

The Other Side of the Coin

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[0:00] We good? All right, we're getting it dialed in. Yeah, we were here a couple weeks ago. It's nice to be back. It's beautiful up here. And then I heard that next week there's a church potluck.

I love church potlucks. And so if Nathan Killian mysteriously suffers an injury sometime this week, and you have to call me back, you'll know why.

I have with me my cell phone. I usually take this out of my pocket before coming up, but I brought it up for a reason. You know, most of us have these. And one of the things that our cell phones these days, any of you remember when a cell phone was really just a phone? Yeah, if you're an old like me.

I'm getting there. But they're so functional now over and above just being a phone. They're arguably a mini computer. But one of the things that most of these have are cameras on them that are pretty sophisticated.

There once was a time when, and when I was younger, I used to be kind of into photography, but I used this stuff called film. Anybody remember film? You know, I had to buy film for a camera.

[1:21] I had a 35 millimeter camera with a number of different lenses and a big bag. And I would go out and take photos. And then I would have to take the film in and have it developed.

And sometimes they were duds. And sometimes now we all have a phone in our pocket that is arguably better than that camera that I had years ago.

And what's great about it is not only do we possess this phone, but it's so easy to take pictures. If I take a dud, it doesn't matter because I can just hit delete, right?

I can take pictures of all sorts of dumb stuff. And I don't feel like I'm wasting film or wasting a picture. I've seen people, well, I've been people who nowadays, when we go to some sort of a conference maybe or something where there are a lot of notes, you see people taking notes this way by taking a picture of the screen, right?

You ever done that? I love that. I mean, I just snap. There's my notes. I don't get writer's cramp anymore, you know? We do it all the time. So I love the fact that I've got a pretty robust camera on me at all times that I can just use really freely.

[2:37] There can be a downside to that. There have been some stories, not really recently, but the past number of years, where park rangers in particular have had to tell people, be careful when you're taking selfies.

Do you know how many people have fallen off a cliff taking a selfie? Because that's the other great thing about a cell phone. Now, can you imagine trying to take a picture of yourself with an old camera?

That doesn't work. But now, you can just flip the screen. But people get so caught up in taking a selfie in a beautiful location that they don't pay attention to where they are, and they trip and they fall off a cliff.

There is a whole Wikipedia page, I kid you not, about injuries and or deaths related to selfies. And it's long.

I kept scrolling, scrolling, scrolling, scrolling, and I only go as far as 2017. And I thought, how far does this page go? Yeah? This is a thing that happens.

[3:38] There was a story out a couple years ago from park rangers also saying, please don't take bear selfies. What's a bear selfie? When somebody sees a bear and they get as close to it as they can and try to take this great selfie of them with the bear behind them.

And park rangers had to remind people, whoa, bears are wild. They're dangerous. Don't do that. You're going to get mauled. So there is a flip side to the benefit of having this phone that we need to be aware of.

Now, when I say that, I'm not suggesting that we don't use the camera on our phones. Nor am I suggesting that we don't carry cell phones. It's just good to be aware of that flip side, the other side of that coin, isn't it?

Frankly, we have all sorts of things in our lives like that. I venture to say that all of us arrived here at this building this morning in a car, whether you were driving it or a passenger in it, right?

Do you know how much cars weigh? When you get behind the wheel of a car, it's a piece of machinery that weighs thousands of pounds. They're dangerous, right?

[4:47] I have power tools in my house. Power tools are great. They make my life a lot of times much easier than it would be without them. But there's also a danger that's there.

We have appliances in our house that have some inherent danger. Anytime you buy a new electrical appliance of any sort, even if it's something simple like an alarm clock, you open the instruction booklet and there's always a few pages about safety warnings, right?

Don't even get me started on medications. You ever seen or read an ad for some of these medications? They say possible side effects are, and I think, why would anybody take that?

Well, the reason is that if there's somebody that has an ailment or a condition, the benefits of that medication often far outweigh the relatively small risks of some of those things happening.

Nonetheless, we need to be aware that they're there, right? I bring all that up because a couple weeks ago, we looked at 2 Corinthians 4.

[5:53] And I'm just going to go back there and read some of this. We won't read the entire passage, but starting in verse 16, just to remind you.

So we do not lose heart, though our outer self is wasting away. Our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

I love those contrasting statements. This light and momentary compared to eternal and weight and heaviness, if you will, right?

And here, as in so many other passages, is the suggestion, more than a suggestion, is that we ought to have in our mind eternity.

And I brought that ball of string. Honestly, I intended to bring the string back. And then I walked out my front door without it. And since my front door is three and a half hours away, we're just going to have to live without it.

[6:55] Remember the little black end of that string that was sort of the relative shortness of our life compared to 300 feet of string. And that the Bible instructs us to set our mind on things that are above, to think about eternity, to put our focus here.

Not as if this little black part doesn't matter, that it doesn't hurt, or that it doesn't give us suffering. But that there's this coming, right?

If we're not careful, though, there can be a danger to that. Let me stop for just a moment and say, there being a danger of a truth doesn't make it untrue.

We need to be careful there. I've heard people at times say, well, I don't like this and such theology or this and such doctrine because it can lead people to this place.

But listen, good theology isn't about you or I liking it or disliking it. It's about truth. Hallelujah. But it is still good to be aware, just as with so many of these things in our life, of the possible side effect.

[8:03] And there is a possible side effect of being so focused on eternity that we sort of stop looking at what goes on right here.

I've known followers of Jesus, God bless them, who are just like bumps on a log. Because, well, we're just waiting for that.

And this doesn't, and that is not the teaching of our scripture either. And so this morning, I want to go to 2 Timothy, if you will. 2 Timothy chapter 2.

And before we dive into this, I'm just going to pause and offer a word of prayer. Our Father God, we, again, thank you and praise you so much for your word, for revealing yourself to us.

As Jim prayed earlier, we're so grateful just for your presence, God. So many times we ask you to come into our presence. Frankly, the reality is we don't need to do that. We are in your presence all the time.

[9:10] And so, Father, rather we pray that we would be mindful of that. That we would hear your voice. And help us to hear your voice in this passage this morning. We don't want to hear the voice of myself or anybody else.

We just want to hear you today, God. So thank you for giving us this word. And we pray you bless this to us. In Christ's name, amen. Starting in verse 1 of 2 Timothy chapter 2.

Let me also just take a quick pause. We talked last, or two weeks ago, about just as a reminder that so many of these books in our New Testament are epistles, which is a fancy word for letter.

Most of them tend to be letters to entire churches, like we looked at in 2 Corinthians. That's a letter to the church in Corinth, right? This is one of a few letters in the New Testament that are called pastoral epistles.

Pastoral because they were written to a pastor. And I think the immediate danger there is some of us might think, well, I'm not a pastor. And so this one's not for me. Not true.

[10:14] Okay. Are there some specific elements of this that are maybe more germane to someone who is in full-time ministry? Sure. Of course. But this is good for all of us.

Remember, all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for you and I, right? You understand? So let's, this is a pastoral epistle. This is written from the apostle Paul late in his life to a dear son of his, Timothy, who he found on one of his missionary journeys.

Found. Bumped into on one of his missionary journeys. Timothy traveled with him a long time.

Timothy at this point is the pastor of the church in Ephesus, a very large and important church.

Paul loves him like a son. And this letter is drenched in stuff where you can tell Paul knows that he's sort of at the end of his life. This is sort of his final encouragements and final thoughts to his dear son, Timothy.

But in verse one of chapter two, he says, you then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

[11:23] I've often, when you look into both first and second Timothy, it's clear that Timothy was experiencing some pressures of ministry.

I mean, Paul wouldn't say things like take strength if Timothy didn't need to hear that, you know? I mean, he was under a lot of pressure. His youth was one of those things that seems to have affected his ministry, where Paul had to say, don't listen.

Don't let people look down on you for that. You know what you're doing. And here he just says, take strength. In yourself? No.

He says, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And then he gets a bit more specific. And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Again, Timothy traveled with Paul for some time on his missionary journeys. And he heard this stuff. And part of what Paul is doing in these letters is he is appealing to his own ministry and saying, Timothy, you know me.

[12:37] You know my record. You know what I taught. You know that there was no variation or deviation in what I taught. You heard me teach this same truth, this same gospel over and over and over.

And this is what I want to call on you. Now to follow that model and for you to teach others. You have it. You know it. And now it is up to you to teach others, to commit this gospel, to commit this truth to others who will continue to teach this.

The early Christian church exploded in the historical world. Partly because this was its model. Partly because apostles like the apostle Paul didn't say, I'm going to be the one and only who, no.

And we said, all right, now you go do what I did. You go tell a bunch of other people and tell them to tell a bunch of other people. And he says here, even from a leadership perspective, you commit this truth now to other men who will be faithful and who will teach it.

And then he goes into three really wonderful examples. I love this little passage. And they're so rich with meaning in their particular world, but I think for us still today, the first one is of a soldier in verse three.

[14:00] It says, share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Some of you remember that old song, Onward Christian Soldiers?

Remember that one? Yeah, that I think is probably drawn from this thought in scripture. But he says, be like a good soldier.

And then he goes on and explains in a little bit more detail what he's thinking about. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

In Paul's world, and Paul does this in other places, we know, uses this example of a soldier. The chief example of a soldier in this world was, of course, the Roman soldier.

The Roman Empire had risen to great power. This is who was in charge during this time, just by way of reminder. And while there were cultures, the Greeks, for instance, were really kind of known for philosophy and art and thinking, the Romans weren't really known for as much of that.

[15:09] It could be argued that much of the art and culture of that sort that the Romans had were really just sort of stolen from the Greek Empire. What the Romans did nail, though, was military.

They got military. The Roman military was second to none in their world in terms of what you might even call technology, their tools, but also in terms of their training.

The Roman army, the Roman military was so expertly trained, nobody could stand against them. And they had this very rigid system of commanding officer and everybody doing precisely what that officer said, without question and without fail.

And then along with expert training, it was said that a Roman soldier could hold their ground against a hundred other regular people because they were just that well trained, you know.

And so this is something that is in Paul's mind. It's something that he knows will be in his readers' minds. This picture of a soldier who's expertly trained, and he says, listen, they got to this point not by paying attention to civilian affairs.

[16:25] And I think, you know, this is arguably still true today. You know, a good soldier, a career soldier especially, that's what they're there for, right?

That's what they're doing. It's not that they have no mind for civilian things, whether it be politics or culture or whatever, but their primary goal, their chief goal, is to do what their commanding officer says.

They have a job, they're going to do that job without question and without fail and do it expertly. And Paul uses this example of, again, what was at the time the greatest army that had ever walked the face of the earth, in my opinion.

He says, be like that. Because he loved the Roman Empire? No, no, no. But because he understood the level of commitment and of training, and he said, you are a soldier of Jesus Christ. Think of Jesus Christ as your commanding officer, right? You don't get involved in civilian affairs. None of that matters.

[17:38] What matters is what your commanding officer has told you to do. Be like a good soldier. Isn't that great? Then he moves on.

Verse 5. And this is another example that we've seen from other passages the Apostle Paul really loves. He seemed to have a real affinity and appreciation for sports of the day.

And he says, An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. We have all sorts of sports today.

I like sports. I don't really play them. I never was particularly great at sports. But I love watching sports. I'm a big baseball guy.

My wife and I both are Formula One fanatics. But no matter what sport that it is that you're following, that you're watching, there are a set of rules, of guidelines.

[18:41] We just recently had the World Cup. I don't know if there are any soccer fans in Leavenworth, Washington. But no? You're missing out.

The World Cup was on. And there are rules. And now there are computers even that, linked with cameras, can determine very precisely if a rule has been broken and whether a goal counts or not. Those things are important, though. If there are no rules, if there are no guidelines, it's just craziness. Anybody can do anything. It's important that in contests of this nature that we have rules, that we have referees or umpires or race stewards or whatever it is that say, no, no, no, you broke the rules.

Now, certainly, in Paul's mind, he has in mind the classical Greek Olympic competitions, doesn't he? Even now, I didn't bring any specific stories, but there have been all sorts of stories.

Maybe one of the most classical Olympic competitions is the marathon, right? Sort of a pinnacle of running competitions. The marathon.

[19:52] Well, to this day, even people try to cheat at those things. All kinds of stories about people who tried to cheat at a marathon by using a car or a shortcut or a twin or, you know, all these crazy things.

And Paul says here, you're not going to get the prize if you do that. You're not going to get the prize if you do that. He talks about a crown because they very frequently get this crown of laurel leaves that would be, you know, placed on their head, designating them as the winner of this event. You see, you've got to follow the rules. And I believe that in Paul's mind is something even sort of additional. You know, when an athlete competes in the Olympics today, they've already gone through a number of, I don't know what you'd call it, qualifying rounds to prove that they're a good athlete, right?

In Paul's day, it was maybe a little bit different. And a lot of scholars have pointed out that one of the things in the very early Olympics that you had to do was to swear an oath that you had practiced at this sport for no less than 10 years in order to compete.

Because they didn't want any old schmuck just showing up, you know. Some dope who doesn't know what he's doing and, you know, ruining the sport. And so that may be in mind, too, that not only do you have to follow the rules during the event and stay in your lane or stay within the boundaries or whatever it is, but that in addition, you had to have prepared that there was work and training that went into this.

[21:31] And he reminds Timothy, look, you know this, an athlete isn't going to get crowned if they don't follow the rules. If they just show up on day one, if I just show up at the next marathon that comes my way, I know to you I look really fit and really athletic.

Do I? You're just going to buy that? Goodness. If I just show up to a marathon and say, okay, I'm here, I'm going to run.

I mean, I'm going to die within the first mile, you know. I'm not ready. I'm not prepared. Paul says a serious athlete follows the rules and is prepared.

Be like a soldier. Be like an athlete. And then he uses this third example. Verse 6. It is the hardworking farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

And this was something that, you know, in his day and age, everybody had more of a closeness to. I think it could be argued that today in our modern world, we are perhaps, most of us, not all of us, but we're perhaps farther away from the source of our food than we've ever been in world history.

[23:04] You know, there's just a great disconnect there. I think there was a bit more closeness here. Even so, in our world, we understand what farming is like. Anybody actually in farming?

Yeah? Was. Okay. It's hard work, isn't it? Yeah. I have a garden, too. Ask me how well it does.

Because part of the key here is hard working, right? I have these romantic notions about having a garden. And my wife and I have both said, boy, we're going to grow these tomatoes and have fresh tomatoes and peppers.

And it's going to be so wonderful. But we're not always very hard working at it. I'm just going to be honest. I get home after work, and I know I should go out and weed or fertilize or whatever I know about as much about gardening as could fit on a 3x5 card.

But I get the basics. But when you're not very hard working at it, it doesn't work. Someone who's going to make their living at being a farmer, it's hard work.

[24:13] You don't get to roll out of bed one morning and say, ah, I don't feel like it. You have to feel like it. You just go. And Paul says it's that hard working farmer that deserves the first share of the crops.

Some scholars have suggested that this kind of goes hand in hand with Paul's, well, first letter to Timothy when he tells Timothy, don't muzzle the ox. Sort of this scripture that we talk about that, you know, people in full time ministry should be paid for that full time ministry.

That they should be recompensed for that. There's a difference there. I don't think that's quite what he has in mind here. Because I think when you put these three examples together, what you see is three examples of work and reward.

Right? I want to be careful here. We sometimes in the grace movement get so, so wound up in that. It's another one of these other side of the coin things. We're almost afraid of this word. We don't want to talk about works. Well, listen. Your salvation, my salvation has nothing whatsoever to do with works.

[25:26] Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. We need to hold to that. That being said, the scripture has all sorts of things to say about our works.

About the work that we are to be engaged in as followers of Jesus Christ. And that is really what Paul is getting at here. In the first example, be like a good soldier.

The reward is pleasing your commanding officer. Making your commanding officer happy. In the second one, to compete within the rules and to compete not only fairly, but to prepare for that and to do all of that correctly.

The reward is this crown. And to work hard as a farmer, your reward is that crop, that bounty. In all of these things, he is talking about work and then a reward that comes with that work.

Now, that goes hand in hand with what we talked about a couple weeks ago in this idea of looking at the future, looking at eternity. This is what Paul says elsewhere.

[26 : 38] Not in the passage we looked at a couple weeks ago, but we referenced it. Set your mind on things that are above. That's where you ought to store up your treasure. Because that stuff doesn't rot or go away or rust or break or that's eternity.

Store up your treasure there. So there is this idea of work that has paired to it a reward. And this is what he reminds Timothy here.

Timothy, take strength. Remember everything I've taught you. And then let me give you these three simple but pretty profound examples.

And he just rattles them off. Be like a good soldier. Soldiers don't get involved in all of this extraneous stuff.

They're here to do this. Be like an athlete who wins the crown because of their preparation, because of their hard work and following the rules.

[27 : 41] Be like this hard-working farmer who gets to enjoy that first crop. You know, the first fruits of what comes up out of the ground because of the work that they've put in.

And he says, after all this, think over what I say. For the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Timothy, I want you to just think about this.

I want you to ruminate on this. And then he wraps this passage up. And if you're reading a Bible commentary, usually this is a new thought, slightly, you know, thematically.

And yet again, this is a letter that he's writing. When you write a letter or an email, you don't say, okay, here's verse 1 of my letter and verse 2. And now verse 10 is a new. I mean, we don't do that when we write letters.

And he wasn't necessarily either. So I think this still is part and parcel of what he's saying. Verse 8, remember Jesus Christ. We could just full stop right there. Remember Jesus Christ.

[28 : 51] Risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel. In my gospel for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.

But the word of God is not bound. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect.

This is one of those words that makes us a little uncomfortable at times. You know, predestination versus free will. But listen, here it is. I'm not going to apologize for it.

The Apostle Paul teaches clearly that there is this elect. But that also that it's his responsibility and Timothy's responsibility and our responsibility to share the message of this gospel so that the elect may respond.

Yeah? I know. Hard to wrap our brains around. What came first, the chicken or the egg? But here it is. But he says, I do all of this for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

[30 : 00] Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Timothy, soldiers don't get entangled in civilian affairs.

They worry about their commanding officer. An athlete isn't crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It's the hardworking farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

Think over what I say. The reality is there's a tension between these two dynamics. They're both true.

The Bible tells us to have our mind, our sight, our hope ultimately anchored in eternity, in what's to come. And yet at the exact same time, it tells us that we have work to do here.

The apostle Paul himself writes about this. You want to turn back with me to Philippians really quickly? If not, I'll read it to you. But Philippians chapter 1.

[31 : 12] And I'm going to start in verse 21. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. You're familiar with that verse, right? If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.

Yet which shall I choose? I cannot tell. I'm hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and to be with Christ. You ever feel like that?

I mean, I joked about age, but the reality is the older I get, the more I understand some of my elders when I was young saying, I can't wait to go home.

I cannot wait to go home. And that's what Paul is saying. I can't wait to go home. Oh, I just want to be with the Lord, right? But, he says that's far better, but verse 24, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Jesus Christ because of my coming to you again.

[32 : 25] And so Paul even writes about this tension between these two dynamics, the one of being eternity-minded, focused on that, and yet at the exact same time being focused on this.

I don't know if any of you are shooters of any kind, but when you look down your site, best practice is to have both eyes open, isn't it?

One eye looking down that site, but the other eye looking downfield and taking in the whole range still. I have a really tough time with that.

I want to close my eye and look down the site. It's even worse for me because I'm right-handed, but for some reason I'm kind of left-eye dominant, and so I want to use this eye to, I'm all messed up. It's really hard to do what I know I'm supposed to do and to keep both eyes open, and it's something that I just have to practice, you know, I have to think about.

[33 : 36] This is something that we have to practice, that we have to think about, I think, to admit that tension, but to admit that both of these things are called of us as followers of Jesus Christ, and we need to do them both.

A lot of us have one eye closed, right? There is a danger on being so focused on just this, this here and now.

Maybe just so focused on what we're going to eat for lunch, you know, or just, we're just not thinking about that other stuff. I've got plans this week. I've got, and the Bible reminds us.

No, no, no, no. Do you know what a blip that is in comparison to eternity? And yet at the exact same time, the Bible says, but wait a minute, the idea here isn't to become all starry-eyed and just lay back and say, okay, I'm just going to wait for you, Lord, and give up on personal hygiene and everything, and just, you know.

That's not what the Bible calls us to. It calls us to work. It calls us to labor. It calls us to suffer even while still having that other eye downrange, yeah?

[34 : 56] We've got to do both. Now, occasionally, we've got both eyes closed, you know. Paul has some strong words to say about some of the people in the church who only care about the things of this world, and in that, he doesn't really just mean the present.

What he means is they're not even mindful of their commanding officer in any way, shape, or form. They just care about riches or materialism or what, you know, they care about the same thing that this world system cares about.

That's a whole other problem. But for a lot of us, I think sometimes one or the other of our eyes is sort of closed. I want to suggest a couple things as we close.

That, one, this calls for prayer. Like so much of our Christian walk, it's almost like prayer is important or something, right?

We need God's help. Jesus told his disciples, when he told them that they were going to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he said, I'm going to send you a helper, right?

[36 : 04] This was his intent. This was the design. And sometimes we don't rely nearly enough on the Holy Spirit, on our God indwelling us.

And sometimes I just need to pray more and say, God, you got to show me this balance. I don't know that I'm doing a very good job. Sometimes I feel like I've got this eye closed and sometimes I feel like I've got that eye closed and I'm trying to do one or the other and I'm having a tough time doing both and holding both of these things in tension, but in their appropriate balance, the way your word teaches me to do.

I need your help. I need your wisdom. I need the discernment of the Holy Spirit to show me which eye I need to open up a little more. But then the other thing is to, as Paul writes to Timothy, consider these things.

I want you to think about these things. The Bible talks about meditating on Scripture, on the truth of God.

And as you, as I, as all of us in prayer ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance, he's going to guide us.

[37:23] And then it is often contingent on us to say, okay, I know which eye I need to open. What can I do to remind myself to keep that eye open? What can I do to break myself from this habit of just seeing everything that's right here in front of me and not thinking about that eternal reward?

Or conversely, what can I think about, do about, what can I do about having my head so lost in the clouds that I'm not concerned about what the Lord has for me to do here and work here for the sake of the elect to be his salt and light?

Because I'm just, you know, waiting. Just take me home, Lord. I'm waiting. I'm still waiting. I'm just still waiting. It's been decades and I'm just going to sit here and wait. I don't know what works for you.

Writing yourself a note, putting it on your bathroom mirror or on the refrigerator. Letting it direct your Bible study.

What passages that you feel like you need to put more time in. But I hope that the only Bible you get isn't here at Cascade Mountain Bible Church on a Sunday morning.

[38:33] You need more than that. But whatever it is that you're doing in your personal scripture study life, you know, having that inform, which I really need help here.

Maybe I'll buy a book to help guide me. But to really dig into this in the right parts to be reminded of, what do I need to meditate on? What do I need to chew on more?

Because the reality is here that we as a people, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, ought to have our mind firmly set on eternity as our hope and as our anchor.

And yet at the exact same time, know that we have work now. We have duty now. We have responsibility now.

And to hold those in balance. That's the people we're called to be. Yeah. Let's be those people.

Followers of Jesus who are obedient to and faithful to his word and to his instruction to us.

[39:42] Father God. Amen.