

REMEMBERING CHRIST

II Timothy 2:1-10

In view of the faith of Timothy, of his talent for service, of the glorious gospel of Christ, of the encouraging example of Paul and of the heroic devotion of Onesiphorus, he was urged to be strong, to be brave and to be steadfast. In these words, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," Timothy was directed to seek from Christ the help which He was ready to bestow. If he would only depend on Christ, he would gain all needed grace, a gift which was unmerited, but also unlimited. To all of the followers of Christ there is offered an exhaustless supply of grace, upon which they can rely for enabling power.

At the time of his ordination to the gospel ministry, in a solemn service in the presence of many witnesses, the treasure of the gospel of Christ had been committed to the care of Timothy. Here in this chapter Paul is reminding him that it is his duty to select faithful men who, under the direction of Timothy, will likewise be ordained to the work of the gospel ministry. As he continued to urge Timothy to be faithful in his own ministerial work, he declared that hardship would be inevitable, but that reward would be certain.

In verses three to six are three suggestive illustrations for the purpose of encouraging Timothy in various aspects of his work. All three, the soldier, the athlete and the farmer, are taken from common life and are used here in a spiritual sense. From the soldier Timothy was to learn endurance, from the athlete discipline and from the farmer perseverance. In another study we discovered that whole-hearted devotion was required of the soldier.

Athletics were important in the lives of the Greeks. They were very interesting to Paul. Now, the connecting link between the soldier and the athlete is found in the word lawfully, which must be interpreted in the light of the rules of the Olympic games. These rules applied not only to the race itself but also to the prescribed training. Athletes had to state on oath that they had received ten months' training before they were eligible to enter the contests. Any athlete who had not subjected himself to the necessary discipline would not have any chance to win the crown, but he would certainly lower the standard of the games. Unless an athlete competed in accordance with the established rules, he would not be entitled to the crown. The value of the wreath used at the crowning of the victor was not its intrinsic worth but the accomplishment which it commemorated.

As Christians we are contending with the forces of evil, and we shall be rewarded only if we observe the rules which are contained in the Word of God. We must strive constantly to make our lives conform to that Word. It is possible to spend much time and effort in Christian service, and yet not be qualified for the crown because we failed to abide by the rules. Self-denial and earnest effort are necessary. We must see to it that our conduct conforms to the Word of God, or we shall miss the reward which we desire.

In verse six the believer is referred to as a farmer or tiller of the soil. He must toil energetically, like the hard-working farmer. "Laboureth" means to grow weary, to become exhausted or to labor with wearisome toil.

Some people imagine that a farmer's life is an easy-going existence, with plenty of good food, lots of fresh air, and everything that is nice. The truth is so very different. Instead there are long hours, constant toil, frequent disappointments, infinite patience and perpetual tasks. However, the hard-working farmer has rights which the indolent man has forfeited. The tiller of the soil is the first to partake of its fruits. But the toil always precedes the fruit.

Timothy was reminded that the minister of Christ, who does his work well, also will find that God's service demands great effort. The glamour soon wears off. But, if he labors hard and long, he is given the assurance that God will see to it that he receives an appropriate reward.

Before the crown there must be the bearing of the cross. Hardship, struggle, discipline and labor must precede the reception and the enjoyment of the reward. Christ Himself went to the cross and suffered at the hands of men before being raised out from the realm of dead men. This was the core of Paul's message and the crowning event in the life of our Lord.

Let me now lay the admonition of verse eight upon your hearts. It says, "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel." It would be difficult to find a more simple statement than this, but the simplest things are often the most vital. This exhortation was recorded here because it is easy for us to think more of ourselves and our needs than we do of Christ.

One of the deepest desires of the human heart is to be remembered, and not forgotten. It cuts to the very depths of our being when we are forgotten by those whom we expect to keep us in mind and heart. No doubt Christ had this in mind when He promised the Holy Spirit as One Who would bring to remembrance all things that He had told His disciples. It was also in His mind when He instituted the Lord's Supper and told them to "do this in remembrance of me."

Every day we should thank God for the possession of memory. It is one of life's greatest calamities to lose the power of memory. While it is a great blessing in this life to be able to remember, when a person dies without Christ he will discover how his memory will be a curse to him.

When a young man goes out into the world to face the hazards of life, his devoted father will counsel him to keep certain things in mind. Frequently he will say to him, "Never forget that I love you and will stand by you." A gracious memory planted in the mind will hold us when discouragement sweeps over the spirit, or when some temptation threatens to carry us off our feet. It was with such an idea that Paul counseled Timothy, "Never forget Jesus Christ risen from the dead."

Christ Jesus is the world's most unforgettable character. To think of life without Him is to imagine salt without savor, or a circumference without a center. To some He may be a "back number," but to those who know Him best, He is the contemporary Christ, as up-to-date as today's problems, as modern as our present necessities, and as new as the most recent happenings of life.

The world cannot forget Christ. He is the central fact in our history, the turning point of time. His advent is the one event by which every man and every movement are dated. If there is anything Christian in our civilization or anything progressive in our history, we owe it all to Christ. Whatever is best in our history, whatever is wisest in our learning, whatever is most uplifting in our laws, and whatever is most lasting in our achievements, we owe to Him. We must not forget Him because of His matchless name, His saving grace and His conquering power.

Remember the incarnate Christ. His birth into our world was a transfer of His person from a previous condition of existence to this earthly one. The incarnation was a divinely ordered event toward which God's whole creation moved. Only an incarnation could work the transformation He has wrought in human life.

Remember the dying Christ. The Christ Who clothed Himself in fashion as a man became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He was put to death like a common criminal, and on a cross of wood uplifted to the vulgar gaze of men. One cannot remember Christ and forget His death.

Remember the risen Christ. There are many ways in which we can think of Christ. We can think of Him as a great teacher. He was a great teacher, greater than all others put together. We can think of Him as an example. There is none to compare with Him. We can think of Him as dying on the cross for us. We shall ever do so. Yet this view of Him must not stand in isolation from the resurrection. We must think of Him as raised from the dead. The splendor of His earthly life and the agony of the cross fade in the glory of His risen life. It is this Risen One Whom we need in all our experiences, and especially when we come to cross the dark river at the last. In remembering Christ, we must remember that He is alive forevermore.

Remember Christ in your daily life -- at home, at school, at the office, at your place of business -- everywhere. Remember Him in youth, in maturity and in old age. He will not forsake you then. He will be waiting to receive you when the portals of the next world open to you.