

“A SOLDIER OF CHRIST JESUS”  
Psalm 27:1-14, Philippians 3:17-4:1, 2 Timothy 2:1-13  
March 12 & 13, 2022

“A record was set in the summer of 1995 that literally brought the sports world to its feet.

Strangely, it was not some incredible record-setting blazing speed or absolute accuracy or some great display of muscular power. As a matter of fact, it was simply an honor given to someone who showed up more than anybody else in that particular sport. His name is Cal Ripkin Jr., a shortstop for the Baltimore Orioles for 21 years. He broke a record that many people thought would never be broken. It had been set by the legendary Lou Gehrig, New York Yankee’s first baseman - 2,130 consecutive games before he hung up his glove and called it quits because of a disease that finally took his life.

“When Ripkin walked on the field to begin game 2,131, the crowd exploded. Of course, they were there that night for that purpose. For twenty-two uninterrupted minutes they stood and applauded. And a lot of us made it a point to be by the television that particular day so that we could watch history being made.

“He stood there, in Ripkin style, and just looked. Eyes became misty as he looked all around the stadium, a stadium where he had played ball throughout his professional career. And then he did a wonderful thing. He walked over to his family and embraced each one of them and gave something to one and a cap to another. It was just one of those great moments. It was a gracious, public declaration in honor of a man who showed up for 2,131 consecutive games, and still went on without missing.”<sup>1</sup> Ripkin went on to play 2,632 consecutive games before his retirement in 2001. He had enjoyed triumphant seasons of carrying his team to the playoffs and even a championship. And he had endured slump seasons with poor batting averages, even being booed by fans, but his fielding carried him through. But through it all, Cal Ripkin entered each game to do his best.

**In good seasons and in bad seasons of our own lives, we are also called to be faithful to our place as followers of Jesus Christ.** Just like Cal Ripkin, there will be days when you want to give up

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<sup>1</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 186)

and quit because things just don't want to go the right way. It is very tempting to give in to easy ways of life and give up striving for Jesus in your daily life. It can be so inviting to stop working as a servant of the Lord and give in to the things of the world so that you no longer have to grind it out on the battlefield of life.

You see, to be a successful player in Major League Baseball takes commitment, dedication and lots of guts. You have to stay in shape, practice on a daily basis, and constantly stay focused on doing your best. You have to be open to try new stances in the batting box, adjust your tactics on the ball field and simply get out there and do your best at every trip to the plate. **Doing the same thing harder, expecting different results, yet thinking it will bring you success, only leads to insanity.** So you have to get up every day and get ready for the next game so that you can do all you can to bring victory to your team.

The same principles apply to our game of life. **To be an obedient Christian takes lots of stamina, lots of determination, lots of commitment and daily devotion** to continue our growth in our relationship with Jesus Christ. But don't expect the world to give you a standing ovation for the years of commitment to Jesus. Granted, there are some who have been honored because of their service and witness to Jesus Christ. But Satan's lies has convinced the world that Christianity is intolerable, that it's standards are outdated and nonsensical, and that one can live a completely successful life without anything to do with Jesus Christ. Hence, the Christian faith is the most persecuted church worldwide.

However that only means that we need to double down on our faithfulness and grow deeper in our trust in Jesus Christ so that we might be the living witnesses to our world of what Christianity is really all about. **We need to commit ourselves again and again to following Jesus in every aspect of our lives**, for He is the only One who can truly give us the life we hope for and the eternal life that we long for.

You see, life is not a sprint, but a marathon. It's daily striving to live according to the standards put out to us by God in this book, the Bible. We don't have to be flashy; we don't need to be popular;

we don't even need to be dynamic. Jesus calls each one of us to put our faith in Him each day and live FOR HIM the best way that we can, and then the world will begin to notice. They may not agree with us, but they will see our faithfulness. Consistency in faith is what it is all about.

Chuck Swindoll says it like this, "I smile thinking of what happened when I had my oil changed recently. I knelt down and watched as the mechanic took a section off underneath my truck that I'd never seen taken off before, though I had had the oil changed by other mechanics.

"I asked, 'Hey, what are you doin' down there?' He looked at me and said, 'You the owner?' I said, 'Yep!' He said, 'Well, this ought to be taken off and cleaned every eight to ten thousand miles.' When he finally got it off, it was gunky-looking underneath. He took a rag and he wiped it all off. Then he put this shield back on underneath where nobody would ever see what he had done. And I said, 'You always wipe all that off underneath there?' He said, 'Yep!' I said, 'Nobody'll ever see it.' 'I do.'

"Excellence in his work. And guess where I'm going next time to have my oil changed and a lube job done?"<sup>2</sup> **Consistently doing the right thing, every day, even if no one will ever see it, is what Jesus has invited us to do as His followers.** We are to put our trust only in the Lord so that He can lead us and use us to affect the rest of the world by our daily, consistent faith.

We hear that in our lesson of Psalm 27 today. King David writes it so well when he says, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; I will fear no one. The Lord protects me from all danger; I will never be afraid. When evil men attack me and try to kill me, they will stumble and fall. Even if a whole army surrounds me, I will not be afraid; even if enemies attack me, I will still trust God*" (27:1-3).

David knew the awesome power of the Lord God Almighty. He had seen the marvelous and the miraculous ways that God delivered His people from their enemies when they put their trust in Him. David had seen it firsthand what God could do, standing right before the giant, Goliath. **God can amazing things with just one person who consistently puts their faith in the Lord.** Even when the odds were all stacked up against David, God was able to defeat the biggest foe and bring victory to the

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<sup>2</sup> (Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations, pg. 186)

people of Israel. It happened all through faith in God.

The Apostle Paul had seen it, too. God had given him the strength and endurance to go to all the cities around the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Though he was attacked, beaten, imprisoned, and even tried unjustly, Paul was able to start many churches, empowering faithful believers to continue to do the work of Jesus Christ in their region, bringing eternal life to millions of people ever since. It was his unfailing devotion to Jesus that gave him the endurance he needed to keep on with the work that God had given to him.

Paul knew the difference that Jesus makes in the lives of those who trust in Him as Savior and Lord. His own life had been transformed from being a persecutor of the church to an ambassador of Christ Jesus. And he tells the believers in Philippi, “... *the one thing I do, however is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God’s call through Christ Jesus to the life above*” (Philippians 3:13-14). His single ambition was to live and work in order to please the Lord God by following Jesus Christ in his every day life.

The applause Paul received at the end of his missionary career was not from people in a stadium, but rather the courtroom of heaven. While here on the earth, Paul was constantly maligned and attacked, but he continued to get back up and use even that treatment to share Jesus Christ with the very ones who were attacking him. **So when he finished his course in faith, Paul received a standing ovation from Jesus and the hosts of heaven for his daily endeavor to live for Jesus.**

So Paul encouraged the Philippians, “*Keep on imitating me, my brothers [and sisters]. Pay attention to those who follow the right example that we have set for you. I have told you this many times before, and now I repeat it with tears: there are many whose lives make them enemies of Christ’s death on the cross. They are going to end up in hell, because their god is their bodily desires. They are proud of what they should be ashamed of, and they think only of things that belong to this world. We, however,*

*are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like His own glorious body, using that power by which He is able to bring all things under His rule” (3:17-21).*

This is the confidence that Paul had in order to continue to pursue the salvation of the people God had sent him to. He was driven to excellence for the sake of sharing the message of God’s love for us through Jesus Christ our Lord. He lived his life according to the commandments of the Lord, even when no one was looking, even if no one else noticed. And he calls each one of us to do the same thing in our own life so that we might also be witnesses to our world of the love of God for us.

Then, Paul encouraged his young disciple, Timothy, to also follow his example in following the Lord Jesus. Listen to how Paul challenges Timothy. This is 2 Timothy 2:1-13. (READ 2 Timothy 2:1-13).

Paul is asking Timothy to put his complete confidence and trust in the Lord as a servant of Jesus Christ. And he invites Timothy to be strong so that he might teach with confidence. That means that Timothy had to dedicate himself, staying true to God’s Word. Timothy needed to be on the look-out for those who would receive the Good News about Jesus, so that he could teach them, and then they could teach others who would also teach others. It’s exponential multiplication! He was not to waste his time on those who wanted little to do with Jesus, but to focus on those who would become so bold that they would teach Jesus to everyone around them. They were to influence many. There was no need to become involved in arguments questioning if Jesus was the Messiah or not. He was not to let others distract him from the truth of the Salvation that Jesus brings. He was not to become discouraged in his work of teaching the Gospel to those who wanted to learn. Timothy was to find those who would believe in Jesus and then live their lives for Him so that he would not be alone in the work.

**But Paul also invited Timothy to become like a soldier working hard to please his commanding officer.** As a soldier, he would have to stay in shape, study hard to know all about the tactics of the enemy, and to be prepared every day to go to battle against evil. Soldiers have to practice

regularly to maintain their sharp eye and true aim. No officer wants a soldier who can't hit a target. So the soldiers train vigorously to be prepared for any situation, at any time, so that they might be successful.

Soldiers are committed to following their commanding officer. They realize that they might not always know the big picture of the battle before them, so they have to trust their commanding officer to guide them and lead them in such a way as to successfully complete their missions. If a soldier does not believe in their commanding officer, if there is no trust in that officer, then the team will always question the orders given to them, and they will regularly second-guess what they are told. An officer who does not lead well does not remain an officer in command of others very long.

Timothy was to put his faith and trust in his Officer, Jesus Christ. He had to be prepared to go where he was told to go, and do what he was told to do, trusting that Jesus knows exactly what needs to be done at just the right time. Timothy had to have the confidence that Jesus has all the power and authority to defeat the enemy, and all Timothy needed to do was to be Jesus' servant, having access to all the resources that Jesus has available.

**But being a soldier is not just fun and games, but is serious work because in every battle it is difficult to defeat the enemy.** It is tough to win any war because the enemy is vicious and desires the total destruction of their opponents. They are usually well supplied and many times out number their foes by large margins. They are often deeply entrenched, not willing to give up any ground easily. Without rigorous training and constant preparation, the enemy can easily defeat us. So it is a soldier's duty to be the best they can be, ready at any time, confident that their CO knows just what is necessary to defeat the enemy.

So the soldier will train hard and become proficient in all the skills needed to defeat the enemy. They don't get distracted with unimportant matters, but stay focused on their part of the mission. Each person has a job to do and the success of the mission is dependent upon each team member doing their best to do what is necessary to put the enemy out of commission. Sometimes great risk must be taken in

order to remove the enemy from their location, and sometimes there is great cost at achieving victory. Soldiers may suffer great hardships and might find themselves hungry and cold and isolated. They might even face tremendous injury, yet they trust in their commanding officer who leads them.

But that's not to scare anyone away from becoming a soldier, for when a soldier enlists into the branch of service, they are putting their lives on the line for their country so that we all might find freedom and liberty and justice for all. They are willing to give of their own lives for the sake of others so that they might find release from the enemy and freedom in their own country.

So the similarities are many between the soldiers in a country's military and soldiers in the army of Christ Jesus. **We have Jesus as our commanding officer, and as we enlist ourselves in His service,** we are to be willing to give of ourselves to accomplish His purposes. We are to trust in His leadership, convinced that He is the One worthy of following. He is the One who brings us from death to life and grants us salvation as we stay faithful to Him.

As His soldiers, we are to be willing to get the training we need to become effective in our own work as part of the team reaching out to those who find themselves in enemy territory. It is our goal to fight the forces of evil to free those enslaved to Satan so that they might find freedom from their occupation and release from their enslavement. Our training comes from the Bible that teaches us the skills in presenting the truth of God's great love for us. Our teachers are pastors, Bible study leaders and others who have been faithful to Jesus Christ. We are challenged to become confident with our sword, God's Word, so that we might defend ourselves from the lies and schemes of the Devil. Dedicated memorization, practice and application of the Scriptures in our lives are essential for us to serve the Lord Jesus. **We are to become proficient with the knowledge of God's ways so that we can distinguish the temptations and enticements of the enemy who seeks to lead us away from God.** And we are to gird ourselves in prayer, surrounding ourselves with the power of our commanding officer, Jesus.

We are not to become distracted by things happening around us that might cause worry or confusion. We're not to worry about our bank accounts, our pensions, or our retirements. We are to

stay focused on living our lives according to the Word of God and touching the lives of those around us by teaching them about the love that Jesus has for us. We're not to be overly concerned about politics, or with the news or with the successes of those who are living without God in their lives. We are to stand ready to step out to meet the needs of those who are overcome by the enemy's influence. **We are to fight for the right, the true and the holy to keep from becoming overwhelmed by the evils of this world.** We are to stand ready to take risks that could release a person from the deadly effects of worldliness. Remember, we are soldiers of Jesus Christ!

Realize that when we stand up for the good and the right and the just, there may be extenuating consequences for our position. Remember, the enemy wants to destroy us, so when we stand up to the evil forces of our world, we will find aggression against us. We could face ridicule, or be ostracized by those we thought were friends, or we could be attacked by them. Don't be afraid, as King David says. **Remain faithful to your training manual, the Bible, and to your commanding officer, Jesus Christ.** Though you may be attacked, you will always be found under the Lord's protection.

The Apostle Paul challenges us to remember this true saying, *"If we have died with [Jesus], we shall also live with Him. If we continue to endure, we shall also rule with Him. If we deny [Jesus], He also will deny us. If we are not faithful [to Him], He remains faithful [to us], because He cannot be false to Himself"* (2 Timothy 2:13).

And by all means, do not make this world into your god. Be willing to suffer hardships, going without all the delicacies and delights that the world might give, in order to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't give in to the desires and cravings of the body, but have self-control, waiting eagerly for the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ as you faithfully serve Him as your Commanding Officer. **Remain committed to Him each and every day so that He might use you at just the right time to save one who is lost or under the control of the enemy.** Stay ready, in season and out of season, to consistently live your life for the glory of God. And then you will hear the applause of heaven, acknowledging your efforts and your dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father, this life is very difficult because we are so tempted to go our own way, away from Your way. It is a challenge to remain a faithful follower of Jesus Christ in a day that calls for us to do our own thing, live our life to satisfy every desire and craving, and take the easy road. Life as Your servant is tremendously demanding. However, we have enlisted ourselves into Your army as soldiers of Christ Jesus. Give us the courage to receive Your training, to put that training into action, and to strive daily to work to bring honor and glory to You as we fight the good fight of faith. Give us eyes to see the enemy all around us so that we might tenaciously hold our ground as Your servants. Give us the strength we need to defeat the enemy in every road and avenue and byway of our lives, so that we might rescue those who are perishing. Enable us to strive each day after Jesus Christ, so that we might be found pleasing to You. Give us the endurance we need to run straight to the goal of eternal life, bringing all those around us with us, for Your glory. This we pray in Jesus' powerful and holy Name. AMEN