

Sermon 6/16/13

P.T. Gaines

There was a movie released in 1990 representing a growing sport in the U.S. Loosely basing the fictional characters on real life people to keep it entertaining, Tom Cruise and Robert Duvall starred in *The Days of Thunder*. While it might be sacrilegious to talk of NASCAR during the NBS finals, a finals sermon analogy seems so cliché. In this movie, Cruise plays Cole, who is the young bronc, full of energy, talent, and absolutely no-experience. Harry, played by Duvall, had been around the sport for decades and coaches Cole through the newness of the NASCAR circuit. Cole knew how to drive, he knew how to race, but when he switched car, driving and track style, he needed someone who knew how to navigate this new life, so to speak, for him. He had to learn to be humble enough to listen, and trust that Harry knew what he was talking about, but in the end, it paid off as a better racer.

This morning we are going to look at an ancient Harry and Cole duo: Paul and Timothy. Much like the more seasoned Harry poured into Cole, Paul, the commissioned apostle, poured into Timothy. This morning we will look at these two characters, and one conversation in particular. They are probably familiar names to all of us, but I want to look at the relationship, the mentorship...the discipleship, of Paul and Timothy. Paul wrote Timothy two letters, the text today is from Paul's second letter to Timothy, which has been generally agreed upon as the last letter we know Paul wrote. Paul and Timothy had a very close relationship. Paul speaks very affectionately of Timothy ever chance he gets; using words such as, "My Son," (2 Tim 2:1) "My beloved son," (2 Tim 1:2) and, is probably the most iconic of their relationship, "My true child in the faith" (1 Tim 1:3). This morning we get to examine some of the final words of the apostle Paul.

These two met in Lystra on one of Paul's first mission trips where He converted Timothy to the Christian faith and subsequently gained one of his longest standing, most faithful, disciples and beloved friends. This all took place near the beginning of Paul's apostolic career, and here we find, in a letter at the end of Paul's life, Timothy still holding to the faith, and to his friendship in Paul. Timothy was a pastor of a church, or churches, in Ephesus, where and this is where Paul's letter found him. Which brings us to an excerpt from the second letter, chapter 2, starting with verse 1, Paul gives Timothy a charge:

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"

Be strong! That is the charge, to be strong. A good friend of mine has gone P90X on me. He has since lost a lot of weight, gained a ton of muscle, and is now going to go to school to be a personal trainer. He will tell you that in order to get strong, you have to work out; by the way, to stay strong...you have to work out. And to stay the strongest, you can't work out the exact same way, with the exact same weights for the rest of your life. Paul charges Timothy to be strong, but he didn't want Timothy to get swollen in stature, rather he says to be jacked for Jesus! Be strong in the *grace* is in Christ. Grace is where the Christian life starts. *"for by GRACE you have been saved, through faith..." [Eph 2:8]* and Grace is certainly where our life as a Christian continues. We cannot be strong in our accomplishments, our programs, or our works; but rather, we should be confident in the work that Christ did on the cross for us, and be ever mindful of His sacrifice and power living in us. This walk is to be done through His power, not on our own power.

To some this may sound like a strange concept, because grace is so often viewed as something that happened in the past, the thing that justified me; however, even as "Amazing Grace" goes: "So grace will lead me home," Paul says here, as he does in his letters to the Romans and Galatians, that grace is where the power of the Spirit lives in us and leads us. What does that look like? I find that when I trust in my own accomplishments, with the youth group or personal areas of my life, I lay awake at night worrying about how it will turn out; conversely, when I am relying on

the grace that is in Christ, I find myself laying awake at night praying for His will, guidance, and purpose to lead me. It is there I find peace that He is in control and I am merely a tool for use by Him. I find when I am searching Google for answers to life decisions, instead of spending time in the Word letting it influence my decisions, I'm being reliant on my own knowledge. Rather when I am regularly in His word, I get a sense of God's heart, and can make informed, prayerful decisions. Spending time asking God and getting to know God before we tackle a project of any size is being strong in His grace. Sometimes it doesn't come naturally, just like you have to sweat and grunt to get anywhere in the gym, sometimes we have to set aside what is natural, spiritually sweat and grunt a little, to grow strong in His grace. Remember to be strong.

However, there is a therefore in this passage. Paul says "be strong," but starts by saying "therefore," referring back to something he mentioned earlier. A quick look into chapter 1, and we see Paul tell Timothy to "*guard, through the Holy Spirit, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.*" Timothy had been given a treasure, a gift, that he was to protect it at all costs. How? Through the Holy Spirit! How would you do that? By being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul also goes on in chapter one to warn Timothy that there are people who don't do this; there are people who fall away and, as said in Paul's first letter to Timothy, become shipwrecked in the faith. He talks about Phygelus and Hermogenes, two people who were apparently at one time all-for and gung-ho for Paul, turning away. Deserting Paul and deserting the work and treasure that had been entrusted to them. Paul doesn't leave Tim hanging though, he tells him of Onesiphorous, who has remained strong, who has been there for Paul, went and visited him in prison, and is continuing to be a blessing to all who he meets. Be careful, because people fall. Guard your treasure, and stay alert!

I prayed for a long time about my involvement with youth ministry. I felt the call when I was 16, on a mission trip to Mexico. I was able to watch a youth pastor from Louisiana interact with his students. Although I didn't really realize it then, that was when I felt moved to pursue youth ministry. It was a strong feeling in my gut, or spirit, if you will. I prayed about it for some time and felt sure that I would be in youth ministry one day, after about 30, when I had a solid engineering career under me. God moved in me a very similar way when the announcement came about a vacancy at this church. I'm not saying He told me that I was going to be the next youth director of NWCC, but He did move in me in such a way to apply. I spent time making a good resume, I spent time bringing to the front the qualifications that, I thought, made me a good candidate. There's no harm in that, definitely no sin. Then, I submitted it, and prayed. I could have worried, I could have called Jack and Dave every other day asking how the search was going, but I know that God has called me to apply, and His will would be done from there. We all know how *that* story ends! It was a stretch for me to apply and not worry, it took some conscience effort, but I believe merely acting on what I felt to be a call from God, helped me be stronger in His grace. I still pray as much as I can over this position God has allowed me to hold. I pray for pure motives, for the health of this ministry, and against division. The danger of me or this ministry becoming shipwrecked is very real, but strength in the grace of our Lord is just as real, and more than effective to guard me, the leaders, and this ministry.

Paul has now addressed where Timothy should stand and charged him to stay strong. Now, Paul in his own words, tells Timothy not to give fish to those around him, but to teach them to fish:

"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"

Paul says a couple of things here. First, these things which I have said and you have heard, the things I have taught you. You have those things in mind now? Ok, good. Teach it others. Now tell those others, to teach others...and others...and...you get the idea. Now, these things have passed the test of witnesses. I'm not talking about theological ideas, I'm not talking about theory, I'm talking about the tried and true gospel message; how to speak it and how to live it. Notice what Paul is saying here: *teach*. I teach algebra one day a week during the school year. I don't sit

down, tell my students the theory of algebra, call them the week after, and expect them to factor a trinomial; instead, I walk them step by the step through the principles that allow them to come to the end of the year being able to do complex algebra. Similarly, we shouldn't always operate in the mode of sharing the gospel, tagging a "follow up" the next week, and expecting someone to produce fruit in their life! We should be *investing* in people, spending *time* with them, and *teaching* them as the moment demands. What Paul is saying here is:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" [Matt 28:16-20]

Paul is saying the great commission in his own words. Teach others, and they will teach others. Far too often I fear we slip into this form of thinking, whether consciously or not, that the great commission is for the pastors, but we are all on the great commission! Yes, Timothy was a pastor, who Paul was charging, but the "faithful men" weren't necessarily pastors! We are *all* charged with teaching and discipling others. This promise of salvation we all hold to will only continue if we pour into the next generation of Christians, young and old. I'm not talking about the youth group here. The student body and young adults of a church are not the next generation of the church, they are the current generation. The next generation is the people outside those doors! We have the greatest gift ever: Salvation, purpose, the abundant life at our fingertips. This shouldn't be a charge, but more an ecstatic we *get* to do this! But we find that this mentality isn't natural.

Here Paul builds three analogies to drive his point home. Each containing their own nugget of wisdom: the soldier, athlete, and farmer.

"Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." (2:2-4)

Suffer. When Paul says suffer here, he is not saying: to take a hammer once a month and smash your toe. Suffering in and of itself produces *nothing*. Let me say that again, suffering in and of itself, produces nothing; however, suffering for the sake of pleasing Christ pleases Him beyond our imagination. What's the difference? The motive. Paul says *"no soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life."* First, if you are of Christ, if you have a relationship with Christ through faith that His sacrifice and resurrection has forgiven you of your sins, congratulations! You are in active service! You signed up the day you believed! So you are called to cast of "everyday affairs." Here's the rub: at times, the everyday affairs seem like a whole lot more fun than the marching orders. You will "suffer" because it will be counter to your nature to cast aside those everyday affairs. Sometimes it takes A LOT of effort, sometimes it's easy. Most of the time, it's learning a habit of not doing something. These "affairs" are anything directly against orders (like lying, stealing, adultery, murder), or things that have no place in nor benefit to God's kingdom. Which, almost always, you'll find that things which have no benefit to God's kingdom, are usually rooted in going against orders. You will "suffer" if you are to change these things. Of course, the question is begged: "why??" Paul says it nicely in the end of verse 4: *"so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."* At the end of the day, our goal, our purpose, should be to please our superior: Christ. The only one who saved and enlisted us.

Paul then says: *"also"* so, in conjunction with what was said:

"if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules."

So if you want to win, follow the rules. To win *any* competition, you must know and obey the rules. If I want to drive in a NASCAR race, I don't show up with a Honda Civic! Not only will I be creamed, it doesn't even come close to the rules set forth by NASCAR's sanctioning body to competition! And, funny enough, if I tell them "well, I wasn't aware

of the rules” I still don’t think they will let me race! We *must* know the rules God has laid down for us, and we must compete by them if we want to lay hold of the prize! We don’t get to make up or have a “personal interpretation” of the rules. God said them, He set them, and we are called to pour over His word, pray for understanding, and live them out. What are these rules? They are the principles laid down by Christ and the apostles, they are why we come to church on Sunday and spend time in prayer and God’s word; to learn more about God, and how to be more like Him. It is living to please Christ as best we possibly can by being strong in grace and letting the Spirit lead us! This even points back to suffering because it is always easier to blaze our own path and make our own rules, but we are called to suffer for the cause of pleasing Christ.

As Billy Mays would have said right here: “but wait! There’s more!” There’s a promise of a prize, or a crown, competing by the rules. It is easier to say what this prize is not. The prize here should not be confused with eternal life, and doesn’t point to material gain. The prize received translates to “*crowned with honor.*” This is a reward for doing well, for following the rules. If you compete by the rules you receive a prize based on how well you ran. There is a prize for following the rules laid down, and finishing the race. This can take many forms! The abundant life that Christ talked about in John 10, or the treasure stored up in heaven that He referred to in Matthew 6. This prize not only seems fitting, a reward for suffering hardship, but serves as a wonderful incentive for those days where we just don’t feel like it. I’m church staff and still have days where I wake up, and my desires and impulses sure seems a lot more enticing than the call to Christ, but I desire to serve Christ, and there is a nice incentive of reward one day promised.

Many times this subject of “rules” makes people’s stomach turn, but I implore you to consider the effect of following God’s principles. Many, if not all, forms of instant gratification leave us dry in the end, feeling empty. I am convinced that when the Bible is followed and allowed to rule our lives as Christ laid it, there is fulfillment and purpose. For me, that alone would be prize enough. To know that I am pleasing someone higher than I, and I have a *reason* to please that someone. We are called to live by the Spirit, not carry out the desires of the flesh. In this we find that Christ gets great pleasure, and we get great reward. We are to compete by the rules, if we wish to win the prize

Paul then reaches his third, and final, analogy:

“The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops”

Having worked on a farm before, I can tell you that anyone can stick a seed in the ground, but it takes a farmer to know what soil gets what seed, when to water, what to weed, and how to fertilize it. Then, the amazing part: the farmer doesn’t make it grow. God’s miracle of biology goes to work and takes a mere seed and grows it into a crop-producing plant! We have been given the opportunity to sow seeds in people’s lives! It takes work, sometimes we need to understand who they are to know how to present the gospel. Then we disciple them by teaching them, encouraging life changes that honor God, and ultimately letting the Holy Spirit work his life-changing magic on them! Yet again, Paul draws this back to the idea that with great work, comes great reward! We get the chance to facilitate God’s work, and God gives back onto us! But You don’t get a crop without investing time and energy into planting, watering, and weeding.

Paul then ends this short exhortation by essentially telling Timothy: take my word for it, but don’t take *my* word for it.

“Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”

Take my word Timothy, pray over it, understand it, and God will confirm what is true.

Paul began this letter by reaffirming to Timothy that He was given a gift, a treasure. This treasure was a spiritual gift that enabled him to serve Christ where it would be on display: pastoring a church in Ephesus was Timothy's call. We don't have a church in Ephesus, but we all have a treasure! Paul calls on Timothy to use that gift, to strengthen it by the power of Christ, then gives three pictures to make sure he understood. To what end? To the great commission's end!

"Entrust these things to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Christ charged the apostles, Paul charged timothy, and he charged faithful men, who charged faithful men to teach and live the gospel. I can say that with assurance, because we are all here. If this had never been done, the church would cease to exist. The next generation depends on us teaching down. We can look at this letter, and see Paul writing to a pastor and think "that's why we tithe, we pay pastors to do that stuff." The problem with that thinking is, really where we are in this letter is the faithful men. We are the faithful men, who should be able to teach others also.

Just the other day: I was listening to two people discuss the younger man's plans for college since graduation is in a year for him. This young man wants to pursue music, but added on "I just really want to get into ministry one day, hopefully through music." My good friend, the older, replied: "if you are a Christian, you *are* in ministry." It is a fine thing to aspire to work in a church, I LOVE my job, I feel very blessed to work here part time pouring into the high school and middle school students, but we must be careful not to elevate the job of ministry to "the pastors." If you are a Christian, you are in ministry. You have a treasure, a *spiritual* gift from Christ, and you've been called to active service for the glory of God. The question is not if I should be in ministry, the question is *where* is my ministry, where I'm at, with what God has given me. The Launch volunteers are actively seeking where their talents and interests take them for ministry. I charge all of you this morning, no matter your age, income level, or spiritual level: where is your ministry? Are you a stay at home mom? Finding that ministry is easy! Living it out might be the hardest, but you have the opportunity to pour into your children every day! Are you a student, high school middle school, or even college? Talk around for a day, and you'll see just how much of a ministry you can have by merely living with *standards*. Career people are in contact with co-workers every day, Dad's, you've been charged with bring children up, and marrieds, you can live out the relationship of Christ and His church in front of the world and have a wonderful ministry.

Maybe you don't feel like you can disciple? Then it is time to find a mentor or a care group and start being poured into so that you can pour out one day. I will say this, however, everyone can teach something. There's a reason, several actually, why I'm not preaching on differing theologies of predestination. I'm not even sure what scripture points to, but I am teaching on what I'm sure: Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. No one gets to the Father but through Him, and if we sit on that glorious news and never reach out to the lost and educate the new Christians, we aren't living out Christ's words, which Paul re-affirms here. It's not called "The Great Suggestion" for a reason...

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"

And THAT is what it is really all about at the end of the day. We are charged to share our treasure for the benefit of others, to the pleasure of our commander who is Christ, by the rules, while being a diligent, hard worker. Teach others, to teach others. Pour into the next generation, the people outside those doors who desperately need the love of Christ.

I'll close with Paul's final, final words to Timothy: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing."*