

Sermon for Sunday, November 2, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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NO TIME FOR CHOCOLATE SOLDIERS
II Timothy 2:1-13

Text: "Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."
II Timothy 2:3

I hope you will keep your Bibles open for a moment to our Scripture for this morning. There are several things there that I would like to call to your attention. The first thing I want you to notice is that St. Paul believed something. In verse 8 he speaks of the gospel which he believes? Well, he speaks of Jesus as the Christ. The word "Christ" is the official Jewish word to describe the Messiah, the anointed one who is to come from God. To say that this Jesus is the Christ is to make a tremendous affirmation about who and what he is. St. Paul says that Jesus is risen from the dead. He affirms the resurrection. In verse 10 he says that salvation is obtained in Jesus and that it rings eternal glory. So in the thing that he believes, St. Paul affirms the historic message of the New Testament about who Jesus is, what he did, and how men who believe in Him will have eternal glory.

But St. Paul not only believed something, the second thing I want you to notice is that he stood up for what he believed. Now, that was no small feat. Because he stood up for what he believed, some pretty bad things happened to him. For example, he says, "I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal." He says, "I endure everything..." So, we know that St. Paul did indeed suffer because he stood up for what he believed and tradition says he eventually paid with his life.

The third thing I want you to notice is this: Not only did he believe something, not only did he stand for something, he also told young Timothy to do the same thing. As our text for today puts it, he said to Timothy, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." So St. Paul believed that those who shared his faith should also stand up for what they believed. They should be willing to pay the price of suffering. They should be willing to share the suffering as a good soldier of Jesus. Now, that wasn't easy in those days. To stand up for Jesus meant to go against the official faith of the Roman Empire. To stand up for Jesus meant to cut across the grain of local deities and local religious practices. That wasn't a very popular thing to do. All one has to do is to read the Book of Acts to see what happened to missionaries who invaded ancient cities with the story of Jesus. Because of doing that, Paul in one place tells us how he was whipped, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked and abused, even being left for dead once, because he stood up for what he believed. It was no time for chocolate soldiers. The heat put on Christians was intense and a chocolate soldier would melt under the pressure. So, St. Paul tells young Timothy to be a good soldier for Jesus and to be ready to share in the suffering. Harry Truman once said, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." The same was true for Christians in those days. If they stood up for what they believed, incredible heat was put on them and chocolate soldiers couldn't stand the heat. Only a good soldier of Jesus who was willing to suffer could stand the heat.

The fourth thing I want to say is this: The word to Timothy is also a word to us. What Paul said to Timothy back in the first century is still God's word to Christians today. God is still calling brave men and women to be willing to suffer as good soldiers of Jesus.

Do you think we need any Christian soldiers today? Do you think we live in a time when our world, our nation, is desperately in need of people who believe in something, who are willing to stand up for what they believe, and who are willing to suffer for what they believe? Do we live in a time for chocolate soldiers or is this a day for Christian soldiers? I'd like to spend a few minutes examining that question with you this morning.

The first point I want to make is this: secular humanism is the ruling religion of our day. It is officially taught in our schools. It is the official stance of our government and our courts. It dominates our public media, our literature, our movies. I call it a religion because it is. Secular humanism has certain beliefs about the origin of life, the origin of the universe and of our world. It has basic beliefs about what is right and what is wrong. Secular humanism rejects God. It rejects the Bible. It rejects Christian morality. It rejects what this church stands for. It rejects what Christians stand for.

Let me give you an example. Because secular humanism rejects a belief in God, it has sought to impose this view on society. Bible reading and prayer in public schools is ruled out. By refusing to let anything about God be taught it is in fact, thereby teaching that a belief in God is not important. Abortion is promoted because it rejects a view of the sacredness of life. When certain recently organized religiously orientated groups have sought to speak out for and stand up for the things they believe in, secular humanism has cried, "foul". It has claimed that the separation of church and state is endangered. Yet, the fact is, their real complaint is that they will brook no opposition from a religion other than their own.

However, this idea that religious people should offer their ideas only on secular ground is belied by our American history. The form of American government, the concepts built into our constitution, the very origin of our nation was religious. In November 1620 when the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock they made a compact which acknowledged God's rightful place. What is being objected to is not religion, but religion which is different from theirs. They believe in great moral latitude as evidenced in the media today. They believe in moral relativism, in situational ethics, and in the newest fad of "me-ism". When in recent years liberal ministers have marched on Washington or gotten involved in the Viet Nam conflict, they welcomed them as enlightened brothers. But when dedicated Christians sought to object to certain policies and programs, they screamed that Christians ought to keep religion out of politics.

See how it works! Who was it that began to smuggle moral preferences into politics? Who pressed for legalized abortions to be paid for by the state? Who claims equal rights for gays? And for lesbians? Who pushes for recognition for the drug culture? Who fought for dropping of the restrictions on what could be shown in movies? Was it the church? Or was it the secular humanists? What secular humanism wants is a political monopoly. They want to lock Christians up within the walls and confines of the church and not permit them to express their views or their concerns.

Or, again, look at another example, the sexually explicit acts now accepted as commonplace in our movies. When Christian groups object to this and protest against it, they are accused of attempting to force their views on society. But isn't it a fact, that the views of those who see nothing wrong with this is being forced on society? Recent studies indicated that a primary cause of rape is pornography. As a consequence of the increase in pornography, according to the FBI Uniform Crime Statistics, a twelve-year-old girl in the United States has a one in three chance of being raped in her lifetime. Who fought for the permissiveness that has led to pornography? Was it the church? Or was it secular humanism?

or here is another example: secular humanists have called people "racists" for objecting to forced busing; they have called people "sexists" for opposing the Equal Rights Amendment; they have called citizens "warmongers" for wishing to maintain a strong defense or resist Communist aggression. But if I call you a racist, or a sexist, or a warmonger, do I not imply you are immoral? So secular humanism has its own standard of morality and we are called immoral if we do not accept that standard. Now, I'm sure many Christians believe in busing or the ERA or less money for defense. But it is secular humanism which protest that Christians are trying to force their beliefs on society if they protest these things.

What America desperately needs today are Christian soldiers who believe something--who are committed to faith; and who will then stand up and be counted for what they believe. To do so will certainly bring one under attack. If you believe in God, in the meaning and integrity of life that the Bible places on it, if you stand for Biblical moral convictions and stand up for them, be assured you will come under attack. You will be called old-fashioned, moralistic, out-dated, and guilty of trying to force your views on others. It is no time for chocolate soldiers who will melt under the heat. Instead, it is time for brave men and women to be good soldiers of Jesus.

The second thing I want to say about secular humanism is this: it has invaded the church. Dr. James Hitchcock, a professor at St. Louis University writing in the New Oxford Review, has made an astounding projection. He predicts that by the turn of the century, most of the present so-called main-line churches will have ceased to exist or will no longer have a distinctive Christian character. Why will this happen? For the simple reason that many of our religious leaders and clergy no longer believe in basic religious doctrines. Since they no longer can speak with conviction and authority on religious matters, they begin to take increasingly passionate and uncompromising stands on issues like African politics, the Panama Canal Treaty, nuclear energy, and various American labor disputes. Dr. Hitchcock goes on to say, "most people probably join churches to have their religious needs met, and they find that these needs are treated by the official church either as non-existent or as dangerous distractions from social involvement."

Isn't that amazing? The most serious threat, the greatest danger, to the life of the church today is from within. It is from her leaders and her ministers. Why should such a church survive? Other agencies and institutions of society can do those things much better than the church. If the church has no doctrine of faith, no integrity of worship, no spiritual vitality, no moral standards, why should it survive?

As your pastor, I must confess to you that I am presently involved in a deep, inner struggle about my role and my place in the Presbyterian Church and especially in a church created by the merger of the Southern Presbyterian Church and the United Presbyterian Church. If the goals and commitments of our denomination, or a new denomination, are the goals of secular humanism, what future does such a church have? How can it--indeed, why should it--survive? I keep asking myself, is it time to stand up unequivocally for what I believe, even if it means separating myself? Within the decade of the 80's I will have to make that decision and so will you as a congregation. We need to be much in prayer about the direction God would lead us.

Back during the days of the conflict in Viet Nam, many liberal ministers and many secular humanists marched and protested, they invaded draft registration offices and created other forms of social conflict, saying our involvement there was immoral. Whether or not it was immoral is a question I cannot answer. But there is one question of morality I can answer. I can say that what has happened in Viet Nam and the genocide in Cambodia is immoral as literally millions of people are either being killed or starved to death or gased or otherwise disposed of. Where are the marchers and protestors now? Back during that conflict, a helicopter pilot killed in Viet Nam was buried in New Hampshire. His parents had the words of John Steward Mill inscribed on his memorial. It goes like this: "War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing is worth a war is worse. Any man who has nothing which he cares about more than his own personal safety is a miserable creature and has no chance of being freed unless he is made free and kept so by exertions of better men than himself."

Yes, our nation--our world--is in a desperate plight. Who can doubt that the Western world is thoroughly secularized? The secular humanism view permeates our nation. But there is another view of life--a view which believes in God, which believes that Jesus came to die for our sins, that the Bible is the word of God, that there is hope for broken lives, and that there is a moral standard by which God judges the world. There are many who rally around the flag of secular humanism for what we are engaged in a war on morality--a war on the structure of the family. Are there those who will stand up for Jesus and rally around him? Yes, these are crucial days in which we live and it is no time for chocolate soldiers. What our world needs are brave men and women who believe something and who will stand up for it--people who will take their share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Where will you take your stand? What kind of soldier will you be?