

## Week Eight: 2 Timothy 2:1-26

*“Tinker, Sailor, Soldier, Spy”*

*2Ti 2:1-26 (ESV) 1 You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 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. 3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. 5 An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. 7 Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.*

*8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*

*11 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.*

*14 Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. 19 But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”*

*20 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. 22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 23 Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

I think it is a great privilege that the Holy Spirit, who empowered Paul to pen this very personal letter, allows us to see what it looks like to *make a disciple*. Paul is pouring the wisdom of his heart into this one person he loves so much. He is entrusting the message and the teaching he received from Jesus to Timothy, and he tells Timothy to take these same precious truths and entrust them to men he knows are faithful, who will be loyal and committed to this commission: *Go and make Jesus followers who will make Jesus followers (2:2), until Jesus comes back and restores the world. (1:12)* When I think of Paul as a prisoner writing to one young man in a far away church, I am reminded of Jesus telling His disciples *The Kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed that grows into a large tree that gives shelter to the birds of the air. (Mat 13:32)* Take the

seed of life that Jesus has implanted in your heart and pour that love into a few faithful men and then stand back and watch what God does. Is it an overnight thing? Nope. It is a lifetime of working and waiting. And one day we will see *the whole structure, being joined together, grow into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph 2:21-22)* On that day, when it is finished, we will look back from glory and see our work, and praise Him for what He did through us.

This is where Paul gets really creative. He uses analogies to teach us what it means to be a disciple, a Christian, in the world where the opposition to our mission never stops, and never will stop. There are six analogies. They all have a different emphasis, different challenges, different rewards and goals. That is because we are all different people called together to do a massive job. In these analogies, which we call similes and metaphors, there is something for everyone, something we can all personally relate to in our own lives. The analogies Paul chooses are *Soldier, Athlete, Farmer, Prisoner, Workman and Household Vessels*. Paul also warns us there are men who are masquerading as disciples but who are not. They are the false teachers, the transmitters of false information. Sometimes they are blatantly opposed to Christ's work but sometimes it is subtle and hard to discern. The subtle ones are the *moles*. They are spies posing as *soldiers, athletes and farmers*. I used the title of Jon LeCarre's book *Tinker, Sailor, Soldier, Spy* because it is about a mole in the British Secret Service posing as one of them but who is wreaking havoc as a spy within the system, creating mistrust and division between one agency and another. In the Christian Church, throughout history, this will be something the world watches as the church creates a legacy of infighting and division over doctrines that spring from men's minds, from false teachers and hucksters. The challenge for every generation is to go back to the *one* commandment Jesus gave to His disciples the night before He died: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (Jn 15:25)* Maybe we can expand that to say: *Love Me, love My message, love the work I have called you to do, love the people you serve, and I will reward you when the race is done!* Let's see how Paul's analogies fit that charge.

**The Soldier.** In the Roman world soldiers were everywhere. They were an occupying force as well as a combat army. They were a hated presence in Israel, yet all of the Gospel writers tell of Roman soldiers and centurions turning in repentance, experiencing the miracle of new birth. When John the Baptizer said *do the things that show your repentance, the people asked "What do we do?" (Luk 3:8,10)* Some soldiers repented: *...some soldiers also asked him, "What about us? What are we to do?" He said to them, "Don't take money from anyone by force or accuse anyone falsely. Be content with your pay." (Luk 3:14)* These soldiers have had a heart change and they *ARE* different. Now they want to *BE* different. That is what "*holy*" means—set apart for God and his purposes, not my own, though they still worked for Caesar. Caesar's soldiers often sadistically inflicted suffering on others, they took what they wanted, and officials looked the other way. Christ's soldiers are in the world to relieve suffering, not inflict it, and to promote justice, not overlook it. The soldier is duty-bound to please the commander, to focus on his duties, knowing the reward may be better pay and promotion. If the commander gives an order, we do not stop to think it over first. We act. We obey. "*Sir, Yes SIR!*" As the Roman soldier could no longer live like a civilian, or get sidetracked in community affairs, the Christian soldier can't be distracted by activities that pull us away from the focus of our duty to live out the Gospel. Since our battle is different, a war of ideas and philosophies that oppose the message of grace

and service, Paul says, *the Lord's servant mustn't be a fighter, but must be gentle to all people, able to teach, enduring evil without resentment...*(2:24) Gentleness and patience are not qualities of the normal soldier. That makes us different.

**The Athlete.** Where being a soldier is about duty and obedience, being an athlete is about discipline, long hours of practice and strenuous training under a demanding coach. The Greeks had a word for that kind of training—*agonizō*. It was *agony*. And all of the discipline has one goal in mind; to compete in the games and to win. The serious athlete trained his body and his mind. He had to learn the rules of the game, and there were a lot of rules! If he figured out a way to cheat he could win without having to work as hard. Many of us are like that if we are honest. We want the crown without the suffering, without the *agonizō*. There is the story of the man running the New York marathon who ran off the course, got into a cab and rode to within five miles of the finish line. Then he waited until he could enter the race without being noticed and came in first. He got caught. He was disqualified and disgraced. If he not gotten caught? He would have basked in the glory of first prize, but as a phony, like the mole in the Secret Service. When we arrive at the last day, at the end of our race for Christ, there will be no cheaters at the finish line. Jesus will be there and He is the perfect judge.

**The Farmer.** The farmer's life is hard. It is uncertain, it takes a great deal of faith: faith in your own skills, faith in God's providence for things like weather and soil conditions and many other uncontrollable circumstances. When Sheri and I got married I was introduced to the world of farming through her relatives. This was in the early 1970's when fuel prices were rising, there was inflation, grain prices were low and farming became very hard. Then came the drought years of the 80's and it got worse! We would be visiting in their small town and I would hear one of the men say, "*I haven't seen mud in three weeks.*" Being a city kid, I would ask Sheri what that meant. Why were they talking about not seeing mud? "*It means it hasn't RAINED!*" She was kind. She only rolled her eyes a little bit. They never lost their sense of humor in those times either. One often told joke was "*What is John gonna do now that he won that 5 million dollar lottery? Sell out and move to the city?*" The answer: "*NO. No way! He's gonna keep farmin' till the money runs out!*" And many families lost their farms. Farms that had been in the family for generations and that had seen them through the depressions and the wars. In those times the farmer always had one thing he could count on. No matter how small his crop, his family could still eat. And that is what Paul says here, *the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops* (2:6) In the Roman world much of the farming was done by slaves. Today we call them share-croppers or tenant farmers. The slaves did the work but the landlord owned the crop and allowed them a small share but took most of it for himself. What does this simile mean for us?

First, there is the temptation to be a kind of Christian absentee landlord, expecting the benefits without the hard work. The reality is the Lord is the Landlord and we are the tenant farmers in his Kingdom. We are promised the *first fruits* as a reward for our own efforts, not someone else's. If we want the rewards, we must do the work.

Second, where the soldier speaks of obedience and the athlete portrays discipline, the farmer is the picture of faithfulness and patience. The seed goes into the ground in the spring. The harvest is in an unknown future. What will happen in between? Nothing happens for weeks. Will there be rain? Will insects and disease attack my crop? The farmers in Sheri's family prayed. I think this is the real lesson in this analogy. We do the work the Lord calls us to do to the best of our abilities with the gifts we have, we pray, then we wait and trust Him for the results. Sometimes we never see the results. But the Lord does. Then He gives us the *first share of the crop*, which is our reward when He

returns. And I am convinced the reward will be beyond our imagining. Remember what Paul says in his first letter to Ephesus? *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than we ask or think, according to the power at work within us (Eph 3:20)* He will reward us in a way that is beyond our comprehension, and it is because of His power in us. What a wonderful God we have!

**The Criminal.** This one is easy to miss. It is clearly marked as a simile and it is Paul talking about himself: *[I am] bound with chains as (like) a criminal. But the word of God is not bound [like a criminal]! (2:9)* Paul wants us, and Timothy, to understand that he only *looks like a criminal* and that he is not actually a criminal. He is in chains in a dungeon because of the Gospel and the Gospel is God's message, not Paul's. The Gospel is an offense to Roman power. A message of a new Caesar-like King being proclaimed throughout the empire must be stopped! Kill the messengers! The Roman rulers reject Jesus as Messiah of the world in the same way the Jewish rulers rejected Him as the Messiah of Israel. *Kill the Messenger!* In a way that Paul does not fully comprehend God has placed him in this prison either to magnify the Gospel, because the Word of God goes forth even from the prison, or to teach us that preaching the Gospel does not always bring adoration, acclamation and comfort. Paul is *really* suffering! But he says *I endure everything for the sake of the elect... (2:10)*. If he must be bound, if he must give his life, so be it. *"God's will be done. As Jesus endured for me, so I will endure for you."* If Paul sees Timothy as his dear son, he also knows God the Father sees them both as His chosen sons, and the Holy Spirit has united them both into God's Beloved Son. Paul sees all believers like that. We are *The Chosen!*

**The Workman.** This fifth analogy is actually a metaphor. A metaphor is a more emphatic use of analogy. *Be a workman unashamed... (v.15)*. It is not *Be LIKE* a workman. I think Paul is describing a craftsman. A true craftsman who is eager to do the job. *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved*, says the ESV. But the flavor of the word *do your best* means *be eager, quick*. I picture a man coming up before the Father and saying *"I really want to do the job and I am qualified!"* Timothy is a skilled craftsman who can *cut a straight [line] through the word of truth*. This is a craftsman who has the tools and knows the job. If a craftsman is a carpenter his cuts are perfect. *"He measures twice and cuts once,"* as my dear father-in-law Jack would say. Jack was a craftsman who made beautiful grandfather clocks. We have one in our home and it is not only a reminder of his work, it speaks to me of the kind of man he was and how much I learned just from watching him. And Jack was never ashamed of his work. He was someone who could stand back, admire and actually be proud of what he had done. Not in an arrogant way, he never bragged openly, but he simply appreciated the beauty of wood. He loved wood because it was his craft. Timothy's craft is not wood but words. The words are the promises and the commands of Jesus that cut a straight line from the Old Testament into the New, from the mind of God to the heart of men. Carefully crafted words promote growth and healing to the soul, but *to fight over words does no good, but only ruins the people who listen. (2:14)* How can words ruin people? Fools who babble nonsense as truth lead people away from Christ. *Their talk will spread like gangrene. (2:17)* Gangrene can kill the body, and foolish and lying words can kill the life in the church. There is a proverb that tells us, *Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword, but wisely spoken words can heal. Prov 12:18*). Wisely crafted well spoken words are like beautiful art that point us upward to a higher calling, to godliness and righteousness, to all that his beautiful. Leave the quarreling to the fools.

**The Household Vessels.** Our metaphors begin to pile up here because there is a great house built on *God's firm foundation (v.19)* that has *vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay (v.20)*. There are all kinds of vessels made of various materials. What, or who, determines their purpose, what they used for? And does the Master determine the purpose? Or does the vessel's material determine the purpose? We might think that only the gold and silver vessels would be fit for honorable use. But it doesn't say that. The wood and clay vessels could also be works of art and beauty. This is the case of a double metaphor because the Master of the house has a will, and the vessels have a will. The question to the vessels is *"Who do you want to serve?"* *If anyone [any kind of vessel] cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. (v.21)* Any kind of vessel can have an honorable purpose if your purpose is to serve the Master, the owner of the House, faithfully. Two vessels who are in the house, Hymenaeus and Philetus, have decided *not* to serve God's purpose. They have changed the meaning of the resurrection in some way that is destroying the faith of some. Our bodily resurrection is the hope, the very foundation, of the Church as a whole and our faith as individuals. The attack on the resurrection is an attack on the character, the person and the promise of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated clearly that He is the true promised Seed of David, the Messianic King that God promised would reign forever. To argue and fight over the meaning of *resurrection* is supremely foolish. Paul told the Corinthian Church: *For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (1Cor 15:16-17)* The Nicene Creed says,

*...the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures,  
and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father;  
from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and  
the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.*

If the Jesus the Ascended King is not reigning from the right hand of God in a physical body right now, then there is no Gospel, no coming restoration, no hope for us.

How do we tie all of these ideas together? These analogies must relate to one another in Paul's mind and I wish I could ask him how, but we only have what he has given us. I wonder if it isn't in the *Faithful Saying*, those three couplets in vv. 11-13. (This is the fourth of these *Faithful Sayings* Paul writes to Timothy. The other three are in 1 Timothy.) Tom Wright calls this *an early Christian proverb*:

*It's the sort of thing you can imagine people learning by heart,  
teaching to their children and friends, and then repeating under  
their breath when standing before tribunals, when being threatened  
by angry magistrates or beaten by guards, when facing sudden and  
fierce temptation. 1*

This bit of proverbial poetry holds forth the kind of promises and warnings we see in the book of Proverbs. It also echoes the teachings of Jesus. He told us clearly there is reward for faithfulness in following Him, and He also said those who deny Him *I will deny before My Father in Heaven. (Mat 10:33)* There is no middle ground. This is a real warning, turned into a terrifying and dramatic scene in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said, *...many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God's message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!' Then I will say to them, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!'* (Mat 7:22-23) Many who did wonderful religious things, working to achieve a righteousness by their own merits, but lacking the one thing that matters—a relationship with Jesus as the

singular priority in life. *Then I will say to them, 'I never knew you. They never knew Him, they only knew about Him.* Lauren Daigle has a song called *Losing My Religion* that says:

*I'm losing my religion  
And finding something new  
Cause I need something different  
And different looks like You<sup>2</sup>*

The soldiers, the athletes, the farmers: they all work and all anticipate a reward at the end, and in Paul's analogy they all do it in the service of their Lord. That is the point. The workman does the best he can with the tools and the talent that the Lord has given. The vessels must keep themselves clean, meaning there is failure and sin, but there is also the cleansing accomplished at the Cross. What about the criminal? How does that fit? The criminal here is not a criminal in God's eyes. He is faithful to the Lord and he is suffering because he is faithful. He will not deny his Lord to save himself. This analogy tells us if we are faithful we will suffer loss in this life. But the reward in the next is glory that outweighs our suffering! Religious philosophies and written creeds will not give us this kind of courage and hope unless we know there is a God who loves us, who knows us, and who cares for us in every circumstance. Maybe it isn't that we *lose our religion*, but suddenly in Jesus we can see what it really means. And He makes it all *NEW!*

When the Spirit of God takes you to the foot of the Cross and then takes you to the empty tomb, and then He points you to the risen Jesus, it is then you see He died for you and He lives for you. He transforms us and we begin to look like *HIM!* Our lives take on a *Gospel Shape*. Our prayers are different, our priorities are different, and our service becomes our joy. When Paul says *I am in chains, but the Gospel is not in chains* he means he is still serving his Lord from a dungeon. That is why I think the last line of the *Faithful Saying* gives him the most hope. *If we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself. (2:13)* There are times Paul has doubted, has gotten depressed or afraid. There are times Jesus said to his disciples *"Where is your faith!?" (Luk 8:25)* But *He remains faithful*. He cannot deny His promise to us. Paul can also take comfort in the faithfulness of Jesus as the final Judge of all things and all men. The men who imprisoned him, and the ones who abandoned him, who turned their backs on Christ even before the persecution began, will find justice without mercy. That is why Paul does not seek his own justice, his own revenge. He harbors no ill will, no resentment. As Christians we rely on God's grace and we rely on God's justice. Again turning to Tom Wright: *There is a world of difference between being blown off the ship's deck by a hurricane and voluntarily diving into the sea to avoid having to stay at the helm.*<sup>3</sup> Think about that.

*He remains faithful.* I want to close with that thought. There are false teachers who are destroying faith in the Church. *But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." (2:19)* We do not know why Christians fail in ministry, fall into sin, or walk away from the faith. But God knows. He knows the true from the false. It can be hard for us to tell for certain. That is why Paul tells Timothy:

*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2:24-26)*<sup>4</sup>

*God when we are in the darkness of sin, blinded and enslaved by the devil, we are often not even aware of how bad it is! We forget that you are a waiting Father. You are looking for us, wanting us to return. I pray if we are ensnared at all, we come to our senses, our wits end, and get up and go home, where you are waiting. And when you see us all of the angels will sing and rejoice as we take your gift, and we repent. Amen.*

**Resources:**

Tom Wright's *New Testament For Everyone. The Pastoral Epistles*. Westminster John Knox Press 2011

Kruger, Michael, Ed. *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the N.T.*

Barclay, William, Contrib. *2 Timothy* Crossway Press. Wheaton. 2016

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Wright, Tom. *New Testament For Everyone. The Pastoral Epistles*. Westminster John Knox Press 2011 p.104

<sup>2</sup> Daigle, Lauren. "Losing My Religion" [AZLyrics.com/lyrics/laurendaigle/losingmyreligion](http://AZLyrics.com/lyrics/laurendaigle/losingmyreligion)

<sup>3</sup> Wright, Tom. *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Wright, Tom. *Ibid.* p.113 In the closing comments on this section, Wright says: *Learning these lessons is never easy. But they are necessary if we are to purify ourselves from menial tasks and get ready for the really important ones. The irony is, though, that the really important tasks are often the ones that almost nobody else sees. Anybody can put on a good show in public. The real test of a genuine minister of Christ, a vessel of gold or silver, pleasing to the master of the house, is whether the metal shines just as brightly when nobody is looking at it.*