

TEXT SERMON

Message: **“ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS”**
 Scripture: **II TIM. 2:3 -4**

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”

The Christian life is spent on a battlefield, not a playground! We are in a warfare! Both our theology and our hymnology reflect this truth. We are familiar with scriptural phrases such as:

- “Fight the good fight of faith.”
- “Put on the whole armor of God.”
- “Stand fast in the faith.”
- “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”
- “We wrestle not against flesh and blood.”
- “I have fought a good fight.”

Likewise our music reminds us that we are in a spiritual struggle. We sing:

- “Rise Up O Men Of God.”
- “Onward Christian Soldiers.”
- “The Fight Is On.”
- “Sound The Battle Cry.”
- “Lead On O King Eternal.”
- “Hold The Fort.”
- “The Battle Hymn Of The Republic.”
- “Am I a soldier of the cross?”

Yet, many Christians are totally untaught and unprepared for the conflict of the ages. In II Tim. 2:3-4 Paul writes to young pastor Timothy and to us very pointed and practical instructions for Christian Soldiers. There are at least three major thoughts in these verses to which I call your attention:

I. THE COMMISSION OF A SOLDIER. II Tim.2:4

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”

What is involved in this commissioning? By Whom are we commissioned and why are we commissioned as soldiers?

A. We Are Commissioned By Our Captain.

All Christians have been commissioned and have been inducted into God’s army. The “call-up” took place when we came to Christ and trusted Him as our

Savior. He not only became our Savior, He became our Captain! Heb. 2:10 tells us that the Lord Jesus is called the “Captain of our salvation.” Captain Jesus! What a wonderful privilege to follow the Lord Jesus as our Leader.

He Captains the Armies of heaven: “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.” (Rev. 19:11-14)

Since He is qualified to Captain the Armies of heaven, surely He can Captain His army on the earth! What a privilege to be in His family and in His army!

B. We Are Commissioned For Conflict.

There is no need for soldiers if there is no enemy, no conflict, no war. When David was sent by his father to check on his brothers who were on the battlefield fighting the Philistines, his older brothers asked him why he had come. David replied, “Is there not a cause?” (I Sam. 17:29).

We are commissioned for conflict in the cause of Jesus Christ. It is a conflict between good and evil; truth and falsehood, righteousness and unrighteousness, God and Satan..

Ephesians chapter six is a chapter about this warfare. It informs us of our enemy and our weapons. It challenges us to “Put on the whole armor of God” which includes a helmet, breastplate, shield, sword, girdle and shoes – as well as the weapon of prayer. This conflict is not just for the super-pious – God expects all of His followers to be dressed up in the uniform of His soldiers.

Illust. When the Italians invaded Abyssinia, the Emperor, Halle Selassie, sent out the following mobilization order:

“When this order is received, all men and all boys able to carry a spear will go to Addis Ababa. Every married man will bring his wife to cook and wash for him. Every unmarried man will bring any unmarried woman he can find to wash and cook for him. Women with babies, the blind, and those too aged or infirm to carry a spear are excused. Any others found at home after receiving this order will be hanged.” He was serious!

His was a physical warfare, ours is a spiritual warfare. Ephesians six tells us, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph.6:12)

There needs to be a sense of urgency as well as an awareness that God expects all of His troops to show up and stand up in this conflict. No A.W.O.L.'s, please!

“Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to gain the prize
And sailed o’er bloody seas?”

No, I must fight if I would win,
Increase my courage, Lord;
I’ll fight the fight, endure the pain
Supported by Thy Word.”

We are commissioned by our Captain for Conflict. Furthermore, in II Timothy 2 Paul writes about the Christian soldier keeping fit for the fight.

II. THE CONDITIONING OF A SOLDIER. II Tim.2:3

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (NKJV) The KJV reads, “endure hardness.”

Both are setting forth that which is expected of a soldier and that is, a soldier must “endure hardship.” That is, there are hardships in the Christian life. It is not a “bed of roses” and God’s grace will enable us to get through those times. God had said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you.” (II Cor. 12:9) No one enlists in the U.S. military expecting to have an easy tour of duty. Neither should we Christians expect “skies always blue, flower strewn pathways all our lives through!” There will be hardships – endure them!

But I believe that Paul is basically referring here to the conditioning or hardening *process* that soldiers go through to prepare them for warfare. A soldier is only as tough as the toughening process one can endure. Endurance is a quality that must be developed in every soldier. Therefore::

A. We Are Conditioned By Training.

Paul says, ““endure hardness.” (KJV) That is, “the hardening process.”

Illust. The U.S. Military calls this “Basic Training”. I was in the Naval Aviation branch of the U.S. Military during the Korean War. In Basic Training we learned to obey orders, stand at attention, use weapons, detect the enemy, work closely with others and were put through the rigors of physical fitness to develop endurance.

If a soldier carries a back-pack weighing 10 pounds for 5 miles he has endured to that extent. If he carries a back-pack weighing 50 pounds for 20 miles he has endured even more. How tough is your faith? How spiritually fit are you? How

strong is your testimony? Are you enduring or are you succumbing to the world, the flesh and/or the devil? In Christ's army we are to be conditioned to:

- obey God's commands;
- know how to use the Sword of the Spirit;
- recognize our arch enemy;
- work closely with others;
- defend the Faith.

Paul uses another word in Rom. 8:29 – he says we are being “conformed” to the Image of Jesus Christ. Whether “conditioned” or “conformed” the intent is the same. The process of conditioning is intended to make us into good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

We are conditioned by training but in addition:

B. We Are Conditioned By Trials.

Trials are what makes us better soldiers! I Pet. 1:7 speaks of “The trial of your faith being much more precious than gold tried in the fire” And 1 Peter 4:12 says, “do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”

Additional scriptures tell us to: “Endure afflictions” (II Tim.4:5); “Endure chastening” (Heb.12:7); I Pet. 2:19 “Endure grief” (I Peter 2:19). The writer of Hebrews says, “You have need of endurance” (10:36) and “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” (Heb.12:1)

Illust. Warren Wiersbe wrote a book entitled, “Bumps Are What You Climb On.” In it he explains that the rocky roads of life, the trials, troubles and tribulations of life are but stepping stones upon which one can advance.

And Eugene Peterson in *The Message* renders First Timothy 4:7-8 like this: “Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever.”

The training and trials that we experience are intended to make us “good soldiers of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim.2:3) Are you in good condition? Are you ready to “fight the good fight of faith”? (I Tim.6:12)

We are already commissioned but are you conditioned? There is one additional question, are you committed?

III. THE COMMITMENT OF A SOLDIER. II Tim.2:4

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may

please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” Another translation reads: “As Christ’s soldiers, do not let yourself become tied up in worldly affairs.”

The key is which world are we trying to gain? We cannot serve two masters. How can I keep from being all entangled in this world? Romans chapter thirteen tells us how: “knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” (Romans 13:11-14)

According to this passage, we are to:

- Be aware – “knowing the time” (Rom. 13:11a)
- Be awake – “awake out of sleep” (v. 11b)
- Be armed – “put on the armor of light” (v. 12)
- Be advancing – “let us walk properly” (v. 13-14)

Illust. A good soldier will look and act the part at all times. It is said that the Duke of Wellington was walking on the street and came to a British soldier who was slouching against a lamp post.. The Duke asked him, “Why are you slouching so, soldier?” The soldier replied, “I am off duty sir.” The Duke sternly reprimanded him saying, “no soldier in her Majesty’s service is ever off duty. That uniform represents Her Majesty. Live the part at all times!”

We represent His Majesty, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our conduct will indicate our degree of commitment.

SUMMATION

As Christ’s followers we are on a battleground, not a playground; we are commissioned by our Captain for spiritual warfare; we can expect therefore, to be conditioned by training and trials in order to make us better soldiers; our commitment will make us aware, alert, armed and advancing the good fight of faith.

Maybe you are not in Christ’s army. Maybe you have just joined a church and are trying to act like a Christian but you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Commander-in-Chief, your Savior and Lord. Embrace the embraceable Son of God as your Savior and submit to Him as your Lord and Captain.

Illust. The daughter of William Booth, Founder of the Salvation army had a pet monkey. She made a Salvation Army uniform for it. Her father saw the monkey in the uniform and said, “take that uniform off the monkey, it doesn’t have the life and it cannot wear the uniform!” Unless you have the Life of Christ you are not in His army!

CONCLUSION

All Christians are called to be soldiers of Christ. It is our privilege to belong to the greatest army ever assembled. We fight for the noblest of causes. We are guaranteed victory by our all-conquering Captain. So, let us be good soldiers!

Illust. C.T. Studd was the son of a very wealthy family in England. He was a great athlete and a national hero of soccer fans. He gave up wealth and fame and became a missionary. He wrote to his fellow countrymen: "I would sooner have a very few daredevil, care-for-nothing, and nobody soldiers, aflame with love for Christ, than a million workers just ten percent below this standard. When will His people take the War of God seriously? Every Christian who is a "man" and not a "sham" ought to be in it with a glorious reckless disregard of the cost and consequences, determined to win or die in the attempt..."

So, "Onward, Christian Soldiers!" Our Commander-In-Chief will soon appear, the warfare will soon be ended and the grand review will begin; rewards will be given for faithful service. So ...

"Onward Christian Soldiers!"

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