

CALLED TO DUTY- FOR LIFE!

Today's Text: 2 Tim. 2: 1-26

Extracts:

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. *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. And also if any one competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.... Nevertheless, the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."* [2 Tim. 2: 1-5, 19]

According to Fela Anikulapo Kuti,¹ the late globally recognized Nigerian Afro beat king, army uniform is a piece of cloth sewn by a tailor. He sang to deride the then military government that brutalized him for being very critical of military rule in Nigeria. To him, the strength and power of soldiers is not in the uniform they wear but justice that they ought to fight for. So, to be enlisted in the Military service of any country does not come easy.² In some countries where the demand for armed forces far exceeds the supply of recruits, military service is compulsory, that is, citizens reaching a certain age have to enlist to serve. In some others, they rely on volunteers. No matter how you are called to duty, it is a complete change of life style- in terms of personal discipline and life choices, among others. Nevertheless, service is not for life. Many service men and women may serve up to retirement while many others may drop out or be dishonourably discharged.

In today's Bible verses, taken from the 2nd Chapter of his 2nd Letter to Timothy, Paul addresses the attributes of believers called to duty as the soldiers of Christ. Unlike in human military services, soldiers of Christ are called to duty for life! If they want to receive "military honours" at the end of their service, they have to perform "honourably" all the way to their last day on earth! Is that possible or feasible? Are you ready to be called to duty for life? Let us find out from this interesting study.

¹ <http://africanmusic.org/artists/felakuti.html>

² Based on information on the US Military, from the following sources: "Enlisting in the Military," <http://www.myfuture.com/military/articles-advice/enlisting-in-the-military> , and "Military Life," <http://www.myfuture.com/military/articles-advice/military-life>

1. Background: The call to salvation is different!

I am always amazed when I read the story of how the highly fortified city of Jericho fell to the men of war led by Joshua, the successor to Moses, the man of God [**Josh. 6: 1-21**]. The city was described as “securely shut up... none went out, and none went in” [**v. 1**]. Yet, God said to Joshua, “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valour” [**v. 2**]. How was that going to happen? Were they going to rely on the military training they had received or their fighting skills? No! They were going to fight and operate as the soldiers of the LORD.

God gave Joshua specific instructions on how to go about the battle for Jericho. Joshua’s troops were to march around the city once each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. On each of those days, they would be led by seven priests who would bear and blow seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. After blowing the horns on the seventh march on the seventh day, all the people were to shout “with a great shout” and the wall of the city would fall down flat, such that the people would go up “every man straight before him” [**vv. 3-5**]. So, by faithfully doing all that God had commanded them, Joshua and his forces won a very decisive victory [**vv. 6-21**].

Examine the “variety” of soldiers involved in this battle. There were *fighting forces* we traditionally call soldiers. There were *priests* who were traditionally involved in worship rituals. Then, there were *the people*, the general population of the children coming out of servitude and slavery in Egypt. *In today’s setting in the service of God, we have apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers* [**Eph. 4: 11**]. Examine also the *fighting techniques* applied. They were well beyond the ordinary because, as the word of God has put it, even though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh [**2 Cor. 10: 3**]. Finally, we note that taking Jericho was not the end of their journey but the road to the Promised Land. *For us, however, the Promised Land that we are heading for is not earthly but heavenly- God’s eternal home*. Are we duly equipped for that journey?

As we approach end times, followers of Christ are facing bigger challenges than pulling down the walls of Jericho. As we hear of wars and rumours of wars, as nations rise against nations, believers face persecution, famines and pestilences [**Matt. 24: 6-9**]. We watch each new day millions of refugees pouring out of the Middle East and Africa into Europe and America, fueling racism and ethnic-cleansing political/religious postures. Where are the soldiers of Christ under such challenging circumstances? Who are even the soldiers of Christ in such cases and what should they be fighting for or defending? What is the definition of their success? Paul’s second letter to Timothy becomes quite helpful in answering such questions and more.

Paul encouraged Timothy (and the Ephesian church that he was pastoring) to endure hardship “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” [2 Tim. 2: 3]. What does it involve to be called a good soldier of Christ? From Chapter 2 that we are looking at in today’s study, here are critical issues that will assist us to answer that question:

a) *You are enlisted by Christ Himself*

Paul writes, “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” [v. 4]. It follows that “a good soldier of Christ” must be enlisted by Christ Himself. Jesus told His disciples while He was still with them on earth, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit may remain” [Jn 15: 16]. He is the vine and those that He has enlisted are the branches. In order to bear much fruits, those branches have to abide in Jesus because without Him, they can do nothing [vv. 1-5].

Recall when Peter and John were arrested and brought before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, for performing a miracle in the name of the resurrected Christ. We are told, “Now when they [Jewish leaders] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” [Acts 4: 13]. *If you are a true soldier called by Christ, people will know without your telling them.*

b) *You must operate only according to the rules*

Paul writes, “If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” [2 Tim. 2: 5]. That implies total submission to the rules and commandments as set down by the one who has called you to service. Jesus has asked, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” [Lk 6:46]. Elsewhere, He added, “You are My friends if you do *whatever* I command you” [Jn 15: 14].

The implication of this is the need for discipline of the body, mind and spirit so that you can know that your discretion has no place in the matter. You may want to or be tempted to wander to the right or to the left but you will hear the voice of the Lord who has called you and you will come to the path of truth and total obedience [Is. 30:21].

On successfully settling the children of Israel down in the Promised Land, Joshua gave them the following parting words [Josh. 24: 14-15]:

Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth...And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

c) *Therefore, you must be ready to endure pain*

Paul writes, “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect [chosen ones], that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He will also deny us but if we are faithless, He remains faithful because He cannot deny Himself [2 Tim. 2: 10-13].

Faith triumphs in trouble through such building blocks as tribulations, perseverance, character and hope [Rom. 5: 1-5].³ For example, David was anointed king as a teenager but was not crowned until he was thirty years old [2 Sam. 5: 4]. During that long period, he ran from pillar to post to avoid being killed by King Saul. Joseph had his dreams at seventeen but did not become governor in Egypt until the age of 30. Look at the travails that he had to pass through and endure [Gen. Chaps 39-41]. The word of God says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the LORD delivers him out of them all” [Ps. 34: 19].

From the foregoing, we can conclude that the journey through life as a soldier of Christ is quite different from soldiering for worldly authorities. Retirement is not an option. Misconduct, such as disloyalty through disobedience or hypocrisy, is out of the question. Your reward is awarded after death, not during your earthly service! How can one cope under such circumstances and still reach the Promised Land of salvation?

2. Your coping devices

In his 2nd Letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul reminded them that not all of us have faith but “the Lord is faithful who will establish [us] and guard [us] from the evil one.” The Lord is the one to direct our hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ [2 Thess. 3: 1-5]. From that perspective, we can cope as soldiers of Christ for life by applying the following devices, among so many others:

a) *Focus on the long haul*

Paul uses the analogy of vessels in a great man’s house [2 Tim. 2: 20-22] to teach us the need to focus on the long haul, especially if we are interested in building a solid foundation. In such a house, there are vessels

³ “The building blocks of Faith,” WBSL, Vol. 14, No. 3: 3 Feb. 2013:
http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_14/ThebuildingblocksoffaithVol14No33Feb2013.pdf

for daily use, such as those made of wood and clay. It is such vessels that family members use for their routine meals and drinks. There are also “vessels of honour,” those made of silver and gold, which are used only and mainly for special occasions, such as when we invite special guests. Interestingly, vessels of gold and silver (that Paul called vessels of honour) have passed through more fire than those for routine/regular use! Paul says that we are vessels of honour, that is, named in the name of Jesus, if we depart from iniquity, flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. Such can only come from habits and habits can only be formed over time. Therefore, you must focus on the long haul if you want to be a fruitful soldier of Christ.

b) Live daily as a soldier of Christ on duty

Paul writes that the Lord knows those who are His [v. 19]. Therefore, you have to learn to live daily as ***a soldier of Christ on duty***. When you watch *CNN Breaking News* on soldiers in a war zone, what do you see? They are in fortified military outfits, carrying sophisticated weapons. Soldiers of Christ must be more heavily armed because they are not fighting against flesh but wicked spiritual forces in heavenly places. In other words, they must war not according to the flesh even though they walk in flesh [2 Cor. 10: 3-5].

Soldiers of Christ on duty must put on the whole armour of God so as to be able to stand against the wiles of Satan and his evil forces. Such armour consists of ***truth*** as your belt, ***righteousness*** as your breastplate, feet covered with the shoes of the ***gospel of peace***, a helmet of ***salvation*** for the head, a shield of ***faith*** and a sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God- ***praying always, ever watchful and perseverant*** [Eph. 6: 10-18]. There is nothing for your back, implying that retreat or fear is out of the question! It is forward ever, backward never! That is how to live daily as a soldier of Christ on duty.

c) Lead others to Christ by your own example

Paul also admonishes Timothy’s flock in the Ephesian church to correct those in error to know the truth, “that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” [2 Tim. 2: 25-26]. The best way to correct others is by our own example. For instance, Jesus corrected the woman caught in adultery, not by joining the mob to stone her to death but by forgiving her and telling her to sin no more. Before that, He had challenged those without sin to cast the first stone. No one could because they knew in their hearts that they were worse! Adultery takes two parties. Where was the man she had slept with? [Jn 8: 1-11].

So, in relating to others, see issues from their perspective (empathy), not yours (sympathy). They may need just your listening ears, not your sharp tongue of judgment. Jesus said to the distraught, “Come to Me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls for My yoke is easy and My burden is light” [Matt. 11: 28-30]. Can any man be more empathetic than that?

The road may be long and rough. The going may be hard and discouraging. Always remember, “the hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.” The Lord knows those who are His. You have died with Him, so shall you also live and reign with Him in eternity if you do not deny Him but remain faithful to Him from today for the rest of your life [2 Tim. 2: 8, 11-13, 19]. That is Paul’s message for us in today’s lesson.

3. Conclusion: Thank God that Jesus is with you till your very last day on earth!

On the day He ascended into Heaven, Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all peoples on the earth and promised that He would be with them always “even to the end of the age” [Matt. 28: 18-20]. You are among those that have been called to His purpose. Therefore, all things are going to work together for you for good [Rom. 8: 28]. So, press forward to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus [Phil. 3: 12-14], bearing in mind always that you are the ambassador of Christ on earth even if you may be in chains [Eph. 6: 20].

Christ Jesus has called you to duty as one of His faithful soldiers. It is for life. Have you accepted that call? It is for your own good!