

Text: 2 Timothy 2:1-9

Title: "Good soldiers of Jesus Christ"

Time: 5/25/2026 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The deaths of soldiers mark some of the most horrific and yet sacred events of American History. It was the Civil War that gave impetus to the celebration of Memorial Day, a time when we remember those who gave their lives that we might live with the freedoms we enjoy in America. The first Memorial Day celebration was held on May 30, 1868, a day when Americans from North and South united to put flowers on the graves of Confederate and Union soldiers and to remember those who had fallen.

War usually involves tragedy. It is a byproduct of the sinful condition of man. But two testimonies, one of Scripture and one of the history of our land, remind us that soldiers are honorable. The first Memorial Day followed that famous time of remembering the fallen at Gettysburg five years prior, in Abraham Lincoln's "Address." Lincoln was brief and to the point, and with words now etched in history, he explained why it is that the soldier is honorable, in spite of the fact that war is horrible. Lincoln taught us that soldiers are men who "give the last full measure of devotion" that others might experience "a new birth of freedom."

Men who die on battlefields typify much of what we see in the Lord Jesus. He is God's Son who gave "the last full measure of devotion" to provide enslaved sinners "a new birth of freedom" from sin. In this sense, Jesus died the death of a soldier, and we who seek to follow Him must live the lives of soldiers. And so our text encourages both Timothy, and each of us this morning, to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ (v. 3).

Our theme this morning is "Good soldiers of Jesus Christ." Every Christian is a soldier engaged in dangerous battle, and Paul wants us to know three things about our battles.

I. Fighting spiritual battles is hard, not easy (vv. 1, 3-7a).

Illustration: Some have joined the military with no consideration of ever having to fight a battle. When soldiers were deployed in 1990 to the Gulf War in Operation Dessert Storm, I remember seeing news reports about some who had joined the military for the career and educational opportunities afforded them. Having grown up in a time of relative peace, some were surprised by the call to the battlefield.

One of the reasons for that surprise was that the recruiting advertisements used then by the military often failed to mention the battlefield. Back then, ads spoke of seeing the world, of learning cutting-edge technology, or of earning funds for college, not of fighting for your country.

Paul is no 5th Avenue marketeer. He will soon be a martyr. He gives it straight to Timothy. And through his inspired text, the Lord tells each of us directly that being a good soldier of Jesus Christ is going to be difficult, not easy, and He tells us why.

1. Persecution is hard (v. 9).

Illustration: Our church has been praying for Iran since the war there began some weeks ago. The conflict has put greater pressure on our brothers and sisters in Christ there, because Christians are viewed as sympathizers with the West. Open-doors.org reports that immediately after the ceasefire that now persists, "at least 54 Christians were arrested in 21 cities. State media accused the 54 Christians who were arrested of committing espionage. The television report suggested links between Evangelical Christians and foreign intelligence services, a narrative that paints an entire faith community as a security threat, gravely adding to their vulnerability."

Application: The first time in my lifetime that I personally experienced what it was like for it to be illegal in America to go to church was during the Covid state of emergency. During that

time state officials deemed churches nonessential organizations that had to be closed to protect public health and slow the spread of the virus. You may remember that we stayed in our cars in the parking lot for a few Sundays during that time, continuing to obediently gather as best we were able.

Thankfully, one of the positive effects of those difficult days was the passing into law of NH House Bill 542. Our representative Keith Ammon was a key sponsor. The law is titled, "An act relative to the protection of religious liberty," and it "provides that, during a state of emergency, the state shall permit religious organizations to operate to the same degree as other organizations that provide essential services or are vital to public health and welfare." [<https://legiscan.com/NH/text/HB542/2021.>]

Those covid days notwithstanding, the free exercise of our religion to assemble for worshipping Christ in obedience to the commands of Scripture is much easier for us than it is for many others around the world this morning. It is as though the Lord has said instead to us, "Endure the blessings of ease, freedom, and prosperity as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." Our case is exceptional, because persecution is a normal hardship for good soldiers of Jesus Christ. That New Bostonians have a more difficult time assembling for worship than do our Iranian counterparts troubles me, and I believe it troubles the Lord.

2. Sacrifice is hard (v. 4).

Illustration: The Hobi family has had some fine dogs in its day, and we also had Shannon. Shannon was a mutt of a dog that was the size of a terrier, had hair which grew as long as a sheep dog, and she must have had some poodle in her too because she never shed. Shannon's hair was always a mess. She would develop huge mats and get embedded burrs in her coat, which were impossible to get out. Giving Shannon a bath was an impossible task which took hours and was never fully suc-

cessful. The only way to deal with her condition was to completely shave her once a year.

Application: The Greeks would have used this word *entangled* in verse 4 to describe those burrs caught in Shannon's black hair. It is used in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a favorite devotional book of the early church, to describe a sheep that had gotten thorns caught in its wool.

A good soldier of Jesus Christ will avoid getting entangled in the affairs of this life. The word translated *affairs of this life* means simply daily undertakings, business affairs, the kids' recreational activities, for example. The Lord Jesus named three thorns of entanglement in His parable of the Sower. The seed which fell among thorns was choked out by the worries, riches, and pleasures of this life (Lk. 8:14).

Paul's point about entanglements is that no private on the battlefield tells his sergeant, "You know what Serge, I've had it with this battle for a while, and I am going to go fishing for a month and take a little break." No soldier says, "Sir, I have just been away from my family too long, so I'm going home now." There is nothing wrong with fishing, and there is everything great about going home, but when these things weaken our fight in the battle, even these good things become dangerously disastrous.

For us, worries can keep us out of the gospel fight. Maybe we think we have to work more and have more, so we do not have time to worship the Lord. Or maybe it is just wholesome recreation. I saw that there is a podcast now called "Sunday Morning Sports Parent." Each episode is a 3 to 5 minute inspirational message from Scripture that you can listen to on your way to the game. That such a service exists is only evidence of the thorny soil of American Christianity. We must untangle ourselves to survive the battlefield.

3. Obedience is hard (v. 5).

Illustration: Last March the UConn Huskies lost the NCAA basketball championship game to the Michigan Wolverines. The final score was 69-63, a six point difference. A big problem for UConn in the game was their foul trouble. UConn had 22 team fouls, whereas Michigan only had 13. UConn scored 12 points on their 16 free-throw attempts, whereas Michigan scored 25 points on their 28 free-throw attempts. That 13 point difference was clearly the reason UConn lost.

Application: Paul tells us that every athlete competing successfully in any game has to understand that he must follow the rules. It does not matter whether or not he agrees with the rules. They are the rules of the game, and they must be followed, or that athlete will be penalized or even disqualified.

Of course, when it comes to gospel ministry, it is not a game that we are playing. The stakes are eternally consequential for us and those whom we serve, and so our obedience is all the more important. We must obey Jesus's command to be baptized. We must obey Jesus's command to make disciples by baptizing others and by teaching them all the commands of Christ that must be obeyed, like the command to love one another as He has loved us.

In our case, disobedience not only costs us a game, it can cost us the power of God's Spirit who alone can do the miracles that are needed for changed lives and gospel witness. Disobedience can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit.

4. Work is hard (v. 6).

Illustration: Farmers know what it is to work hard. Mark mentioned in passing last Wednesday morning that he burns thousands of calories in a day. Kyle Dean followed up by saying that he did the same when he worked in construction, but that now that he is in sales for Edwards Jones, he has to try to run every day to get the same result.

Application: When Paul wants to emphasize that Christian ministry is hard work, he mentions the farmer, not the Edwards Jones salesman. His point is that the cause of Christ deserves this kind of diligent labor, whether physical or mental. The work and mission of the church is not just a leisurely Sunday morning event. Winning spiritual battles in the lives of people is hard work that keeps us busy daily. Perhaps we have reaped a very small harvest because we have not worked hard in the field at Bible reading, prayer, and visiting with people.

Illustration: Horatius Bonar, *Words to the Winner of Souls*:

“Tis not for man to trifle. Life is brief,
And sin is here.
Our age is but the falling of a leaf -
A dropping tear.
We have no time to sport away the hours.
All must be earnest in a world like ours.

“Not many lives, but only one have we -
One, only one.
How sacred should that one life ever be -
That narrow span!
Day after day filled up with blessed toil,
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil.”

Persecution, sacrifice, obedience, and work are hard things that must be faced by good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Fighting spiritual battles is hard, not easy.

II. Fighting spiritual battles is for armies, not isolated soldiers (vv. 2-3).

Note: The word translated *endure hardness* in our KJV Bibles is translated *suffer with* in newer translations. It is a word that means *to suffer together with someone*. So the command in v. 3 is not only to suffer hardship, but also to do it side by side with someone else. The KJV translation of this word in 1:8 brings out this nuance of the word nicely: *Be thou partaker of the afflictions*.

Application: Paul understood that fighting on the battlefield of spiritual warfare can be a lonely task. Later in the letter we learn why this is such an important emphasis to Paul at this time (2 Tim. 4:9-16). Paul needed the encouragement of others.

Not everyone was qualified to meet this need. Only those who were faithful were qualified (v. 2). Faithful men teaching other faithful men to do the same is the battle plan of good soldiers. We are an army. We must fight together, not go it alone.

III. Fighting spiritual battles must be done with God's ability, not our own (v. 1, 7-9).

Application: These verses mention two ways to draw on God's ability rather than our own in spiritual battle.

1. Grace is a way to draw on God's ability instead of our own (v. 1). God's grace is simply the sum of all the free gifts we receive from Him, none of which we deserve. When Paul says to be strong in this grace, I believe he means that we are spiritually strong to the degree that we see how blessed we are as recipients of God's free gifts, and how little we deserve to be so blessed. This thankfulness for God's grace is our source of spiritual strength, and at the very center of God's gracious gifts is the free gift of His Son (v. 8). We are strong when we see Him and remember what He has done for us. We are terribly weakened when we begin to focus on self and think that we deserve better than what we are experiencing from the hand of God.

2. God's Word is a way to draw on God's ability instead of our own (vv. 7, 9b). One of Satan's primary goals in spiritual battle is to get us to rely on our own battle plans. His weapon is the lie. As our defense, believers have both an unlimited invitation, and an unlimited power. The invitation to consider God's Word is unlimited (v. 7, "in all things"). Because Paul was inspired when he said, "Consider what I say," we can hear God saying, "Consider what I say through Paul." Your God invites

you to understand what He says. That universal understanding is a free gift to those who are willing to listen.

Also, the power of God's Word is unstoppable (v. 9). Paul could be stopped, but God's Word could not be. You can deny the relevance of the messenger this morning, but you cannot deny the relevance of the message. God's Word is not bound – instead, it binds. May we find strength for our battles in the Word of God that cannot be bound.

Conclusion: Have you and I been good soldiers of Jesus Christ? When it comes to the work of the gospel through our local church, have we endured persecutions, sacrifices, obedience to the rules, and hard work? Are we committed to do so together by the grace of God and the word of His power?

Isaac Watts asked himself that question in his hymn, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" Paul's challenge to Timothy about good soldiering causes us to consider this question honestly before the Lord, who certainly knows the correct answer. As we find the true answer, may we determine to become better soldiers.

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching