Paul’s Parables to Timothy Scripture Reading: Romans 8:12-17

September 8th, 2024 Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 2:8

**SLIDE 1**

 Last week we finished up a rather long series, a summer long series in fact, on the parables of Jesus. We reviewed parables about forgiveness, about God’s compassion toward us, about our need to do good toward others, about how the last are actually first. We picked apart Matthew chapter 13 where Jesus shared eight stories about what the kingdom of heaven is like. But remember, Jesus was not telling us about what we should expect to experience after this life ends, Jesus was letting us know that the kingdom is here and now. We live in this eternal kingdom right now, yet it is not fully present…but it is coming, perfection is coming. So hang on.

 So we closed out the To Tell a Tale series with the idea that we, as a church, are a household of faith and we are the ones who take responsibility. We take the old truth of God’s word and apply it to a new world. Next week now we are going to be taking a look at season 2 of *The Chosen*. This is one way we can function as a householder of faith as we try to provide for those around us. We went through season one last September and so we are going to pick up where we left off next week. So this Wednesday, our Grow groups are going to be watching the first episode and we will analyze that same episode a bit more then come Sunday. The Chosen is a fantastic look into the person and work of Jesus and I think the filmmakers do a great job of making sure that they remain true to scripture. So we are excited to delve into the show and I would encourage you to invite others to come and join us as it is a very easy way to enter into the story of the bible. So, we want to make the most of this opportunity and hopefully we can bring some other folks into the fold. We are privileged to get to be able to share old truth in new ways.

 So that makes today’s sermon a one-off.

**SLIDE 2**

It’s not necessarily connected to any sort of series, but I got to thinking…we just finished up a long series on the kingdom of heaven where Jesus helped us understand what this kingdom is to which we claim our citizenship. And today we are going to hear from the apostle Paul as he guides a young pastor named Timothy. Paul uses a few parables, or at least analogies, to help Timothy better understand how we ought to live into this kingdom. So, Jesus has described for us this kingdom and today, Paul is going to help us see how we can best live in this kingdom.

 It’s helpful to know that Timothy was a protégé of Paul’s. The two worked closely together and, in fact, Timothy is mentioned as a co-author of six other Pauline letters including 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians and Colossians. By the time Paul writes specifically to Timothy, he was serving as a pastor in Ephesus. Now the church in Ephesus was near and dear to Paul. In all of his traveling, he spent the most time in Ephesus and so Timothy represents, in Paul’s estimation, the best of the best. He wants to ensure that, as a pastor, Timothy remains true to the gospel so that the Ephesians can continue to thrive and grow as a church and faithfully live out God’s word.

 So today we are actually going to take a look at 2 Timothy and I want us to notice something in the very first verse.

**SLIDE 3**

 Paul extends a normal greeting, but he adds a very clarifying statement: “From Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by God’s will, *to promote the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.*”To promote the promise of life. See, I think life is pretty confusing at times. We are surrounding by different voices and different opinions and different agendas, and that is why I love the word of God. Because it breaks in through all that other noise and brings clarity to the confusion. Paul just sums up the entire goal of ministry, the entire reason why we dedicate ourselves to church: the entire purpose of our Christian life is to promote the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.

 That’s the goal, the purpose. Now that doesn’t make life easy, but it does make it simple. And I think we cover this purpose pretty well here at Forest Hills as we strive to Love God and Grow in our faith and Serve others. I’d say that, if we are faithful to live that out, we would be promoting the promise of life. And in service to that good work, Paul adds some helpful description in chapter 2:3 and he does this by way of a few analogies. Let me read it for you:

**SLIDE 4**

READ 2 Timothy 2:3-8.

 This is my good news, or the Greek there is *euaggelion* which means gospel. This is my gospel, which is the good news that Paul promotes about the promise of life that is in Jesus. But this good news starts off with something very bad: suffering. And we go from bad to worse as Paul does not encourage Timothy to flee, retreat, run away from suffering. What does he say? Accept your share of suffering…This is coming from Paul, who at the time was an old man, who was currently suffering in prison. There is no sugarcoating here. Accept suffering like a good soldier of Christ.

**SLIDE 5**

Now, I have never served in the armed forces. I have never seen combat. But I would assume that a soldier on the battle field has much different priorities than a civilian back home. For a soldier, the word of their commanding officer is final and dictates what action they will take. For a civilian, their day is wide open. Their decision space is virtually endless. But Paul says, “Nobody who serves in the military gets tied up with civilian matters, so that they can please the one who recruited them.” A civilian sleeps in a bed, a solider sleeps in barracks. A civilian waits in a waiting room, a soldier waits in a foxhole. A civilian eats hot food off the stove. A soldier eats MREs (Meal Ready to Eat) out of a pack. A civilian concerns himself with comfort, a soldier concerns himself with victory and is willing to give his all. Paul is making abundantly clear here that a solider is not a civilian…soldiers suffer and Timothy is a soldier. Are you? Are you willing to suffer for the promotion of the promise of life? Are you willing to put your life on the line for the gospel? Soldiers do. Soldiers suffer…anybody ready to enlist?

**SLIDE 6**

But he goes on… “In the same way, athletes don’t win unless they follow the rules.” It’s been a couple of weeks now, but how many of you followed the Olympics? It was interesting this time around because at our house we could stream the different events. So instead of watching the curated normal network coverage of the games, I could actually go and search each event separately. It was kind of exciting for me because there were quite a few sports that I never even knew were in the Olympics and some events that I had never seen before.

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So our family ended up watching rugby and badminton and water polo and handball and judo and yes, even a little breakdancing. It was fun to discover some new sports, but I have to say, it was also frustrating, because for the many of these events, we did not know what was going on. We did not know the rules, we did not understand the penalties or the way judges were scoring. We certainly were not privy to the strategic decisions involved or the subtle skills needed. But as we watched and tried to figure out some of these nuances, the one thing we could be sure of was that the athletes themselves knew exactly what they were doing. Nobody hit the court or the field with a confused look on their face. They were determined to do what they had trained so hard to do. They knew they why could never win unless they obeyed all the rules and expectations. They knew that they would be scrutinized. Paul’s readers would have been very familiar with the Olympics and, despite having different events, they would have been very familiar with the rules and regulations of sporting events. So, as we see ourselves as athletes in our promotion of the gospel, I think our question becomes, “Who’s rules do we go by?”

For Paul, the answer is clear: a soldier obeys the commander, an athlete obeys the coach. We have been given a set of rules and we cannot win unless we obey those rules.

 Paul then presents a third analogy: a farmer.

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 “A hard working farmer should get the first share of the crop.” Now, again, I did not grow up on a farm and have never been a farmer, but I go to the grocery store and I buy food and eat it, so I respect farmers. They literally provide. And being a farmer is not really an occupation, it more so makes up one’s whole life. A farmer lives on nature’s schedule in a sort of dance with the weather. And I think we all understand the concept that a lazy farmer is not going to fare well come harvest season. This picture of a farmer stands as a final consolation from Paul. We suffer as soldiers, we follow the rules as athletes and in the end, we get the first share of the crop as farmers. As we live to promote this promise of life, it stands to reason then that we would be partakers in that same promise!

**SLIDE 9**

 My daughter Bethany works at Caribou Coffee here in town where she serves up high quality beverages to the masses. I wouldn’t know, I’ve never had the stuff. I’ll stick with my Mountain Dew thank you very much. But in her role as a barista, she is there to make drinks of course, but she is also tasked with promoting certain drinks. Maybe it’s a new menu item or maybe some seasonal product, but as an employee in the company, she is encouraged to try these products so that she can relate to customers what they are like. As part of the company, she gets to share in the product.

**SLIDE 10**

In the 1980’s Sy Sperling became famous for his television ads that he ran for his company, Hair Club For Men. After talking about the benefits of his system for battling thinning hair he would hold up a picture of his formally bald head and close every commercial with the same line: “Remember, I’m not only the Hair Club president, I’m also a client.” It makes sense that those promoting a product should also be users of that product. It makes sense that those who promote the gospel would first be beneficiaries of the new life found in Jesus Christ.

**SLIDE 11**

 So our role as Paul outlines it here comes full circle: What includes the suffering of a soldier and rule-following of an athlete, also results in our own participation in the promise of the gospel just as a farmer gets the first share of the crop.

 So instead of seeking after comfort and a life of doing things our own way by our own rules, we join with Timothy as he takes some sage advice from Paul, who again is imprisoned at this point, who has been beaten and chased out of town, who has been stoned and shipwrecked, who has been plotted against and weathered by opposition…Paul suffered as a soldier in service to Christ. Can we say that we are up for the same? Thankfully I have not been stoned or shipwrecked, I have not been imprisoned for my faith…but am I willing to be? I’d like to think so…It’s hard to say as I stand in a comfortable setting and will go from here to a comfortable house and come back on Monday to a comfortable office.

**SLIDE 12**

Am I soldier or a civilian? Do I covet comfort or am I willing to suffer? And if I am willing to enlist for the sake of the gospel, am I also willing to follow the rules, to obey the way God has ordained, to live as a well-trained athlete? May my answer be yes! Because with this yes comes the promise of the farmer: a share in the crop. The suffering and the obedience are well worth the trouble because our share in the promise is so good! What could compare to the gift of living eternally in relationship with God? What prize on this earth stands up in comparison? And on the other hand, what amount of suffering wouldn’t we be willing to endure for a slice of this promised life?

**SLIDE 13**

 Paul says, “Think about what I am saying: the Lord will give you understanding about everything. Remember Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead and descended from David. This is my good news.”

 You are a soldier, you’re an athlete, you’re a farmer…Think about it, says Paul. The Lord will give you understanding. The Holy Spirit will fill you in. He will walk with you every step of the way. “Remember Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead and descended from David.” Keep Jesus in focus, keep him front and center. Remember who he is and what he has done! Paul shows us the scope of Christ’s work, starting with David. This was the origin of Jesus. He was from the line of David, and he was raised from the dead. From beginning to end, that sums it all up. In Revelation 22:13, the last chapter of the Bible Jesus calls himself the Alpha and the Omega,

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which is the same as saying he is A-Z, the beginning and end. The entirety of God’s promises are included in him. Jesus Christ rose from the dead so that we would too. That is the good news of the gospel. That is what a dying world needs to hear. Are we willing to live as soldiers, athletes and farmers dedicated to promoting this good news? Can we do that? We can when we remember Christ who was raised from the dead. This is our good news! This is our driving force! This is the one thing that is worth it all!

**SLIDE 15**

 But maybe you have heard all this before…maybe you are not so enamored with the beauty and power of this gospel. Maybe your excitement has faded…maybe you’ve signed up as a solider but you’ve dropped your weapon…maybe you’re training as an athlete but you’ve skipped a few days. Maybe as a farmer you’ve drifted to partaking of some other crop. It’s true that our hearts can grow cold…we can become indifferent to this good news. If that is you, I want to encourage you to take this passage from 2 Timothy and mediate on it in the coming weeks. Pray over it. Internalize it. Ask God to rekindle in you a passion for this precious good news.

 I decided to take this passage, with the addition of Paul’s opening verse and I turned it into a prayer that we could share in together as a church. This is something we could pray for these next couple of months as we dive into the Chosen. So we can contemplate on the story of Jesus with the help of this show, but in the background as we watch and learn, we could be engaged in this prayer…It’s in your bulletins if you haven’t noticed. Would you read it with me?

**SLIDE 16**

Father God, I know I am here to promote the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus….

Help me to accept my share of suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. I don’t want to get caught up in civilian matters. I want to please you!

As an athlete, I know victory only comes by following your rules.

May I serve as a hardworking farmer and I thank you for my share of the crop.

Lord, give me understanding about everything. Help me to always remember Jesus who was raised from the dead and descended from David.

Thank you for this good news.

Amen.

Take this prayer home and pray it! Put it in a place where you will see it! Use it as a bookmark or post it on the mirror or something, but please take this card home and pray this prayer in the coming weeks. May the Holy Spirit lead us into understanding and renew our passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen!