

Soldiers of Christ Arise

by A.W. Tozer

The Christian life is a warfare, not a game, and requires us to be willing to take hardship and deprivation seriously in order to achieve spiritual greatness.

Duration: 31:34

Scripture: Ezekiel 33:32, Matthew 6:33, John 14:15, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 6:12, 2 Timothy 2:3-4, James 1:22

Topics: "Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker criticizes certain leaders who he believes are leading young people astray by portraying the Christian life as a game. He argues that this mindset affects various aspects of Christian culture, such as music and magazines. The speaker also mentions that he will be speaking at a convention of religious writers and editors, where he expects to have a more challenging and confrontational discussion. He emphasizes the importance of being a good soldier of Jesus Christ and willingly embracing hardship for the sake of the faith. The sermon concludes with a reference to the story of John Bunyan's 'Christian entering heaven' from 'The Pilgrim's Progress.'

Transcript

In the text, the text is from the passage you previously read in your hearing this morning, 2nd Timothy, 2nd chapter. I just want to read the 3rd verse. Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Paul is writing to Timothy, the younger man. The last letter Paul wrote shortly after this, he was beheaded. But he was writing to this younger man, he called his son, his son in the faith, told him to be strong and to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Now, let me begin by saying to you that success in the Christian life requires that we have right views concerning the Christian life. But it requires something more than that. It requires that we do not have erroneous views of the Christian life.

You say that's tautological, you're repeating yourself, but I'm not. It is necessary that we have right views. The views we hold are right views.

It is necessary also that we do not allow any erroneous views to get in with our right ones. You see, a man may have twelve tenets in his Christian creed or his philosophy of the Christian life, which he thinks he

draws from the scriptures. He may divide them up into twelve tenets.

He may say, I believe this and this and this, and twelve of them. And ten of them may be right, and two of them wrong. So that he not only has right views concerning the Christian life, that is, he has ten right views, but he has two erroneous views.

And while I suppose that most of us have some erroneous notion somewhere about Christian life, which we hope not to correct by constant reading of the scriptures and meditating thereon, but I repeat that there are views of the Christian life held and taken by men, which are erroneous, and because they're erroneous, they're very harmful. You know, an error can be deadly, or an error can simply be a mischief, something that doesn't harm you too much. If you have a bottle of something non-poisonous and a bottle of deadly poison in your cabinet, and you give the baby the wrong medicine, that error will cost the baby his life.

On the other hand, it may be as my mother once, she baked a cake, God bless her, and she flavored it. And afterward, the people that were there, company was there, and they cried and they nibbled on it, but it didn't go so well. And finally, somebody said to her, my mother was a lovely little woman, everybody called Prudy.

Her name was Prudence. Prudy, what did you put in this cake? She hustled out to find out. She thought she'd put vanilla.

But instead of that, she'd got hold of a bottle called something vegetable compound. It was a medicine for women. And she'd put that in instead of the vanilla.

Now, that didn't hurt anybody, and if the medicine was any good, it might have done some of us some good, particularly ladies. But it's possible, you know, to make mistakes and not have them dangerous mistakes. It's possible to make mistakes that are deadly.

I believe that there is a rule held of the Christian life. Nobody ever formulated it, you know, or put it down in print, that you can get at it and say this isn't true, but it's sort of accepted. The view is this, that the Christian life is a game to be played.

This is the notion, it's pretty prominent in our time, that the Christian life is a game to be played. Well, that is an error, and it's an error that has bred a whole spate of religious activities that are not in keeping with the word of God. This notion that the Christian life is simply another form of entertainment and fun.

We hear young people testify, get up and say, I used to think the Christian life was very hard, but I find I can just have as much fun as anybody. And now the dear little thing, she's just repeating what she's been told by some half-witted leaders that should be off somewhere with a net thrown around them and led off, but instead of that they lead meetings and give talks. And they lead the young people to think that the Christian life is a game, a little cleaner one, but a game.

And so that affects our music, and if you're going to have fun, of course your music is going to be that type. It affects our magazines, so that many of our Christian magazines. Next Thursday I'm speaking twice down at Winona, Indiana, to a convention of religious writers and editors and so on.

It won't be a meeting where you have to be nice, it'll just be where I can let my hair down, figuratively speaking, and tell those people what I think of a lot that's printed these days. This erroneous idea that the

Christian life is a game, it creates a certain kind of meeting and a certain kind of leader, and the whole atmosphere of services are determined by this error. Now, the Spirit says not that the Christian life is a game, it says the Christian life is a warfare, and there's a vast difference between playing and fighting.

When an apple leaves, or leaps, whichever that is, goes down here and takes that little crooked stick and starts knocking around a bottle cap over the ice, that's a game. And nobody is going to kill anybody else, and there's nothing but a game. It'll either be one by one side or the other.

And I noticed last night that it was Chicago that took it again, but Robert wants more. But it was a game. Nobody's going home to Chicago tonight because the maple leaves beat them.

It's a game. They're there, they're having fun. And when it's all over, why are they going home laughing and they even love to have a soda with the other team? They're their friends.

It's a game. But it's quite different if they had guns and were standing across from each other, shooting each other. When you shoot, you play for keeps.

When you play hockey, you can lose one Saturday night and win the next. But when you have war, it's death. And the Christian life is not a game to be played that everybody smiles and says, Well, we'll try it again sometime.

We'll get you this time. No, no. The Christian life is a warfare, and we're fighting with a determined enemy who's out to get us, and he's playing for keeps, or shooting for keeps, if you like.

Whether we are or not, he is. And so we're engaged in warfare, though there may be many occupations, many things that we're doing. Maybe traveling, building, farming.

You will notice in our text here that he uses the figure of speech of a soldier, he uses the figure of speech of a wrestler, and he uses the figure of speech of a farmer. Another place he talks about the famous 215, show thyself approved under God, a workman who needeth not to be shamed, there's a carpenter. And elsewhere he talks about us as shepherds and sheep.

So there are many figures of speech used, and if this were the only place the figure of a soldier appears, I would say, Well, it's a figure of speech, and we'll pass it over and won't make too much of it. But the truth is, the whole Bible teaches this. The whole Bible teaches that we're living our lives under war conditions, that there is a critical emergency existing, and that whether we're traveling or building or farming or wrestling or fighting or whatever we're doing, there is no peace except in the heart of the Christian, that there's a war on, that there's a war between God and Satan, between heaven and hell, between those who want to serve God and those who do not, between the flesh and the spirit.

This warfare is constantly going on. Now, the Christian is a soldier of the spirit. You know, many things that are allowable in normal times are not allowable in war times, because of the enemy and the danger.

There are several things that have to go out as soon as a war comes. One is ease, one is pleasure, and one is convenience. You don't win a war if you fight it at your convenience.

You don't win a war when you fight it at your ease. You don't win a war if you go into it for the pleasure you can get out of it. You only win a war when you take it in dead earnestness, and a certain number of men at least dedicate themselves to winning that war.

And so we Christians ought to remember that. The Communists know it, and because they have accepted that as a war, they say we're at a war, and they believe we're at war. And they'll talk about the Cold War, and it is a war.

And it's a war that's being carried on now, not with guns, but it's a war that's being carried on with ideas ready to be carried on with guns at any time. And the Communists know it, and the West doesn't know it. And that's why the West has been in retreat ever since the Second World War, before the Iron Curtain countries.

Because we're going to play and have fun if it kills us, and the Communists say we're not out for having fun now, we're going to conquer the world and then we'll have our fun. Now, there are certain things I say that go out when war comes in. One of them is ease, one of them is pleasure, one of them is convenience.

And there are certain things that come in when war comes. Hardship, deprivation, hard discipline. So the Spirit exhorts us in the text here.

One version says, Take your share of suffering. Another version says, Be ready to do without comforts of life. Another says, Bear suffering.

Another says, Share our hardships. These things voluntarily assumed they are the cross of Christ, if they are assumed for Christ. And there always lies the power and spiritual greatness.

Remember that. Always spiritual greatness lies there, and away from it lies weakness and spiritual failure. There has been a weak retreat from the cross in recent times, a weak retreat from the cross.

Thousands of people have retreated from the cross. They trust the cross for salvation, but they don't want any of the cross in personal living. They want to be saved by the cross, and so they will sing that dear old hymn, I'm so happy and that's the reason why Jesus took my burdens all away.

And they will sing that, believing that that's all the cross is for, to take my burdens away, forgetting that he said, Take up thy cross and follow me, meaning that the cross is not only the means by which God takes burdens away, but that the cross is the means by which God slays the flesh of men to fill them with the Holy Spirit and raise them to newness of life. So now I want to talk a little bit about where that retreat from the cross, because undoubtedly there has been a retreat from the cross in recent times, a retreat into weakness, and it shows itself in a number of ways. Multiplied luxuries, for instance.

We preachers preach about John the Baptist. He wouldn't have owned us, really. He wouldn't have owned us.

He would have said, You're too well-dressed and you're too well-fed and you're too comfortable. John the Baptist was dressed in camel's hair and with a girdle around his loins, and he was living on wild honey and locusts. Not locust trees, but locusts, little things that hop and fly.

He was eating locusts and honey. That's all he had to eat. He didn't order a filet mignon well done with mushrooms.

But in the morning he got up and he had himself some honey, and if he could catch a locust, a locust. And when he got hungry at noon, he had himself locusts and honey. And then when supper time came, he had honey and locusts.

He just varied it that way. But it was honey and locusts, locusts and honey. It wasn't a very good diet, now don't you tell me that it was, but he lived like that.

And John was clothed in camel's hair. Now we say, well, you don't think we ought to dress in camel's hair. No, I don't think that.

But I do think this, that we ought to be willing to take some of the same attitudes of hardship that John took. If the Holy Ghost calls us to something hard, we ought to be willing to take that thing and do that thing. We don't have to dress like John, but we ought to have the spirit that John had.

Now, there are periods of power in the Church, and those periods of power correspond exactly with the periods of rugged, simple living. I want you to hear this. Those periods of power correspond with the periods of rugged, simple living.

And just as soon as a denomination gets over being persecuted and having a tough time and gets much, and it can say, we are increased with goods and we are in need of nothing, they begin to backslide immediately. And it's the same with the individual Church, a Church like this. Dr. R. R. Brown claims a Church ought to be always a little bit in debt for its own sake.

He says that all Churches should be a little bit in debt. He thinks that if you get too much money, it isn't good for you, and I think he's right. I think he's half humorous when he says it, but I believe he's practically right about it.

But the little Churches that are fighting and struggling and getting along with nothing, they love each other and know each other, and they pray over every little thing, and they meet and with shining eyes talk about their plans. And when a Church gets bigger and lots of people come and money rolls in, there's nothing to worry about, then we forget that simplicity and fellowship that we once had. I tell you that denominations and Churches prosper at the times of rugged, simple living, and they go to pieces when they get too much.

In multiplied luxuries in lands like this, they are certainly not good for the Church of Christ. It's the same for a Christian. I'm quite certain that a thousand arguments can be found to defend luxuries and excessive comforts, but three facts shatter all their arguments, and these three facts are the teachings of Scripture and the light of history and the testimony of our own hearts.

How many are there of God's children that can say, when I was poor and struggling, I got along well, everything was fine, and I was a better Christian than I am now, but now I have the money, I can do as I please, I can go and come as I please, and the result is that I am not as good a Christian as I used to be. We usually wouldn't admit it, and we wouldn't be so frank about it all, but I think generally that's said to be so. Now, the remedy for all this is very simple.

Be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, a good soldier. A soldier doesn't consult his convenience. I said to a friend this morning that it's too bad that the Church has to run on the convenience of God's people.

Christ did nothing Christ did that was convenient. It wasn't convenient for him to come down from heaven and leave his Father's throne above. It wasn't convenient for him to be born of the Virgin Mary.

Nor was it convenient to be raised in this simple poverty of a carpenter's home. Nor was it convenient for him to be kicked about and driven and cursed and finally whipped and lashed and crucified and nailed on a tree. It wasn't convenient.

He was not living after his convenience, nor consulting his feelings. And it's never convenient for a soldier. I remember when I entered the military service many years ago, I never had a heart heavier in all of my life.

A heavy heart, going away from your friends, your loved ones, your home, everything you knew, and going out, and you don't know where you're going and don't know when you're coming back. It's all out there, that's it. I said to one of my sons who had been in Italy under the fire, I said to him, I never myself was under fire, and so I didn't know, and I said to him, what do the boys say when the big guns begin to boom and the shells begin to scream over their heads and they know they're up there facing the enemy? He said, usually they say, well boys, this is it.

And this is it may easily mean this is death. Did you read the other day in the newspaper about that famous English flyer that made so many trips across the Channel and finally, one of those trips, the machine went out of control and he was plunging toward the Channel and he knew, and he yelled over the intercom system, well chaps, this is it. And that was the last they ever heard about him.

This is it. When a soldier goes out there, this is it. He's not out there for his comfort, but to get something done.

To get it done and get it over with and get home. Canadian soldiers and American soldiers, above all the soldiers in the world, get the homesickest, for such a word. They get more homesick, why? Because they have such lovely homes and so much to come back to.

So many things to live for. Not black bread. Their choice of anything.

But when war comes, you give all that up. You live on care rations for whatever you can get. You live and you fight.

Instead of having your shower, you don't change clothes for two weeks at a time. Stand in the mud, whiskers grow, never brush the teeth, waiting, always waiting, expecting that bullet under fire. And Christians are under fire, my brethren.

This is a warfare. You're soldiers, do you know it? One of the first things they do for you when you get into the service, when they take a bunch of recruits in the weirdest-looking outfits no two fellows dressed alike. Green pants and brown pants and black pants and blue pants and yellow sweatshirts and blue sweatshirts and sneakers and all sorts of different shoes.

There they stand up there. And a tough old sergeant talking out of the corner of his mouth starts on them. And when he starts on them, they start to snap out of that.

Take your chest out. Pull your stomach in. Stand up straight.

Get the hump out of your back. Soldiers now. Imagine what they can do in two weeks' time with a man.

Two weeks' time they've made a soldier out of that sloppy, over-fat fella that never sat down, you know, he just sat on his spine halfway up. Now he stands up straight. I smile at MacArthur and Eisenhower.

Never saw a picture of them taking a bend over, did you? They're soldiers. They stand up straight. They're old men, but they stand up straight as an owl.

Soldiers of Christ arise, we sing. And that's supposed to be the topic this morning. The remedy, I say, for all this that's wrong with us is simply to take this text and take it seriously.

Don't think it's here as a boutonniere to pin on my lapel and go my way, but it's something that's supposed to take hold of me and change my whole life and shape me in my living. Obey the holy scriptures and get a hold of this idea that life isn't a game but a warfare. And if everybody listening to me now, every Christian listening to me now, would get a hold of this idea and say to himself today, I believe this, that I am not engaged in a game but in a war to change the whole color and complexion of this church overnight.

Now, we must be willing to put away whatever childish desire for convenience and comfort that stands between us and God. Our Lord God doesn't care if we have comforts provided. They don't stand in our way.

But the moment they get in our way, then they are dangerous and they are wrong. The military authorities don't mind if a soldier eats a candy bar, but if they came upon this situation with battle lines drawn and seesawing back and forth, one men at one side pushing ahead, the next men dying everywhere, and a big lug stood there eating a candy bar. Oh, you know what he'd get? He'd get the guardhouse.

And he'd well deserve it, and I'd like to throw the key away on him. There's no time in the munch on a candy bar when the future of your country is at stake, and maybe the future of your life, your own future on earth. So God doesn't care if Christians have some comforts.

We want them to have them, but we want them to have them in a way that will not stand in the way of the things of God. If your Wednesday night comforts keep you away from prayer meeting, they're harmful to you. If your Sunday morning comforts keep you away from church, they're harmful to you.

And if your excessive luxuries keep you from giving to the Lord's work as much as you should, they're harmful to you. And if your love of eating and ease stands in your way of praying as much as you ought to pray, they're harmful to you. Whatever gets between you and the military character of your Christian life, that's a harm to you and a harm to the whole church.

I love the book of Nehemiah. It's not a spiritual book so much as it's spiritual, too, but it's spiritual in a good, tough way. Remember, they used to take a hammer in one hand and a sword in the other? And with one hand they pounded the nails and whatever they did with the hammer, and with the other they held a sword.

And if the enemy came, they just dispatched him and went on with their work. A sword and a hammer in the hand of these servants of God under the direction of Nehemiah. I believe that Christians ought to have a sword and a hammer in their hand, and a man with a sword and a hammer won't be munching a candy bar in time of war.

He'll have too much on his hands and too much to do. So we ought to put away childish notions and begin to live like sons of the new creation. God Almighty converted you and me, gave us the nature of God within us, Peter says.

We have the nature of God, the divine nature. We're living for the future, living for the world to come. Therefore we ought to begin to live like that, live like sons of the new creation.

Our Lord said, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, let him take up his cross daily. He said daily there, not weekly, but daily, not once a year, but daily. Let him so pattern his life, so arrange it that there's somewhere for a cross all the time.

That there's somewhere for him to do something that he wouldn't have done except he was in wartime and there was a cross to carry and an enemy to face. Somebody says, we've got better poaching, that'll do it. No, my brother.

I was reading in the book of Ezekiel this week. I confess I got just a little bit discouraged reading it here. This book of Ezekiel, where the man of God says, You ought to live with somebody that plays well on an instrument and sings beautifully, but they're not going to listen to you.

Go ahead, son of man, and preach to these people. I'll be with you, and they'll know a prophet has been in your midst. But don't expect them to do anything, because they're too snug, too much settled down, too much in love with themselves.

They inhabit this land, and they are not going to live any other way. So you go ahead and preach, and I'll be with you, and I'll bless you for it. But you don't have to look for people to do much changing.

That rather discouraged me. But I wouldn't apply it to Avenue Road. I said to my own heart and to God, I won't apply it here to Avenue Road.

I don't believe it. We're not going to do that. We're not going to listen and then say, Well, that was a good sermon, and then go home and live the same way.

We're going to let truth change us, aren't we? We're going to let truth change us. When we hear truth, we're going to say, Well, now that's for me, I'm going to change. We don't need more or better preaching.

I'm quite convinced that if we obeyed the poorest preaching in the city, I don't know where the poorest preaching in the city is. No preacher believes in his prophet, I can tell you that much. But it could be here.

But the poorest preaching in the city, if it's gospel preaching at all, is good enough to make sense out of the hearers if the hearers won't listen to it. But we become connoisseurs of good preaching. We become religious dilettantes.

And we demand good preaching, but we're not going to do anything. We say, Well, wasn't that a sermon? Then go right back and live the way we've been living before. That's what God said they'd do.

When Ezekiel preached, I have better hopes of you and things that become salvation. I do not think you're going to live the same. Some of you are.

Some of you couldn't be changed. He couldn't change you with a saw and a hammer. Nobody's going to do anything with you until the man with the strayed pants takes over.

We're going to lay you out. But until that time, you're your own boss, and no preacher is going to change you. Well, all right, God bless you, I can still be your friend, but I'm sorry.

But I'm looking for people, more of them, more of them. I hope there will be many of them, and I have optimistic expectation that there shall be many of you who will listen and say, By the grace of God, I'm not going to waste the word, I'm going to make the word mean something to me. So, read better books.

I mailed off last Friday. The book has taken me ten years to get ready. I'm not book-selling, but people are going to buy it.

I'm sure they're going to buy it, there'll be thousands of them sold. But it won't do anybody any good. Unless when they read it, they say, This is for me, now, God, what would thou have me to do? Well, I think that's all for this morning.

Let's be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. The Lord awaits to receive such a seeking, seeking to be a changed man, changed from a civilian to a soldier, changed from ease to hardship, voluntarily imposed for Christ's sake. If we were to do these things, if we were to stand up as good soldiers and put ourselves in the fight, it's going to be over one of these times.

This morning I read out loud in my study the story of John Bunyan, of a Christian entering heaven. A Christian entering heaven, remember, in Pilgrim's Progress. Beautiful, beautiful.

As you know, the Christian paid a terrible price for the privilege of entering in by the gate into the city. He paid a terrible price, he bore upon him the scars of a long, hard journey. He got there, he was welcomed by the sound of trumpets and the voice of multitudes of just men mid-purchase.

But it cost him a long, hard journey. This is a long, hard journey you and I are engaged in, warfare and fight and travel and forced march. But if you keep right on believing and dare to be a soldier for Christ, the day will be when you will cross over and enter through the gates into the city.

You will be welcomed by the sound of trumpet and the voices of the ransom. It will be worth it all in that day. Soldiers of Christ, let's arise and act like soldiers.

Amen. End of sermon.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/0/SID0339.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-tozer/soldiers-of-christ-arise/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net