

Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times Part 14

We look again at Paul's remarks to Timothy in his final letter. Last Sunday we said that Christian ministry is relationally hard, wounds and hurts come with relationships, even among brothers and sisters in Christ, and that we need to forgive, to shake it off and let it go. We need to guard our heart so we won't fall in love with the world and lose our way. We said there is a love for the world that is incompatible with Christian ministry and Christian living!

I want to look again at these final verses and dig a little deeper into Paul's message for Timothy and for us on how to live in troubled times. Paul writes, **“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

I said last Sunday that Paul had chosen to forgive those who deserted him and failed to stand with him in court. We know by his words, “May it not be held against them,” and also by his greetings to Timothy from Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers since these were likely some of the believers that had “deserted him.” Paul forgave them, however there was another person mentioned in this passage that had deserted Paul on an earlier occasion. “Get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry.” Notice...

Mercy means another chance. For some reason I feel Paul is kind of a no-nonsense, “you get one shot at this and if you blow it, you’re out because I don’t have time to mess around with you” kind of a guy. Acts 12:25 tells us Paul and Barnabas had gone on a mission’s trip and they took Mark, also known as John Mark with them. They left Jerusalem, traveled to what is now part of modern day Syria, then on to Asia Minor, modern Turkey, then to the island of Cyprus and from there we have this bit of information. **“Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia where Mark left them to return to Jerusalem.” Acts 13:13** We don’t know why Mark left. Perhaps he was homesick. He was young, maybe he just got bored. Perhaps he was afraid. The trip did get more dangerous. After Mark left, Paul was attacked, stoned and left for dead in Lystra. Whatever the reason for his departure, in Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas decide to revisit the cities where they had ministered and when Barnabas suggested they take Mark with them again, Paul was not having it. **“Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and...went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” Acts 15:38-41**

Division is difficult. Choices are made and feelings get hurt, but it doesn’t have to be that way forever. Let downs don’t have to last. God’s mercy is not only so we can be forgiven, but so we can forgive. We all make mistakes. How about seeing beyond the mistake, the misjudgment of the past and see the good, the growth, the potential? Paul looked beyond the mistakes of Mark’s past and said, “Bring Mark. He is useful to me in ministry.” The past is past. The cause of Christ is bigger than a couple of people and their disagreement. Failures happen but we can still forgive! It’s about more than us and our rights, our opinions, it’s about the King and his Kingdom, it’s about the gospel and the church. Mercy means another chance!

Notice...**The importance of relationships (especially in troubled times).** I said relationships are hard, messy, but they’re also a gift from God. Paul cherished his relationships. Even though people let him down and deserted him, he forgave, he offered another chance, he longed for and loved the people in his life. “Do your best to come to me” he told Timothy, “come before winter and bring Mark.” We hear him often in his letters say things like, **“I thank my God for all of you...I long to see you” Romans 1:8-11** **“Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown...” Philippians 4:1** We could go on. The point

is simply that Paul cherished friendships, even though the friends were, like Paul himself, far from perfect. The truth is, you won't find any flawless, perfect friends, not even in the church. But don't let that stop you from finding friends to journey with, to pray for and to pray with. We need them, especially in troubled times. **Friends are a gift from the Lord. Cherish them!** Forgive. Show mercy. Life can be brief. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed. Cherish your friendships while you can. Hold them close. You know what else? **Friends are a gift from the Lord. Be one!** It's not just about whether your friends let you down, have you let them down? Did you stand beside your friends? Recognize and honor God's gift of friendship. Notice...

The Ultimate Friend. There is an ultimate friend, for troubled times and for good times. We will look closer at this next week, but remember that when no one else stood with Paul, Jesus stood with him (v17). The Lord stood with him and strengthened him when no one else would or could. Be assured that Jesus will not leave you or forsake you. Paul said "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom." Friends can do a lot for you, but they can't do that. There is only one who can keep you from evil, who can rescue and deliver you from Satan's attacks and safely bring you to his kingdom and that's Jesus.

Just because someone, some friend, some Christian friend, failed to show up for you or deserted you or said something that wounded you, don't let that cause you to abandon the One Friend who will never leave you or let you down, the One friend who is able to rescue you from every evil attack and bring you safely to heaven someday. I may not always understand what Jesus my ultimate friend is doing, I don't always understand his timing or his ways, but I know he will cause all things to eventually, eternally work for my good. You see, he proved his love for me when he died on the cross in my place, dying for me when he knew I was guilty, when I was a sinner. He pardoned me, forgave me and is preparing a place for me so I can be with him forever. If friends fail you, run to the ultimate friend. Run to Jesus! Turn to Jesus! Trust Jesus!

Notice... **Never stop growing.** Paul told Timothy, "**When you come, bring...my scrolls, especially the parchments.**" I love this about Paul. Facing execution and he asks Timothy to bring his books and his notebooks. If I'm dying, I want my books.

We don't know exactly what Paul is referring to and can only speculate. It could have been papyrus scrolls and parchment books. Some suggest it may have been writing materials, correspondence, it could even have included legal documents or proof of Roman citizenship he needed for his trial. It very likely included Old Testament writings. The point is, being close to

death or to the end of your life doesn't remove the need to keep learning, to keep growing, to keep being spiritually nourished and fed. In troubled times you need the Word of God with you. You need to read God's word, meditate on it, memorize it, hide it in your heart so you can pull it up in troubled times. Read God's word so you can stand on God's word!

Earlier in the letter Paul said, "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (3:16). He said the Scriptures are able to make you wise (3:15) and he told Timothy, "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this." (2:7). This is what Paul intended to do, to reflect on God's word so the Lord could give him insight. He was going to continue to study God's word so he would be thoroughly equipped for whatever was next in his life, for whatever was left for him to do in his final days. John Piper commented as to why Paul wanted his books. "Because reading and thinking over what you read is how God speaks to you now and makes himself known to you now, both through his inspired word and through spiritual teachers, dead and alive. Because reading and thinking over what you read is how God nourishes and strengthens the soul for living and for dying. Because reading and thinking over what you read is the way worship is ignited and joy is increased and peace with God is sustained – for the journey and for the final river-crossing. Form the habit of reading now and don't ever think you can do without it. And if your eyes fail you and all your friends have failed you, take your food money, if you must and pay to have the bible and good books read to you. 'The hour of my departure has come Timothy, bring the books and above all the parchments.'" God's word would help Paul finish the race and keep the faith. The word of God will help you finish well. It will help you die well! Keep learning, keep reading, keep reflecting on what God has said. Keep growing! Notice what we learn from Paul about...

Possessions and priorities. "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas..." Gordon Fee, in his commentary on 2 Timothy suggests Paul had been on his way back to Ephesus when he was arrested, "either in Miletus" where he had left Trophimus who had taken ill, "or Troas itself. There, at the house of Carpus (presumably a believer in that city), he had left his cloak, the heavy woolen garment used by travelers in cold or rainy weather. Now he wants Timothy to bring it (apparently in anticipation of winter)... Paul obviously expects Timothy to take the same route (Ephesus to Troas, overland across Macedonia on the Egnatian Way, by ship to Brundisium and on to Rome."

Books and a cloak. That's what he has left at the end of his life and he had given the cloak to Carpus. Perhaps he didn't think he would need it anymore. Maybe he didn't think he would reach Rome alive and he knew Carpus could use the cloak. Ultimately Paul was always thinking about laying up for himself treasures in heaven rather than on earth. It was never about making money for him. He was a tentmaker, working so he could support his ministry. Stuff didn't matter to Paul. What mattered was that the gospel message was proclaimed, even at his trial. What mattered was the gentiles heard the gospel in Rome (v17)! What mattered was the influence, the relationships, the lives touched, the time and effort invested in others, ministers trained, believers disciplined, the kingdom advanced. Paul fought the good fight of faith, finished the race, kept the faith, that was the priority, not possessions.

Understand the priorities, the balance in life. You don't have to be poor to be a follower of Christ, but rich or poor, you do have to be generous. He calls us to be good stewards, to respond to the poor, the needy, to care for widows and orphans, to live open and generous lives. The Lord said through the prophet Jeremiah, **“He defended the cause of the poor and needy and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me? declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 22:16** It's about priorities, not possessions, it's about giving, not receiving, it's about caring for others. Is that not what it means to know the Lord? Trust him because he has promised to provide if we will be obedient and faithful. Paul proves it with his very life. Finally...

“To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” This is what it was all about for Paul. That God would be glorified by every choice, every decision, every step. Paul was in prison an earlier time when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. Then he hoped to be released, and he was, but he wrote, **“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:20-21** In troubled times, in the best of times, if you have an abundance or if you don't even have your cloak and your books, may your desire be that Christ would be exalted in your life, through your life. To live is Christ and to die is gain. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen!