Christians are trusting

Our Old Testament lesson for today introduced to us a woman of remarkable character. Her name was Ruth. While Ruth’s story may have a fairy tale ending, its beginning, is tragic. As a young woman she finds herself morning at the grave of her husband. She was a Moabite who had married an Israelite. Although distant relatives these two peoples hated each other and it is likely that Ruth was considered a traitor for her marriage. Her prospects of finding another husband were low. And in a culture dominated by men, a widow faced a future of poverty and starvation.

Her mother-in-law tells her the only logical thing for her to do is to return to her parent’s house. She reasons that she is too old to have another husband and it would take too long for her to have a son for Ruth to marry. But Ruth refuses to listen. She says, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”1 Remarkable when you consider that Ruth did not know where she was going to live, what she was going to eat, or how the people of Bethlehem were going to treat her.

As you read through the book of Ruth you will learn that this young woman displays many fine qualities. She is loyal, humble, honest, and hard working. But from the very beginning we come to understand that above all she is trusting. As she faces famine, poverty, starvation, and alienation she puts her trust in God.

In our lesson for today from 2 Timothy 2:11-13 we are going to be talking about trust in God. And as we do, we are going to see that trust is not just a characteristic found among Old Testament believers like Ruth. Rather we are going to be reminded that New Testament believers like you are trusting. Today we are going to see that Christians trust in God for life, salvation and forgiveness.

Last week we talked a little about the struggles and difficulties that men like Paul and Timothy faced as Christians living in a sin-filled world. Paul makes reference to those struggles and difficulties again today when he says he is “suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.” Unlike Ruth, Paul was not about to have a fairy tale ending. In a few more chapters he will tell Timothy that he has fought the good fight, he has run the race marked out for him. He seems to understand that soon he will face a martyr’s death. And yet like Ruth, Paul puts his trust in God.

Paul writes about the believer’s trust in God when he writes in verse 11, “Here is a trustworthy saying”:

This statement is used by Paul four other times in the Pastoral Epistles to highlight some important, reliable truth. Here it introduces a series of conditional statements whereby a cause produces an effect.

The first conditional statement of cause and effect in Paul’s trustworthy saying is found in the second half of verse 11. There we are reminded that the Christians trust in God for life. Paul writes, “If we died with him, we will also live with him.” The life that Paul is talking about is a life that pleases God. It is a life of perfect harmony with the will of God; a life that is full of love for God and love for our fellow man.

A God pleasing life is the life we were created to live. But then sin came into the world. Because of sin, a God pleasing life is a life that we are unable to live on our own. In Romans 8:7 we are told, “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” As a result of sin, the life we live is really no life at all. It is a life of rebellion against the will of God; a life of hostility toward God and hostility toward our fellow man. It is a life that Proverbs 14:12 tells us “leads only to death”.

The God pleasing life that Paul is talking about is only possible if we have died with Christ. How is it that we died with Christ? In Romans 6:3 Paul explains how we died with Christ when he writes, “All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Paul is talking about the death to sin and self that every Christian undergoes when the Holy Spirit creates faith in us either through Word or Sacrament. He is talking about how we were changed from unbelievers to believers. He is talking about our conversion from dead in sin to alive in Christ. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit are we able to live a God pleasing life. That is why the Christian trusts in God for life.

The second conditional statement of cause and effect in Paul’s trustworthy saying is found in verse 12. There we are reminded that the Christian trusts in God for salvation. Paul writes, “If we endure, we will also reign with him.” The reign that Paul is talking about is the salvation that awaits the sons and daughters of the heavenly King. It is the eternal life in the paradise that is describe in Revelation 21:4 as a place where there “will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.”

But before we reign in salvation we must endure on earth. Endure implies that living our God pleasing lives here on earth will be met with some resistance. But this ought not to surprise us. As long as we live in this sin-filled

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1 Ruth 1:16
world our new life with Christ is not an easy life. Anyone who tells you differently is trying to sell you something. Jesus, our Savior told us to expect resistance when he said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Our Savior said this, by the way, as he was on his way to literally pick up the cross upon which he would suffer and die as the payment for the sins of the world. Our Savior endured the scourning and shame of his own people, he endured the persecution and pain of the Romans, and he endured the torment and torture of being forsaken by God. He endured all this so that just as he might be one with us in our sin we might be one with him in salvation.

When we live a God pleasing life in this sin-filled world and face resistance we are walking in the footsteps of our Savior. Rather than being discouraged by this resistance it might be helpful for us to remember where those footsteps lead. In Ephesians 1:20-21 we are told that after our Savior endured the scourning and shame, persecution and pain, torment and torture that God then, “raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given” And from his seat at the right hand of God our Savior then says to us from Revelation 3:21, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.” Only by following in the footsteps of our Savior is the believer invited to reign in heaven. That is why the Christian trusts in God for salvation.

The third conditional statement of cause and effect in Paul’s trustworthy saying is found in verses 12-13. There we are reminded that Christians trust in God for forgiveness. Paul writes, “If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” All throughout the Bible the phrase “God is faithful” is a reference to God keeping his promises. The faithfulness that Paul is referring to is God’s promise to forgive. In Lamentations 3:22-23 we read, “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

The reason God’s ongoing forgiveness needs to be discussed is sadly because of our ongoing need for forgiveness. Paul speaks of disowning Jesus. When we hear of someone disowning Jesus, we might think of Judas who betrayed him or Peter who denied him. But we ought also to think of those who refuse to do what Jesus says. In John 13:34 Jesus says, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” The person who dishonors their parent, pastor, government, or any other authority that God has established disowns Jesus. The person who speaks to another with harsh and hurtful words disowns Jesus. The person who seduces and lusts disowns Jesus. The person who covers up truth and lies disowns Jesus. The gossip disowns Jesus as does the person who is filled with jealousy. When we think of the people who disown Jesus, we ought to think of ourselves.

Those who continue to disown Jesus until death or judgment day will in turn be disowned. In Matthew 7:23 Jesus tells us he will “tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

According to the pattern of cause and effect that Paul has established up to this point we might expect that to be the end of his trustworthy saying. But it’s not, because our faithlessness does not affect the faithfulness of God. No matter how often he is rejected, as long as we still live, God’s call to repentance continues to be heard. It is heard in passages like Luke 13:34, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together” As long as we live, God calls out to us to turn from our evil ways. He calls us to repent of the times that we have disowned him by not loving one another. And to all who turn to God in sorrow over their sin they will find a God that his faithful to his promise to forgive. That is why Christians trust in God for forgiveness.

As Ruth faced famine, poverty, starvation, and alienation she put her trust in God. And if you read the rest of her account you will learn how Ruth was rewarded for her trust. Through her God moved history one step closer to the fulfillment of his promised Messiah. One of Ruth’s descendants would be born in one of Bethlehem stables.

Today we have been reminded that trust is not just a characteristic found in Old Testament believers like Ruth. Trust is a characteristic of all who believe. Including Christians like you who trust in God for life, salvation, and forgiveness. One of the greatest characteristics of Christians is trust. Amen

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1 2 Timothy 2:11-13 Pentecost 21 October 13th 2013 Pastor Harmon Lewis @ Saving Grace Lutheran Church, Mobile, AL

2 Matthew 16:24