Reasons to Endure

2 Timothy 2:8–13

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Archaeological Moment: The Historical Reality of Jesus' Birth

Before we turn to 2 Timothy this evening, I want to take a few minutes for our Archaeological Moment. Tonight the focus is the historical reality of Jesus' birth — and I think you'll find that the evidence is richer than most people realize.

When Luke opens his Gospel, he is careful to tell us exactly what he is doing: *"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus"* (Luke 1:1–2). And the Apostle John, writing in his first letter, makes the same kind of claim with even more personal weight: *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we have seen it"* (1 John 1:1–2). These men are not writing mythology. They are insisting, repeatedly and deliberately, that what they witnessed happened in real time, in real places, among real people.

And the archaeological and historical record bears this out in remarkable ways.

Luke tells us that the birth of Jesus took place during a census decreed by Caesar Augustus, while Quirinius was governing Syria (Luke 2:1–2). For a long time, critics treated this as a historical error. But we now possess several lines of evidence that support Luke's account. The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* — the "Acts and Achievements" of Caesar Augustus, inscribed on bronze tablets and displayed across the Roman Empire after his death — records that Augustus conducted multiple empire-wide censuses during his reign. This is not a later legend; it is Augustus's own account of his administration. We also have the tombstone of Quirinius Aemilius Secundus, a Roman officer who served under Quirinius in Syria and who explicitly mentions conducting a census of the city of Apamea during that period. And Papyrus 904, a Roman census edict discovered in Egypt and dated to roughly the same era, describes precisely the kind of enrollment Luke mentions — requiring people to return to their ancestral homes to be registered.

What about Bethlehem and Nazareth themselves? First-century remains have been found at both sites, confirming that these were inhabited Jewish communities in the time of Jesus. At Bethlehem, archaeologists have identified domestic structures and storage areas consistent with Luke's description of Jesus being laid in a manger — a feeding trough, often carved from limestone and found in the lower levels of homes where animals were sheltered overnight. The Church of the Nativity, built over the site venerated from earliest Christian centuries as the place of the birth, sits atop cave structures that are entirely consistent with this kind of domestic architecture. The palace of Herod the Great — the Herod of Matthew's account — has been excavated at the Herodium, just a few miles from Bethlehem, confirming the historical setting of the narrative. Even the Nabataean incense trade, which would have made frankincense and myrrh commercially available gifts in first-century Judea, has been documented through archaeological finds along the ancient trade routes.

None of this proves the virgin birth by a trowel. But it does confirm what Luke and John insist upon: the story of Jesus is not set in the mists of legend. It is anchored in a world of Roman censuses, provincial governors, Herodian palaces, and limestone mangers. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us — and history remembers the neighborhood.

Introduction: Paul and Timothy

There are two books in the Bible that bear the name Timothy — 1 and 2 Timothy — and both are letters from Paul to this young man he clearly loves. In 1 Timothy, Timothy has been sent to the church at Ephesus while Paul is in Macedonia, and reading that first letter, it is immediately clear that Timothy has his hands full. There were false teachers spreading heretical doctrine, disorder in the congregation, spiritual infants positioning themselves for authority, and the pervasive cultural influence of the Artemis cult shaping how people thought about worship. First Timothy is, accordingly, a practical book — full of instructions on how to handle false teaching, theological clarifications, and guidance on how to order a church and identify qualified elders.

But 2 Timothy is different. It is written a few years later. Paul is now in Rome, in prison, in chains. And this time, what he writes to Timothy is not a technical manual for solving church problems — it is a letter to strengthen a person. Paul is writing to encourage his son in the faith to hold on.

Last week we looked at Paul reminding Timothy of what he has been entrusted with. He writes in 1:6, *"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God."* The word translated "gift" is *charisma* — a gift of grace, rooted in *charis*, grace itself. Paul is pointing Timothy to everything that has been given to him: the gospel message, a share in God's redemptive work, salvation, the new life and holy calling that comes with it, the promise of life and immortality,

and the indwelling Holy Spirit. As Paul says in verse 14, *"By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."*

He then illustrated what it looks like to guard that deposit with three pictures: the soldier who endures, keeping his focus on the kingdom rather than on civilian comfort; the athlete who endures, competing according to the rules rather than cutting corners; and the farmer who endures, doing the hard work of planting and cultivation while depending on the King for the harvest.

Today we come to 2 Timothy 2:8–13. In this passage, Paul gives Timothy reasons to endure — motivators for why, despite whatever suffering or hardship he is facing, the situation is not hopeless but hopeful. Paul is trying to help Timothy see beyond the horizon of whatever valley he is currently in.

The Need for Reasons to Endure

Can you relate to needing a reason to keep going? Have you ever felt like quitting? Have you ever been in a situation where you had simply had enough — where the reasons for staying, the reasons to endure, had dried up?

Maybe it was a job. The work was hard, soul-crushing, poorly compensated, and you eventually concluded there was no good reason to stay. Maybe it was a skill you were trying to develop — the effort required was real, but the motivation to push through it just was not there. Maybe it was a leadership role where you carried responsibilities no one appreciated, absorbed constant criticism, and finally asked yourself why you were doing it at all.

There are moments in life when there is simply no sufficient motivation to sustain you through the hardship you are facing, and so the path of least resistance — quitting, finding a way out — becomes the easiest option. And sometimes, honestly, that is the right call.

But there are other times when the situation is painful and discouraging and difficult, and the right response is not escape but endurance. Faithfulness despite the cost. A willingness to suffer through it.

This is precisely what Paul is calling Timothy to. *"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God"* (2 Timothy 1:8). And again in 2:3, *"Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."*

Paul knows what Timothy is facing. He knows about the false teachers, the internal conflicts, the power struggles between competing factions, the corrosive influence of the surrounding culture, the persecution gathering on the horizon. He knows that Timothy's mentor and closest

friend — Paul himself — is sitting in a Roman prison. And yet Paul does not say, let's tone it down, let's find a comfortable place to hide, let's just quietly wait for things to improve. He says, endure.

We need to hear this. I am not sure it is said often enough in our churches today. So much of what passes for preaching is oriented around comfort, or blessing, or self-improvement, or guilt-driven motivation to do more. What we hear far less often is a straightforward call to stay the course — to be faithful to the one in whom you have believed, however hard it is.

The only way to endure is to remember why. You need reasons — motivators strong enough to hold you in place when everything in you wants to find the exit. Paul gives Timothy four of them.

Reason One: The Historical Reality of Jesus Christ

> *"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal." (2 Timothy 2:8–9)*

Notice what this first motivator is not. It is not a philosophy — endure because it will be good for you in the long run. It is not a law — endure because God requires it of you. It is not even a promise of reward — endure and you will receive a greater blessing. The first reason Paul gives Timothy to endure is a person: Jesus Christ.

And what Paul says about this person is carefully chosen. Out of everything he could have said, he highlights two things. Descended from David — the historical incarnation of God, fully human, fully one of us. Christmas. And risen from the dead — victorious over death, because he is God. Easter.

These are not ideas. They are not symbols or metaphors. They are historical events. They happened. And because they happened, history itself pivots upon them. If you want to live in accordance with the actual nature of reality — not an imagined or preferred reality, but the world as it actually is — then you live by faith in Jesus Christ.

Of the four reasons Paul gives, this is the one that most personally motivates me. I am a pastor. I am a Christian. I willfully accept hardship and fight the good fight — not primarily because it brings me comfort, or because I enjoy it, but because it is true. The gospel is not a coping mechanism. It is not a helpful story. It is an account of things that actually happened, things that change everything. That is worth enduring for.

Reason Two: The Sovereignty of God and the Power of the Gospel

> *"But the word of God is not bound!" (2 Timothy 2:9)*

I suspect that when Paul was arrested and thrown into a Roman prison, it sent a wave of fear through the churches. If Paul could be chained, what did that mean for the gospel? What did it mean for the movement?

We feel something similar today. There are real pressures on Christian faith in our culture — restrictions, cultural hostility, the steady marginalization of religion from public life, troubling trends in church attendance. These things are worth taking seriously.

But Paul makes a declaration that cuts through all of it: even though he himself is suffering, bound with chains as a criminal, *the word of God is not bound.* There are no barriers in this world that can hold back the sovereignty of God. No chains, no laws, no cultural pressure, no hostile regime — nothing in this world can stop God's purposes from moving forward. What you do in the name of the gospel has real power, because the power behind it is not yours.

I want to share a story from David Miller's *The Path and the Peacemakers* that has stayed with me. Bible translators Bruce and Jan Benson and their fourteen-year-old son were driving down a mountainside in the Peruvian Andes when they came around a switchback and found themselves bumper to bumper with a truck full of Shining Path terrorists. Armed men surrounded their car and ordered them out. Jan thought, *This is it. This is the end of our lives.*

The rebels took them to a nearby town. On the way, terrified and disoriented, Jan felt a compulsion to pray and then to sing. She said later that it began as a trickle — a sense that the Lord inhabits the praises of his people. She protested internally: *But Lord, I don't know how to praise you right now.* The answer came simply: *Sing. At least you can sing.* And so she began: *"You are my hiding place. You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you."*

That night, unexpectedly, the rebels released the Bensons — but they kept the car, the projection equipment, and the film reels of the Luke portion of the New Media Bible, the same material used in the Jesus Film.

A year later, living in the capital for safety, Jan received a phone call. One of their captors had become a Christian and wanted to meet with them. When they sat down together, he told them that he was an experienced killer, and that the plan that night had been to kill them. But for reasons he could not explain, they simply could not go through with it. And then — having kept the film — the rebels set up the projector and watched it, again and again. At one viewing, several hundred rebels watched the story of Jesus in their own language. Many were so shaken that they wanted to lay down their weapons and leave the Shining Path right there. And this former enemy, now standing before the Bensons as a brother in Christ, asked them to forgive

him for his part in what had been done to them. The Bensons eventually returned to that region and completed their translation of the New Testament.

God's witnesses may be imprisoned. His Word cannot be. The gospel *"is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"* (Romans 1:16). Endure — because what you do in the name of the gospel has power, and it is not your power.

Reason Three: Love for Others

> *"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." (2 Timothy 2:10)*

Paul is explicit here. He endures — chains, persecution, a hard and costly life — not for his own advancement, not to secure some special standing before God, but for others. So that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. That is love.

I have seen both sides of this. I have known Christians who were once faithful and engaged, who seemed genuinely planted in the life of the church — and then when the heat came, when the worries of life pressed in, when temptations arrived, they quietly dropped out. And the harm they did to themselves was real. But what they often failed to see was the harm done to others. There is a selfishness in that kind of exit that tends to go unexamined.

But I have also seen the other side. I have watched Christians face extreme hardship — a cancer diagnosis, a devastating loss, a prolonged and painful trial — and instead of retreating, they leaned in. And they bore witness to a depth of faith that you simply cannot manufacture in comfortable circumstances. Their endurance, their faithfulness in the middle of real suffering, changed people around them. It strengthened the faith of those who were watching.

Why should you endure? Why should you keep the faith, steward the gift God has given you, stay in the room when it would be easier to walk out? Because your faithfulness is not only about you. It is one of the primary ways you love the people around you.

Reason Four: God's Love for You

> *"The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:11–13)*

There is a great deal in these three verses. Most scholars believe that what Paul quotes here was an early hymn sung by the first Christians — likely in the context of baptism. The rhythm of the lines, and the past tense of verse 11 (*if we have died with him*), point in that direction. Dying with Christ, being buried with him, rising with him — this is the language of baptism, of entering into his death and his resurrection.

What this passage describes, at its heart, is the shape of God's love toward us. And the final two stanzas of this hymn are the ones I find most striking.

If we deny him, he also will deny us. This describes a love that does not force itself on anyone. If we look at God and say, *I want nothing to do with you* — if we genuinely disown him — God honors that choice. He does not coerce. He will one day say, as it were, *Very well. I have prepared a place where you will never have to see me again.* That is the nature of hell: the full and final absence of God, freely chosen.

But the next line is entirely different in its register: *If we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself.* There is a distinction here between disowning God and failing him. Between saying *I do not want you* and stumbling, falling short, struggling to keep faith in a hard season. For the person who fails but has not turned away — God does not turn away from them. He extends grace. He extends his strength. He holds out his hand and says, *Get up.* He does this not because we have earned it, but because of who he is. He cannot deny himself. His faithfulness is not contingent on ours.

Maybe tonight you are in that place. You have stumbled. You have not done a good job of enduring. You feel the weight of your own inconsistency and weakness. The good news is that Christ's faithfulness does not rise and fall with yours. Come to him in repentance. Depend on his mercy. Ask him for the strength to take the next faithful step.

Conclusion: Remember Jesus Christ

Paul began this whole passage with two words: *Remember Jesus Christ.* That is where he starts, and it is where I want to end.

Endure — because the gospel is true. Remember who he is. He is the promised King, descended from David. He is risen from the dead. Whatever hardship you are facing has not changed the truth of the gospel. History pivots on what he did, and you are living on the right side of that pivot.

Endure — because you are on the winning side. God's Word is not chained. You may hit a closed door. You may reach the limits of your strength or your influence. But God is still able to work in and through and around the circumstances you cannot change.

Endure — because your life impacts others. Keep praying. Keep speaking the truth in love. Keep extending the patience and kindness of Jesus to the people around you. You may not yet see what God is doing through your faithfulness, but that does not mean nothing is happening.

And endure — because God is for you and loves you. Christ keeps his word. He promises life with him, and a share in his reign. His warning about denying him is serious, and worth taking seriously. And when you have failed — come to him. Repent. Depend on his mercy. And ask him for the strength to take the next faithful step.

He remains faithful. He cannot deny himself.