

II TIMOTHY 2:1-7
CHRISTIAN IDENTITY!
PART 1

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to II Timothy chapter 2 as we continue our study through Paul's second letter to his son in the faith, Timothy.

Remember that Paul is in prison for his faith in Rome for the second and last time. And as he is in the Mamertine prison in Rome, he is passing the torch of faith on to Timothy. He wants Timothy to carry on the work. Paul knows this time that Ceaser Nero is going to put him to death for his faith in Jesus Christ!

And, as you can imagine, Paul is not going to just put fluff into this letter. This is it for him, and he knows it and thus, he wants to give Timothy the tools to finish strong in the faith.

I have called our study this morning – ***CHRISTIAN IDENTITY!***

And Paul is going to share with us some valuable lessons about our identity in Christ.

Think about that. Our identity in Christ is important!

But what does that mean?

Listen carefully because this is going to be our focus this morning and for the next few weeks – ***CHRISTIAN IDENTITY!***

We are told regarding our Christian identity,

Our identity in Christ is first and foremost one of newness. We are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Identity is defined as ***“the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognizable or known,”*** so our new identity in Christ should be recognizable both to ourselves and to others.

If we are *“in Christ,”* that should be evident, just as being *“in the world”* is equally evident.

A further definition of identity is *“the quality or condition of being the same as something else.”*

In the case of our identity in Christ, our lives should indicate that we are the same as Christ. The name *“Christians”* means literally *“followers of Christ.”*

In our new identity in Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6), but we are reconciled to God (Romans 5:10). This new identity completely changes our relationship with God and our families, just as it changes the way we see the world.

Our new identity in Christ means we have the same relationship with God that Christ has - we are His children. God has adopted us as sons. We are able to call Him *“Abba! Father!”* (Romans 8:15-16). We are both joint heirs (Galatians 3:29) and friends (John 15:15) of Christ.

And this relationship is even stronger than those we have with our earthly families (Matthew 10:35-37).

Instead of fearing God as judge, we have the great privilege of coming to Him as our Father. We can approach Him with confidence and ask of Him what we need (Hebrews 4:16). We can ask for His guidance and wisdom (James 1:5) and know that nothing will take us from Him (Romans 8:38-39).

We also rest in His authority and respond to Him with trusting obedience, knowing that obedience is a key part of remaining close to Him (John 14:23).

The family of God encompasses a vast body of believers who strive together to grow closer to God (1 Corinthians 12:13). It's a family that is stronger for the gifts of each person in it (Romans 12:6-8). Members of this new family seek the best for one another (1 Corinthians 10:24), encourage each other (Galatians 6:1-2), and forgive each other (Matthew 18:21-22). Each member has a specific role, but the roles are acted out with respect and grace (1 Peter 5:1-5).

Most of all, we respond to each other in love - not the feeling, but a selfless, conscious act of sacrifice, which is reflective of the agape love of the God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20).

We are no longer citizens of the world but apart from it (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). We understand that we are a part of a heavenly, God-ruled kingdom. Things of the earth no longer draw us (Colossians 3:2).

We don't fear or over-emphasize suffering on earth or the trials we face (Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 3:14; 4:12-14), nor do we place importance on things the world values (1 Timothy 6:9-11).

Even our bodies and our actions reflect that our minds are no longer conformed to the world (Romans 12:1-2) but are now instruments of righteousness to God (Romans 6:13). And our new kingdom perspective means we understand that our enemy is not the people around us but the spiritual forces that endeavor to keep the people from knowing God (Ephesians 6:12).

All of this is the ideal - the character of a mature follower of Christ. One of the greatest blessings about our identity in Christ is the grace we're given in order to grow into the spiritual maturity that truly reflects our new identity (Philippians 12:6).

Our lives in light of our identity in Christ are filled with a heavenly Father, a large, loving family, and the understanding that we are citizens of another kingdom and not of this earth.

- <https://bit.ly/3SMRLsN>

And it is not easy, but through Christ we can manifest the qualities of our Lord in our lives, we can have a true – ***CHRISTIAN IDENTITY!***

Let me give you an example of the problem today, how we don't know our identity.

Several years back, at a convention, there was a man who was wearing two name badges.

When he was asked the reason why he was wearing two name badges he responded back, ***“Oh, I'm having an identity crisis!”***

Maybe that is where you are this morning, having this identity crisis. You want to be identified as a Christian, but there is a part of you that is struggling with the things of the world manifesting itself in your life.

And let's be honest with ourselves. We are all struggling in this area. We all want to be more like Christ but that battle of the flesh against the Spirit is strong.

That is why these lessons that Paul is giving to Timothy are for us as well.

You see, Paul did not want Timothy to have an identity crisis, so he carefully explained to Timothy what a pastor is and what a pastor does specifically, but as you see these lessons, they are for all Christians to apply to their lives.

And make no mistake about it, we are in a battle, and I believe that is why Paul is speaking of our Christian identity here in this second and Paul's last letter to Timothy.

What is interesting to me is that after he gets done speaking to Timothy about our Christian identity he then speaks of the coming apostasy or the falling away from the truths of God found in the Word of God.

In other words, we need to learn how to stand strong in the days we are living in because the battle is getting more and more intense! We have to know what we believe if we are going to finish strong!

I have broken down the verses we will be looking at this morning into the following main points.

They are,

BE STRONG – II TIMOTHY 2:1-2

BE A SOLDIER – II TIMOTHY 2:3-4

BE AN ATHLETE – II TIMOTHY 2:5

BE A FARMER – II TIMOTHY 2:6

BE WISE – II TIMOTHY 2:7

So with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in II Timothy chapter 2, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this topic –

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY!

II TIMOTHY 2

VERSES 1-2

As we have seen in our study of I Timothy and now II Timothy, over and over again Paul admonishes Timothy to be strong. In fact, in both these letters we see Paul admonish Timothy to be strong some twenty-five times!

What does that tell you?

That tells me that Timothy may have been afraid, and thus, there was some fear in the life of Timothy!

Maybe he wavered in what to do. Maybe he thought of giving up because the work was too big for him to do, or the problems were overwhelming. Even some of his elders had gotten into heresy and that can be discouraging, especially for Timothy!

And Paul's point here is not that this is a suggestion for Timothy, this is a command, this is what he needs to do each day! He is to **"Be strong in the Lord."**

Paul's message to Timothy can be paraphrased like this, *"You therefore, my son, I command you to continue each day without ceasing to draw your strength from God's grace which is available to you through your relationship with Jesus."*

The key here is that Paul is not admonishing Timothy to take some kind of Karate class so he can defend himself!

Paul is not speaking of building up the body to defend himself!

Not even a self-help class or some motivational speaker seminar!

Then what is Paul speaking of here?

Paul is speaking of that inner strength that God gives to us, and that inner strength is manifested in outward actions. Paul is telling Timothy to be ***STRONG IN THE LORD!***

In other words, as frail, as timid as Timothy might have been, Paul tells Timothy, ***“Son, you are weak, but God is strong. Rest in His strength and He will enable you to do great things. His grace is sufficient for you!”***

Now here is where many of us get into trouble. We just sit around and expect God to do great things through us.

That is not what Paul is saying. His point is simple. Yes, it is all about God enabling us to do the work, but then we must take those steps of faith and walk.

Let me give you an example of what I mean.

As Moses died, Joshua was now going to lead the children of Israel into the Promise Land, and he had some fear, some uncertainty.

Think about this for a minute, think about what Joshua faced. Moses led them for forty years and they didn't make it there. And now it was up to Joshua!

Thus, in Joshua 1:2-9 we are told, **“Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them - the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you**

may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

Notice, his strength is from the Lord, so he was not to be afraid, but it didn't end there.

Joshua needed to walk into the Promise Land, he was to defeat the enemies who outnumbered them, who were stronger than they were and yet they had the Lord fighting for them and in their weakness, even though they didn't deserve it, God extended His grace and brought them into the Promise Land giving them great victories.

Paul is saying the same thing to this timid young pastor and to each of us! Timothy did not deserve this from God, none of us do. But it was a grace gift that God had given to him! And now he needed to walk accordingly!

You see, we are saved by grace. We are sustained by grace. We serve by grace. And one day we will be taken to glory by the grace of God. None of this is because we deserve it, but because He loves us that much! It is a free gift.

Notice again what Paul said here. He wrote, “**. . . be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**” II Timothy 2:1.

In other words, “*Grace here has its simplest theological meaning, as the divine help, the unmerited gift of assistance that comes from God*” (White)

As we rest in that grace it gives us the confidence, it gives to us the boldness that we can never have when we think that we have to live up to some certain standard for God to use us.

We should desire that, but we also need to understand that grace means that we do not deserve anything that God has given to us and in knowing that it should help us to move forward and use what God has given to us for His glory!

The reason this is so important for us to understand is because Satan steps in and he messes with us. He hates God, he hates all that God gives to us, and thus, he wants to destroy that gift of God through legalism and other things.

In regard to legalism, you have to do this, and you can't do that. You have to live up to a certain standard or God won't give you this grace gift.

But doesn't that negate what grace is all about?

You bet it does because grace is getting something we don't deserve and as soon as we put legalism in there, and we are working for this, then it is no longer grace, but it is works and God owes us this.

No, He never did, and He will never owe us anything. But his amazing grace, how sweet that sound, that saved a wretch like you and like me!

For Timothy, and I believe this is true for all of us, that we are to share with others what God has taught us.

This is not just for pastors, but it is for all of us because we all are being taught by God and thus, we are to give to others what God has given to us. This is what ministry is all about, teaching others the things that God has taught you.

Paul starts out by saying here in II Timothy 2:2, "**And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses . . .**"

Timothy traveled with Paul for some twenty-five years. He heard the messages that Paul gave. He heard how he spoke to different people with different backgrounds about the Lord.

And the main thing is that Paul's message did not change, it was still all about Jesus and the gift of life He has given to us through His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary and rising from the dead on the third day. It is - ***THE GOSPEL MESSAGE!***

Make no mistake about it, Paul was not a man pleaser. He served the Lord faithfully throughout his life. And even though the message was difficult for many to hear, it did not stop Paul from sharing with them the love of Jesus!

And here he is, at the end of his life, and he is admonishing Timothy to take the words Paul shared and commit them to men who will be able to then go and teach others, faithful men!

And as these faithful men hear and take the message to others, it is passed on again and again and again! It just keeps going, at least it should!

As a pastor, this is one of the most important things that I can do. Train others to do the work of the ministry!

Now, we may ask ourselves, ***“Who are these faithful men?”***

They, of course, are believers and they are also servants. They are not looking to be served but to serve others with the things of God. That is a very important lesson.

So Paul tells Timothy, ***“I have poured God's truth into your life, now you find men who are faithful to God, filled with the Holy Spirit and disciple them as well. Pour your life into them so that they can pour their lives into others!”***

Let me give you this example to show you how simple things of faith can be passed down to others and impact their lives tremendously.

We are told,

. . . In the early seventeenth century Dr. Richard Sibbes wrote a little book about Christ called *The Bruised Reed*. A copy of that book fell into the hands of a tin peddler, who gave it to a boy named Richard Baxter, who became the greatest of Puritan pastors. Baxter wrote, among other things, *A Call to the Unconverted*, which Philip Doddridge read in the early eighteenth century, and he in turn wrote *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*.

William Wilberforce read that book, and it so changed his life that he led the fight for the abolition of slavery. He was a tiny, stunted man but had such eloquence for Christ that James Boswell immortalized it by writing that during one of his speeches *“the shrimp grew and grew and grew and became a whale.”*

Indeed Wilberforce became a huge influence in nineteenth century British culture and saw the abolition of slavery in Britain just three days before his death. Significantly, Wilberforce has been an inspiration for Charles Colson and the organization he founded, Prison Fellowship.

- R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1-2 Timothy and Titus – To Guard the Deposit, pp. 209-210

We may not always know the outcome of what we are doing, but can we be faithful and pass the things of God down to others, faithful people who will continue to teach others the things of God? We need to!

That is a huge responsibility for Timothy, and Paul is going to help him to get focused, to stay on course, to be patient in the work and like I have said, the Holy Spirit is speaking to all of us about these things.

And, as Paul said in I Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

May we not lose sight of that. We are in a battle. And because we are in a battle, Paul is going to show how a soldier in the Lord’s army needs to have a mind that is focused on the Lord or single-mindedness!

The key here is – ***BE STRONG IN THE LORD!***

Remember what Paul said in Ephesians 6:10-11, **“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”**

If you are not standing in His strength, then you will not be able to – ***BE A SOLIDER!***

VERSES 3-4

First of all, as you are going to teach others, understand you are in a battle for the faith. You are in a battle for the truth. That is why Jude was admonishing us to earnestly contend for the faith that has been entrusted to us, once and for all! (Jude 1:3)

Thus, Paul starts out by speaking of a soldier as he shows Timothy what a strong spiritual life is all about.

Please understand that what Paul is saying here is not a suggestion, but it is a requirement, a command for him to follow – to be a soldier in the battles that are before him.

The picture I see Paul painting here is that a soldier needs to be ***FOCUSED*** because he will face hardships, not that he might.

Paul says, *“Timothy, like a faithful soldier, you **MUST** endure hardships. This is just part of living the Christian life. It is not going to be easy but forge ahead. And don’t let the distractions of this world move you away from what you are called to do!”*

You see, a good soldier must be obedient to his commanding officer and not let the things of this world distract him from what he is called to do.

Can you imagine being in a battle and your buddy next to you is on his smart phone playing games! That is a distraction, he lost focus and he is putting you and others in danger because of it!

Paul, picturing a Roman soldier, saw how he had a purpose; he was not distracted from the work he was called to do by his commanding officer.

And here’s the thing. In the same way, if a believer is not willing to endure hardship, they will never accomplish much for Jesus Christ. They will give up as soon as something hard is required of them; they cannot fulfill Jesus’ call: **“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”** (Matthew 16:24)

On the other end of the spectrum, think of it like this. If you are in a battle against the enemy and you are partnered with someone who is waving a white flag all the time, giving up, do you really want him to be your partner?

Absolutely not. You want someone who is going to be focused and will continue to fight to the end!

A good soldier does not give up just because he is facing hardship!

And as believers, that should be our attitude as well. And if it is not, if you are not willing to endure hardship, then you will never accomplish much for the Lord.

It is interesting because if you look at the armor of God given to us in Ephesians chapter 6, there is nothing really covering our backend.

Why is that?

Because, as Christians, we are never in retreat, we are forging ahead for the Lord and our equipment, the things the Lord has given to us will see us through because the battle is His and all we must do is walk by faith!

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-27, “**. . . ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.’**”

May we be faithful in our service to the Lord!

Now let me add this because this is one of the problems that has come into the church today and because of it, many are unwilling to endure hardships for Christ.

What is the problem?

What is the thing that is causing us to lose focus?

The problem is this. Many Christians have been led to believe that the Christian life is all about them. It is about their wealth, their prosperity, their success, their needs met.

They say things like, “***You can’t help others until you help yourself first!***”

The problem with that is ***SELF*** will never be satisfied and thus, you will be helping no one!

Make no mistake about it, it is all about Jesus, it is all about others and then, it is about you!

You see, if you are so focused on other things instead of the Lord, well, it is impossible to serve the Lord and the things of this world. You will have to choose; will it be the Lord or other things?

And the reality is, most of us don't really understand what war is about, the cost, how these men are focused on what they are doing.

Also, many Christians are not taught about the warfare they are in.

One writer tells us of some very brave soldiers as he wrote,

Knowing they would be mowed down by Nazi machine guns, the first soldiers off the landing craft at Omaha Beach charged valiantly.

Those who miraculously made it to shore safely began to climb the cliffs, knowing they were most likely climbing to their deaths.

What would cause a man to hit the beach or to climb a cliff, knowing he would be gunned down in the process?

Subsequent studies have shown that the heroes of D-Day did so out of respect and appreciation for their commanding officer and fellow soldiers.

The concept of fighting for one's country is sometimes too big, too abstract.

But risking one's life for the safety of one's commander or for the safety of the soldiers right beside him makes sense.

- Jon Courson

And that is what we will be looking at next. You see, as a Christian, the Lord is our commanding officer, and we need to be in complete obedience to Him.

But before we get to that, let me finish up with these verses.

Paul is telling us that we need to stay **FOCUSED** on what He has called us to do and not let the affairs of this life entangle us, stop us from what we are to do.

Now please understand that Paul is not necessarily speaking of things that are wrong, but anything that can interfere with what we are called to do.

I can give you an example in my own life. I love to run, I love to race and when I was first married, I ran many races, even after I was saved.

And one of the races I ran in was here in Wisconsin. This race was through a forest and as you came out, the course split. One way was for the 10k runners, and the other was for the 5k runners. I was running the 5k race.

As I came to the split, I lost focus, and I went the wrong way. I know, you can't believe that I would go the wrong way, but I did. And as I was running, I got refocused and realized I was going the wrong way and got myself back on course!

If something you are doing, which may not be wrong, is interfering with your relationship with the Lord, getting you to lose focus, you need to let it go and draw close to Him!

In fact, here in I Timothy 2:4, the word "**affairs**" in the Greek is a word we get the English word "**pragmatic**" from.

What is my point?

It is simple. This word, "**pragmatic**" speaks of practical, everyday things, our daily things we do.

And like I have said, these “**affairs of life**” are not necessarily bad things, but they can easily distract you from the work that God has for you, entangling you! Be careful.

And so, the mark of a good soldier is that he needs to be **FOCUSED** because in any battle there will be hardships and there will be things that come your way to entangle you or tie you up, preventing you from doing the work that God has called you to do!

Let me share this perspective with you and then I will share with you someone who is **FOCUSED** on the work that God called him to do.

We are told,

The strong desire to please other people is an integral characteristic of fallen man. And because of the continued influence of the old self (Eph. 4:22), even Christians are tempted to be men-pleasers.

Many Christians succumb to that temptation and become more concerned about pleasing their fellow workers, their neighbors, and their friends than about pleasing the Lord.

And for the same reason, many pastors fall into the trap of wanting to please their congregations or their communities more than to please the Lord. That desire inevitably leads to moral and spiritual decline, because pleasing the world, including worldly Christians, demands compromise of God’s truth, God’s standards, and personal holiness.

- John MacArthur

Again, be careful, stay **FOCUSED** on the Lord and the work He has called you to do!

Let me share with you what one man did, how he was **FOCUSED** on the work.

John Wesley traveled by foot or horseback some 250,000 miles, preaching more than 40,000 sermons . . . He lived simply and gave away most of whatever income he received. Yet he was continually ridiculed and pelted with stones by ungodly mobs and was ostracized by fellow clergymen in the Church of England. When maligned [criticized], he answered, ***“I leave my reputation where I left my soul, in the hands of God.”***

Make no mistake about it, Wesley was no ‘man-pleaser’ and it cost him, just like Paul.

May we be good soldiers in the Lord’s army, being single-minded in the work that God has called us to do!

Now we may not feel like soldiers, and we may wonder if we can accomplish anything for Christ. We can’t but He can through us. We just need to be focused on what He has called us to do.

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

Audie Murphy was an unlikely hero. Weighing in at only 112 pounds and with the face of a child, Audie was 18 years old when he went overseas during World War II.

Nothing about him suggested a hero in the making. Yet when called upon by his commanding officers to do the duty of a soldier, Murphy held nothing back.

By war’s end, the quiet boy from Texas had fought with extraordinary bravery and saved the lives of countless fellow soldiers.

He returned home to an adoring public, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, and received at least 36 other medals - more than anyone else in U.S. history, all because nothing meant more to him as a soldier than the will of his commanding officer.

- Today in the Word, June 21, 1995

Thus - ***WE ARE TO BE SOLDIERS IN THE LORDS ARMY AND STAY FOCUSED!***

As we read on, we will begin looking at – ***BE AN ATHLETE!***

VERSE 5

And now Paul now speaks of the athlete, that he must follow the rules, or he will be disqualified from the competition.

The idea that Paul is trying to get across to Timothy is that of - **OBEDIENCE!**

The Greek Games, still held in Paul's day, had every athlete meet three qualifications.

- ***He needed to be born a Greek.***
- ***He had to prepare for at least 10 months for the games and then swear before a statue of Zeus attesting to that fact.***
- ***And then he had to follow the rules of the event he was in.***

To fail in any of those requirements meant automatic disqualification.

As Christians, we too must be **OBEDIENT** to the Lord and follow the rules He has set for us to compete.

What are those rules, you might say, that we are to follow?

First of all,

- ***We must be born again or saved, that is obvious.***
- ***We must be dedicated to the work that God has called us to do, not lackadaisical about it!***
- ***And thirdly, we must put forth a constant effort in the work.***

And think about this for a minute. If you are a serious athlete, do you compete to come in second or third?

Of course not, you compete for only one reason and that is to win!

And if you are going to win you are going to have to be disciplined in how you train. You will have to sacrifice a lot and work hard.

Remember what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 9:25-27, “**And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.**”

And please keep in mind that *“Our spiritual competition is not, of course, against other Christians. Trying to outperform another believer is far from spiritual. Rather, our competition is against our fleshly old self, against the world, and against Satan and those who serve him.”* (Source Unknown)

We need to know who the enemy is, and we need to fight with certainty. We need to discipline our bodies so that we don’t fall prey to sin and disqualify ourselves from service!

We must obey the rules.

I don’t know if any of you follow the Tour de France and how, several years ago, Lance Armstrong won seven titles! That is amazing. And yes, that was many years ago but the story that we remember of Lance Armstrong was how he cheated.

You see, after winning his seventh title, then the truth came out and it was found that he was doping and thus, since he did not follow the rules, he was disqualified and stripped of all seven of his Tour de France titles.

Some of you may remember Rosie Ruiz and what she did. Rosie Ruiz was a Cuban American woman who was declared the winner in the female category for the 84th Boston Marathon in 1980. An amazing victory.

But then it was found out she cheated and had her title stripped eight days after the race. They discovered that she had not run the entire course. She did not follow the rules!

Rosie Ruiz, whose name became synonymous with cheating when Boston Marathon officials vacated her victory in the 1980 race after determining that she had sneaked into it about a mile from the finish line . . .

Ruiz was working as a secretary at a commodities trading firm in Manhattan when she stunned the running world by being the first woman to cross the finish line in Boston in 2 hours, 31 minutes and 56 seconds. It would have been the third-fastest time ever recorded by a woman in a marathon.

But suspicions about her victory arose immediately. Spotters had not seen her at checkpoints along the 26-mile course, and after the race she told a television interviewer that she had run only one other marathon, the 1979 New York City Marathon, and that she had finished that race in 2:56:33.

“So you improved from 2 hours and 56 minutes to 2 hours and 31 minutes?” the interviewer, Kathrine Switzer a TV commentator who had gained fame as one of the first women to run in the Boston Marathon, asked incredulously.

“I trained myself,” Ruiz replied, without explaining further.

She then appeared not to understand Switzer’s questions about interval training - workouts designed to improve a runner’s speed.

“Rosie Ruiz, the mystery woman winner - we missed her at all our checkpoints,” Switzer said as Ruiz stood by, a laurel wreath on her head.

Ruiz's claim about the New York race quickly unraveled. Susan Morrow, a freelance photographer, came forward to tell The New York Times that she had been on the subway with Ruiz during the marathon and that Ruiz had told her that she had dropped out at the 10-mile mark with an injured ankle.

- <https://bit.ly/3uddUqU>

May we follow the rules and run the race to win. May we “**... do all things through Christ who strengthens [us].**” Philippians 4:13.

And so, the mark of a good athlete is his **OBEDIENCE** to the rules so he may receive the crown!

Now we will look at the last point before we conclude, and that is – **BE A FARMER!**

VERSE 6

Look at what we have seen so far.

We have seen that a soldier is to be **FOCUSED**.

We have seen that an athlete is to be **OBEDIENT**.

And we are going to look at now a farmer and what I see here is Paul teaching Timothy - **PATIENCE**.

Let's face it. Being a farmer is not a glamorous job; you work hard, and it takes time before the harvest comes and you see the fruit of your labor.

You have to work the soil. You have to plant the seed. You have to care for the land. You have to watch out for weeds that will choke the life out of the plant. You have to wait for the rain to come and help the plant to grow. And after all that comes the harvest.

It is not easy, and Paul puts this in perspective for us in regard to the Christian life.

Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 6:9-10, “**And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.**”

It is easy to grow weary as you serve the Lord. You expect fruit from your labor instantly. But that is not how it works. It takes time.

And James picks up on that in James 5:7-8 as he wrote, “**Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.**”

Don't give up, be like the farmer who tills the soil, plants the crops and then waits for the harvest down the road.

And yes, like one writer put it,

Many Christians' lives are like the farmer's. Although there may be occasional times of excitement and special satisfaction, the daily routine is often, in itself, unattractive and unrewarding. But whatever their day-to-day responsibilities may involve, all faithful believers are promised God's blessing and reward. We may be underpaid, treated unfairly by our boss or fellow employees, and misunderstood or unappreciated by fellow Christians. But Christ's reward to His faithful disciples is never deficient, never unfair, never late, and never omitted.

- John MacArthur, II Timothy 2

And yes, it is not easy, but, as James reminds us, “**. . . the coming of the Lord is at hand.**” Praise God for that! May we not lose sight of that fact!

Now I think the point that Paul is making here is that before Timothy can give spiritual food to the congregation, the Word of God, he must first partake of it himself! And I believe the same is true for every one of us. He says, “**The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops.**” II Timothy 2:6.

Think of it like this. How can we give what we ourselves don't possess?

We can't!

If you are not being fed the Word of God, partaking of the Word of God, then how can you feed others, as I have said?

Again, you will not be able to!

I know you may not believe this, but when I prepare these messages, I think I get more out of them than you do.

Why do I say that?

Because I am preparing and what I am sharing is only a small part of what the Lord was showing me as I studied His Word.

And thus, for me, for all of us, we must learn to be *PATIENT*.

Yes, it is work as a pastor pours his heart, his life into people, but it takes time. The fruit will come.

I also know that God's Word is living, and it is powerful and the only thing that can stop it from working in you is *YOU!*

As you read God's Word be open to what the Holy Spirit is showing you. Don't say, “*I wish so and so would read this. They really need to hear what God is saying regarding their lifestyle!*”

As true as that may be, you are the one who is reading it and thus, God is speaking to you!

Maybe you don't think God is speaking to you. Maybe you can't hear God.

Here is the solution. When you read the Word of God read it out loud and as you do you will be hearing the voice of God showing you what you need to do!

But it is hard to have patience.

Maybe you heard the story of the salesman who was on a train. It was an old train, and it was slowly crawling, you might say, through the countryside.

Then, all of a sudden it came to a complete stop!

The only person on this train, besides those working on the train, was a salesman. And as the train stopped, he asked the conductor what the problem was, why it had stopped.

The conductor said to the man, "***Nothing to be concerned about, sir. There is a cow on the tracks.***"

About ten minutes went by and the train slowly began to creep along the tracks, and it only went about 1 mile and then, once again, it stopped!

The conductor told the salesman not to worry, "***This is just another brief delay! Don't worry, we will be moving once again very shortly.***"

Well, at this point the salesman was very frustrated, and he said to the conductor, "***What is it this time? Did we catch up to the cow again?***"

Patience, Lord, give it to me and give it to me now! We laugh at that but how true it often is. We are in a hurry and God is always on time!

So what we see here is that the key to the hardworking farmer is **PATIENCE!**

Listen to how Paul sums this all up for us in II Timothy 2:7 as we look at – **BE WISE!**

VERSE 7

As Paul opens up this verse, he uses the word “**consider**” and in the Greek it is a command, not a suggestion.

Paul is not just encouraging Timothy; he is commanding Timothy to constantly remember and ponder these principles!

Why is that so important?

Because they are essential to fruitful and faithful ministry and for that matter, they are essential for every Christian. In other words, it will show our – **CHRISTIAN IDENTITY!**

Let me paraphrase what Paul is saying to Timothy here.

He is saying, “*Son, as I have shared with you what the Lord has given to me, think these things over and ponder them. Examine your own life and ask yourself if you are a strong Christian, a spiritual Christian, a mature Christian. Examine yourself and see for the Lord will give you the understanding you need if you are listening to Him. Yes, it is not going to be easy but stand strong in the Lord and apply these things to your life so that you can grow and when people look at you, they will see a beautiful picture of Christ!*”

Folks let’s face it. The Christian life is not easy. If it was, we would not need Jesus. But we need Him more than ever.

You see,

There are certain things the spiritual Christian has to endure, such as suffering for the faith.

There are certain things he has to avoid, such as becoming entangled with the affairs of the world.

There are certain mandates he has to obey, namely, the commands of his Lord.

There are certain things he has to do, including tasks that seem mundane and ordinary.

And, just as surely, there are things he will be given to enjoy, the victory and the rewards of a dedicated, selfless, and disciplined life.

Through His apostle, the Lord assures us: “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).

- John MacArthur, II Timothy 2

Again, ***CONSIDER THESE THINGS!***

Remember how Paul explained the Christian life with three illustrations. He spoke of the life of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer and in each of them, there is the idea of persevering until the work is completed!

- *The soldier who stops fighting before the battle is finished will never see victory.*
- *The athlete who stops running before the race is over will never win the race.*
- *The farmer who stops working before the harvest is complete will never see the fruit of his crops.*

It is as C. K. Barrett wrote, as he sums this up for us, ***“Beyond warfare is victory, beyond the athlete’s effort is the prize, and beyond the agricultural labor is the crop.”***

So, as Paul encouraged Timothy to **“be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”**

As he told Timothy to take those things that he had taught Timothy and to **“commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”**

He then admonishes Timothy to be like . . .

- A **SOLDIER** who is **FOCUSED** on the work his commanding officer has given to him.
- A **ATHLETE** who is **OBEDIENT** to the rules that are before him.
- A **FARMER** who works hard and is **PATIENT**, waiting for the harvest to come in.

Next week we will continue looking at our **CHRISTIAN IDENTITY!**

But as I close this morning, I will leave you with this. Paul said, “**Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.**” II Timothy 2:7.