good work in you *will* be faithful to complete it, whether you do your part perfectly or not. And that's good, because (spoiler alert) you're *not* going to do your part perfectly. Not by a long shot. But the Lord cannot and will not deny Himself and if you're saved, you are *in* Jesus Christ. He is and always will be faithful.

The closing questions are simple: Are you in Christ? If you are, are you living out these promises? These are very plain but powerful promises given to us. If you want rest, reward, assistance, spiritual security, direction, hope, here's how you get them. Recognize who you are in Christ. Endure by His power as He directs you where He wants. Paul summarizes it all up in chapter 2 verse 1 where he simply says, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." That's it. Maybe for you today that means just remaining at your post like a good soldier. Maybe it means being obedient to publicly proclaim the Gospel. Maybe it means to endure actual persecution. *You* know the specifics of your life, I don't. But these are principles gives to all of us. Paul and Timothy and you and me. It's not always easy, but it's always possible and it's always good news. Because we are headed home, to eternal glory, to rule with our King. That's the journey we're on. Unlike modern travel, we don't just sit while someone else flies the plane or drive the bus. We walk ourselves. Paul says we *run* ourselves. Paul's Gospel is our Gospel. So burn this song into your mind and heart and let it build you up in hope and strength and security in the Lord.