

### **Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times Part 13**

Paul is bringing his final letter to a close and that means we are close to the end of this series. In what appear to be rambling, personal comments to Timothy in the conclusion of the letter, there are lessons for Timothy and for us about how to make it through troubled times.

**“Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. 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. Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.” 2 Timothy 4:9-22**

Can you hear the loneliness and sadness in Paul’s words, while at the same time you hear the hope that is still keeping him and encouraging him? He’s alone, as part of his ministry team has been sent on assignment. The work has to go on. Demas has deserted him so he is bearing the pain of that betrayal. Tychicus has been sent to Ephesus, probably carrying this final letter to Timothy and he would perhaps take Timothy’s place as pastor of the church while Timothy comes to Paul in Rome. He is without his papers, his books. He is cold and had given his warm cloak to Carpus. He wants to see Timothy and is urging him to make the trip from Ephesus (in Turkey) to Rome because he knows his execution is imminent and it will likely be their last time together. “Do your best to get here before winter” he urges, because the ocean crossing in winter would be more treacherous or even impossible and beside, Paul needed that cloak because it was cold and damp in the dungeon.

Added to his loneliness was the fact that at his first defense, which may have been a preliminary hearing, no one came to his support. No one dared speak in his defense or on his behalf. We assume they were too frightened of the Roman authorities. He graciously forgives them, but it must have been painful. In addition, he warns Timothy about Alexander the coppersmith (metalworker). The verse literally says Alexander “informed many evil things against me.” Some suggest this Alexander was the informant responsible for Paul’s arrest. If it happened in Troas, Timothy would pass through Troas to get to Rome and Paul is warning him to be on guard. Alexander strongly opposed the gospel message and might be a threat to Timothy just as he was to Paul.

Friends and co-workers had deserted him, enemies of the gospel had attacked him, he is old, cold, lonely, facing death, still he declares to Timothy “But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength!” Life can be hard, but Jesus still gives us strength to be victorious. Paul encourages Timothy and all of us to not give up. Remember he told us to endure hardship like a good soldier. These verses illustrate the very things Paul has been telling Timothy and us. Troubles, hardship, loneliness, but the Lord stands with us. He will turn it all to good, to glory. Paul rejoices because the main thing, the gospel was proclaimed so that the whole Gentile world was made aware of it through his trial! To God be the glory for ever and ever.

Let me give credit to two great pastors and authors, John Stott and John Piper for their insight and overview of this passage as I make a couple of simple observations. The first thing we see, quoting John Piper, “**Christian ministry is relationally hard.**” I would tell you this is especially true for pastors and people in full time vocational ministry. You give and sacrifice and sow and pour into the lives of people, you stand with them, pray for them, weep with them, rejoice with them, bear their burdens, and then, “Demas has deserted me because he fell in love with the world...Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus left and is attending church in Dalmatia. Thank God Luke is still here with me.” It’s the nature of ministry that people come and go, that God sends people other places to serve, but it’s still painful when they leave. It’s still lonely. It’s still hard. Then you’ve got people like Alexander the metal worker that attacked and slandered Paul, questioned his motives, opposed the gospel and made it harder to preach and serve. Then Paul said at his first defense where he could call character witnesses and thought for sure the members of the church would stand with him, no one came to his support. I’m not asking for pity, I’m just telling you ministry is relationally hard. This past year has taken a toll

on pastors everywhere, including all of us. Unprecedented challenges and loss. Families and friends lost. But it's not just hard for full time pastors and ministers because we are all called to Christian ministry, Christian living for the good of others, trying to serve and bless others and we all get disappointed and wounded and feel deserted. We've all had people say things that hurt us or they spoke against us at times. Comments on Facebook and social media have divided and wounded, lines have been drawn that parted long-time friends. We've all been there, expecting someone to show up on our behalf and defend us or speak for us and when no one shows, it's painful. The sad reality is after 45 years of serving this church, first as a youth pastor and then as associate and for the past 36 years as your pastor, I know there have been times when I failed to show up. You needed me and I wasn't there or I said something, I hope not intentionally, but nevertheless, I said something and my words stung or offended or my absence wounded or hurt you. It's happened. God forgive me and I ask you to forgive me.

Paul needed people and they didn't show up. The church didn't show up for him. Maybe you've felt the sting of it too. Paul's pastor didn't show up, his Sunday School teacher didn't show up, no one called. It wasn't that they forgot, it wasn't that they had another appointment. Paul said they deserted him (v16). He had grounds for bitterness, anger, but what did Paul do? He said, **"May it not be held against them." Paul chose to forgive!**

Relationships are hard, and Christian ministry is relationally hard and Christian living for others is hard, but mercy has to win out. We have to forgive and let things go. Consider this. Paul says "no one came to my support but everyone deserted me," but then in verse 21 he sends greetings to Timothy from Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers. Who are these people? They're the people who didn't show up! They're the people of the church that let him down at his first defense, but Paul knew people make mistakes and fear can make people do and say strange things and relationships among Christians can get messy at times and can be difficult at times but mercy and grace and forgiveness and redemption makes all the difference. Let me quote from John Piper, "On the basis of what Paul does here and what Christ has done for us on the cross – even for Peter who denied him and for the eleven who all abandoned him...don't be so simplistic and don't be unforgiving. It is simplistic to say, 'If they were real Christians, they would have stood by me.' Human souls and human circumstances are not that simple. It is possible to love someone deeply and let them down. So don't be simplistic and don't be unforgiving. Say to yourself and God over and over about the believers who have hurt you:

‘May it not be held against them!’ Not by my heart. Not by God’s heart...Eubulus and Pudens and Linus and Claudia did not show up at Pauls’ trial and Paul sends their greetings to Timothy.” Choose to forgive! That brings me to the second thing I want us to consider.

**You have to guard your heart.** In ministry, in life, you have to choose to forgive. You have to choose to show mercy because you’re going to need mercy. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” That’s the golden rule. Many of us learned that verse as children. We want everyone to show us mercy, to forgive us, to understand our circumstances, to accept our excuse, our explanation, but then we refuse to forgive, to extend the same understanding and mercy. “May it not be held against them, by me or by God.” You have to guard your heart against holding a grudge, refusing to forgive, and you have to guard your heart against falling out of love with Jesus and falling in love with the world. Look at this:

**“Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.”** Demas stopped guarding his heart. We don’t know what happened. He had been with Paul when he wrote the letter to the Colossians. “Our dear friend Luke the doctor and Demas send greetings.” Colossians 4:14. In Philemon 24 Paul refers to Demas as a fellow worker. Apparently Demas had been a valuable part of the ministry team, but something happened. Something altered his focus, lured his heart away from the Lord, away from ministry. He loved this world Paul said, and we have no biblical evidence that Demas ever repented or ever returned to the apostle or to Jesus or to the church.

It’s interesting that Paul says “because he loved this world.” I think he is warning Timothy and all of us, of the dangers of loving this present world, of preferring the world and its pleasures over Jesus and a life lived for him. John warns us, **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” 1 John 2:15-17**

Demas took his eyes off of the ball, he lost the plot, he stopped guarding his heart, use any metaphor you want, but ultimately Demas chose to love the wrong thing, to love what will pass away, to love this life more than eternal life. He sold his soul for something that will not endure.

If you are in love with the world, you end up loving what unbelievers love. If you are in ministry, sadly you'll either change your ministry to be compatible with that love for the world, which is something we see happening everywhere, or you'll do like Demas and finally leave the Lord and the ministry and his church. John Piper said, **“There is a love for the world that is incompatible with Christian ministry.”** ...**John Piper** The church needs to hear that, ministers need to realize that. Paul wanted Timothy and all of us to ponder that. Piper writes, “There is a love for the world – the present age, the God-ignoring, God-denying, God-demeaning, Christ distorting products of culture – that is mutually exclusive with real, deep love for Jesus. There is a love for this world that is irreconcilable with the ministry of exposing the world and witnessing to the world and rescuing from the world and if possible, changing the world...Remember, more people leave Christ and leave the church and leave ministry and leave the hope of heaven because of love for this world than anything else. One wonders: what was in Thessalonica? Was it a woman? Was it home – perhaps he grew up there? Was it a business offer? Was it just comfortably and safely far away from this utterly committed apostle Paul? What we know is: Demas did not leave in order to follow Jesus. He left Jesus to embrace the pleasures of this world.” And we have no record that he ever made it back!

Timothy, Carbondale, followers of Jesus, there are dangers out there. Wounds both from inside and from outside the church that disappoint and harm and can make us bitter and cause us to lose our way. Temptations to give up, to turn away from Jesus and to love this present world and lose our faith, lose our relationship and fellowship with Jesus. Demas left Jesus for this world, for stuff that is decaying and dying and passing away. How sad, but what about you? Are you making choices to deepen your love for Jesus and for his word and for the things of God or are you turning away from him and falling in love with the world? Piper said, there a love for the world that is incompatible with Christian ministry, but there is also a love for the world that is incompatible with Christian living. Are you guarding your heart? What about your relationships? Have you forgiven those who have wounded you so your heart stays pure? Have you prayed “Lord, don’t let it be held against them, not by me and not by you.”? Let’s take a moment to examine our hearts. Have we forgiven those we need to forgive? Is there anything that is pushing Jesus and our love for Jesus out of the way? Let’s do the work of repentance today. Let’s renew our devotion to the Lord!