

Thought for the Week 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020 Remembrance Sunday

2 Timothy 2:1-13

*<sup>1</sup> You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. <sup>3</sup> Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. <sup>5</sup> Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. <sup>6</sup> The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. <sup>7</sup> Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*

*<sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. <sup>10</sup> 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.*

*<sup>11</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*

Having enlisted in the Lord's army after encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus and enduring countless dangers, toils, and snares as a result during his missionary journeys, Paul was a Christian soldier if there ever was one. Toward the end of his life—while facing a trial before Caesar for his commitment to Christ—Paul sat in a cold Roman prison, cut off from the world, with just a quill and some parchment. Paul knew that he would soon be executed and so he wrote his final thoughts to a young pastor named Timothy, passing to him the torch of leadership, reminding him of what was truly important and encouraging him to keep the faith. In 2 Timothy 2:3-4, Paul makes this brief statement:

*"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." (2 Timothy 2:3-4 NKJV).*

In these two short verses Paul uses four e-words—enlist, endure, engage, and entangle—each representing a different aspect of what it takes to become a soldier of Christ. I actually want to start with the last e-word, which is—enlist.

• ENLIST

You can't become a soldier if you don't enlist. Thankfully, our country no longer uses conscription. Recruitment officers are sent out to encourage people to volunteer, but men and

women have the freedom to choose whether or not they serve in our armed forces today. And people make that choice for different reasons. Some enlist out of a sense of patriotic duty, some were raised in military families, and still others because they're looking for some sense of direction or purpose for their lives. No matter what the reasons are, it's a tough decision—life changing, to simply leave everything behind.

Similarly, God does not force anyone to serve in the service of His Kingdom. He does send out recruitment officers, like you and me, to encourage people to serve in His Army, but it's an individual's choice whether or not they heed God's call. And people make the decision for different reasons. Maybe you were brought up with the faith of your parents, maybe you sensed God's leading in your life, or maybe you came to Christ looking for a sense of purpose and direction. No matter the reason, it's a life changing decision and not one to be taken lightly. Jesus said, *"If anyone comes to me but loves his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters—or even life—more than me, he cannot be my follower. Whoever is not willing to carry his cross and follow me cannot be my follower"* (Luke 14:26-27 NCV). Following Jesus is a life-altering commitment that requires full devotion. It's a personal pledge that you are going to let Christ become the leader of your life. And I'm certain there are many here today who testify that it was the best decision they ever made!

If the first step to becoming a spiritual soldier is enlisting, the second step is enduring.

#### • ENDURE

Those who serve in ever branch of the military have a lot to endure, not the least of which is the gruelling physical punishment experienced during basic training. Of course, there are many less physical hardships that they have to endure as well. One of the most difficult things is just being away from their families. And then there's the rigidity of military life and discipline often personified in the attitude of ranking officers such as the Sergeant Major.

The story is told of a Major that was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and got a new office. The first morning he was in his new office, a young private knocked on the door. The Colonel, feeling the urge to impress the young man, picked up his phone and began talking. "Yes, General, thank you, I'm glad that the Field Marshall is pleased with that. Yes, I will pass that information along to the men. Yes, goodbye, sir." Then, turning to the private, he barked, "And what do you want?" The soldier said, "Nothing important, sir. I was just told to come along and hook up your new telephone."

If you want to be a soldier, you have to have endurance. So does a Christian. As Paul told Timothy, *"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"* (2 Timothy 2:3 NKJV). Thank God that we live a country where Christians don't experience the kind of hardships they do in other parts of the world—hardships like the ones Paul experienced. During his missionary journeys Paul was flogged, stoned, shipwrecked and much more. But things are getting more difficult for believers as society becomes ever more secularised and you can be sure that sooner or later our faith will be tested.

James reminds us, *"when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow"* (James 1:2-

3 NLT). As soldiers of Christ, we have to endure. We have to keep the faith. And we have to praise God, even in the midst of our struggles.

So, we enlist, we endure. And we engage.

#### • ENGAGE

The famous American General William Sherman once said, *"You don't know the horrible aspects of war. I've been through two wars and I know. I've seen cities and homes in ashes. I've seen thousands of men lying on the ground, their dead faces looking up at the skies. I tell you, war is hell!"* While we have not experienced the horrible aspects of war, we have great respect for those who have been engaged in it - which is why we remember and honour them today. Even those service men and women who serve during peacetime, however, must still be prepared to engage the enemy. They must stay sharp and vigilant, always prepared for battle.

As Christians we need to do the same. As Paul explains, *"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NIV).

In other words, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we have to be prepared to engage in spiritual warfare. We battle temptation. We stand opposed to false religions and worldviews that are hostile toward Christianity. We are called to defend our faith with reason and precision. We can't be afraid to stand up for Jesus either in the public square or in our personal relationships. God is counting on us to "take captives," which means not just surrendering our own thoughts and beliefs to Christ, but also leading others to do the same—with gentleness and respect. In the Lord's Army, we don't kill our enemies; rather, we make them our allies. And in the Lord's Army, we aren't fighting alone. Just as soldiers in a squad, platoon or company, depend on each other, we Christian soldiers rely on our church family to support us and stand beside us. Even more, we have God on our side.

So, in order to be a soldier we must enlist, endure, engage, and finally, don't get entangled.

#### • ENTANGLE

The last e-word that Paul uses in these two verses is entangled: *"No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life"* (2 Timothy 2:4 HCSB).

A new recruit, shortly after joining the Royal Navy, who asked his commanding officer for a pass so he could attend a wedding. The officer gave him the pass but informed the young man he would have to be back by 7.00 p.m. Sunday. "You don't understand, sir," said the recruit. "I'm in the wedding." "No, you don't understand," the officer shot back, "You're in the Navy!"

When you serve Christ, you are also expected to be completely committed to Him and His Kingdom. You are expected to serve Him faithfully, not allowing anything to keep you from doing His will.

Unfortunately, countless Christians, after coming to Christ in faith, do get entangled in the affairs of this world. They let other things become more important to them than Jesus. We need to be careful about the things we let distract us from Jesus. As Paul has said elsewhere, *"Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ"* (Philippians 3:8 NLT).

So, as on this day we remember and honour those who fought and those who died so that we might live in freedom, let us also remember that we are called to enlist in Christ's service, not to get entangled by the world around us, but to engage with it with the Good News of the Gospel, praying that God will give us the strength and courage to endure to the end.

### **PRAYERS FOR REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY**

Let us pray for all who suffer as a result of conflict, and ask that God may give us peace: for the service men and women who have died in the violence of war, each one remembered by and known to God; may God give peace.

For those who love them in death as in life, offering the distress of our grief and the sadness of our loss; may God give peace.

For all members of the armed forces who are in danger this day, remembering family, friends and all who pray for their safe return; may God give peace.

For civilian women, children and men whose lives are disfigured by war or terror, calling to mind in penitence the anger and hatreds of humanity; may God give peace.

For peacemakers and peacekeepers, who seek to keep this world secure and free; may God give peace.

For all who bear the burden and privilege of leadership, political, military and religious; asking for gifts of wisdom and resolve in the search for reconciliation and peace; may God give peace.

O God of truth and justice,  
we hold before you those whose memory we cherish,  
and those whose names we will never know.  
Help us to lift our eyes above the torment of this broken world,  
and grant us the grace to pray for those who wish us harm.

As we honour the past, may we put our faith in your future;  
for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever.

**Amen.**