

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Motives for Sacrificial Ministry, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:8-9

Code: 55-7

Now this morning as we come to God's Word, let's open to 2 Timothy chapter 2...2 Timothy chapter 2 takes us back to the passage that has been drawing our attention, this wonderful second chapter of this letter from Paul the mentor to Timothy his son in the faith. And as he comes to verses 8 through 13, he speaks to Timothy about motives for sacrificial service. Most of the letter of 2 Timothy is involved with a call to effective, faithful, courageous, bold continuing service to Christ. As you know, Timothy had hit a low point in his life. He was in a difficult ministry. He was failing to do all that he ought to have done. He was letting his gift fall into disuse. And Paul was very concerned about him and so he writes this epistle to encourage him toward dedicated spiritual service. Now part of that demands sacrifice. It may well demand suffering in some cases. And this section, verses 8 through 13, is a section in which Paul attempts to motivate Timothy and anyone who reads this, including ourselves, to a sacrificial ministry.

Now by way of introduction let me say that any careful student of the New Testament knows that when you come to confess Jesus as Lord, that involves submission to Christ and to His cause. Anyone who names the name of Christ, Jesus said anyone who identifies with Him will obey His commandments. We come then into a submissive role in terms of the cause of Christ at the point of salvation. The essence of being a disciple is taking up your cross and following Him, He said, and that literally meant going all the way to death if that was required. The cross to the people to whom Jesus spoke meant death, that's all they knew about a cross was that people died on it. When Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow Me," He said in a sense, follow Me submissively even if it costs you your very life. And that might be the price. Jesus also said in John 15 that if they persecuted Me and hated Me, they'll persecute and hate you. The time will come when even religious people will reject you, they'll throw you out of the synagogues, they'll kill you. That just goes possibly with the territory.

In Hebrews chapter 11 there is a listing of the great heroes of the faith many of whom gave their lives for the cause of the Messiah who had not yet come. And we are called to give our lives for the Messiah who has indeed come and for whom we wait to come again.

Throughout the history of the church then, from the very beginning teachings of Jesus, it's been apparent to anyone who studies the Word of God that following Jesus Christ involves sacrifice. For some it involves the sacrifice of their life in death. For others it involves the sacrifice of their life in life...saying no to their ambitions and desires and self-will and all of the things that might be on their

own agenda for the sake of the will of Christ. But when you look at the church, it's hard for us, I think, to put it in perspective because we live in such a comfortable environment. But millions upon millions of people through the years have died because of the cause of Christ. Now there are always those sacrifices that do not involve death. Times of desertion. We all know about a Christian person in a marriage who is deserted by a non-Christian and left to very often fend for themselves. Of course a sad situation that so often happens, an unsaved husband leaves a Christian wife because he cannot tolerate her faith and leaves her to do whatever she can to care for the family and support them. Sometimes that's a form of persecution that is worse than death for death would usher that believer into the presence of Jesus Christ.

And then there is the persecution of rejection and alienation and mockery and many forms of persecution short of death. In any case, faithful obedience to Christ will cause us to come into conflict and contention with the world. The Word of God and a life that exalts Christ will always stir up animosity in a Christ-rejecting world.

The point of it is this, that we're called to suffer for Christ. And Paul later writes to Timothy in a third chapter that all that live godly will suffer persecution, it's just the way it is. If you live a godly life in an ungodly world, there will be a negative reaction.

Now as we come to verses 8 to 13, Paul is saying to Timothy, "here is reason enough to suffer," that's the idea of this section. Here is reason enough to be courageous, here is reason enough to put your life on the line and make whatever sacrifice God calls you to make. It may be mockery, it may be rejection, it may be alienation, it may be desertion, it may be death. Whatever it is, here is reason enough to make it. In other words, Paul is saying to Timothy the value, the worth of your ministry far outstrips any personal consideration that would make you back down to protect yourself.

Now keep in mind also that this is Paul's last letter. He writes no more after this because his life is taken from him, he is executed. And he wants to make sure that Timothy, his son in the faith, is going to pick up the work and carry it on. Now we are remembering in verses 1 to 7 our message the last two weeks, Paul has just given Timothy some very strong exhortation to keep on doing what he ought to do. And he has reminded him in verse 2 that he's to be a teacher, and then he's reminded him that he should be a soldier and fight the battle and not get tangled up with the world and do everything to please his commander. He's reminded him that's he's an athlete and an athlete has to work hard, discipline his body, trained at the maximum, make sacrifices, deny self in order to win. And then he's reminded him that he is a farmer, a tiller of the ground who patiently quietly silently in a rather dutiful way day after day has to sow and prepare the ground and then weed the crop and wait for it to come in. It's hard, hard and lonely work.

And so, in verses 1 to 7 he is calling Timothy to the work. In verses 8 to 13 he's motivating him. Why should he do it? Why should he be a faithful teacher? Why should he be a faithful soldier, faithful

athlete, faithful farmer? Why all the strain and stress? Why should he devote himself so totally to that cause? The answer comes in the motives that are given from verses 8 through 13.

Before we look at that let me just remind you that Timothy was living in a time when the church was being persecuted. Persecution against Christians was escalating and Timothy was very aware of that. And it may well have been that Timothy knew his life could be taken from him because of the cause of Christ. The first major wide-spread persecution of Christians was related to a very famous historical event and that was the burning of Rome. On July 19 in A.D. 64 the fire that destroyed Rome began. It burned for six days and seven nights and it totally devastated the metropolis of Rome. All of the temples and shrines and public buildings were destroyed. But more than that, most of the common people of Rome lived in tenement buildings made out of wood and they went up like kindling. In fact, it burned at such an incredible rate that Nero, it is said, stood on the tower near his palace and watched it burn with a certain kind of glee in his heart over what he saw. He was actually thrilled at what is quoted in historians as "the loveliness of the flames."

It became apparent to the people that Nero himself had started the fire. You see, Nero loved to build and he wanted to burn Rome to the ground apparently so that he could build it again bigger and better and more to his own glory. The population in the holocaust was reduced, as one writer says, to a vast brotherhood of hopeless wretches, dispossessed of their homes, family members burned to a crisp, they were lonely, homeless, destitute. It is even said that Nero when he saw the flames die down sent men out to fan them again.

Now when this began to turn on Nero, Tacitus, the historian writes, "But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order by Nero. Consequently," says Tacitus, "to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most tortures on a class hated for their abominations called Christians by the populous." In other words, he had to blame somebody to get the guilt off his own back so he blamed the Christians. Slanders had already been circulating about the Christians and persecutions had already begun and this just made them rampant. The hatred escalated. Paul, of course, was caught in this hatred of Christians and that's why he was in prison at the very time he writes the letter and Timothy was also very much aware that people knew Timothy's association with Paul, knew him as a leader of the Christians and he could well wind up just as Paul wound up, sitting in prison until the moment of his execution.

And so, he had to be willing to face suffering if he was going to be courageous. And Paul wasn't going to let him walk away and say, "I just think I'm going to leave the ministry for a little break until the heat dies down." Paul wasn't about to let him off the hook. And he writes to him, in effect, and says, "Keep doing what you've always done, do it stronger than you've ever done it, be courageous, be bold in the face of any persecution or any suffering." To suffer for the sake of Christ, to Paul, was an honor, it should be so to Timothy.

Now was it worthwhile? Is it worthwhile to put your life on the line? Look at verse 9, "For which I suffer hardship..." Now in that little phrase Paul says, "I'm willing to suffer," and the implication here is, "so should you be, Timothy." For the sake of proclaiming the gospel, Paul is willing to endure evil treatment, that's what the word means. "I have been willing to endure evil treatment." It's a present-tense verb, it means continuously. "I have been willing continuously to endure all the evil treatment that comes to me. Timothy, you should be as well and here are four reasons why, okay?" And I want you to get these four reason...four reasons why.

Reason number one, the preeminence of the Lord...the preeminence of the Lord. Look at verse 8. "Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, descendant of David according to my gospel." Now that verse focuses on the preeminence of the Lord which is a driving motivation in the heart of Paul. And Paul is saying, "Timothy, in effect, your service will be more aggressive, you'll have greater courage, greater boldness, you'll be able to endure your share of evil treatment, suffer for Christ and maybe even die for Christ if you remember who He is. Don't lose sight of the preeminence of the one you serve."

This is so important...so important. The word "remember" again is a word implying "keep on remembering." You could translate it, "Keep always in your memory." In other words, it's a constant focus. You never lose sight of who you serve. Paul says in Acts 20, "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind and facing all the plots of the Jews." How could he face all of those plots against his life? Because he never lost sight of who it was he served. He didn't serve the church, as such. He didn't serve some calling in his own life. He didn't serve some ego need. He didn't serve some ambition. He didn't serve some track to success. He served the Lord. The focal point of his thought was the preeminence of the one in whose service he lived. Remember Jesus Christ, the perfect teacher. The perfect teacher who is the ultimate teacher. Remember Jesus Christ the soldier, the greatest soldier, fought the greatest battle, won the greatest victory. Remember Jesus Christ the greatest athlete, ran the purest race, will win the greatest prize. Remember Jesus Christ the true sower of the seed, tiller of the ground, reaper of the harvest. Remember Jesus Christ, the preeminent one.

And John says it this way in 1 John 2:6, "If we say we abide in Him, we ought to walk the way He walked." It's a simple thing but it's really the focus of life. And what is it about Jesus Christ that helps us understand His preeminence? Look again at verse 8, "Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead." Literally, having been risen out from among the dead. Having been risen out from among the dead. His, by the way, was a selective resurrection. He was raised alone out from among the dead. Paul calls Him the prototokos, the first-born, the preeminent one out from among the dead. He is having been raised. That's a perfect tense and that means something happening in past time with continuing results. And the idea here is not to remember the resurrection, that's not it. He's not saying remember the resurrection. He is saying remember the having been risen Christ who is now...what?...alive. That's the issue. The living Christ, remember the living Christ. We do not serve a

past event. We do not serve an historical person who is no longer around. We serve a living Christ. Constantly keep in your memory the living Christ.

And what is bound up in that? Well primarily His nature as God and His role as Savior. When you look at the resurrection you see God, battering the shackles of death, as it were. Escaping the bonds of hell. You see God who can destroy Satan and death which is Satan's greatest weapon. When you look at the resurrection you see His deity as He blasts through the grave. But you also see the work of His salvation, His saving work. You look at the resurrection, His...which is the result of His death and you think of His death and His death was a death for sin. So remember Jesus Christ who is now alive from the dead is to say remember Jesus Christ, God in human flesh who died on a cross, rose again and now lives as Savior, as the living God.

Then he says, secondly, remember Jesus Christ, having been risen out from among the dead, descendant of David. A very interesting Greek term. It says "out from the spermatosof David," in the Greek. In other words, right out of the very loins of David. What is that to say? That speaks of His humanity, David being a man, and also of in the work sense His royalty, or His dominion, His sovereignty, His majesty, His kingliness.

So on the one hand he says to Timothy, and I love this, if you want to have a motive remember the preeminent one you serve. His preeminence can be seen, one: in His deity and His saving work which we see in His resurrection. In His humanity and His royalty which we see in the fact that He was born out of the line of David. He is the God-Man, He is the Savior King. He is Jesus which means savior, He is Messiah, or Christ, which means King. He is Son of God, He is Son of Man. So much is here. And all of this, Paul says, is according to my gospel, or according to the gospel which has been entrusted to me and proclaimed by me.

In other words, Timothy, keep your focus on the preeminence of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospel I have preached. He is God, He is man, He is Savior, He is King. And if you continually remember Jesus Christ, that becomes tremendous motivation...tremendous motivation.

Now let me just give you some practical ways that you will perceive the preeminence of Christ and it will have a direct effect on your life. Listen, first of all, when Paul says remember Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the Savior King who had to suffer death for the sake of His own gospel before He was resurrected, who had to suffer humiliation as a man before He was exalted as a King, when he says remember Jesus Christ, first of all what he is saying is remember Jesus Christ suffered before He was glorified, was humiliated before He was crowned, died before He rose. In other words, Jesus Himself knew pain before pleasure. He knew joy before sorrow. He knew hatred before heavenly worship. He knew persecution before exaltation. He knew death before a throne. And the point is this, should you think to escape what He couldn't escape? He who was perfect? Should you find the path of glory strewn with roses when He found it strewn with thorns? Should you be ushered into glory to

experience the bliss of heaven having never known pain? Are you better than Christ?

In other words, the point is, remember Jesus Christ. Remember His path to glory. Remember He the perfect one had to learn obedience by what He suffered, Hebrews 5:8 says it. Are you going to expect less? Are you going to buy the prosperity gospel garbage that God wants nothing but a giddy sort of frivolous happiness in this world for all of His children? Should you not expect to be a partner of His sufferings? And so when you as a believer go out to preach the name of Jesus Christ and speak the name of Jesus Christ and boldly confront the world...and I'll tell you, folks, listen carefully to what I say...you do that even in the United States of America and people will react negatively to that if you speak the true gospel, if you call men back from their sin. It always creates a negative reaction in an unbelieving heart. But you must be willing to do that. You say, "Well I might suffer a little bit." That's good because you should not be able to avoid what Christ Himself could not avoid, nor should you live some illusion that you have some rights that even He didn't have.

So, in remembering Jesus Christ, you are remembering what He had to suffer before His glory. You're remembering that He was hated before He was loved. He died before He was given a throne. He was a man before He was exalted to the glories of the God/Man.

Secondly, look at it another way. Not only do we remember Jesus Christ in the fact that He found the path to glory was a path through pain and suffering, but you remember Jesus Christ as the supreme example of how you take that suffering. And, Timothy, when you go against the wall, as it were, and you confront people who don't love Christ and you live the godly life in an ungodly society and you boldly preach the truth, follow the pattern of Jesus Christ. What is that pattern? Listen carefully to 1 Peter 2:21, "You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." The verse before says, "What credit is there if when you sin and are harshly treated you endure it with patience, but if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God." So in a context of suffering for righteousness sake, you follow the example of Christ and in verse 22 it says, "Who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in His mouth, when He was reviled He didn't revile in return, when suffering He uttered no threats but kept entrusting Himself to the one, that is to God, who judges righteously." In other words, you follow His example.

How did He accept suffering? Without retaliation, without bitterness, without vengeance. He simply committed Himself to God and endured it for the sake of the truth. That's the issue. He set the pattern, it says in Hebrews, for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross despising the shame and is now set down at the right hand of the Father. In other words, He was willing to endure the shame patiently, quietly, without retaliation because He saw the glory ahead. He's our example. He's our pattern. And so as you go to live for Christ and speak His truth, you do so with boldness and courage, you take whatever suffering comes and you follow the example of Jesus. You're not vengeful, you're not bitter, you're not retaliatory, you accept it quietly and you commit yourself to God

and you wait for the day when God gives glory to those who have suffered.

So remembering Jesus Christ means, one, remember He suffered, why should you not. Remember, two, how He suffered and that's how you should endure. Thirdly, remember Jesus Christ also carries the idea, remember that He is alive. Remember that He is King. Remember that He is the rightful heir to David's throne is now set down at the right hand of the Father on high. He is living and He is reigning. You say, "What does that mean?" Living, He's our high priest. Reigning, He is the sovereign who controls everything. Why should I worry about what happens? Why should I worry about suffering the hatred of men, the retribution of men who hate the gospel, who hate Christ? Christ is there to give me sympathy as a high priest, to give me compassion, to bear my hurts, to understand my burdens, to know my needs. And He's also there to control everything because He's sovereign. To know on the one hand as man that He is the faithful high priest who is touched with the feelings of our weakness, and on the other hand He is God who is sovereign is to know enough. So I can give my life away because I remember Jesus Christ, I remember that He's risen from the dead and having been risen from the dead demonstrated that He is God who is sovereign and He is appointed King, I also remember that He is risen from the dead, living once as man in this world, able to understand my burdens, and my hurts. And He who suffered can compassionately understand my own small small amount of suffering.

Fourthly and finally if we look at this preeminent view of Christ, it all boils down to this, beloved, and you have to get this in your minds. Because Jesus is so preeminent, He is the prototokos, the preeminent one who ever lived in this world, because He is the preeminent one, remember Him in the general sense, the big sense, remember the worthiness of His person and therefore the worthiness of His cause. We should never hesitate to give our lives to the cause of Christ that is such a worthy cause, if He is the preeminent one, mark it, then His cause is the preeminent cause, is that right? Has to be. If He's the most important personality in the universe as God, as incarnate God, then His is the most important cause. So why would I not boldly courageously give my life for the cause of the most preeminent one?

So, you see, if you understand the glory of His person, if you understand that He is the God/Man, the Savior/King, the faithful high priest, the sovereign ruler, if you understand that His preeminent saving cause is the greatest cause in the universe, then you will happily give your life for that cause because there's no cause that comes close to it. So, remember Jesus Christ, born from the dead, raised from the dead, out of the loins of David and you have the sum of all that He is and all that He came to do. If you understand that, that ought to motivate you to be courageous. It's amazing to me that men will die for a lot less than this cause, isn't it? Amazing... Monks light themselves on fire for demonic causes. And here is a cause to live for and here's a cause to die for...the preeminent one with the preeminent cause. So remember Jesus Christ.

I've always believed that a well-trained memory is one that permits you to forget everything that's not worth remembering. And to remember only that which is worth remembering and that which is most worth remembering is the cause of Jesus Christ. That's what you live for.

So, reason number one, to live a sacrificial life, the preeminence of the Lord. Reason number two, the power of the Word...the power of the Word. Look at verse 9. That statement then which we mentioned earlier, Paul puts his own testimony in, "For which I suffer hardship, even to imprisonment as a criminal, but the Word of God is not imprisoned." What a great statement. I love that statement. The Authorized says, "The Word of God is not bound." So Paul says, "Look, Timothy, let me tell you even I am willing to endure evil treatment to the extent of imprisonment as a criminal. Why do I do that? Because I know that though I may be imprisoned, the Word of God can't be. So I'm willing to put my life on the line. They may throw me in jail but they can't bind the Word of God."

Now the term "imprisonment" could mean chains, that term can sometimes be translated chains or shackles or prison. Back in chapter 1, do you remember verse 16 where Paul says Onesiphorus was not ashamed of my chains? Paul was in prison in Rome in that stinking wretched pit in the ground at the Mamertine Prison that I described to you months ago. He was there waiting execution along with a lot of other people in a vile kind of environment, without any normal sanitation, people jammed into one sort of pit in the ground, living in fear of death. And no doubt he was there with people who would not be comfortable in his association, nor he in theirs. He says the gospel preaching has brought me to imprisonment, to chains, probably he was shackled. He feels the shame of this as indicated by the word "criminal," you see it there? Imprisonment as a criminal, that's a technical term, it was used in the Greek language technically for burglars, robbers, thieves, traitors, murderers. In fact, it's translated in Luke 23 as the word malefactor, you remember that word malefactor? It is used in Luke 23 to describe the two thieves, as we know them, who were dying on each side of Jesus Christ. They were criminals. The courts had judged them worthy of death.

Paul then is calling himself here a criminal. He had been then placed in prison not as a religious criminal, but simply classed with the rest of the criminals. And the very fact that he uses that very strong and technical word, *katergos*(?), has inherent in it the idea that there was a tremendous amount of shame. I'm sure there were some people who were glad, some people maybe even who were somewhat rivals of Paul in the church who were glad that Paul was in prison and wanted to criticize him for being there, but there was shame involved in being there, not only among the populous, but as I said, maybe even among some of the Christians who misunderstood Paul's integrity. There was shame in being a criminal. He uses the word to express the shame that he felt.

Now listen carefully to what I say. Some people would say, "Look, Paul, why did you keep preaching and get yourself stuck in that prison? I mean, if you just soften the message and quit confronting everybody, and quit preaching in public places, and attacking public figures, if you would just quiet down and sneak around the back part of town and pass out tracts and beat it, nobody's going to know

you're there. You've got to be subtle. Now look what you've done. You've got yourself in prison, Paul, and now your ministry is really messed up."

Now there are people who think like that. There are people today who are under the allusion that the only reason the gospel has freedom to go out in America is because America's free. And so there are people who want to spend all their time in political action trying to keep America free so that the gospel can keep going out. Now I don't want to argue with that. But there's this idea that if we didn't have a democracy in America, the gospel could never go forth and the Word of God would never accomplish anything, and so we have to work very hard to keep America free so God can keep proclaiming His truth.

I want to tell you something, folks. You've got to look at this verse again. Paul says, "I may be in prison but the Word of God is not...what?...it's not bound." You better understand this. There is never a justification to compromise the gospel to make it inoffensive so we don't lose the right to preach it. Because if we make it inoffensive, then what good is it to preach an inoffensive gospel? That's no gospel at all. We preach the truth with boldness, we say what ought to be said. We don't mince words. You must speak the truth.

You say, "Yeah, but what's going to happen if we all start boldly proclaiming Christ everywhere, they're going to put clamps on us, things are going to happen. We might get put in jail." That's wonderful. If God wants us to have a jail ministry, so be it. Paul in his first imprisonment was in jail and he writes the Philippians and at the end of the Philippian letter which he wrote from jail on his first imprisonment he says, "All...all the new believers implied...all the new Christians in Caesar's household greet you." Sure, all the time Paul was in jail, he was winning people to Christ. You think it was bad for Paul to be chained to a soldier, imagine how it was for an unregenerate soldier to be chained to the Apostle Paul. He'd get one of them converted, and they'd put a new one in and he'd convert that one and away he went, see.

Paul says to Timothy, in effect, in chapter 4, "Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season, all the time, reprove, rebuke, exhort. And don't ever mitigate it, be faithful, bold, courageous, sacrificial if it means chains and death. Why? Because the Word of God will never be bound." What a promise. In fact, verse 9 actually says the Word of God has not been, and implied, never will be imprisoned.

You remember the great hymn by Martin Luther? "A mighty fortress is our God," you remember those two lines? "The body they may kill, God's truth abideth...what?...still." I was in the catacombs in Rome, what an experience. We went down into the ground and down in the ground there's a large assembly area where the church met at one time, just a hole in the ground way under Rome. There's 600 miles of catacombs under there. Ten generations of Christians are buried in those catacombs. All those catacombs you wander around in and they're just little tunnels, have little shelves all along the

catacombs where they put the bodies of the Christians that died. They estimate they buried between two and four million Christians there over a three-hundred year period, ten generations of them. There are inscriptions on the wall. You can even see them there. There's the sign of the fish which is the most common one. My favorite inscription on the wall, "The Word of God is not bound." You can kill us, but you can't stop the Word of God.

John Bunyan, you remember John Bunyan wrote from jail Pilgrim's Progress. John Bunyan preached the gospel, they put him in jail. You know what happened when John Bunyan was in the Bedford Jail? He was in a cell inside a high wall. The wall was on the outside, inside was the building. He was in a cell. In the daytime the crowds would gather outside the wall, they couldn't see over the wall. John Bunyan would come to his cell window and preach through the bars and his voice would carry over the wall. The Word of God was not bound.

I want to tell you that in 1949 there were 700 thousand Christians in China...1949, 700 thousand Christians. In the early fifties the Communist Revolution came which was known as the cultural revolution, 30 million people died. It was a massacre, it was a bloodbath and many of them were Christians. Seven hundred thousand Christians out of a nation of millions upon millions upon millions of people. And in the early fifties the Christians for the most part were massacred. I want to tell you something. Since the early fifties for 35 years they have been under the reign of terror of Communism. At this present time in China the estimate is that there are somewhere between 30 and 100 million Christians. You say, "How did that happen?" The Word of God is not...what?...it's not bound. The political...the political scene had absolutely nothing to do with what the power of the Word of God can accomplish.

I was reading a little book called "The Church in China," I thought I'd share a couple of things just to give you a little bit of a feeling for the power of the Word of God. No matter where or when they meet and under what circumstances, the house church is made up of one thing, people. Sometimes the absence of those who are not there is as significance as the presence of those who are. Missing from one meeting was a young science teacher, a Christian who refused to teach Darwin's theory of evolution as truth. She told the officials that Darwin was anti- God and that the theory of evolution was not true. For weeks they tried to persuade her. Good science teachers were difficult to find, especially after the cultural revolution. She would not relent. Her reply was always the same, "We're not monkeys, we're men and women made in the image of God." Later she would cry the same words through broken teeth and bloody lips. Today she is a janitor at the school and is forbidden to attend house meetings with fellow believers.

There is also the noticeable void left by the beloved doctor who refused to confess that Chairman Mao was bigger than Christ. He was beaten and left unconscious by the Red Guard. They covered him with a blanket and let him lie on the hospital floor. They told him they would be back in a few days and they returned and his response was "My Christ is bigger than Chairman Mao. My Christ is Lord of

Lords, and King of Kings. My Christ has been given the name above all names in heaven, on earth and under the earth." More beatings. And the same response. "My Christ is bigger." After several days they decided to end this heresy once and for all, they stripped him naked, made him stand up on a narrow bench barely six inches wide. "Now," they shouted, "if your Christ is bigger than Chairman Mao, let Him save you. Our Chairman Mao can save you, just admit it."

Well, to make a long story short, he recited the story of Daniel and his three friends in the fiery furnace. And by some kind of supernatural strengthening, stood on that six-inch wide piece of board with every muscle in his body aching for almost 24 hours. At the end of which time they took him down, dragged him away and hanged him. The Red Guard fought among themselves, it says, they were frightened. Some wanted to cut him down before he died and after a scuffle someone cut the rope, the man, the doctor, fell to the floor, preached his last message, "As I was hanging there," he said, "my heart was melting for you," and then he died just like his predecessor Stephen had done before him.

You think that killed the church? Not at all...not at all. They don't even have Scriptures, that's fascinating to me. They don't even have the Bible and the Word of God isn't bound. What part of the Scripture they have, they have hidden in their hearts and they have fragments. In 1966 the Red Guard made a concerted effort to burn all the Bibles, hymnals and other Christian literature. They did their job well. Today it is not uncommon to see a group of several hundred people with only one Bible, only one Bible. "I know of one village," says one reporter, "where there are 5,000 believers, four preachers and not one complete Bible. One person has a New Testament which begins with the thirteenth chapter of Mark and goes through the book of Titus." And still the Word of God is not bound.

"I have 3,000 people in a house church that I visit and teach. We have three Bibles and two New Testaments." That's it and the Word of God is not bound. It isn't how many Bibles you have, it's how much you believe it, right? It's the power of the Word of God, the power of the Spirit of God. This Scripture, says the writer of Hebrews, is alive and powerful and sharper than any...what?...two-edged sword. The Word of God is not bound. You see, that's why we preach with no fear. That's why we boldly proclaim Christ in the media to anybody who asks, confronting the truth, speaking the truth and if it is the truth we speak it and we don't worry about consequences. The Word of God is not bound and the Christ who is preeminent has a cause that is worth any kind of suffering. The Word is not bound.

Andrew Melville was one of the early preachers of the Scottish Reformation. One day the Regent Morton sent for him and denounced his writings as he was proclaiming the truth. "There will never be a quietness in this country," he said, "till half a dozen of you are hanged or banished from this country."

"Sir," answered Melville, "threaten your own courtiers in that fashion, it's the same to me whether I rot in the air or on the ground. The earth is the Lord's, my father land is wherever well doing is. I have been ready to give my life when it was not half as well worn at the pleasure of my God. I lived out of your country ten years as well as in it, yet God be glorified, it will not lie in your power to hang or exile God's truth," end quote. That's the spirit. That's the courage.

The greatest modern proof that the Word of God is not bound is the story of the church in China. Seven hundred thousand Christians under terrible persecution, murder, deprivation, without the right to meet and preach, without the Bible, thirty-five years later becomes between 30 and a hundred million believers. You can't imprison the Word of God. And that means that if you preach and proclaim and somebody puts you in prison, nothing has changed. The Word of God is equally powerful. No matter what happens to the preacher, as someone has said, He buries his preachers but His work goes on. No matter what happens to the preacher, the Word goes forth.

And so I say to you, and I'm just going to give you those two points, we'll look at the next two next time, motive for sacrificial service is built around my remembering the preeminent Christ and my being confident that the Word is not bound. So what do I fear? They can put me in prison, they can't bind the Word of God. It may well be that if the church ever got on fire the way it ought to in America and really confronted this ungodly system with biblical truth in a courageous bold way, if people stopped compromising the message and we really began to preach Christ purely and truly, the system would become hostile to us and in the hostility of that system, who knows but what God might bring the true revival that seems to be so far away.

Let's covenant this morning to be faithful, to be courageous, to remember Christ and remember His Word can't be bound. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank You this morning again for the high calling that is ours in Christ. Thank You for the privilege of even naming His name, the privilege of preaching His truth, the privilege of witnessing, telling others the gospel. Give us boldness, give us courage. And help us to know that there is not just hostility out there, there are those whose hearts are prepared to receive the message, to hear the truth, to believe and be saved. I pray that out of this congregation You will raise up those who have great courage, great boldness, who will speak the truth not just among those who already believe but among those who do not believe. Give us a wide and far-reaching platform and opportunity to proclaim Christ that we may be faithful and honorable servants, faithful teachers, soldiers, athletes, farmers, who give the effort sacrificially with self-denial, to win the prize, to receive the reward for the glory of the one we serve, the one in whose name we pray, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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