

Our Mission as Good Soldiers of Christ

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[0:00] Well, good morning. It's always our joy to welcome David and Nicky Vaughan back from France and it's a special treat to have Michelle with us this year just having graduated from their equivalent of our high school and having place to, is that right?

Okay, I didn't want to demean your education and we'll be going to the nice city of Nice, France for her further education.

So David's going to preach to us in this hour and the next and then give his report on France in the afternoon hour after our luncheon.

Let's turn to the Lord in prayer as we begin our Lord's Day together. Great God in heaven and Father, we thank you that you never change, that you are the same, Lord Jesus, yesterday, today, and forever.

But we do thank you that you do change us and that you have promised to change the world and the whole order of creation one day for your people. So we give you thanks and look forward to that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[1:18] We thank you for bringing David and Nicky and Michelle safely to us and we now look to you to come and to bless David as he ministers to us today, that he might know your presence and help with him and that we might know the blessing of meeting with you, our God, and having dealings with you as he ministers the word to us.

So we lift up our voice together and ask for help and we do so with thanksgiving that you are our God and you have deigned to live in us by your spirit.

So meet us now, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Good morning. Good to be with you again. If you would please turn to 2 Timothy chapter 2.

We'll read from verses 1 to 13. The apostle under inspiration says to Timothy, his co-laborer, You then, my child, be strengthened or be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

[2:43] No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say. For the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ. Risen from the dead. The offspring of David has preached in my gospel. For which I am suffering.

Bound with chains. As a criminal. But the word of God is not bound. 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. The saying is trustworthy for if we have died with him, we also live with him.

[3:44] If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he will also deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful.

For he cannot deny himself. So, for these few minutes together, we will be thinking about our mission as good soldiers of Christ Jesus.

It is getting more difficult to be a Christian in the United States, isn't it? and it will be getting more difficult. You've undoubtedly been warned, but it's ominous.

The same thing, of course, is happening all over the West, and it's good for us to turn our minds for a few moments to the fact that we are in a great war, and not just because of the way things are turning ethically in the Western world, but we are in a war, an invisible, cosmic, amazing war.

If you've seen The Lord of the Rings, that dark film, so stressful to watch it, you feel like you're on the edge of your seat for about hours.

[5:06] That is really nothing compared to the invisible realities that are going on all over the face of the Earth as an incredibly wicked kingdom of darkness strives to bring men to an eternal hell, and God works to bring and elect people to eternal glory.

Well, let's put ourselves under God's Word and think about what the message of our Lord is to us. It's Paul speaking to Timothy.

Timothy was a missionary. You're not a missionary, perhaps, and you may say, is this relevant to me? Am I a soldier? Paul says in this passage, share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. But we know, and you know from the rest of Scripture, that we're all soldiers.

Ephesians 6, remember? How we're all dressed in this armor. You perhaps remember our Lord's Word to the church in Smyrna. He said the one who, he's speaking to all the Christians in Smyrna, and says, the one who conquers, I will grant to sit on my throne just as I conquered and sit on my Father's throne.

[6:31] And to all Christians, there is a conquering which presupposes a war and an enemy. And so, I won't belabor that point, but we and you have been enlisted in the greatest war of all time.

A war that if we could see all that's going on, we would be trembling every moment. Now, it's a good war, and Paul calls Timothy a good soldier, share in suffering as a good soldier.

Today, people think that no war could be good, but there are good wars, because this is not a war to kill, but a war to save from death, to give eternal life.

And the way we win this war is not to make other people suffer, but it's to share in the suffering of Christ Jesus, and thereby bring salvation. It's to deliver men, and not to harm them.

They tell us that during World War II, which was a saving war also, wasn't it, as far as the Allies were concerned, and we think of what's an awful, horrible thing was happening as Hitler was taking over the world and bringing six million Jews to Holocaust and taking away freedom, and countries were being ravaged, and armies were overrunning regions and killing.

[8:05] We're told that even in this country, there were many young men who were living their lives, ordinary civilian lives. Some of them were frittering away their lives.

They were playing around. They were young men, but they were acting like children. They were playing games. And then Pearl Harbor happened. And many of these young men, even 18, 19 years old, were all of a sudden enlisted.

And they were brought into the war zone. And we learned that many of these young men, their lives completely changed.

And they began to live months and years of a life in which the stakes of what they were and what they did every day were beyond compare.

They knew that peoples and countries were depending upon them. And whether or not they were faithful and willing to suffer and even give their lives.

[9:15] Their whole regiment, their life might depend upon their actions in one battle. And so many of these men, they grew up in a day, so to speak.

They became different. And honestly, some of them passed from young men doing nothing to heroes. And they tell us that when they came back, some of them had a post-war trauma.

And part of that post-war trauma was that they had come into a life that was full of importance and meaning and urgency.

And when they got back to the United States, a lot of people who had not been there and didn't know this firsthand, they were playing dominoes.

They were living trivial lives, some of them. They had no idea what these young men had been through day after day. And so the soldiers could not share it with anyone.

[10:22] They didn't understand what it was to have life and death hanging upon you and your men day after day, week after week. And so some of these soldiers, they had a post-war trauma.

And they just wanted to find another soldier that they could be with and talk to and know what it is to live a life that's full of urgency and meaning and that life is not dominoes.

C.T. Studd was a man who understood that sometimes we have to leave ordinary life behind because there's a great war going on.

He was in the 1800s, the late 1800s, a great man. He was the captain of the Cambridge cricket team. Cricket was very important in England, which was the greatest empire of the world. He was on the all-star team of England that went to Australia and won the World Cup like the, would be like the World Series of baseball.

[11 : 31] He was twice named the best cricket player in England. He was very famous and he had basically the world at his feet.

And then his father came to Jesus Christ through a sermon of D.L. Moody. And then he and his brothers came to Jesus Christ. And he left England and joined Hudson Taylor's mission, the China Inland Mission.

He gave up everything, fame, fortune, everything that was laid before him. And he said, some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell.

I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. While in China, he inherited 25,000 pounds.

Today, that would be several million dollars. He promptly gave it all away, all of it. And so, the Salvation Army was able to send 50 missionaries to India with that money.

[12 : 38] George Mueller was able to build more places for orphans with that money. And D.L. Moody built a Bible institute that you can see today in Chicago called the Moody Bible Institute with the money that C.T. Studd gave him.

So he spent 10 years in China, almost died of typhoid fever. They had to carry him back to England. He recovered. He began to go around England and America to stir people up for missions.

He went back to China. And then, in about 1900, he went to India with his family for five and a half years to serve as a missionary there.

He had ill health again. He's so sick, so he has to return again to England. And while he's in England in 1908, in Liverpool, he sees a sign that says, Cannibals want missionaries.

Okay. We don't have to wonder why. And he decided to take up that challenge. His daughter, Edith, relates this.

[13 : 42] She says, Muslims were sweeping down over Africa making converts, and unless a chain of mission stations were made across the center of Africa, nothing else would stop them.

Father wanted to start the first mission in the middle of this chain, plum in the heart of Africa. And in my time in West Africa, I've met up with many, many, many, many churches.

In fact, I've been training 170 pastors in Burkina Faso, and all of them are the result of the mission that C.T. Studd started. The doctors, when he wanted to go to Africa, said, you are such a sick man, your body's a museum of diseases.

If you go, you'll die. Here's what the biography says. C.T. Studd says this later, the committee refused to let me go unless I promised not to go south of Khartoum in Sudan.

Through intimation they had received from the doctor that if I ventured south of Khartoum, I should never come back. On my refusing to give the promise, they declined to help me to go, withdrawing the funds necessary for such a purpose.

[14 : 56] His answer to the committee was this, gentlemen, God has called me to go and I will go. I will blaze the trail, though my grave may only become a stepping stone that younger men may follow.

He went, he did not die, he spent 20 years in Africa, and thousands of Africans came to Christ through his ministry. Why do I bring up C.T. Studd?

Because C.T. Studd made a statement that has been very important to me for many years and I think what Studd says is what Paul is saying to Timothy and what we also need to hear.

He said, God's ideal of a saint is not a man primarily concerned with his own sanctification. God's saint is 50% soldier.

Today we've recovered some wonderful teaching about delighting in God, desiring God, enjoying God. We're hearing constantly about this now, aren't we?

[15 : 58] And it's wonderful and it's true and it's good and if we don't do this, we'll make shipwreck of our Christian lives. But if we're not careful, that 50%, if it ever becomes all the Christian life means, we're in big trouble.

Because God's ideal of a saint is not a man or a woman who is primarily concerned with his own enjoyment of Jesus Christ. God's saint is 50% soldier.

When we lose this perspective, nothing can really recover us. Bible reading, good worship, good teaching, trying to enjoy Christ and enjoy his gospel.

Without this element, something is missing. interesting. And it's interesting as I was a young Christian and had been in some very good churches and had been blessed in these churches, I then came to and came back to a town and found a church that was not only had good teaching and reverent, joyful worship and all of these sort of things, but this church was tremendously preoccupied with reaching the unreached in the world.

And when I got there and saw the excitement and the urgency and the bigness of the vision of this church, it was like a church that was embracing the world in their arms.

[17:42] There was something huge about it, enormous. And my idea of the Christian life just went like this. But, so the question I want to ask you is, do we not need to constantly be reminded of and renew in our minds the fact that we are 50% soldiers?

Do hymns like this resonate with us today or have they been sort of relegated to the past? Rise up, O men of God, have done with lesser things. Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the king of kings.

Rise up, O men of God, in one united throng. Bring in the day of brotherhood and end the night of wrong. Now, let me open a little parenthesis because I don't want you to misunderstand.

we are in a great cosmic war. But, first of all, not all of us are on the front lines. Timothy was. Being a soldier of Jesus Christ does not mean the same thing for everyone. Paul seems like every day he was being shipwrecked or bound in chains or whatever.

[19:00] And that's the place of soldiers on the front line. But, during the second world war there were people back in the United States where no battles were fought.

And, they were working in their normal jobs. And, they were raising their children. But, I guarantee you when they came home from work, they sat by that radio and with the greatest intentness they listened to the latest news.

Because, they were living the war. Weren't they? And, here's this young woman when she gets off of work or has her free time, what she's doing. She's in that gymnasium somewhere with some other women and they're sewing uniforms for the soldiers.

Or, they're writing letters. Or, they're doing what they can. So, it means different things for different people. Another thing we must say about this is it's a strange war that we're in.

Because, it's a cosmic and heavenly and divine war, we're soldiers but we're also sheep of the shepherd and he's leading us to lie down in green pastures and he's leading us beside quiet waters and he's restoring our souls.

[20:13] But, in the same psalm, the psalm 23, it says he sets a table for us in the midst of our enemies. There's a war going on also.

And so, we're being refreshed and we're resting in Christ at times and we feel like we're halfway in heaven sometimes and then at other times we're battling with all our hearts in prayer for others and this sort of thing.

So, I want you to get the whole balance. Stud didn't say we're only soldiers. You can't be intense all the time, can you? But, we are soldiers.

And we come home and we sit by the radio or we come to church and we say, what's the latest news about the mission of God and about those who are being rescued and saved and pulled out of the fire?

How's it going? And what can we do? So, as long as we have the balance, we can go on to the next point. Very quickly. So, I've just said, and this was the longest point, that we are, and you are, we've all been enlisted and we are soldiers.

[21:22] And we must never let this get away from us. Every day, we must remember that this is going on and we're part of it. And it's a great privilege.

The men who were in the war, they had great fears, but they felt that this was a mighty noble, the most noble thing they'd ever done. The resources.

Okay, we've been enlisted, but secondly, the resources. you might say to me, Pastor, I'm just not at all, you know, this share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus and bound with chains and all the rest of the I'm just so ordinary a Christian.

But do you remember who Timothy was? Timothy was Mr. Fearful. Paul's always having to reassure him. He says, do not be ashamed of me or of my chains, but suffer with me according to the power of God.

He's saying, I know you're a Christian. I know your grandmother and your mother were, and I'm sure that you have faith because he's always doubting that he has faith. And he even has to write, Paul has to write the Corinthians when he sends Timothy there and get a letter before Timothy gets there.

[22:42] And he says, when Timothy arrives, let him be among you without fear because he's doing the work of the Lord as I am. The man's so fearful that he's got to say to the church, don't scare him when he gets there.

That's the sort of guy that Paul says, share in suffering with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. I'm riding you bound in chains and you might follow me.

Well, how could that be? Well, it's simply a matter of the resources. And in the beginning, Paul says to Timothy, he says, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Be strong. Not in your strength. Spurgeon said, one man says, I will do what I can. Any fool can do that.

The one who believes in Christ does what he cannot, attempts the impossible, and achieves it. And so, we do not live according to what we are.

[23:44] We live according to what Christ can make us. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And he tells him later on in verse 8, remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the offspring of David according to my gospel.

And undoubtedly, partly that's because he wants Timothy and you to remember that we are in union with the risen and reigning Lord, the cosmically reigning Lord who said all authority in heaven, on earth, and in all the spiritual realm belongs to me.

Now go, I am with you to the end of the age. I don't want to say anything more about that, but simply that we must not allow Satan to make us think that we are unable to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ in the part of the war where God has placed you.

In fact, the truth is you're already acting as soldiers and you are much more dangerous to Satan than you even realize. You are a good soldier and you are conquering and you can conquer even more.

The next point is the stakes. We're enlisted. We have these resources as soldiers, but the stakes. What is at stake? in verse 8 he says, remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the offspring of David is preached in my gospel for which I'm suffering, bound with chains.

[25:19] We can see him there as a criminal, but the word of God is not bound. Therefore, I endure everything. And the everything for Paul, remember how amazing it is.

I endure everything. He's been stoned. He's been beaten. He's been half dead. He probably died and was resurrected one time. At least some scholars think so, when he went to the third heaven. And he's imprisoned. He's in danger from criminals and from the Jews and from the Gentiles. And he's before kings and all of this. But I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Now, we may wonder why these young men in World War II were so changed. What changed them? So that they became valiant heroes? Well, part of what changed them was the stakes. When they understood and realized that the very fabric of Western society, the freedom, the life of their own loved ones was in danger.

[26:34] And they got to the battlefield and saw the ravages. Then they realized it's time to stop playing games. Stud was not always like we've heard he was just now.

In fact, not at all. He had a great change in his life. He said this, I once had another religion, mincing, lisping, bated breath, proper, hunting the Bible for hidden truths, but no obedience, no sacrifice.

Then came the change. The real thing came before me. Soft speech became crude salt. The parlor game became, with the nurses, became real cricket on the public ground.

Words became deeds. The commands of Christ became not merely Sunday recitations, but battle calls to be obeyed unless one would lose one's self-respect. How did that happen?

Well, strangely enough, by something he read that was written by an atheist. And here it is. This atheist said, did I firmly believe, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another?

[27:48] religion would mean to me everything. I would cast away earthly enjoyment as dross, earthly cares as follies, earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity.

Religion would be my first waking thought and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I would labor in its cause alone. I would take thought for the morrow of eternity only.

I would esteem one soul gain for heaven worth a life of suffering. Earthly consequences should never stay my hand nor seal my lips. And he goes on to say, I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season.

And my text would be, what shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul? well, I don't agree with everything in there because we who are Christians know that you can't live quite that.

Life can't quite be just only. He's almost taken the humanity out of humans. But nevertheless, the essential thing that he says is true. We never forget.

[29:02] We never forget his soldiers. Do you know that soldiers even play cards? They write to their girlfriends. They sleep. They're not on the front all the time, but they never forget.

They never forget. And if they're good soldiers, they're waiting for the time when their furlough will be over and they can go help again. A little illustration about the stakes and how we need to keep them before us.

And remember that, as Paul says, that there are people that need salvation and eternal glory or eternal hell is at stake.

Paul's thinking about this. Salvation, saving them out of this eternal hell and bringing them to eternal glory. The stakes.

You may remember that we told you that when Nikki and I were leaving for France, our visa was refused. A great surprise because we'd already left our apartment, packed all our belongings up.

[30:12] It was in a big container ready to be shipped to France and we were living with my parents just for a few weeks and we were set to go. And normally the visa was automatic because I was asking for a student visa to study the first year at the University of Dijon.

And it should not have happened because these student visas were just easy to get. So for days we were in quite a quandary. What is the Lord doing?

We were confused. We were praying. We were talking. And then one day I said let's go down to the basement where mom has her old piano and sing some hymns to encourage ourselves. And so there was a Methodist hymnal there and we didn't know the hymns in this hymnal and we turned to one and Nikki played it and we sang it and here's what it said and it changed our direction.

Awake my soul. Stretch every nerve and press with vigor on. A heavenly race demands thy zeal and an immortal crown.

A cloud of witnesses around hold thee in full survey. Forget the steps already trod and onward urge thy way. Do you remember it?

[31:26] We were so stirred both of us that we looked at each other and I said honey we've got to go. So we went anyway without a visa.

And I can't tell you the story of as tourists we could be there for three months but we left France we went to the embassy in London and we and we said I presented my papers and he said we can't serve you here you're an American we're the French embassy in London we serve British citizens but wait just a minute he went back and he came back and he said you're really lucky everyone's in a great mood this morning here's your visa but what I wanted to say was what gave us the courage to say we're going to do something crazy we're going to leave anyway and go was the stakes a heavenly race demands thy zeal and an immortal crown when Paul says that he is doing everything for the sake of the elect and I'm going to put a couple of points together because I want to end but we see that he says in this verse

I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory I think this they also should ring in our ears Paul's saved he has eternal glory he's even seen it he's been to the third heaven and seen things that he's not allowed to say on earth he has it but he's thinking of they also isn't it wonderful you see in a soldier is someone who's sacrificing his life for someone else and the men who went up on Normandy and drove the Normandy beach and you see the cemeteries in Normandy are incredible there are thousands of plots just row and row and these men they knew when they embarked they knew when their feet touched that water and they went up and the

German soldiers were lined with their big guns they knew this is not for me this is for them on the other side but isn't it wonderful and eternal glory Paul sees the elect but he sees the elect of all he

sees a huge multitude and he sees Habakkuk saying the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea and it's something so huge and magnificent that they also is immense it's the love of God for multitudes that no man can count and I sort of think of it like this when I was in my first year at college I have a fellow two rooms down named Ray who was a beautiful singer and guitarist and I would like to go down and ask him to play some of my favorite songs

I love to hear him play but he frustrated me to death because he would never finish a song have you met some guitar players like that they'll start playing this thing and you're just getting into it and then they change to something else and I kept saying Ray play the whole thing and you know you never could get the full thing of what a good singer and guitarist Ray was unless he'll play the whole song but you see Paul is thinking of the whole song you know I've been saved but that's just one note I want to see my Jesus unfold his whole love I want to see him bring the multitudes in they also all of them and this is our war that Christ might unfold the greatness of his grace and his love and the victory and triumph of love and grace over sin and evil that's what we're about and it's wonderful well the last thing that I'll say is simply that

[35 : 52] Paul speaks about some obstacles he gives three but I only want to mention one he says in verse 4 no soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please please the one who enlisted him Timothy must mustn't get caught up into things that will make him forget that he's a soldier that there's a war now isn't that the problem in American churches you see we live in a society of entertainment don't we more than this is something different than in other ages and in other places others didn't have this temptation so much but you know just with YouTube you can spend your whole life entertaining yourself you can spend a thousand lives and it's so interesting there's such funny and amazing stuff on there and we're just flooded with distractions and entertainment and we can so easily get ourselves tangled up in things that are like civilian pursuits to the soldier

I don't know what it would be for you is it making or spending money or is it sports or is it trivial pursuits is it entertainment and none of those things are bad in and of themselves and you need to keep doing those things there's a difference between using a rope to climb a mountain and being entangled in a rope you see in the first case you've got the rope in the second case the rope's got you and what I'm saying is to be a soldier you mustn't get so entangled into whatever it is is this a video game did you know that 183 million people in America play video games for at least one hour a day and 5 million people in America are playing video games for 40 hours a week that's a full time job and most of them are our young men and I want to say brethren let's quit wasting our lives you're entangled but you are a soldier you're made to be a noble man

I know it's fun to have a pretend war and to save pretend people on a screen but my goodness there's a real one out there and we need you rise up oh men of God and have done with lesser things