

## 2 Timothy 2:8-13 — The Reward Is Worth The Sacrifice

**February 14, 2021**

Happy Valentine's Day! If you are married or have someone special in your life, I hope you are able to make him or her feel special today. If you are watching online, I need your help. I am still working on a Valentine's gift for Cindy. If you are watching on Facebook or YouTube, share your Valentine's Day ideas with me in the comments section of the Livestream feed. I will choose one of your ideas and tell you how it went over next week. Thanks in advance for the help!

This week, while working on ideas to make Cindy feel special, I checked the Internet to find crazy things people have done for love. There were plenty of crazy examples I can't share. Here is one I can share.

One woman had a back-to-nature, tree-hugging boyfriend who was a committed vegan. When he proposed, he told his girlfriend he would only propose if she agreed to join him in veganism for life! Unbelievably, she sacrificed a lifetime of joy with steak and hamburgers for a boyfriend! Thankfully, my wife was not that way. It would have made my marriage proposal difficult if I had to choose between a lifetime of Cindy and a lifetime of hamburgers! The point is, people will make great sacrifices for love. People do it because love is worth the sacrifice!

This morning, as we continue our study in 2 Timothy, Paul's words have a similar theme. When it comes to following Jesus, sacrifices for Jesus, and suffering because we share about Jesus, the reward is worth the sacrifice.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2. While you are turning, let me take a moment to get those of you who are new up to speed with our study of 2 Timothy.

The letter of 2 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul as he languished in the Mamertine Prison in Rome. Paul's was arrested for being an outspoken Christian. He had already been condemned for the crime of following Jesus and was to soon be executed. Before his death, he wrote this letter to Timothy. Timothy was a young pastor leading a large, problem-filled church in the city of Ephesus. The church of Ephesus didn't respect Timothy because of his youth. The church of Ephesus was also divided and riddled with infighting. Timothy's problems were not limited to the church in Ephesus. After Paul's arrest, many of the Christians in Asia stopped following him because they didn't want to be arrested, imprisoned, and executed like him. They weren't just abandoning Paul, they were abandoning the gospel message.

Even worse than the problem in the church of Ephesus and Christians in Asia was the opposition of Roman society against Christians. In previous studies, I have talked about the persecution of Christians in Roman society but haven't taken the time to develop that point. Let me take a few minutes to give you that background.

It was July 19, A.D. 64, when Nero lit the great fire of Rome. It burned for six days and seven nights, destroying most of the city. Ancient historians consistently blame Nero for the fire as his soldiers were seen lighting the flames and relighting the flames when the citizens were able to put them out. Why was Nero burning down their capital city? He wanted to rebuilt the city to his own liking.

The fire left the people of the city decimated. The ancient historian Tacitus described those who were left alive as hopeless wretches dispossessed of their homes who had many of their family members burned to a crisp. The people that were left were destitute and starving. If you think members of Congress were infuriated when the Capitol was stormed a few weeks ago, that was nothing compared to the anger of the Roman people. To direct the rage of the people away from himself, Nero blamed Christians for the fire. As a result, there was empire-wide persecution of Christian. That is what led to Paul's arrest, imprisonment, and execution for nothing more than being an outspoken Christian. The same thing would most likely happen to Timothy and other Christian leaders in the years that followed.

For obvious reasons, Timothy shifted to self-preservation mode. He took a low-profile stance for Jesus. He wanted to save his skin. He wanted to get his name off the grid. When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, he encouraged Timothy to not hide Jesus. He encouraged him to be bold and outspoken for Jesus all the way to the end of his life.

Last week, Paul told Timothy how he needed to think of his job as the pastor in Ephesus. He need think of himself as a soldier in battle. He needed to expect opposition. He needed to expect people to shoot at him. Paul also told Timothy to think of himself as an athlete. Timothy was not just marking time in his life. Like an athlete in competition, he was to strive to do his absolute best for Jesus in this life. He was to remember that one day he would stand before Jesus and be rewarded by Jesus for how he lived. Lastly, Paul told Timothy, and he told

us, to think of himself as a farmer. A farmer does a lot of hard work behind the scenes. A farmer does not have the glory of instant results. The farmer doesn't get his paycheck until he has worked long hours. The harvest Timothy was working for was the next generation of believers.

This morning, we move from Paul telling Timothy to think of himself as a soldier, athlete, and farmer, to verses 8-13 where Paul motivated Timothy to follow Jesus no matter the sacrifice. Let's see what Paul said.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. 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 will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself. 2 Timothy 2:8–13 (ESV)

Paul told Timothy, and us, we must remember the reward for boldly speaking about Jesus is always worth the sacrifices we experience when we talk about Jesus. Paul gave Timothy, and us, four things we need to remember when following Jesus is hard. Paul said these things to motivate Timothy, and they will motivate us, to be bold for Jesus when it was costly to speak about Jesus.

### **Remember the identity of the Jesus we serve.**

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel... 2 Timothy 2:8 (ESV)

Paul told Timothy to remember the identity of the Jesus we serve. The privilege of serving Jesus was the driving motivation in Paul's heart and it is to be the driving motivation in our hearts. If we see ourselves as privileged to serve Jesus and to represent Jesus to the world, we will be bolder, more courageous, and more outspoken for Jesus.

The honest truth is that most of us are self-consumed. We think about ourselves and our own skin before anything else in this world. We want to avoid conflict. We want to avoid hurting people's feelings. Most of us have a burning desire to be liked. That is why we don't want to say or do anything that offends other people.

Imagine you are at a family gathering and some of your relatives don't know Jesus. The perfect opportunity presents itself to be able to share the good news of Jesus and how Jesus changed your life. Many of us won't say anything. We won't take advantage of that opportunity because we want to preserve our reputation. We don't want our relatives making fun of us for talking about religion and for being a Bible thumper. That is why we stay quiet about Jesus when there is a perfect opportunity to speak about Jesus. This week, as I was reading through the New Testament in my personal Bible study I ran across these verses in Acts that remind us how boldly and fearlessly Paul spoke about Jesus.

...serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 20:19–21 (ESV)

How was Paul able to face the plots of the Jews who multiple times tried to take his life in the book of Acts? Why did Paul keep talking about Jesus even when he knew it would lead to assassination attempts on his life? He continued to speak boldly for Jesus because he never lost sight of the identity of Jesus and how privileged he was to represent Jesus to the lost world around him. Let me give you a modern example.

Do you remember when Kayleigh McEnany took over as press secretary for President Trump? That was a high pressure job. That was a thankless job. She left her newborn child behind during the week. She was constantly attacked by reporters and undermined by the media. It felt like everyone was against her. Why did she take the job? The President of the United States asked her to serve her country. It was a privilege to serve the president. It was an honor to serve the president so she was willing to endure insults, mocking, and even death threats for the privilege and honor of serving the president.

We are in a similar position. We serve as the press secretaries representing someone far greater than the President of the United States to the world. We have the honor of speaking for Jesus and representing the gospel. At times, will that be costly? Yes. Will we be mocked and insulted for Jesus? Yes. When we are attacked for speaking about Jesus, we must remember it is a privilege to be the ones chosen by God to represent the gospel to the world. God could have chosen angels, but instead he chose us.

To emphasize the greatness of Jesus, Paul reminded us of some of the things that make Jesus so great. He rose from the dead. Jesus did what only God can do. He died and conquered death, rising from the dead. You think serving the President of the United States is an honor that would motivate you? Remember we are serving someone who has done something no one else in history has done. Only Jesus rose from the dead and conquered death. Representing Jesus is pretty special!

Representing Jesus is not like going door to door to sell Mary Kay or essential oils, or Shaklee. God chose us to represent him and his incredible saving grace to the world.

Think about what the Bible says about the greatness of Jesus.

And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. Acts 10:42 (ESV)

If you think serving the president of our country is impressive, serving Jesus is more impressive. He is the one who will judge the living and the dead. When people tell us to be silent about Jesus, remember who we represent, the one who conquered death.

Paul also told us Jesus is the offspring of David. What does that mean? This speaks of Jesus' humanity and his kingliness. Jesus is not distant from us. Jesus is God who became one of us. If you think serving President Biden would be an important position, serving Jesus is serving the one the Bible says is the king who is the rightful ruler of our planet and all of history.

So Paul said to Timothy, and to us, be motivated to represent Jesus. Don't be afraid to represent Jesus. Is there a price to represent Jesus? Yes. Some people will mock us. The honor of representing the mighty Son of God to the world makes the reward worth the sacrifice.

The next time you are at work and you are afraid to bring Jesus into a conversation, remember the identity of the Jesus you serve. The next time your friends at school are going to a party and they are making fun of you for not joining them, remember of the identity of the Jesus you serve. The next time society threatens us, or mocks us, remember the identity of the Jesus we serve.

If Jesus suffered to share the gospel, we can expect to suffer when we share the gospel.

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.” Matthew 10:24–25 (ESV)

If the world hated Jesus, expect the world will hate us. Being hated for the sake of the gospel message is a normal thing. It is to be expected in life. The thing to remember when the world hates us for speaking about Jesus is that we are on the same path as Jesus. What path did Jesus walk? Jesus experienced suffering in this life but glory in the next life. Jesus died for the gospel in this life but he was exalted as king in the next life. Jesus suffered before he was glorified. Jesus was humiliated before he was crowned. Jesus died before he rose. Jesus knew sorrow before he knew joy. Jesus knew persecution before exaltation. Like Jesus, we will experience suffering in this life for being faithful to the gospel but will be rewarded in the next life.

Why do we think that if we live faithfully for Christ in this world, we will escape suffering for Christ in this world? The opposite is true. We are no better than Jesus. If the world hated Jesus, the world will hate us the more we become like Jesus. The thing we must remember when we are mocked for Jesus is we follow the same path as Jesus. Suffering and sacrifice for Jesus now, reward from Jesus later.

Do not buy the prosperity gospel garbage that says God wants everybody happy, rich, healed and to have no problems in life. Who was the most righteous man in the New Testament? Jesus. How did the prosperity gospel work for him?



They killed him because he was righteous. Who was the most righteous man in the Old Testament? Job. The Bible says he was the most righteous man on the face of the earth. How did the prosperity gospel work for him? Not well. He suffered incredibly because he was a righteous man. Remember we should expect suffering if we are faithful to Jesus and speak about Jesus in this life. Glory comes later when we are with Jesus.

If we tell our friends about Jesus at school, and if we invite our friends from the YMCA to church, and if we refuse to be dishonest about the numbers when our bosses ask us to cook the books or bend the truth, expect we will suffer for Jesus. Expect we may not get job promotions. Expect we will not be invited out to lunch with others from the office. Expect it. Embrace it. Don't try to avoid it. Suffering for Christ comes in this life. Rewards from Christ comes in the next life.

### **Jesus models for us how to handle suffering for the gospel.**

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

We will not just find ourselves suffering like Jesus, but Jesus is the model we are to follow when it comes to how to handle suffering for speaking about Jesus and sharing the gospel.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:22–23 (ESV)

How do we handle people who tell us to be quiet when we tell people about God's amazing love for them and the exclusivity of God's plan to save them. We accept it and keep moving, just like Jesus did. We don't try to get even with people. We don't get nasty with people. We don't get bitter or unforgiving

toward people. We accept the suffering that comes our way and focus on the finish line, the day we will be with Jesus in heaven and be rewarded for how we lived.

...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

The way Jesus handled all the mocking, suffering, and torture of the cross and all the hatred of the vile men who were filled with glee to see Jesus suffer as he died was he kept thinking of heaven. He kept thinking of being rewarded by God the Father for his faithfulness. The same is true for us. When it feels like serving as a soldier of Christ is too hard because people are constantly shooting at us and everyone is against us, when it feels too hard to follow Christ and too costly to be bold for Christ, remember the day we will be richly rewarded in heaven for our boldness. This life is only the warmup. How we live now will determine the way we are rewarded then.

**Remember the life-changing power of the gospel message.**

...for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! 2 Timothy 2:9 (ESV)

Paul told Timothy it was worth suffering for Jesus. He said it was even worth being treated like a criminal because he boldly shared the gospel. As we already learned early in this series, Paul was imprisoned in the Mamertine Prison in Rome. He was in a pit deep underground that was only accessible by a manhole-sized opening at the top. There were no bathroom facilities. Food was occasionally dropped down the hole. It was pitch black. There were as many as 30 men in this 20-foot-wide space. It was disgusting. It was putrid. The men in

this pit were not just any men. They were the worst of men. Paul said he was bound in chains as a criminal. That word criminal is a very graphic word in Greek. It means the worst possible criminals. These were thieves, traitors, or murderers. It is the same word used in Luke 23 to describe the criminals that hung on the left and right side of Jesus when he died. They were guilty of insurrection and murder.

Paul said that because of Jesus he was being treated not as a white collar criminal but as the worst kind of criminal. Implied in what Paul said is, "If Jesus was treated like a terrible criminal and I am being treated like a terrible criminal, Timothy, if you faithfully speak the gospel, it is only a matter of time until you are treated as a terrible criminal too. Expect it."

Some people would say, "Paul, let me give you advice. It is your fault you are in jail. Don't you know Nero hates Christians and he is on a rampage against them? Now it the time you should soften your message. Now it the time you should stop being so public about your faith. Stop telling people openly and publicly about Jesus. Stop telling people that apart from Jesus, everyone will spend eternity in the lake of fire. Stop telling people there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Paul, you need to go undercover for Jesus at this time. You need to be quiet about Jesus at this time. After things blow over and Nero is gone, then you can speak about Jesus again. Right now, save your skin. Be quiet!

"Paul, don't you realize that by being put in prison, you can't tell people about Jesus. If you were just less outspoken about Jesus, you would be around the future to tell more people about Jesus."

Paul had an answer to those who encouraged him to be quiet. He said, "The Word of God is not bound." There is never justification for softening the gospel message. There is never justification for compromising the gospel message. There is never justification for cowering in fear and being afraid to speak the gospel message.

Paul said that even if he was put in jail, it was worth speaking the gospel about Jesus. Even if they put Paul in jail, they could not stop the life-changing power of the gospel message he spoke that God uses to change lives. You can put a person in jail but you cannot put the life-changing power of the gospel message in jail.

In Rome, there are catacombs. Romans typically burned bodies after they died. Christians began burying bodies out of respect for the body. Burning a body symbolized the fires of hell. Burying a body symbolized sleeping in the dust of the earth until Jesus returns, when he says our names and the very same bodies that died will rise from the dead. As early Christians in Rome ran out of graveyard space on the top of ground, they began digging below ground, creating the catacombs. There are 600 miles of catacombs in Rome. Ten generations of Christians are buried in the catacombs. Estimates claim there are between 2 and 4 million Christians that were buried in the catacombs over a 300-year period. The bodies were put in holes in the wall. Those holes were sealed, and many times an inscription was put on the tomb, just as we put a message on a tombstone. One famous grave in the catacombs has the words of this verse on it. "The word of God is not bound." The message is that you can jail me, you can kill

me, but you cannot stop the gospel message shared by me. The life-changing power of the Word of God cannot be bound! The fact of our gathering in worship this morning is evidence of that truth.

Another example of this is the church in China. In 1949, the church in China was approximately 700,000 Christians. That may sound like a lot but that is nothing compared to the population of the country. In the 1950s, the communist revolution began. Almost 30 million died; many of China's Christians were killed. For more than 70 years the church in China has been underground as the communist government continues its efforts to extinguish the church. It wants everyone to worship the state. How well has its attempt to bind the word of God gone? In 2018, it was estimated that the underground church in China has grown to 234 million people. There are more underground Chinese Christians than there are aboveground American Christians. There are more Chinese Christians than there are members of the Chinese Communist Party.

How did this happen when the Chinese government jails and kills Christians as it attempts to extinguish the church? The Word of God is not bound. They could lock up Paul, but the Word of God still made progress. Our government can lock us up and make our culture opposed to the gospel, but the Word of God will still make progress. That is why we never need to be afraid to speak it. Even if we are jailed and killed for Jesus, the life changing Word of God we have spoken will continue to live on, being shared and changing lives.

So what do we have to fear? When we speak about Jesus, we know we will get resistance. The Bible promises us the more clearly we speak about

Jesus, and invite people to trust in Jesus, the more resistance we will receive. If we are so bold for Jesus that we are locked up or killed for Jesus, that is OK. You can lock up Christians, but you can't lock up the power of the gospel message they share. Don't worry about being too bold for Jesus that you pay a price for it. One day we will be dead and gone anyway. What will remain is the legacy of the gospel we shared and the power of the gospel message we spoke.

**Remember the significance of the task God gave.**

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. 2 Timothy 2:10 (ESV)

You ask Paul, "Why do you endure all this. Why do you choose to endure beatings, floggings, stoning, and brutal imprisonments all because you tell people the truth about Jesus?" Paul said he went through all this for the sake of the elect. This is where things get interesting because the topic of election.

We covered election a few weeks ago. As we have seen, God identifies people, even before the creation of the world, that he chose to put together with Jesus, his son. They are the elect. When they hear the good news of Jesus, their election in eternity past manifests itself in the present when they trust in the good news of Jesus and are born again.

Some people would immediately say to Paul, "Why put your life on the line to tell the elect about Jesus? If they are elect, isn't it God's responsibility to save them?" They would tell Paul to say to God, "I don't need to get involved. These people are your elect. It is your responsibility to save them. It is not my responsibility to put my neck on the line." Some people misunderstand election. They take it as an excuse to avoid evangelism. They take it as an excuse to

avoid speaking about Jesus. They claim that whoever is going to be saved will be saved because they are elect so we don't need to do anything. Why worry about telling them about Jesus? If they are elect, God will bring them to Jesus.

That is the wrong way to think about the doctrine of election. Election is not a reason to not tell people about Jesus. It is the encouragement we need so that we know when we speak about Jesus, some people are guaranteed to respond. They respond not because of the slickness of our gospel presentation, but they respond because they were elect in eternity past so when they hear the good news of Jesus in the present, the Holy Spirit leads them to repentance and trust as they are born again.

Paul didn't feel he had a responsibility to save people. That is God's job. He had a responsibility to present the good news of Jesus and God would bring about the results! Paul cannot think of a better thing to do with his life than to be the instrument God used to share the gospel message with people and watch God take that message and change their lives. Think of a sea of drowning victims in front of you. What is the best thing you can do with your life beside throw them the life preservers they need to live? Would you rather do your taxes while they die? Would you rather calculate a spreadsheet while they die? There is nothing better to do in life than to be the instrument God uses to share the life-changing and life-saving gospel message to those who are dying and desperately need to hear it.

Look how we see the issues of God's elect from eternity past coming to saving faith when hearing the gospel message as we look at Paul preaching the gospel in the city of Corinth in the book of Acts.

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. Acts 18:9–11 (ESV)

"Paul, I have a lot of elect people in Corinth who are chosen from eternity past to be saved by my son. That salvation won't be realized until they hear the good news of Jesus from your lips. Stay in town and keep talking about Jesus. You have the privilege of being the instrument I will use to bring the saving gospel message to the elect."

You say, what happens if there are elect people in my community and I don't tell them about Jesus? How does God work his plan and bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus. The answer is simple. If the people of CrossWinds Church are not faithfully sharing the gospel and reaching people with Jesus, God will bring the elect to another church where they will hear about Jesus. We simply need to ask ourselves, if God has elect in our community that he wants to save, can he bring them to CrossWinds Church so they will have the gospel and be saved?

What are you doing with your life? What is your highest goal? Is it just to move up the corporate ladder? Is it just to get a higher paying job? Is it to make more money? Is it to buy a bigger house? Those are not necessarily bad things, but they are not the best thing we can do with our lives. Anchor in your mind that there is nothing more significant we can do with our lives than to speak the



gospel message to people who desperately need to hear it. That is the only way they will be saved. This is why Paul said, "I don't care how hard you beat me. I don't care how many times you jail me. I don't care how many times people laugh at me. The privilege of sharing the gospel message and watching the lives of the elect be changed by the gospel message is worth the sacrifice."

So this week, when you are working hard in the office for a paycheck, remember that is an important thing you can do with your life but it is not the most important thing you can do with your life. Find a way to share the gospel and reach people with Jesus.

### **Remember the reward God promises.**

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

Paul began by giving us a trustworthy saying. What is a trustworthy saying? By the time Paul wrote this letter, the church began to develop creeds. At this point, creeds were simple sayings that crystalized basic apostolic teaching. Paul referred to one of the early creeds that everyone knew. The parallelism of the creed means it was probably a little song that was sung because it has rhythm.

At a time in history where one might suffer or die for Christ if one spoke about Christ, this little creed was an encouragement to many. It compares how we live in this life with what our experience will be in the next life.

### **If we die for Christ, we will live with Christ.**

If we die as martyrs, we will live with Jesus for eternity. Losing our lives in this world is a guaranteed way to make sure we will spend eternity with Jesus in the next world. Why is this a guarantee of eternity with Jesus? Only those who have trusted in Jesus and love Jesus will lose their lives for Jesus. Look what the Bible says about dying for Jesus.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:21–23 (ESV)

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Acts 7:59 (ESV)

So those who lose their lives in this world for Christ rest in the promise of God that they will instantly open their eyes in heaven to be with Jesus in the next world. Nothing could be better.

### **If we endure with Christ, we will reign with Christ.**

Some people will not die as martyrs for Christ. Some people will end up living a life of suffering for Christ. Today, one in every eight Christians live in an area of the world considered a place of intense persecution. While Islamic extremism is the most notorious persecutor of Christians, fast on the rise is Chinese persecution of Christians. China is on the cutting edge of hacking and surveillance technology. That is why you hear of the Chinese constantly trying to break into the Pentagon's computers. The Chinese government uses its hacking technology to hack into the phones and the bank accounts of Christians. With the electronic spying, the government uses the information to tear apart families and ruin people's lives. Suffering for the gospel is a normal thing in China. It is an

expected thing. While Christians in Islamic countries and in China pay a high price for speaking about Jesus, in America, and even in rural Iowa, we will pay a price for being outspoken for Jesus.

We must remember that the reward for boldly speaking about Jesus will always outweigh the sacrifice we make for speaking about Jesus. We may suffer in this life but we look forward to reigning and ruling with Christ in the next life.

By the way, this is also a way to know who is truly saved. Only those who are truly following Christ are willing to die for Christ. Only those who are truly following Christ will be willing to suffer for Christ. When it becomes inconvenient to follow Jesus or hard to follow Jesus, those who do not truly know Jesus will fall away.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12 (ESV)

Notice the writer of Hebrews warned Christians against having an evil heart, an unbelieving heart. The way you recognize an evil and unbelieving heart is people fall away from Christ under pressure.

**If we deny Jesus, he will deny us.**

We may name the name of Jesus now, but if under persecution, stress, or difficulty, we deny Jesus, Jesus will deny us. These are people who claim to know Jesus but fall away from him over time. It reminds me of Jesus' parable of the soils. The Word of God fell on four different types of ground. One of the ground types in Jesus' parable was the rocky soil. That represented people who heard about Jesus with excitement, but when trouble or persecution came their way for following Jesus, they walked away from Jesus.

This is not talking about momentary denial. The apostle Peter faced that on the night Jesus was betrayed. Three times under pressure he denied knowing Jesus. He repented of that and was restored by Jesus. He became a leader in the early church and eventually died as a martyr for Jesus. That is momentary denial. The denial talked about here is permanent denial. It is long-term denial. If we disown Jesus, he will disown us. By the way, the only reason someone can disown Jesus after claiming to know him is if they never knew him in the first place. If they had truly known him, they would never walk away from him.

The truth that those who deny Jesus in this life will be denied by Jesus in the next life was originally spoken by Jesus.

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 10:32–33 (ESV)

So some will claim to follow Jesus, but under pressure, they will deny him and walk away from him. As a result, in eternity Jesus will deny knowing them. That is a scary place to be.

**If we are faithless, he will remain faithful.**

If someone is unfaithful to Jesus, if one remains in a continual state of unbelief, Jesus cannot deny himself. People may not be faithful to their promise to follow Jesus but he will be faithful to his promise to deny them. That means those who deny Jesus will end up being damned by Jesus. When it says Jesus will remain faithful, that means he will remain faithful to his judgment, because while some people are unfaithful to their promise to follow him, he cannot be unfaithful to his promise to deny them. This is very strong. Under persecution and suffering, and may I add COVID, do not walk away from Jesus! Do not let

anything tear you away from Jesus! Look what the Scripture says about those Jesus will ultimately judge. There are two groups:

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9 (ESV)

The first group is those who do not know God. They have never heard the good news of Jesus, so they cannot be saved by Jesus. They are still stuck in their sin. The second group is those who have heard the good news of Jesus, but they do not obey the gospel. They have walked away from the gospel. That is a scary place to be! Whatever sacrifices we have to make to follow Jesus and to be bold for Jesus in this world is worth the reward we will receive from Jesus in eternity.

## Conclusion

So when following Christ is hard, when we are tempted to be quiet about Christ around our friends or at work, instead of boldly speaking for Christ, we must remember one simple truth --- the reward is worth the sacrifice.

The honor of representing the greatest news in the universe from the greatest person in the universe to people who desperately need to hear it is worth it.

We remember the life-changing power of the Word of God. The reward of making a lasting difference in people's lives for time and eternity because we are speaking God's saving words instead of our own, makes the reward of seeing lives saved worth the sacrifice.

We remember the privilege we have of being the instrument God uses to bring about his saving purposes in people's lives that God planned in eternity past.

We remember the reward that comes if we die for Jesus or if we suffer for Jesus is far better than an eternity if we deny Jesus.

My friends, be bold for Jesus. Remember the reward will always outweigh the sacrifice.



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