

“Why We Believe Following Jesus Is Difficult”  
(2 Timothy 2:1-13)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation. Last time,

1. We considered one of major errors

a. Of so-called “Church” today:

b. The Health and Wealth movement.

(i) Say so-called, because many involved in this

(ii) Aren’t really Christians at all.

(a) If you seek Lord merely to be healed,

(b) Or seek Him to be rich,

(c) You’re really not seeking Him for right reasons.

(iii) Jesus invites those who are weary and heavy laden by sin

(a) To come and take His yoke (Matt. 11:28).

(b) He invites those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

(c) To come and be satisfied (Matt. 5:6; John 6:35).

(d) He doesn’t want you to come

(1) Under any pretense

(2) That He will fulfill your lusts

(3) Or give you the things

(4) He actually calls you to give up

(5) To follow Him.

2. Those who promote this thinking

a. Aren’t promoting God’s kingdom, but their own.

b. And it becomes quite clear

(i) When you compare their character to Christ’s.

(ii) They are so unlike Him:

(a) They’re far more like the Pharisees Jesus condemned,

(b) Who “inside . . . are full of robbery and self-indulgence” (Matt. 23:25).

B. Preview.

1. This evening,

a. Let’s consider another aspect of this movement

b. That we want to distance ourselves from:

c. The Abundant Life movement.

(i) Abundant life includes:

(a) Health and Wealth – God promises wellness and wealth.

(b) Word of Faith – name it, claim it.

(c) Seed Faith – sow under health and wealth.

(d) Full Gospel – belief in continuance of gifts.

- (e) Prosperity Gospel – God wants you to prosper materially primarily.
- (ii) All believe in continuance of gifts,
  - (a) All believe Lord’s will is for you to be healthy and wealthy,
  - (b) All believe that Lord wills
    - (1) You prosper in virtually every physical way.
    - (2) Just become a believer,
    - (3) All your cares and concerns over,
    - (4) You’ve entered blessing.
- (iii) In terms of Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress
  - (a) It’s like being in Beulah Land continually,
    - (1) With no struggles,
    - (2) No trials, temptations,
    - (3) Nothing to interrupt perfect happiness
    - (4) And blessedness
    - (5) Which you can have
    - (6) If have enough faith.
  - (b) This is just opposite of Edwards’
    - (1) Fly in the ointment:
    - (2) That even the best experiences on earth
    - (3) Will have something in them to remind you
    - (4) You shouldn’t expect full happiness here –
    - (5) That this is reserved for heaven.
  - (c) They describe it as being in Beulah Land,
    - (1) But it really amounts
    - (2) To making your home in Vanity Faire.

- 2. Tonight let’s consider three things:
  - a. What the Abundant Life Movement is.
  - b. Why they believe the Bible teaches it.
  - c. But why we believe that far from teaching this doctrine,  
The Lord actually tells us that life will be difficult.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, what does Abundant Life movement teach?
  - 1. We don’t have to look far
    - a. To find a spokesman for this doctrine:
    - b. On Joel Osteen’s website,
    - c. He has as an article of faith: “We believe . . . as children of God, we are overcomers and more than conquerors and God intends for each of us to experience the abundant life He has in store for us.
  - 2. What does he mean by “abundant life”?

- a. It seems that each promoter of this thinking
- b. Tries to outdo one another in overstating it.
  - (i) Kenneth Copeland expressed it by saying: “Dogs beget dogs, and cats beget cats, and God begets gods. You are all little gods.”
    - (a) The Abundant Life is having power to make things go your way
    - (b) Because like God, you have power
    - (c) To command the world and its circumstances
    - (d) And they will obey.
  - (ii) Joel Osteen is a bit more subdued, but not much. Here’s a quote from his book, *It’s Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, and Increase in God’s Favor*, to give you better idea:
    - (a) “God never created us to be average. We’re not supposed to drag around, barely making it, defeated and depressed. God created us to be the head and never the tail, to be happy, healthy, and whole.
    - (b) “The Scripture says: ‘We have been made in the image of Almighty God.’ When God made you, He put a part of Himself in you. You might say that you have the spiritual DNA of Almighty God. He’s your Heavenly Father. You have some of His traits, some of His characteristics.
    - (c) “In your genes right now are His favor, wisdom, strength, talent, and ability. Just as your natural DNA came from your parents, your spiritual DNA is from your Heavenly Father. The good news is that the spiritual always overrides the natural. God’s DNA will override any negative DNA in your family line.
    - (d) “You have the right gifts, the right talent, the right personality, the right height. You have the courage, the strength, the ability you need. But just as with the physical, some spiritual genes lie dormant, waiting to be activated.
    - (e) *“Every one of us has potential waiting to be released.”*
    - (f) “You have more in you. Don’t you dare sit around thinking, *I’ve reached my limits. I’ve had a rough upbringing, and I’ve made a lot of mistakes.* No, the Creator of the universe has equipped you with everything you need. You have been programmed to be a victor and not a victim.
    - (g) “If you’ll stay in faith, no matter what has come against you, at the right time your seeds of greatness will activate and you will fulfill your God-given destiny.
    - (h) “It’s your time to believe” (43-47).
  - (iii) We might call this the “Burger King” cult:
    - (a) “Have it your way.”
    - (b) God wants everything to go your way.
    - (c) It has many adherents: Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, Fred Price, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagen, Oral Roberts, Richard Roberts, Joseph Prince, Robert Schuler, to name a few.

B. Why do they say they teach this?

1. Because of statements in the Bible like these:
  - a. Jesus says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly” (John 10:10).
  - b. The Lord says through Jeremiah, “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope’” (Jer. 29:11).
  - c. Jesus, “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:31-33).
  - d. Psalmist, “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Ps. 1:1-3).
  - e. Paul, “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21).
  
2. They believe these are so many blank checks
  - a. To ask God for whatever want
  - b. And He’s bound to give it to you.
  - c. God becomes our servant.
    - (i) In real sense, we become His masters,
    - (ii) To hold His promises over His head
    - (iii) To give us what we want.
  
  - d. They don’t characterize Him in this way,
    - (i) They believe this is what He wants for us.
    - (ii) The cross was all about making us whole,
      - (a) Healthy, successful,
      - (b) Children of God that experience
      - (c) Nothing but victorious living.
  
    - (iii) The thing that makes this seem plausible
      - (a) Is the fact that God does promise to do great things for us,
      - (b) But not in the sense they mean it.
  
    - (iv) There are so many who follow these gurus,
      - (a) Who prefer this “spin” on the promises
      - (b) Because it suits them –

- (c) This is the way they would prefer things to be,
- (d) Because they have worldly hearts.

3. Why do these really teach these things?
  - a. Because they want big churches.
  - b. They want to be famous.
  - c. They want to be rich.
  - d. Those that are successful are rich,
  - e. But strangely, it doesn't work same for their followers.

C. But what does the Lord tell us in His Word

About the Christian life? Can this be true?

1. Bunyan gives us an accurate picture in Pilgrim's Progress.
  - a. The Christian life a dangerous, hard road,
  - b. A very straight path, of the strictest morality,
  - c. A path full of snares, pitfalls, and enemies that are trying to destroy us.
  - d. It's the most difficult road one could possibly choose.
2. We see something of this in our text this evening:
  - a. Paul exhorts Timothy,
    - (i) To be strong in God's grace (v. 1).
    - (ii) Why?
    - (iii) Because Christian life difficult.
  - b. Christian life is a military life –
    - (i) You are soldiers,
    - (ii) Called to fight in the war of two kingdoms.
    - (iii) To fight your sinful desires
    - (iv) And put them to death,
    - (v) So can engage the battle to recover souls.
  - c. As soldier, Paul says you will suffer hardship.
    - (i) You need to dedicate yourself to winning this war;
    - (ii) You are not to entangle self in affairs of life,
    - (iii) But seek to please one who enlisted you (vv. 3-4).
  - d. You need the dedication of an athlete.
    - (i) Athletes discipline themselves thoroughly,
    - (ii) In order to win the competition and so the prize,
    - (iii) Especially when competing according to rules (v. 5).
  - e. Paul points to his own example:
    - (i) He suffered hardship,
    - (ii) Even imprisoned and treated as a criminal (v. 9).
    - (iii) But was willing to endure these things
      - (a) For sake of Christ's sheep –

- (b) That they might be saved,
- (c) And have eternal glory (v. 10).

- f. Paul goes on to say
  - (i) What you must be willing to do
  - (ii) To inherit eternal life:
    - (a) If you would live with Him, you must die with Him (v. 11).
    - (b) If you would reign with Him, you must endure (v. 12).
    - (c) If you would have Him confess you, you must confess Him (v. 12).
    - (d) You must be faithful, or He, in His faithfulness
    - (e) Can do nothing other than judge and condemn you (v. 13).
- g. Does this sound like kind of life the Abundant Life gurus talk about?

### 3. What do these passages mean?

- a. Paul, “Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:10-12).
- b. Jesus, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12).
- c. “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (John 15:18-19).
- d. “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).
- e. “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13).
- f. Paul, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED’” (Rom. 8:35-36).
- g. The gurus say they’ll hate and persecute you
  - (i) Because they’re jealous of your prosperity.
  - (ii) Is that what the Lord is speaking of?
  - (iii) No, they’ll hate you because you’re like Christ.
    - (a) Who, by their standards,
    - (b) Did not experience the Abundant Life.
    - (c) He was poor, hated, and ended up being killed by His own people.

4. Now you might say,
  - a. If this is the cost, then who will make it to heaven?
  - b. If this is what the Christian life is like, who would want to live it?
  - c. The answer is, you, if you're Christian.
    - (i) You will make it, because Lord promises you will.
    - (ii) And you will live this life, because you won't want it any other way.
    - (iii) Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28).
  - d. If you're a true believer
    - (i) Lord has changed your heart,
      - (a) You desire to live godly
      - (b) Even in ungodly world.
    - (ii) You'd never be happy
      - (a) Giving into the world's sins
      - (b) Making your home here.
    - (iii) You will do what Christian does in Pilgrim's Progress:
      - (a) Fight against temptation and sin,
      - (b) Fight against the world and Satan,
      - (c) You will move forward on straight and narrow path
      - (d) Even though it's difficult.
5. And as far as the abundant life Jesus speaks of
  - a. And promises the Lord has made,
    - (i) These are meant to sustain you
    - (ii) In your spiritual warfare.
  - b. The abundant life is having God's Spirit
    - (i) His love, His presence in your soul.
    - (ii) "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).
  - c. The Lord does have plans to bless you,
    - (i) But they're mainly future:
    - (ii) Not in this world, but the world to come.
  - d. The Lord will take care of your needs here
    - (i) If you will seek first His kingdom.
    - (ii) He will bless and prosper all you set out to do
    - (iii) For His glory and to further His kingdom.
    - (iv) And He will do far more than you ask or think
    - (v) When your life is dedicated to His cause.

- e. God hasn't promised
  - (i) To bless a life dedicated to self-indulgence,
  - (ii) Greed, pride, and hypocrisy,
  
- f. Following Jesus is difficult
  - (i) The most difficult thing you will ever do,
  - (ii) But it's also the most blessed of lives,
  - (iii) Because the Lord has promised
    - (a) To satisfy you now with His Spirit
    - (b) To take care of all your needs,
    - (c) And to give you an eternity of blessing
    - (d) In His presence,
    - (e) When your work for Him is finished in this world.
  
  - (iv) It's difficult, but it's the only life
    - (a) A true believer will choose
    - (b) Because it's the only life that leads to heaven
    - (c) And the One we love the most.
  
  - (v) May the Lord give each of us grace to live it. Amen.

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