GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS
(2 TIMOTHY 2:8-13)

8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the
dead, descended from David. This is my gos-
pel, 9 for which I am suffering even to the
point of being chained like a criminal. But
God's word is not chained. 10 Therefore I en-
dure everything for the sake of the elect, that
they too may obtain the salvation that is in
Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

11 Here is a trustworthy saying:

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

12 if we endure,
we will also reign with Him.
If we disown Him,
He will also disown us;

13 if we are faithless,
He will remain faithful,
for He cannot disown Himself.

Introduction: We began this service with a chorus singing: ♫ The steadfast love of the Lord
never ceases. ♫ Do you believe it? Why? Bottom-line, isn’t it because we fervently confess
that God is faithful? We are going to close our service testifying how great our Father’s faithfulness
truly is. How our hearts leap for joy and in praise as we consider these words:

♫ Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;

There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;

As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be. ♫

♫ Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me! ♫

♫ Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth;
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide.
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow;
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! ♫

Let us focus our attention on God’s great faithfulness, and have a deeper sense of adoration in Him who is so marvelous, so magnificent, and so merciful.

I. A Trustworthy Saying (2:11a)

2:11 – The Apostle Paul has just stated that he perseveres/endures through life’s battles by the power of God’s Word. But then he affirms that he does this “for the sake of the elect,” that is, for God’s people. His focus was on being a godly example to fellow believers and to those who do not yet know Christ, so “that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory” (2:10). In other words, he knew he was going to heaven, and he wanted to take as many people with him as he possibly could!

Now in order to give further support and encouragement to his dear son in the faith Timothy, as well as to other Christians like you and me, he proceeds to quote “a trustworthy saying” that was popular in the first century church. In fact, it is likely that this was at least part of a hymn that was sung by these early believers.

“Trustworthy” (pistos) is an excellent translation for a word that literally means “faithful.” This saying is reliable; it can be depended upon. This is the key theme of this passage, since the same Greek word (pistos) is represented by the word “faithful” in verse 13.

It is interesting to note that the first word following “a trustworthy saying” in the Greek text is “for” (gar), which indicates that Paul is giving a solid reason for his own perseverance in the faith and the salvation of God’s people. Let’s see how Paul encourages his first century readers (and us in the 21st century!) in quoting these lyrics from a popular hymn of his day.
II. Conversion (2:11b)

2:11 – “If we died with Him” relates the believer’s foundational spiritual experience of being united with God the Father in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is His death, and His death alone, that makes us a new creation in Christ. The vast majority of Biblical scholars agree that this clause points to baptism and the new life that follows. Compare what is stated in Romans 6:3-8:

> Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

“We will also live with Him” looks to the distant future of spending an eternity “with Him” in heaven, but it also implies that we get a taste of new life “with Him” during our temporary sojourn on earth.

The word “also” (καί) emphasizes that this promise made by our Lord will most definitely be fulfilled. It most certainly will come to pass!

∴ How can we be so sure of our salvation, both in the past (justification) and in the future (glorification)? Because we are such fantastic, dedicated people? Because of our own good deeds and numerous accomplishments? No way! It’s all because of Jesus and what He has done for us. When we look back to our baptism, we are assured of what God has done for us – personally!
III. Perseverance (2:12a)

2:12 – In light of what God has done for us in the past through conversion/baptism, this hymn now says, “If we endure.” This relates to the present experience of salvation known as sanctification.

“Endure” (hupomenō) describes an active and forceful steadfastness, determination, and endurance under adversity, not merely a passive staying power which would be suggested by the word “patience.” Even better it expresses stick-to-it-iveness, that is, sticking to the Lord of Life.

“We will also reign with Him” means that we will participate in Christ’s rule as the King of all victory. This is a key theme in the book of Revelation:

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth (5:10).

There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever (22:5).

This is really something that all of us long for and look forward to experiencing after Christ’s second coming! This is what helps to motivate us in our day-to-day perseverance.

IV. Judgment (2:12b)

2:12 – While the first half of this verse was quite positive, this half deals with a very negative reality: “If we disown Him.”

The word “disown” (arneomai) may be also translated as “deny” (the same term used by Peter in Mark 14:68, 70, when he denied knowing Jesus). This is not a mere momentary denial (like Peter’s), but this verb is in the Greek present tense which indicates a persistent and consistent rejection of Christ as Lord.

The result of a professing believer persistently denying Jesus as King in thought, word, and/or deed is brought up next: “He will also disown us.” Jesus made this same basic assertion in Matthew 10:33: “But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” The Bible declares that God takes no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:32), but He is just. The crime fits the punishment. If someone rejects Christ, then he/she will have a Christless eternity. Again, this is a just sentence, though it does not reflect the deepest desire of God’s heart, as 2 Peter 3:9 brings out: “He is not willing that any perish but for all to come to repentance.”
V. Faithlessness (2:13)

2:13 – Verse 12 dealt with two extremes: steady positive endurance (+) and determined negative denial (–). This verse now deals with a somewhat intermediate position: “If we are faithless.” That is, if a once professing Christian appears to be unfaithful to God in thought, word, and/or deed.

Now the balance of this sentence requires that the text read: “He will be unfaithful to us.” That makes sense. That is just. That is fair. But that is not what this early Christian hymn says! On the contrary, it is totally and unexpectedly off-balanced! Instead we read: “He remains faithful.” What a shocker!

“Faithful” (pistos) is the same Greek word that was used in verse 11 for “trustworthy.” Now do you see why this is such a reliable, dependable, “trustworthy saying”? Because God is that way! He will never give up on us in this life. (Unfortunately, in the afterlife it is too late according to Hebrews 9:27, “Each person is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”)

“For (gar) He cannot deny Himself” indicates a reason for God’s continued, persistent faithfulness – for that is His very nature. It is utterly impossible for Him to give up on us.

Personal Application

Have you ever given up on someone? Maybe you have a relative (a child, grandchild, sibling, parent, cousin), friend, acquaintance, co-worker, etc., who has made a profession in Christ, yet appears to have forsaken our Lord in thought, word, and/or deed. It hurts, doesn’t it? Maybe someone has even mocked you and what you believe in, or worse yet, ignored you. “Your beliefs are so incredibly archaic and outdated,” they say. “How can you continue to be so out of it; this is the new millennium that we are living in!” Maybe they don’t even say it, but you know they think it. They simply ignore the subject of Jesus – who He is and what He has done. They most definitely don’t want to have to seriously ponder the concept of life after death!

While you and I may have given up on certain people, God hasn’t. Jesus’ actual death on the cross and historical resurrection from the dead can be just as real for them as it is for you and me. God’s Word has that kind of power. God’s character is such that He will never quit being faithful to draw people to Himself. Isn’t that encouraging?

God’s faithfulness certainly was inspirational for Thomas Chisholm (1866-1960), who was born in a log cabin in the state of Kentucky. He began as a school teacher at the age of sixteen, although he himself had no high school or college education. The Lord got a hold of his life when he was twenty-seven, and he became a new person in Christ. He became a pastor for just a few years, but he had to resign due to poor health. In other words, he had his fair share of difficulties, troubles, and struggles, just like the rest of us.
Still the Lord helped him to write over 1200 hymns, and by far his most popular is “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” Chisholm did not write this hymn because something extraordinary had taken place in his life. Instead, he wrote this hymn because over his entire life he had learned to see the greatness, the magnificence, the faithfulness of God. At the age of 75 he wrote these words:

My income has not been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness.

Astonishing gratefulness. That is something that the Lord wants to more deeply instill within all of our hearts. How can this be? Because “He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

Utterly dependent and thankful for His great faithfulness,

Pastor Steve Waterman