

## 2 Timothy 2:8-13 - Enduring with Christ

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.! This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.

! But God's word is not changed. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Here is a trustworthy saying, if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Thank you, Alexis. Well, keep that passage open in front of you. If you're new or visiting with us this morning, we have been working our way through the book of 2 Timothy. We've arrived at chapter 2, verse 8, and so we're going to spend our time looking at those verses together. Let me pray for us as we come to God's word. Let me pray. Father, we thank you this morning that we have the awesome privilege of listening to what you say in your word.

We live in a world full of voices yelling all sorts of things at us, and into that world you speak words of life and truth. And so, Lord, we pray that we would listen well this morning. Bless us and our time together, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[ 1 : 3 3 ] Now, I wonder if I could ask you, as we come to look at these verses, what you think makes for a good life, a good life? I think you could say, couldn't you, that the purpose of all of our lives, whoever we are this morning, our purpose is to try and live what could be called a good life, a life that's worth living, a life that you can be proud of, a life that has purpose and significance and meaning. That's what we want to do with our lives, don't we? None of us want to live a wasted life.

We want to live a good life. Now, the ancient Roman philosopher, Varro, writing a century before Paul, wrote, sorry, before Paul wrote the passage that we just read, he said that four things constituted a good life. He said that pleasure, rest, a kind of perfect combination of both pleasure and rest, because one in excess of the other is bad, and then the sort of necessities of life in harmony.

That's what a good life is all about. Now, I don't reckon that probably many people would disagree with Varro, would they? Varro never had a social media account, but I reckon those four categories pretty much track what people post, don't they? The pleasure of life. You know, look at the show that I just went to see. Look at the football match that I'm at. This is me in the stands. Or rest, you know, this is my view for the next few days. Or the perfect combination of the two. No one wants their feed to make them appear as if they're always on holiday. They take holidays seriously, but they're also at work. You know, good health, the necessities of life. Just set a PB and park run. Look at me.

Or, you know, this is me with my friends having a great time. Food. Well, everyone seems to post pictures of their food, don't they? Perhaps that sounds about right. Maybe a good life is a life of pleasure, rest, the perfect balance of the two, and the necessities in perfect harmony.

But unfortunately for Varro, a few centuries later, his ideas found themselves up against probably the greatest human mind that's ever lived, an African man named Augustine. And Augustine pointed out that if those four things constitute a good life, then for most people, most of the time, a good life is just not possible. Augustine's point was that pleasure, rest, the perfect combination of the two, and the necessities of life are very quickly lost and taken away from us. We get sick, pleasure vanishes.

[ 4 : 14 ] Maybe an accident happens, poverty strikes or war strikes, rest therefore becomes impossible. Augustine said as well, we can't seem to master our own desires. We end up overeating, we end up over speaking, we end up over working, and all of a sudden, pleasure, rest, the perfect combination of the two and the necessities of life have vanished from us. Or perhaps our relationships break down, which they always do, sometimes even through no fault of our own, and then the good life has gone.

Augustine's point then is if Varro's good life is not possible, if Varro's good life is just too unpredictable, then it follows that in Varro's view, life has really no meaning, or no purpose.

Now think about it, if the purpose of a good life is to have pleasure, rest, the perfect balance of those two, and all the basic necessities in life in perfect harmony, if that's the purpose of life, but we can't have it, then life is meaningless, purposeless. I think we probably live at a time where people are waking up to this reality. Maybe you are this morning. Maybe you have searched hard for the purpose of living in pleasure and rest and fame and wealth and whatever it is. And perhaps you've seen that those things are flimsy and unpredictable. Perhaps they've slipped through your fingers and you've noticed that they're not there anymore. I think it's why we live at a time where the biggest killer of men under 50 is suicide. Mental health amongst young people is the worst that it seems to have been ever. And I think that's in part because the good life that we have been sold has just not worked out. And because the good life is outside of our grasp, and through no fault of our own, we recognise the sort of purposelessness of it. There's a kind of despair. I think it's probably that despair which lies behind the assisted suicide bill. You know, if life has no pleasure, it has no meaning.

It might as well be ended. Now bring all that back to 2 Timothy with me for a moment. And here you find that Timothy is being asked by Paul in this letter to join with him in suffering for the gospel. That is word for word what Paul says. Chapter 1 verse 8. He says, So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.

He's then told in the verses that just immediately precede the ones that Alexis read for us, to serve Christ like a good soldier in verse 3, or to run like an athlete in verse 5, or to work hard like a farmer in verse 6. And so if Timothy had studied Varro at school, which I think he could well have done, he certainly lived in a world that was shaped by his ideas, then Timothy would know, as he reads this from Paul, he knows, doesn't he, that Paul is not offering him a good life.

[ 7 : 21 ] Not one as it's been understood by the world, at least. There's not much pleasure. There's not much rest in the suffering that Paul describes. Now, why is that? Why is Paul writing to his dearest friend and telling him to suffer for the gospel, even though that goes against every way that he is being taught to live a good life in the world, to find pleasure and rest and the necessities of life?

Well, listen, this is the key for us this morning. If you don't get this, you won't understand any of it this morning. Get this, okay? Paul doesn't think that life is ultimately about pleasure or rest, or even the perfect harmony of those two, or of life's essentials. Because the good life that Paul is interested in is not the fleeting good life of now, but an eternal life. A good, eternal life.

Let me try and show you how this works in the passage. Look down at verse 8. Notice there's just one instruction at the start of verse 8. Take a look at it. It's the instruction to remember. Remember Jesus Christ. Now, I've been puzzling over this for a while, wondering, you know, what, you know, is Paul concerned that Timothy is going to forget Jesus, right? You know, maybe he's concerned that Timothy, like Jesus would just slip from his mind somehow. But the more I thought about that, that's crazy, isn't it? Like, Timothy is a preacher of the gospel. He's working in a local church.

He is effectively a church pastor. He's committed to the teaching of the scriptures, doing the work of an evangelist, the public reading of the Bible, the ministry of visiting. You know, for Timothy to forget Jesus would be like Michael Jordan forgetting about a basketball court. It's like, wait a minute.

I'm there all the time. Be like a chef forgetting what an oven is. I don't, I just don't think that's Paul's instruction. And the closer you look at it, it's not actually. The instruction is given in the detail of it. Look down again at verse 8. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel. Now, the penny dropped for me when I realized those aren't three separate things for Timothy to remember. It's not Jesus Christ, comma, pause, resurrection from the dead, comma, pause, descended from David. No. They're actually all one thing. The commas have been added by our translators, which means that the instruction is for Timothy to remember that the gospel that he believes, that he preaches, is the gospel of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. It is the gospel of David, descended from David. In other words, the thing that Timothy is not to forget is that at the heart of the the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is dying before rising. In the pattern of an ancient King David, who was promised the throne forever and ever, but then persecuted, booted out of his kingdom by a rebellious son, spending his life struggling with sin, death, war, and betrayal. And that's what

[10:25] Timothy's to remember. Remember, Timothy, that following Jesus has a shape or a pattern. Put it another way, my gospel, says Paul, has a very different definition of the good life that Varro sold to you. And you must remember that, keep this in front of you, that my gospel, the gospel with Jesus Christ at the center, there is an eternal life, a glorious with the Lord life. Good life is eternal life. Evil is eternal evil. And so the purpose of life is not the pursuit of temporary pleasure or rest, the perfect balance of the two, the necessities of life in perfect harmony. No, the purpose of life is to find eternal life in Jesus Christ. Augustine, in his answer to Varro, put it this way. He says, the philosophers have supposed that the final good and evil ought to be found in this life. That was their mistake. But we shall reply as follows, that eternal life is the supreme good and eternal death, the supreme evil. That's the big idea in this section of Paul's letter.

He's telling us, isn't he, that the good life that we seek, the good life that brings purpose and meaning to every day, a good life that's available to the sufferer, to the sinner, a good life that's available to the rich and the poor, the good life that's available, even if you're sick and dying, that good life is eternal life. And you find it by faith in the resurrected Jesus who descended from David.

I want us to come on and have a look at the rest of the verses, but let me just pause there for a moment and ask you to consider that carefully for yourself this morning. I wonder whether you have ever been honest enough just to think about the purposelessness of life. Maybe you have that ache in the middle of the day, that sense that there's probably more to life than a nice holiday or a big following on social media or a full bank account or a great job. Let me tell you that is because eternal life has been placed in your heart. And that is what you're really longing for. That's what you were made for.

The resurrection of Jesus is not a kind of neat trick. It's a signpost to what we're all made for. And of course, it scans too, doesn't it, if you're a Christian this morning.

We're not immune, are we, to this trap of thinking that a good life is about pleasure and rest. That's why Timothy needed to be reminded. Timothy, you're going to be sucked in by the world that's going to tell you that the purpose of life is finding pleasure and rest in the here and now.

[13:03] Remember that that's not the good life we're seeking. The good life we're seeking is eternal life. Elizabeth Elliot was the widow of a missionary who was speared to death by a remote Ecuadorian tribe in the 1960s. He and his four friends, they were young men. They were trying to reach people with the gospel who had never heard about Jesus before. They spent months and months preparing. They'd flown over, they'd dropped food and messages, and they were ready to travel. The night before they went, they sang together, we rest on thee, our shield and our defender. And then they left and they never returned. Speaking in 1976 to a missions conference, Elizabeth asked this about her late husband and his friends to the congregation that was gathered. She said this, she said, what does that do to your faith?

Speared to death in the course of their obedience? What does that do to your faith? Does it demolish it? Were their lives wasted? It's a good question, isn't it? I mean, being put to death in your 20s by trying to obey Christ, that would be enough to put anybody off. That's not a good life, is it?

Elizabeth answers, she says, a faith that disintegrates is a faith that has not rested in God himself. You have been believing in something less than ultimate, some neat program of how things are supposed to work, some happiness all the time variety of religion. You have not recognized God as sovereign in the world and in your life. You have forgotten that we're told to give up all right to ourselves, lose our lives for his sake, present our bodies as a living sacrifice. The word is sacrifice, she said, because the good is eternal and not temporary. Now in a way, that's the whole idea.

The purpose of life is to gain the good of eternal life and you find it by faith in Jesus Christ who died and rose. But let's just try and scan through the rest of the verses and see three other things here which kind of contribute to this. So I wanted to show you what does not suffer, what we must do, and what we must not do. Okay, so let's start with what does not suffer in the world. What does not suffer in the world? Look at verse 9 with me. This is my gospel for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal, but God's word is not chained. Now Paul here, notice, compares the chains on his feet with the absence of chains on the gospel message, God's word as he calls it.

His point is that though he suffers, the word of God is not suffering. In fact, the word of God is always achieving what it was set out to do. It is unchained. So verse 10, Paul concludes, therefore, because God's word is unchained, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. In other words, this is what's going on in the world, says Paul, I am suffering, the gospel is prospering.

[16:13] And it's not just that those things kind of contrast one another. In fact, they go together, don't they? It's not that Paul's suffering is providing the means of salvation for the elect.

Jesus' suffering does that, right? But Paul's suffering is the means of people hearing about Jesus. It's the means of them hearing the gospel and being saved. As God, through the preaching of the gospel and specifically the suffering of his messenger, saves all his people, the elect, as he calls them. The elect who then, by the gospel, obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus, which comes with eternal glory. So Paul's life is one of suffering and preaching, while the gospel is free, unchained, accomplishing the purpose of God in the saving of his people. Now, this unchained, never-thwarted gospel, the gospel that is delivering eternal life to the elect, means all of a sudden, doesn't it? Notice, Paul has found a purpose. He's found a purpose in life. Here's a purpose that extends, that isn't thwarted, because here is an unchained reality in a world of chains, a purpose that's not insecure or unpredictable, but solid. Just think about how this works for us.

Think about the things that you do in any given week. Perhaps like us this week, you went to do the grocery shopping, and then when you got home, you were so tired that you left the bags on the floor in the kitchen overnight. You know, you put the fridge stuff, you have to put the fridge stuff away, don't you? But everything else, well, that can wait till the morning. And then when you get up in the morning, you find that the mice have had a feast on the loaf of bread that you left on the kitchen floor, and you were hoping to have for lunch the next day. You know, why is that? Well, in a 2 Timothy 2.9 kind of way, you could say, couldn't you, that grocery shopping is in chains, right? Grocery shopping, along with everything else in this world, is frustrated. Or maybe you spent all day waiting for a delivery, but it never came. That's because you don't need me to tell you this, do you? Delivery companies, they're in chains. They're part of this frustrated world. They're part of this world where things go wrong. Maybe you're in a hurry to get to a meeting only to find that the tube wasn't running, or the bus got stuck, or the car broke down. Or perhaps you're trying to organize accommodation, but the landlord never answers the phone or replies to emails. Perhaps you're waiting on a visa, but it's grindingly slow. Perhaps you came to London to find a partner, to find money, to find success, but all you found is loneliness, long hours, extortionate rent. Why? Well, because we live in a world of chains, don't we? But, says Paul, amidst all of that, there is one reality in this world which is unaffected, unchained. One reality that always accomplishes exactly what it wants.

An unchained reality that sets people free for eternal glory, and that unchained reality is the word of God, the voice of God. And so Paul is happy to endure the chains of this life. For him, the physical chains of a Roman dungeon, because he inputs suffering, and the unchained gospel outputs eternal glory. Not just for Paul, but for all God's people.

There's a story. I tried to verify this story this week, but I couldn't. So I, you know, I might have made it up. But there's a, I'm going to tell it anyway. There's a, there's a story about a company of soldiers in communist China whose job was to clear sand off a railway line in the Gobi Desert.

[ 19 : 43 ] This was like a, the definition of a difficult and frustrating task. So as soon as you, you know, were clearing by hand. And as soon as you clear the sand off the railway line, the wind just blows it back on. So each day they would get up, they would clear the railway line. Overnight, the sand would blow back on it. They would get up the next day. They would have to do it again. And you ask yourself, don't you, well, what's the railway line there for that's so important? What is going along those tracks that mean that it's worth having that company of soldiers spending day in, day out clearing the tracks? Well, you're told that the railway line exists to bring supplies to the company of soldiers who spend their life clearing the sand off the railway line. It's like the definition of futility, isn't it? What do you do for a living? I clear sand off a railway line. What's the railway line there for? To bring supplies for me to clear sand off the railway line. Why don't you just stop?

I don't know. I've never asked that question. And that's what life is like, isn't it? Without an eternal purpose, that's exactly what life is like. You know, you work hard, don't you, to pay for a holiday. And then you return from holiday and you're more exhausted than you were when you went. What was the point in that? You know, you go to the gym to fight for good health and you're sweating it out day in, day out, only then to go to the doctor and be struck down by a cancer that you never saw coming. You spend hours and hours researching the purchase that's going to bring you pleasure. You're on eBay or Amazon or Facebook marketplace, or maybe you're fancy and you're buying it new and you think this is going to be it. And when you get it, everything just feels exactly the same as it did before. We spend our lives clearing sand from a railway that doesn't need to exist. And Paul says in the midst of that world of meaningless futility, there's a message from God, a word from God, a message that always accomplishes his purpose, a message that brings atonement from sin, that brings rescue from death in the resurrection of the son, that's unaffected by the forces of evil. Because this message is the conquest of evil, crushing it at the cross, Satan bound and chained as the unchained gospel marches on. Live for this, live for this, says Paul.

The gospel never suffers. Secondly though, what we must do in this life, what we must do. In verses 11 to 13, if you look down at them, we've got essentially what I think is a trustworthy saying, as Paul calls it, probably a hymn or something that the church used to sing together. And it's in two sets of pairs. The first pair show what we must do, and the second what we must not do. Okay, so the first, what we must do. Here is a trustworthy saying, if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. Here it is, to live and reign with Christ, we need to die with him and endure with him, following him. This then is Paul's definition of the good life, right? Sell the good life to me, Paul. Okay, yes, it's dying and endurance. That's what he says. Doesn't sound that good, does it? But this death, death with Christ, we need to understand, don't we? In other words, what Paul is saying is that being a Christian, becoming a Christian, is not using Jesus to accomplish the desires that you have for your own life. People treat Jesus like that, don't they? You know, we pray when we get stuck. Jesus, please help me.

Jesus, please get me out of this fix. But in Paul's image, becoming a Christian is not treating Jesus like that. Instead, becoming a Christian is actually dying with Christ, laying ourselves down on the cross with him. The old us crucified with Jesus. I am dead to sin, you say. I am dying to my selfish desires. That driving concern to live for my own glory is dying with Jesus on the cross. My own plans, my own dreams. Jesus take them to the cross. That's faith. You know, faith in Christ is not believing in some kind of abstract way that Jesus died for your sins. Faith is, if you like, here, it's handing over your old self to Jesus and saying, take me, kill me on the cross, that old sinful, selfish desire that I might now live resurrection life with you. Life that we experience in part now by faith but will fully experience in his presence. This is the good life, isn't it, that Augustine was talking about. A life that is dead to sin but alive to God. A life that is dead to death but alive to eternity. And then we find, don't we, that pleasure, rest, work, relationships, all those things are gifts to enjoy. Temporary pleasures, not the meaning itself. As we die to the desire to make those things God's, we are liberated to enjoy them as the gifts they were intended to be. And then in verse 12, as we're looking at with the children, we are encouraged to endure, literally stay or remain. Don't move from this hope in Jesus. Keep trusting in him. Even in the world of suffering, endure sickness and grief and betrayal and divorce, persecution and injustice. Sometimes things are even targeted directly at us because we follow Jesus. And it's not that those things are right or fair. They are unjust. They are immoral. They are unfair. But they are also, says Paul, temporary. They're a blip on the timeline of eternity. And they can do nothing to cut out our purpose in life. Because one day we will reign with

Christ in new creation. I wonder if I can just ask you how this applies to you this morning. How does dying to live and enduring to reign work out for you? Perhaps this is true of you. I know, because I've spoken to lots of people, I know this is true of lots of people, not necessarily in this room, but lots of people in our community. For lots of people I talk to, their Christianity has never gotten beyond that asking Jesus to help them with their plans in life. Please, Lord Jesus, help me to find pleasure. Help me to find rest. And effectively, what we're doing is asking Jesus just to help us find what everybody else is looking for. And if that's you this morning, can I say to you, you know, as gently as I can, but hopefully as clearly as I can, and it's not me saying it, it's Paul saying it.

[ 26 : 11 ] Really, if that's you this morning, if Jesus is really just in your life to help you find the things that everybody else is looking for, you're not really a Christian, not least by his definition.

You might be what you call a cultural Christian, but you're not converted. And that means that you're not yet in receipt of eternal glory, not until yet you've died with Christ. Or maybe you are a Christian this morning, and it just feels hard. The Christian life feels like enduring. It's tiring.

It's not thriving. It feels like I'm persevering. We're not cruising. The Christian life has brought me trouble. It's brought me sleepless nights. It's made me sad. It's made me confused. It's made me poor. It's made me misunderstood by others. If that's you this morning, can I say that's exactly how it's supposed to be? You're not doing it wrong. The glory is still to come. There might be times when it's not like that. Let's pray that there will be. But just because it is like that does not mean you're doing it wrong. The glory is still to come. There is a day when we will reign with him.

So we sing now, don't we, songs like this, and to the grave, what will we sing? Christ, he lives. Christ, he lives. And what reward will heaven bring? Everlasting life with him. Eternal good.

Finally then, what must we not do? Those positive instructions are then mirrored in the second half of this trustworthy saying by the negative ones, aren't they? If we disown him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself. I want you to keep your eyes on the passage and to think carefully about this because I think Christians have misunderstood these verses.

[ 28 : 01 ] Christians love to say, God is faithful even when I am unfaithful. Now in a sense that is true, but that is not what these verses are saying. Almost all the commentaries will tell you that what this verse means, that the pair are to be taken together. Okay, so if you disown God, God disowns you as a punishment for your disowning of him. If you say, I don't want you, God, God says, you won't have me, then. He disowns you. And then if we are unfaithful to him, I will not have faith in you, God, we say.

I will not believe in you. I will not submit to you. Then you can be certain that God is a big believer in God. And he will be faithful to who he is. And he will bring a judgment on the faithless because he cannot disown himself. If you say, God, you don't exist, you are not real, you are not to be submitted to. God cannot say, yeah, that's right. He can't say that. He has to say, that's wrong and I will judge it.

It's terrifying warning then, isn't it? That while there is an eternal good that Paul is longing Timothy would shape his life around, an eternal good that eclipses the joys of this life with an unbridled joy in the presence of God, there is also, as we end, an eternal evil that eclipses the suffering of this life with the unbridled agony of the absence of God. I think some of the most terrifying words of Jesus, and Jesus was the clearest on this, actually, when he says towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, he says, away from me, I never knew you.

I came to church. My parents brought me to church. I called myself a Christian. I sang the songs, even the new ones that I didn't really like. I took the supper. Away from me, I never knew you.

Your obedience was only ever about yourself. You were trying to earn a good life in this life. You were not looking for eternal glory through knowing me. Away from me, I never knew you.

[ 30 : 25 ] It's a terrifying prospect. And so Paul says we must die to self to live for Christ. Because if we deny the Lord, he will deny us. God will meet our faithlessness with faithful justice.

So much so that it doesn't matter if the faithless life is full of pleasure and full of rest. The perfect combination of the two, all that's necessary in life in perfect harmony, it will only be temporary. It will not be enough to eclipse the agony of hell, says Paul.

So can I invite you this morning to a good life? I don't mean pleasure, rest, the perfect combination of the two and the necessities of life in perfect harmony.

I mean, can I invite you to an eternally good life, a good life in the glories of heaven with our Lord Jesus? And can I tell you that the way to find that is in the unchained message of the gospel, the gospel which talks about Jesus dying before rising, the message that was promised to David of an eternal throne, but was his through the betrayal of his son, that he found through suffering and difficulty, a life of enduring faith and future glory, a life where hardship is bathed with significance, where we have a purpose in life and hope in death, where hard decisions, difficult circumstances and pain drive us closer to our saviour, who invites us, come reign with me in glory.

Let me pray as I close. Let's just take a moment of quiet and we can pray in our own hearts as we respond to what the Lord said to us.

[ 32 : 25 ] Heavenly Father, we pray that for everybody in this room, all of us, would find our purpose in life, in living for eternal glory and not temporary pleasure.

Forgive us, Lord, that our desires have been too shallow, our hopes have been too temporary. Lord, we pray that you might lift our eyes to see that the Lord Jesus, who died, rose again, ascended into glory and is returning one day.

And that life now trusting him means that good life is eternal life with him, reigning in glory. Please, we pray, might you help us to endure?

Might you help us to keep going? Might you help us, please, we pray, to do all that we can to live for him in the strength that you give.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.