

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

A CAUSE WORTH DYING FOR

2 Timothy 1:10-11

By

Steven J. Cole

September 10, 2006

© Steven J. Cole, 2006

For access to previous sermons or to subscribe to weekly
sermons via email go to: www.fcfonline.org/sermons

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, Updated Edition
© The Lockman Foundation

September 10, 2006
2 Timothy Lesson 5

A Cause Worth Dying For
2 Timothy 1:10-11

In his excellent book, *Don't Waste Your Life* [Crossway, 2003], pp. 45-46), John Piper tells about Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards, who died in April, 2000, in Cameroon, West Africa. Ruby was over eighty, had been single all her life, and had spent her life making Jesus Christ known among the unreached, poor, and sick. Laura was a widow, a medical doctor, pushing eighty, who served with Ruby in Cameroon. Their brakes failed, the car went over a cliff, and they both were killed instantly.

Piper asks, "Was that a tragedy? Two lives, driven by one great passion, namely, to be spent in unheralded service to the perishing poor for the glory of Jesus Christ—even two decades after most of their American counterparts had retired to throw away their lives on trifles." He answers, "No, that is not a tragedy. That is a glory. These lives were not wasted. And these lives were not lost. 'Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it' (Mark 8:35)."

He continues, "I will tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider a story from the February 1998 edition of *Reader's Digest*, which tells about a couple who 'took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast ... when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball and collect shells.'"

When Piper first read that, he thought that it was a joke, a spoof on the American dream. But it wasn't. Rather, this *was* the dream: "Come to the end of your life—your one and only precious, God-given life—and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells. Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: 'Look, Lord. See my shells.'" Piper concludes, "*That* is a tragedy." He rightly urges, "Don't buy it [that version of the American dream]. Don't waste your life."

Some would probably conclude that a frail, lonely man in his late sixties had wasted his life. He was chained in a Roman dungeon without enough clothes to keep warm, about to be executed because he proclaimed that Jesus Christ, not Caesar, was Lord. He had known years of hardship, privation, persecution, betrayal, and disappointments. If he sounded a little bitter or cynical as he faced death, most of us would not blame him.

But, rather than being even slightly bitter or cynical, the apostle Paul was confident and upbeat as he exhorted his younger disciple, Timothy, not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, but to join with him in suffering for the gospel (1:8). Clearly, Paul believed that the gospel was a cause worth living for and worth dying for. If you live your life for the glory of God through the gospel, in line with your spiritual gifts (1:6), you will not waste your life.

This is not to say that in order not to waste your life you must go into some form of “full time” Christian ministry. But it is to say that if you don’t want to waste your life, you must live it in view of the shortness of this life and the reality of eternity. That means that you *live in such a way that your life makes no sense if there is no heaven or hell*. When people who do not know Jesus Christ look at how you spend your time and money, they should think, “This guy is nuts!” They don’t take eternity into account, but you do. So with Paul, you can say (1 Cor. 15:19), “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.” Because these eternal truths are certain, to spend your life for the gospel is to spend it wisely. In our text, Paul is saying,

Because through the gospel Jesus Christ abolished death and appointed us to serve Him, it is a cause worth dying for.

It has always amazed me that in light of the statistics on death—one out of one people die—people are not consumed with finding the answers to questions like, “Where will I spend eternity? How should I spend my short and uncertain life here in view of standing before God some day?” You would think that every young person would wrestle with those questions before he gets out of college, lands a job, and settles into some vague pursuit of happiness, which often devolves into watching pointless and profane TV shows every night. Very few spend much time at all thinking about the crucial questions in life.

You would think that every retired person would be panicked. It's the fourth quarter and the clock of life is counting down to the final buzzer. Very shortly, he will stand before God. You would think that he would be consumed with knowing for certain that his sins were forgiven and that he had eternal life. Yet, as I see in every issue of my AARP magazine, the focus is on how to stay healthy, hide your wrinkles, and pursue your selfish dreams, ignoring the inevitable approach of death.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the *only* answer to these tough final questions that we all need to face. Paul here shows us three things that will help us to live in a truly meaningful way, both for time and eternity, if we will respond to them.

1. Christ Jesus personally brought God's salvation to us through the gospel by His appearing.

Verse 9, as we saw in our last study, is a succinct summary of the gospel of God's sovereign grace: God "saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." But how was that eternal purpose of God made known in time? It was "revealed by the appearing of Christ Jesus our Savior." There is no salvation apart from the appearing of Jesus Christ. We get our word "epiphany," which means an appearance or manifestation of God, from the Greek word translated "appearing." This is the only time the word refers to the first coming of Christ. Every other time it refers to His second coming.

That Jesus Christ *appeared* implies that He existed before He came to this earth. Jesus asserted such about Himself. He told the disbelieving Jews (John 8:58), "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." He often referred to being sent to this earth by the Father (John 3:17, 34). In John 17:5, Jesus prayed, "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." These statements of His preexistence are assertions of His deity. There is no good news of salvation apart from the truth of the deity of Jesus Christ. The cults that deny His deity do not preach the gospel. If Jesus Christ is not God, then He cannot save us from our sins.

But the fact that Christ Jesus appeared also asserts His true humanity. He was born of the virgin Mary through miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit. He fully shares our humanity, except that He was born without any sin. The four Gospels tell us of His sinless life, His profound teaching, His miracles that authenticated His claims, His voluntary, sacrificial death on the cross for our sins, His bodily resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into heaven. Many of the facts about this promised Savior were predicted in the Old Testament, centuries before His coming. The Christian faith rests upon this verifiable history that testifies to the appearing of Christ Jesus our Savior.

But the Christian faith is not just knowing these facts about the life of Jesus Christ. Rather, it concerns knowing Him personally. As Paul says (1:12), "I know whom I have believed." Or, as he put it (Phil. 3:8), "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." So if we ask, "How can this frail old man who has suffered so much, who doesn't even have a coat to keep him warm, who has no wife or children, no retirement benefits, who is facing an unjust execution, how can he be so joyous?" The answer is, "He had come to know the glorious person of Christ Jesus his Savior."

Have you come to know Jesus Christ personally? Can you call Him "Christ Jesus *my* Lord"? How does this happen? It has been revealed in Scripture (1:10), but also God has to open your blind eyes to the truth of who Jesus is. He opens your eyes to see that you are a sinner, in need of a Savior. He shows you that Jesus Christ is the only Savior from sin. When Paul shared the gospel with Lydia in Philippi, we read (Acts 16:14), "and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." If you don't know Christ personally, ask God to open your heart to who Jesus Christ truly is. Trust Him alone as your Savior.

2. Christ Jesus our Savior abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

There are two aspects of this:

- A. By His appearing, Christ Jesus our Savior abolished death.

A critic may scoff by saying, "You can believe that if you want, but the local cemetery proves that you're believing a fairy tale." Obviously, Christians and non-Christians all die. Believing in Jesus as your Savior doesn't give you a free pass around death. But, of course, Paul knew that. He saw many believers die. He mentions his own impending death (4:6). He was not promoting some form of Christian Science, where you tell yourself that sickness and death don't really exist.

The Greek word translated "abolished" means to nullify or to render inoperative. Paul uses it in Romans 6:6, where he says that "our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with." Obviously, we still live in these bodies that are prone toward sin. Our bodies have not been annihilated. What Paul means is that the power of sin has been broken, so that we do not have to be slaves to sin any longer.

So when Paul says that Christ abolished death, he means that through His death and resurrection, Jesus broke the power of death and freed us from fear of judgment (Heb. 2:14-15). While believers are still subject to physical death (unless we're alive at His coming), the sting of death has been removed. Note the parallel between our text and 1 Corinthians 15:53-58. Both speak of Christ's victory over death and then talk about our service for Christ as a result:

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

It is because Jesus Christ took the sting of death from us that death for believers is now referred to as sleep (Acts 7:60; 1 Thess. 4:13). This does not mean that our souls sleep. The moment we die, we are consciously in the presence of the Lord in heaven (2 Cor. 5:8). But our bodies sleep in the grave until the return of

Christ, when they will be raised and transformed into incorruptible bodies that are suited for heaven.

I love that scene in *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian and Hopeful come to the final river of death. They are fearful that the water will be over their heads. But Hopeful goes first and calls back to Christian, "Be of good cheer, my brother; I feel the bottom, and it is good." For every Christian, the bottom is good because of the word of Christ Jesus our Savior, who has promised that He will take us to be with Him in heaven (John 14:3). When you face death, trust in His promise to bring you safely to the other side.

B. By His appearing, Christ Jesus our Savior brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

"Life" refers to the new life that we receive at regeneration. "Immortality" refers to the eternal, incorruptible nature of that life. The new life that we receive from God at regeneration is eternal life. It can never be taken away from us, because Jesus Christ promised (John 10:28), "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." Eternal life is His gift to His sheep, and it is permanent. When He returns, the dead in Christ will be raised and we who are alive will be instantly transformed (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:52). In that glorious moment, "He will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain" (Rev. 21:4).

Christ Jesus brought these wonderful truths "to light through the gospel." In the Old Testament, there are scattered references to the hope of eternal life beyond the grave, but for the most part, they were dimly visible, in a comparative dusk, as Bishop Moule puts it (*Studies in II Timothy* [Kregel, 1977], p. 50). But Christ brought these truths out into the open. So as Christians, we look "for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:13-14). Note, again, Paul's emphasis there on salvation resulting in service.

That's the flow of thought in our text. Christ Jesus personally brought God's salvation to us through the gospel by His appearing.

He also abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. But, He saved us so that we would serve Him.

3. God's salvation is always unto service.

Paul finishes the sentence (1:11), "for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher." Many Greek manuscripts add, "of the Gentiles," but that may have been added from copyists to make it conform to 1 Timothy 2:7. This repeats the flow of thought that we saw in verses 5-7, where after mentioning Timothy's salvation, Paul exhorts him to kindle afresh his spiritual gift in service to the Lord. The point is, God doesn't save us so that we can live our own self-centered, happy lives, ignoring the needs of others. He saves us so that we can serve in His great purpose of saving souls and conforming them to Christ for His glory.

Note, also, that we do not volunteer to serve Jesus in our spare time. Rather, we are drafted—appointed—to serve. As we saw in verse 6, God has given every saved person at least one spiritual gift to use in service for Him. You will give an account of how you used your gift, just as I will. In the parable of the talents (a talent was an amount of money, not an ability), the Lord gave five talents to one servant, two to another, and one to the third servant (Matt. 25:14-30). The man with five invested them and earned five more. The man with two invested them and earned two more. But the man with one buried it and returned it with no profit. The master rebuked him strongly and threw him into outer darkness.

One lesson from that story is that if you think that you can't do much for the Lord because you aren't very gifted, you're in the greatest danger of burying your talent. The one-talent guy looks at those with two or five talents and thinks, "I can't make that much difference, so why bother?" But that's a serious mistake. If the Lord has seemingly only given you lesser gifts, don't bury them! Use them! Often, when you begin to use them, you will discover that you have been given more gifts than you thought at first.

Paul mentions three offices to which he had been appointed: preacher, apostle, and teacher. Why does he use this order? It would seem that apostle was his highest role. Perhaps he is thinking in terms of the order of the gospel. The preacher (the word referred to the herald, who announced the king's messages to the

people) proclaims the gospel, getting people saved. The apostle established the saved into churches, where they could grow in Christ. The teacher equips those believers for the work of service.

The office of apostle as one who had unique authority from Christ no longer exists, because the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). We have the apostolic foundation in the New Testament. In the sense of "one sent out to plant churches," the role does exist. But for the sake of avoiding confusion, such people should not be called apostles, but missionaries or church planters.

Some have questioned why Paul here reminds Timothy of what he already knew, that Paul was a preacher, apostle, and teacher. I think that Paul was so caught up with the greatness of the gospel and God's call to preach it that he just got carried away in amazement that God had laid hold of him, a persecutor of the church, to preach the gospel. If you're hesitant to serve the Lord, go back to the glorious gospel that saved you from a life of futility. Whatever your gifts, God saved you to serve in the great cause of the gospel, a cause worth dying for. Because through the gospel Christ Jesus abolished death and appointed us to serve Him, it's a cause worth dying for.

Conclusion

The day after Joe Bayly and his wife buried their almost five-year-old, who had died of leukemia, he stopped by the doctor's office to thank him for his kindness during the nine months between the diagnosis and death. The receptionist called him to the desk, nodded toward a little boy playing on the floor, and whispered, "He has the same problem your little boy had."

Bayly sat down next to this boy's mother and spoke softly. "It's hard bringing him in here every two weeks for these tests, isn't it." He didn't ask a question; he stated a fact.

"Hard?" She was silent for a moment. "I die every time. And now he's beginning to sense that something's wrong ..." Her voice trailed off.

Bayly chose his words carefully. "It's good to know, isn't it, that even though the medical outlook is hopeless, we can have hope for our children in such a situation. We can be sure that after

our child dies, he'll be completely removed from sickness and suffering and everything like that, and be completely well and happy."

"If I could only believe that," the woman replied. "But I don't. When he dies, I'll just have to cover him up with dirt and forget I ever had him." She turned back to watching her little boy push a toy car on the floor.

Bayly felt compelled to say, "I'm glad I don't feel that way."

"Why?" This time she didn't turn toward him, but kept watching her child.

"Because we covered our little boy up with dirt yesterday afternoon. I'm in here today to thank the doctor for his kindness."

She looked straight at Bayly and said, "You look like a rational person." He was glad she didn't say, "I'm sorry." "How can you possibly believe that the death of a man, or a little boy, is any different from the death of an animal?" (From, *The Last Thing We Talk About* [David C. Cook, 1973, revised edition], pp. 12-13.)

The answer to that woman's question is, we believe that the death of a person is different because we believe the historic facts about Jesus Christ. By His death and resurrection, He conquered death. By His certain promises, He has given us hope beyond the grave and a purpose worth living and dying for.

Application Questions

1. Why is it important to emphasize the historical foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ, and not only subjective experience?
2. How would you counsel a believer who told you that he lived in fear of death?
3. Why should a Christian's life seem crazy to a person who doesn't believe in life after death? Specifically, what should be distinct or different about us?
4. Why should the "one-talent" Christian be especially concerned about using his/her gifts?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2006, All Rights Reserved.