

Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times Part 15

We are bringing this lengthy series to a close this morning. Paul has warned Timothy about the troubled times that are coming, the difficulties he would face and has encouraged him to hold tightly to the word of God that's been committed to him, to remain steadfast in the faith that's been passed to him, to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, keep preaching the word of God, remain alert to the schemes of the devil because Satan will try to pervert the gospel through false teachers, he'll discourage you by persecution and physical hardship and attacks, he will try to deceive you with false doctrines, distract and defeat you through the allure of compromise but don't give up Timothy. Instead, hold on to the faith. Guard the gospel you've embraced, if you have to suffer for the faith then endure hardship like a good soldier, remain committed to the gospel because it's the truth that leads to salvation. Keep proclaiming it because it's the only hope for this world. It's the truth that will keep you in troubled times.

Paul has seen his share of troubles and as he looks ahead, he sees more on the horizon. How will Timothy get through the troubled times? How will we get through them? We are to do all the things Paul has instructed us to do, the things I just mentioned, but look again at the final words of this letter, the last written words we have from the Apostle Paul. **“The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”** Here is a word for troubled times. This is how we will make it: the Lord is with us and His grace that's with us is all sufficient! We know this now, this morning sitting in a church service, but what about in the middle of trouble, when it seems the last thing we have is enough grace, or when the Lord seems far from us? Paul knew that feeling.

Look back at verse 16. **“At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.”** We talked about this a couple of weeks ago so I won't belabor the point, but it bears repeating that Paul faced this trial alone. After all the years of service to the Lord and his church, untold hours of labor and sacrifice, pastoring, preaching, teaching, evangelizing, planting churches, long hours of ministry and then making and repairing tents after hours so no one could accuse him of not paying his own way. All the travel, the hardships, sick, beaten and left for dead, his life constantly in jeopardy, and when he needed someone, everyone deserted him and left him alone.

You ever felt that way? Deserted? Unsupported by family, friends, associates, church members, the people you would have sworn you could always count on? None of them showed up! The truth is, in spite of multiple friends and family, everyone faces things on the journey

where you simply have to go it alone; moments and places where no one else will go with you. No one else will hear the call of God the way you do. Sometimes the Lord may direct you in a solitary path. Obedience to God can be a solitary thing. Sometimes what you know is right and according to the word of God, what's in keeping with God's will for your life, everyone else will think is crazy. You've lost your mind. Or they will desert you, ostracize you because you won't go along with the crowd, you won't live like them, you won't compromise your convictions and you'll have to stand alone. Middle School. High School. College. On your job, your career. "If you want to be part of our group, if you want to advance at this company, you'll have to _____." You'll have to stand alone. Integrity, character, faith, obedience to God, choosing to live for Jesus, that may find you standing alone. At least it may feel like you stand alone.

Paul understood. In fact, I can guarantee this wasn't the first time Paul stood alone. Imagine when he returned from Damascus and told his father the Pharisee that he was now a follower of Jesus! Imagine him facing his family, his teachers. Their star pupil had rejected their teaching. He knew what it was to stand alone. Perhaps you've been there. If so, then understand what else Paul understood. He may have felt lonely, but he wasn't alone. There is a difference. Loneliness is a feeling. Aloneness is a physical state of being. (Is this person alone? Yes. Are they lonely? I don't know.) You can be lonely in a crowd. Paul may have felt lonely, deserted, and you may feel that way too, but the truth was and is, he wasn't alone and neither are you. Paul remembered and discovered in the aloneness, in the loneliness, something all of us need to remember. He said, **"No one came to my support...everyone deserted me...But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength..."**

Picture Paul, alone in that prison cell in Rome, swallowed up by the darkness when he remembers that Jesus said, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you." He wasn't alone after all. Imagine Paul in that courtroom, standing alone when they asked if he had anyone to speak in his defense. How is it that no one is here? But then he remembers Jesus said, "Go and preach the gospel and make disciples and I will be with you even to the end of the age." He wasn't alone. Jesus told his disciples, **"On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles...don't worry about what to say...for it will not be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."** Matthew 10:18 The Holy Spirit was with him! Paul may have been feeling sorry for himself as he faced the trial alone knowing everyone had deserted him but then he remembered that Jesus told his disciples,

“A time is coming...when you will be scattered, each to his own home... you will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my father is with me.” John 16:32 Jesus had felt alone. He had been deserted too, but he knew his father was with him. It was the same for Paul and the same for us! The Father is with us, Jesus is with us, the Holy Spirit is with us! We’re not alone. You may feel lonely, but you are not alone!

Paul said, “I felt deserted, but Jesus stood at my side. I wasn’t alone in that courtroom after all. Not only was the Lord with me, He gave me strength!” Knowing He is there beside you, walking with you, aware of all that is going on in your life and circumstances, gives you strength. You may be facing a mountain, an enemy, a giant, but you aren’t alone. Jesus is with you and you and Jesus together have your enemy outnumbered! “I can’t do this alone.” You won’t have to because you aren’t alone! Jesus is with you and he gives you strength. His strength. Strength so you can do all things through Christ. He doesn’t intend for you to fail or to fall. He has equipped, empowered, enabled and strengthened you by his grace. Remember Paul’s final words to Timothy and to us, “Grace be with you!” Grace, God’s unmerited favor, His blessings, His strength, His presence is with us so we can accomplish all God intends for us to do. God’s grace is with us and is more than sufficient for every trial.

Paul said God was with him and strengthened him in order that “through me the message [of Jesus and of salvation through faith in His name] might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.” Think of it. Paul stands before the court in Rome and rather than call witnesses to defend himself, he becomes a witness for Jesus! Can’t you hear him? “Bear with me and I’ll try to explain. I was born Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee of my people the Jews, a persecutor of those you call Christians, but one day on my way to Damascus, I had an encounter that changed everything...I met Jesus, the crucified, risen Savior and Lord!”

Jesus has a way of taking our weakness and turning it into strength. He takes our trials and turns them into opportunity for spreading the gospel and proclaiming Jesus as Savior and Lord. He will take what was designed for your defeat and turn it to victory, turn it to a means of fulfilling the purpose and plan of God for you and for your life.

Paul said, **“And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth.”** We don’t know exactly to what Paul was referring. Was the lion Satan, or Nero, or the prosecutor of his case? What we know is, Paul was still confident the Lord’s provision and presence would be with him to the

end. Paul declares, **“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”**

We shout “amen” in response to this, but then stop to think about the circumstances. God will rescue us, but wait...didn't Paul die this time? What kind of a rescue is that? “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack” is written by a man who also wrote, **“I have been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea...I have labored and toiled and gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked...” 2 Corinthians 11:23-27**

How is that being rescued? Ask yourself this question: what was the point or purpose of Satan's evil attack? To irritate Paul? Inconvenience him? Make him uncomfortable? No, that's a waste of Satan's time and effort. He didn't care if Paul was inconvenienced, he wanted Paul to quit, to give up, to throw in the towel. He wanted Paul to abandon his faith like Demas, to deny God, denounce the gospel, pack up his parchments and tell everyone, “Jesus let me down. This is too hard. I'm done. I'm going home.”

But Paul said the Lord rescued him! Plenty of times he literally rescued him, spared his life, helped him escape from the clutches of evil men. But this time, Paul says, “I've been rescued again. No, the chains didn't break off this time. No earthquake opened the prison doors like before. I'm pretty sure the time has come for my departure, but hear me once again Timothy, I've been rescued. The devil didn't win! I've fought the good fight and I've still got some fight left in me. I've run the race with determination, the finish line is just ahead and the devil hasn't stopped me! He can't and He won't stop me. I started well, but I'm finishing even better - I preached my last sermon at the very gates of Hell! I've kept the faith. I'm still serving Jesus, my Lord and Savior, for whom I've given up everything and count it as nothing, as rubbish, for the sake and privilege of knowing Him and being his servant. I haven't compromised, I haven't sold out, I haven't given in or given up. I haven't quit, quieted down or resigned. I haven't let myself be bought by the world nor blinded by the lust and pride of life. I

was blind once but from that day when Ananias prayed and Jesus restored my sight, all I've been able to see is Jesus! Yes sir, Tim, I've been rescued and he is still rescuing me. So I won't fall victim to any of the devil's evil attacks. By his grace he's brought me safe this far and by his grace he'll lead me all the way home. The Lord is with me Timothy, giving me strength and he is with you and he'll strengthen you too. His grace is with me and His grace is with you Timothy and all of you that read this letter. He is with me, rescuing me and he is going to bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. One of these days the cell doors will open, and the Emperor's guards will lead me up out of this dungeon and to the place of execution. They'll push my tired old battle scared body onto the ground, place my neck on the executioners block and Timothy, that's going to be my final and complete rescue. And with my faith still intact and shouting the victory, the blade will fall and Jesus will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom, just as he promised, having delivered me from every evil attack and then I will be him and will give him glory for ever and ever. Amen!

You may be standing alone right now, but don't forget the Lord is with you. You may feel lonely, but you aren't alone. He is with you. He's going to strengthen you so you can do all things through Christ. He has a plan and purpose that will be completed in and through your life if you'll trust him and keep obeying him, his will and his word.

"The Lord will rescue me...and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom." Notice Paul said "The Lord will." Not He might, not He could, not I'm hoping so. The Lord will! It was settled as far as Paul was concerned. Troubled times? There's no reason to worry or to be afraid. The Lord will rescue me and when the time is right the Lord will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. Jude wrote, **"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." Jude 24-25** He is able and he will! To him be glory forever and ever. He will carry us through! You're going to make it! In the meantime, while we navigate these troubled times, rest in Paul's final words, **"The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you."**