

Midweek Message

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. (2 Timothy 2:3,4 ESV)

With today being Veteran's Day, I thought I might expand a little bit on what Bonnie mentioned during the Children's Message this past Sunday. I know I mentioned in the sermon I would share more about our requests in prayer and I am planning to do that next week. However, in this week's message I want to share some thoughts about our calling to be soldiers of Christ Jesus. In the passage from 2 Timothy, the Apostle Paul uses the imagery of a soldier to depict how we're to see ourselves as believers in Jesus. In fact, he uses three different analogies from real life to help us grasp certain aspects of the Christian life. He talks about an athlete and how an athlete only receives the prize if he competes according to the rules. He talks about a farmer and how he's the first to enjoy the fruit of his labors. And he also talks about the soldier and how the soldier must continue despite the obstacles that come, enduring the hardships, striving only to be the best, focusing on what it means to be a good soldier. So, in this message I would like to look at the imagery of the soldier he presents in the hope that we'll strive to be good soldiers of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

First, to be successful Christian Soldiers we must understand the soldier's task. When we think of soldiers there are two very distinct truths, we need to grasp that good soldiers follow and they fight. Did you get the gist of the Scripture above in that we're soldiers of Christ Jesus? In other words, we're not here in this world to promote our own ideas, to pursue our own goals, to build our own little empires. We're here to serve the Lord Jesus in every aspect of our lives. Jesus made that very clear when he said, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). You see, if we're true followers of Jesus, if we're really those who belong to Him, we'll carry out His orders, doing what He commands us to do no matter what. We'll devote ourselves completely. We'll give ourselves unreservedly. We'll follow Him whole-heartedly. We'll obey Him absolutely. Regardless of what He calls us to be and to do we'll be what He wants us to be and we'll do what He wants us to do. We'll live our lives in harmony with what He has revealed in His Word. You see, that's what it means to follow the Lord and as we're doing so there's also a battle in which we're to be engaged, a fight that's set before us. This battle is fought on the spiritual front as the Apostle Paul tells in that great chapter of spiritual warfare when he writes,

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:10-13 ESV).

This battle is fought with the truth of the gospel as that alone is able to change the minds and hearts of those who are still in the grasp of sin. It's not the people themselves that we fight but is the dark power that has blinded them to the truth.

Second, as successful Christian soldiers we must understand the soldier's training. Many of us have either served in the military or know someone who has served in the military and we've come to realize that becoming a good soldier requires extensive training. The same is true of us as we need to be trained for the battle that's occurring for the souls of men, women, and children. In that passage from 2 Timothy, the Apostle Paul begins with these words, "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 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" (2 Timothy 2:1,2 ESV).

Timothy had received his training from the Apostle Paul and was then instructed to train others who could also then pass on the teaching of the gospel as they in turn trained even more—and on it goes even down to today and beyond. In fact, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, *“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come”* (1 Timothy 4:7,8 ESV). The point is that we all need continual training, what we call discipleship, so that we can be made ready for the battlefield. Becoming a good soldier doesn’t just happen by itself. If our task in this life is to be focused on pursuing and promoting the Kingdom of God, of following the directives of our commander, and fighting the good fight of faith, then we must learn what it means to live in such a way that everything we do, whether in word or deed, is done for the glory of God.

Third, to be successful Christian soldiers we must understand the soldier’s tools. Soldiers on the battlefield have an assortment of tools and that’s also true of Christian soldiers. We’re told in this passage that we must *“be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”* Now there’s a lot of meaning in that phrase but suffice it to say it focuses on the Scriptures that are given to us for that very purpose. The Apostle Peter tells us,

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Peter 1:3, 4 ESV).

He adds this at the end of that letter when he writes, *“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity”* (2 Peter 3:18 ESV). The point is quite clear in that our strength comes through the knowledge of our Lord as we grow in His grace, learning and maturing in the faith. In Ephesians chapter six there’s an extensive list of the tools that have been given by God for our spiritual battle. We’re told, *“Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm”* (Ephesians 6:13 ESV). This armor is for our protection as well as for our battle against the forces of evil around us.

Fourth, to be successful Christian soldiers we must understand the soldier’s testing. The Apostle Paul tells us that we’re to *“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”* Just as a nation’s soldiers suffer in times of conflict so also, we who belong to Jesus will suffer at various times and in various ways. The Apostle Peter, talking about the trials we often face, tells us, *“so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 1:7 ESV). Suffering isn’t always pleasant but when we consider the outcome and how we grow through it, we can rejoice that God is at work in our lives.

Finally, as successful Christian soldiers we must understand the soldier’s triumph. Just as soldiers relish in the victory of that battle which is also true of us in the spiritual battle. We’ll experience that triumph through our continued faithfulness as we stand firm to the last day in which we can say with the Apostle Paul, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:7,8 ESV).

So, on this Veteran’s Day thank God for those who’ve soldiered to preserve our freedoms and remember that we’re all soldiers in the fight for true freedom that only comes through Jesus Christ.

Pastor Mark