Enduring Hardship as a Good Soldier

"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

If there was anybody in the early church qualified to speak about adversity, it was Paul. We can hardly imagine what he went through (2 Corinthians 4:8-10; 11:23-28). And so when Paul urged Timothy to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” he was encouraging Timothy to emulate the decisions he himself had made on numerous occasions. Until the last battle is won, hardships are inevitable, and the mark of a good soldier is one who endures them because he promised that he would.

Serving high ideals (even in the things of this world) requires that we look ahead. Anticipating that the going may get rough, we count the cost and promise that we won’t forsake our endeavor merely because it has become difficult. That’s why civil servants take an oath of office, lovers take marriage vows, and soldiers swear allegiance when they enlist. We never know specifically what hardships we’ll face, but looking ahead, we know there will be some — and we decide in advance that we’re not going to break our promise. This does not mean we should obsess over the future or fret about its challenges. But it does mean that we think seriously (1 Peter 1:13) and make wise preparations, not waiting until the hardship arrives to decide whether we’re going to be courageous.

To be sure, it is the Lord’s strength that will see us through. No amount of courage or commitment on our part would be sufficient if it weren’t for the Lord’s help. “I can,” Paul said, “do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). But Paul’s great faith and humility did not eliminate the need for him to make up his mind to “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” In Timothy’s case, Paul wasn’t concerned about whether the Lord would do His part; he was concerned about whether Timothy would keep fighting the good fight when it became really hard.

Just like soldiers facing enemy fire, so too must the saints of God make decisions each hour —­­ indeed, each minute — to uphold the commitments they have made. The time for rest will come later. For now, there is work to be done, and there are dangers to be encountered. Heaven will not be for the cowardly, but for the brave.

"Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties" (Winston Churchill).

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