

Prayer

When You created the World, Heavenly Father, You fashioned the laws which hold the Universe together and moulded the life of humanity in Your image. Make us conscious of our dependency both on You and also on the created world in which we live, so that we might be good stewards of all creation as we were meant to be. Through Jesus Christ, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Cross

The Cross is recognised almost universally as a Christian sign, but it is not always understood. Pray in repentance for what was done by crucifying our Lord on the Cross.

On-going prayers

- Pray today for those who report the news by TV or by newspaper
- Pray about the world economic downturn and its driving powers
- Give thanks for the joy of a good night's sleep

Meditation

Speak to us in words of prophecy, Lord God

And may we discern the truth of Your Word

Speak to us in words of challenge and vision

And may we be willing to be tested to our limits

Speak to us in words of love and comfort

And may we be empowered by them for action

Speak to us in words of wisdom and revelation

And may we be fed by them, day and night

Speak to us in words of faith and sound teaching

And may we accept the Bible's truth and honesty

Speak to us in words used by the Lord to bless the crowds

And may we use them again to bless our troubled world

Speak to us in words which change all things for good

And may we grasp them now, not let them go ... for ever.

Bible Study - 2 Timothy 2:8-13

⁸ Keep in mind Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead, a descendant of David; this is my gospel ⁹ for which I endure suffering, to the point of being chained up like a criminal. But God's Word is not chained! ¹⁰ I therefore endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

¹¹ This is a reliable saying:

If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him;

¹² If we endure, we will also reign with Him;

If we deny Him, He will also deny us;

¹³ If we are faithless, He will remain faithful

For he cannot deny Himself.

Review

This is a powerful piece of scripture that is not always understood as well as it could be. It begins with some plain speaking from Paul to his protégé Timothy, encouraging him to remain focussed on the Gospel (2:8) and reminding him that he, Paul, was bound in chains for the Gospel and Timothy was not. There is perhaps a note of chastisement here, for Paul's imprisonment could not fail to remind him that his whole life was lived in the shadow of his coming trial before the Roman Emperor in Rome 'for the sake of the Gospel' (Acts 25:10f.). Whatever trials the younger Timothy endured, he faced the same temptations to focus on personal suffering as other Christians, and he was not always as focussed on the glorious Gospel as he might be. It has always been part of Satan's armoury to convince us that suffering shows God's neglect, when in fact, the very opposite is true.

God's Word is not chained! At the end of verse 9 we read the affirmation 'God's Word is not chained!' When Paul wrote this to encourage Timothy, he meant God's Word in all its parts. God's Word is the written work contained in the scriptures; all the Old Testament (the New had not yet been written and defined) was thought of as written by the famous characters of Israel's past, but more importantly, Paul believed that God had revealed Himself uniquely through everything it described. God's Word was the story of the world, of His people, and was also the history of God's plan of salvation. As a scholar, Paul would have been well versed in the literary complexities of the text, and yet through his experiences he was convinced of its power both to save and to reveal the true and living Christ. Paul also believed in the power of God's prophetic Word to save souls when preached; he had done this all his life, opening up the possibilities of evangelistic preaching for generations to come. He also knew full well that the Word of God was spoken, sung, discussed and communicated by God's people, in conversation, worship, spiritual discussion and in many other ways. God's Word is communicated in all these ways, but it all fits together and we can recognise it when all these come together in agreement with the written Word. It has never been chained to humanity and if we try to control it, then we are in direct conflict with the Holy Spirit.

The eternal hope Verse 10 continues with a statement of humble spiritual victory. Paul accepts that his own suffering is part of the wider ministry of God's Word and His plan of salvation. The testimony of many great Christians is that when suffering comes, then if this brings greater glory to God and furthers the Kingdom of God, then the redeemed human spirit can endure anything. The horrors of inhumanity (which for Paul was the imprisonment he endured) are bearable for the Kingdom. Today as in every age, we can observe such spiritual humility and heroism, but most find it hard to endure suffering for which they can find no reason nor perceive how it can further God's Kingdom.

It is possible that Paul had this in mind as he continued, for he proceeded to quote a well known saying placing suffering and humble faithfulness in an eternal context. Verses 11,12 and 13 are themselves a fascinating text from Paul's letters, and they contain great insight into the spiritual life and faith of early Christians.

The relationship of people with God Almighty Paul begins with the words; 'this is a reliable saying', and thereby makes it clear that he is quoting a saying, song or hymn known to both him and Timothy; perhaps something well known in the early church. The poem is fascinating. The first three lines follow a simple logic with each half of the line agreeing with the other; 'if ... then ...' The fourth line subtly changes this structure and presents us with a sudden yet complete contrast, leading up to the final climax, which declares that God is always faithful, however things may feel or seem to us here on earth, and whatever our unfaithfulness; because by definition, God 'cannot deny Himself!' (2:13). The first line describes the reality of baptism; 'if we have died with Him, we will also live

with Him.' The second line describes the reality of Christian life and witness, and its eternal consequences; 'if we endure, we will also reign with Him.' The third line describes the spiritual reality of our own choice, for if we reject God completely, then He cannot accept us; 'if we deny Him, He will also deny us.'

The fourth line addresses the heart of the matter; does God ever turn His back on us because of our human weakness and failing? The answer is typical of Paul's writing in all his letters and confirms the loving character of God. The fourth line declares that although we are weak and even 'faithless', the Lord is in this instance different from us. He always retains faith with those who have not denied Him, even if they have been 'faithless'. If we follow this passage carefully, it gives extraordinary hope to all who love the Lord and know their own failings; and this means all of us! Thanks be to God!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Paul appears to rejoice in his suffering; is such an attitude towards suffering helpful to us today, and if so, how?
2. In what ways do people 'chain' up God's Word?
3. Discuss in your group the meaning of each of the four lines in the poem (verses 11,12 and 13). What do they each say about our faith?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have always found this text to be challenging and this brief study contains only a small part of my understanding of it. The poem in verses 11,12 and 13 first caught my eye when I was a teenager, and I did not understand it at first. God used this passage to help me understand the difference between the natural failings of our human nature and the rebellious denial of God that stands against both Him and His revelation. Some deny this distinction is real or helpful, but I have always found it a useful tool for seeking discernment about matters of faith and personal behaviour.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Discuss the poem in verses 11,12 and 13 with another Christian friend or family member and explore any areas of this text which is enlightened by your discussion. Allow the Lord to bless you with greater understanding found through others.*
- *Pray for all who suffer and do not know what to make of it. There is much suffering which appears unexplainable, and there are other scriptures which speak about how to handle such suffering (Psalms, Job). Pray for those who feel lost in their suffering.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we offer You everything that has happened this day; the good which has inspired us, and the more difficult things that have challenged us. Work through everything with which we are involved to bring about peace and harmony in our lives; not peace and harmony with the world, but peace and harmony with You, our Lord and Saviour: AMEN