



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

Come Before Winter 2 Timothy 4:16-22

I am reading from 2nd Timothy 4:16-22.

This is what God's Word says:

ESV 2 Timothy 4:16...At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! ¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. ¹⁹ Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰ Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. ²¹ Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. ²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Loneliness is a terrible thing.

It casts something of a dark shadow over the way a person looks at life. The sun no longer seems to shine quite the way it used to. Grass no longer looks bright green. Instead, it becomes darker...muted...more black than green. What we once would have called white puffy cotton-like clouds we now see as a sort of dull gray.

Life looks different...*it feels different* when you are lonely.

Time goes slower.

When you are lonely you tend to hear the individual ticks of that stupid clock that you never noticed before. You jump when the refrigerator comes on. Every channel on television seems to suddenly be showing the exact same program. Every channel seems to be running the same commercials at the same time...the exact same five minute long infomercials.

When you're lonely, you want to sleep but can't. On the other hand, you want to wake but find it hard to do. You drift a lot when you're lonely.

You feel the compulsion to eat and yet food tastes different when you are lonely. It tends to be bland. Grilled salmon winds up tasting like oatmeal...oatmeal with no sugar or cinnamon or milk...sticky, lumpy, pasty oatmeal.

It's hard to swallow. It's hard to get it down.

When you're lonely you want the sound of human voices around you, but you don't really want to have to listen to what people are actually saying. It takes too much energy. When you hear others talking...it sounds more like they are mumbling. Their voices sound like...how is it Camus describes it...the muffled jabber of parakeets?

Loneliness is a terrible thing. It's worse when you are sick, or when you are heartbroken. It's worse yet when someone you love goes away and you know they

aren't coming back. I don't this experientially, but I suspect it's worse still when you are in prison.

And Paul was.

He was all alone.

It seems strange to me that Paul would close his letter...his marvelous, straight from the heart, pull no punches, I am about to be poured out like a drink offering letter...with the memory that even when he thought he was all alone...he wasn't actually alone.

I covered the point Paul makes about being deserted and all last week. I finished discussing the text only to discover that though *I was finished* with the text the text wasn't quite finished with me.

Look at verse sixteen, and let me explain what I mean.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:16**...At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!

I made the point in our lesson last week that Paul had been arrested and that all those around him at the time had scattered like quail. He had been left all alone. They had abandoned him. His friends and colleagues had deserted him much like the Lord Jesus' disciples had deserted him. And Paul being the magnanimous, Christ honoring, blood-bought disciple that he was felt compelled to pray for mercy on their behalf. He wanted very much that God not hold their abandonment

of him against them and so he prayed that God might cast the memory of their failure into the sea of his forgetfulness. And the reason that he could do that was because even when he thought he was alone, he wasn't alone.

Look at verse 17.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:17**...But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

You see right square in the middle of Paul's being abandoned, the Lord Jesus himself came and stood by him and comforted him when no one else would. Now last week, when I went through the text, I focused principally on the underlying biblical allusion Paul uses in verse seventeen...that is, I focused on Paul's pointed reference to the story of Daniel and his surviving being thrown into the lion's den. I made the point that Paul's use of the allusion allowed him to argue that he had been rescued from his enemies in the same way that Daniel had been rescued from his in the lion's den.

And it was right for me to make the point the way I did.

I don't think I said anything wrong, but what I said was marvelously, notoriously incomplete. You see the allusion to Daniel Paul makes wasn't simply metaphorical. He wasn't simply making an allusion to Daniel. It was historically true as well.

You see Jesus really did come and stand by him.

This historical incident underneath Paul's allusion to Daniel here in 2nd Timothy 4:16-17 really did happen. The Lord Jesus himself really did come and stand by Paul in the midst of his loneliness and isolation. And Paul remembers it and wants to pass along the comfort he derived from it to his son in the ministry Timothy.

Now to make this come alive for you a bit, I need to take you back to the *Book of Acts*. But don't worry I am not going to read all four chapters where the story takes place. Instead, I will paraphrase in my own way some of what I could read just to keep you from running for the exit. Still, I do want you to see that this memory that Paul possesses was not some sort of dream or vision but was a real encounter with the risen Christ...a real encounter that sustained him and kept him going in the midst of debilitating isolation, loneliness, and despair.

Now I expect that if you know the *Book of Acts* at all you remember that in chapter 19, Paul's preaching had precipitated a great movement of the Spirit of God in Ephesus. Paul had spent nearly three years in Ephesus preaching and teaching and arguing for the truth of the gospel and he had done so with great effect and success. The whole city had been put into a great uproar on account of the fact that many who had worshipped Diana had abandoned their idolatry and turned to the gospel, and they did so in such great numbers that many of the craftsmen in the city who made their living from producing idols of Diana turned out in a great tumultuous protest against Paul, the other disciples, and the gospel.

As a result of the success of the gospel there in Ephesus, Paul wound up having to leave the city. When he did, he moved west to visit Corinth before he intended to turn back east to go to Jerusalem.

In chapter twenty, Paul preaches in the upper room in Corinth and a young boy named Eutychus falls asleep and falls from a third story while Paul is preaching and is killed, and Paul sweeps him up in his arms and somehow through the power of the Spirit of God restores Eutychus to life.

And then at the end of chapter twenty, Paul sets sail from Corinth and heads back east to Jerusalem. On his way back east he summons the Ephesian elders and they come down to Miletus to meet Paul one last time. And if you know the *Book of Acts* at all, you will remember no doubt that in the scene where the Ephesian elders meet Paul on the beach at Miletus and they all kneel down there on the beach and pray and kiss each other and cry because Paul tells them he does not expect to ever see their faces again. And why does he do that? He does that because it has been prophesied that when he arrives at Jerusalem he will be arrested and clamped into chains.

And the same thing happens in chapter twenty-one when Paul gets to Cyprus. Disciples come and meet him and pray with him on the beach as he moves toward his destiny at Jerusalem.

And then finally near the end of chapter twenty-one Paul finishes crossing the Mediterranean and arrives at Caesarea on the coast of Palestine about seventy-five miles from Jerusalem and there too he meets with a number of Christian disciples.

Look at the text with me...Acts 21:8.

^{ESV} **Acts 21:8**...On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

⁹ He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "**Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'**" ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "**What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.**" ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "**Let the will of the Lord be done.**"

You see Paul knows what is coming. Now that isn't going to make it any easier. Still Paul makes it clear that he knows what is coming.

Now when Paul gets to Jerusalem he meets with all of the elders and the apostles and they are all nervous about the fact that he has been so successful in taking the gospel to the Gentiles. They are nervous because they know that many of the Jews have been scandalized by Paul's preaching to the Gentiles in the manner that he has, and so they want him to give a practical demonstration to the Jews at Jerusalem that he hasn't actually abandoned the law altogether. They want him go to the temple and to shave his head and take a vow and demonstrate that he is not hostile to Judaism or to Jewish ceremonial law. And so, as a concession, Paul does just that. Not only does he take a vow himself, he actually pays for four other men to do the same.

But while Paul is at the temple, some Jews from out in the provinces where Paul has been preaching to the Gentiles see him in the temple and come to the wrong conclusion that one of the men with him taking a vow is in fact a Gentile. That causes the temple to explode in protest because doing such a thing was forbidden and would have been considered an act of desecration or sacrilege. There were

certain areas of the temple where Gentiles were forbidden to go. Luke hastens to tell us that Paul had not done what he was accused of doing, but still that *was* what they thought he was doing.

Let's pick up the story in Acts 21:30.

^{ESV} **Acts 21:30**...Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. ³¹ And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. ³² He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

The Jews intend to beat Paul to death, but he was rescued by Roman soldiers who begin to move him back toward their barracks in order to save his life. The crowd follows the guards shouting and venting their anger. At the head of the stairs just before they enter the barracks Paul stops the centurion and asks him in Greek if he can address the crowd in Hebrew. The centurion gives Paul permission to do so and the crowd grows silent as Paul speaks to them in their own language.

Paul then proceeds to preach a long sermon, a sermon that sounds very much like the sermon Stephen preaches earlier in Acts, and the crowd listens attentively until Paul tells them that the Lord Jesus has commanded him to go and preach the gospel to Gentiles at which the crowd explodes into rage.

The crowd begins to scream and throw dust into the air and rant, **“Away with such a man! Away with him...such a man ought not live! Away with him!”**

The Romans have to rush him off into their barracks.

The next day the Roman centurion takes Paul before the Sanhedrin in an attempt to try to understand why Paul is so hated so terribly by the Jewish officials. While being examined before the high priest, Paul is struck in the mouth in exactly the same manner the Lord Jesus himself had been struck in the mouth when he had been interrogated before the high priest.

Paul then addresses the men of the Sanhedrin and tells them that the real reason he is there is because he believes in the resurrection. His comment about the truth of the resurrection causes a fight to break out between the Pharisees who believe in the resurrection and the Sadducees who do not...a fight so terrible that the Roman centurion again has to rescue Paul by taking him back inside the Roman barracks.

And that is when it happened. That was when the Lord Jesus actually came and stood beside Paul. Look at Acts 23:10.

^{ESV} **Acts 23:10**...And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks. ¹¹ The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "**Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.**"

You see what I mean now about the text not quite letting go of me. It was important for you to make the connection between what Paul is saying in 2nd Timothy 4:17 and what actually happened. It was important that you understand what Paul was referring to when he said:

^{ESV} **2nd Timothy 4:17**...But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

Now what happens in the rest of the Acts passage is that a young boy, Paul's nephew, learns from a number of Paul's enemies that there is plot to assassinate Paul. After he learns of the plot, Paul's young nephew visits him in the Roman barracks and explains to him what is about to happen. Paul tells his nephew to go to the centurion and explain what is about to happen, and the boy does with the result that the centurion decides to send Paul down to the coast to be put on a boat back west to Rome. Well that's not quite the whole of it. He doesn't just send him to the coast, he sends him to the coast with an armed escort made up of 70 Roman soldiers on horseback, 200 hundred foot soldiers, and 200 spearmen to shield him from this band of murderous assassins. The Lord Jesus you see providentially arranges Paul's safety. The risen Lord Jesus commanded and the Roman government obeyed. The scene is intended, I think, to remind the reader of the end of John where Jesus tells the soldiers at Gethsemane to let his disciples go and they do what he says.

Now I want us to think for a moment about the events leading up to the Lord Jesus coming in the night and standing by Paul.

Paul had been attacked and beaten in the temple.

He had been rescued by the Romans only to be turned over to the Sanhedrin to be beaten again and rescued again.

The Sanhedrin then plotted together to kill Paul, and all of Paul's friends and cohorts abandoned him and then right then at the very worst moment of Paul's life Jesus came and stood next to Paul and encouraged him...strengthening him...making sense out of the incomprehensible.

Why? He did so because he had something very important for Paul to do. He wasn't quite through with Paul. And the fact that Jesus had shown up at the darkest moment of his life...at the moment when he was really and truly all alone...sort of redefined every other dark moment that Paul could ever imagine.

You see even when Paul thought he was alone, he wasn't alone.

He wasn't alone in his work or his isolation or even in his discouragement. He had had proof of the approbation or approval of Jesus and that was enough to keep on going on the darkest of nights.

But there's one other thing. It seems to me that Jesus coming and standing there that one time was sufficient to sustain Paul into the future. There is a sense in which whenever danger comes in the future Paul seems to just shrug his shoulders and say, **"Eh. I've been here before. I'm not worried."** The Apostle Paul seems to have understood the point that Winston Churchill would make some eighteen hundred years later when he said, **"There is no exhilaration in the world quite like being shot at and missed."** Paul had been shot at and missed and it had given him the courage and endurance to press on in his proclamation of the gospel.

You can see that in 2nd Timothy 4:18 where Paul makes a wonderful assertion.

ESV **2nd Timothy 4:18**...The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

You will note it is not quite the same thing as saying I will never die. Still, Paul realized that until his task was complete, he was invincible. He knew the Lord Jesus would strengthen him and protect him and that that protection would extend even into death and beyond. And that fact brought praise to his lips, **“To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.”** It is one thing to be in the kingdom. It is something else all together to be in it and to be allowed the high privilege of actually being able to serve a compelling role in its advance. And because Paul had been granted that privilege he found himself breaking into praise and benediction.

Still Paul wasn't quite content to end it there. You see he realized that even when thought he was alone, he wasn't alone. He mentions ten different people or groups of people who stand with him. Look at verse nineteen.

ESV **2nd Timothy 4:19**...Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰ Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. ²¹ Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. ²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Paul explains to Timothy that there are others who stand with him...who stand with him in much the same way that the Lord Jesus had stood with him. They are here and there spread out across the Mediterranean still doing the work of the ministry. He knows that is true and he takes comfort in the fact. Still, he wants to see Timothy one last time. And so reminds him to come before winter...to come before the shipping lanes all close...to come before he winds up being stuck where he is and Paul winds up...winds up going to stand in the presence of Lord Jesus.

Paul wants to see Timothy's face one last time.

Now last August when we began our study I used this...this old Crescent wrench as an illustration of something passed down from one generation of Brownings to the next. My dad found it once out in the field when he was plowing. He found it and soaked in Liquid wrench and cleaned it up and gave it to me. His point was that it had been my grandfather's or perhaps even my great grandfather's and that he had recovered it and wanted me to have it and to pass it on to my son and my grandsons. Was it a kind of foolish sentimentality? I guess it may have been. But here's the thing I understood all that lay underneath the metaphor.

Paul reminds Timothy here at the end of 2nd Timothy that the Lord Jesus had come and stood by him when he was all alone. He had come and stood by him and encouraged him by reminding him that he had something very special to finish. I think Paul wants to do the same with Timothy. He wants him to come and to stand by his side and receive the same sort of encouragement from Paul that Paul had received himself from the Lord Jesus.

I can just imagine Timothy arriving in Rome and hurrying to the Mamertine Prison and to see Paul one last time. I can just imagine all the crying and rejoicing and remembering that went on, and I can just imagine at some point Paul saying, **"You know Timothy, I don't think I will ever forget that night in the Roman barracks in Jerusalem where I was in such despair...when the Lord Jesus himself appeared to me to encourage me to press on with the gospel. In fact, Timothy come just a bit closer. Yes, right there. The Lord Jesus wasn't any farther away from me that you are now. In fact, he stood in relationship to me exactly where I now stand in relationship to you when he said to me, 'Paul you are not quite**

through. I need you to take the gospel to Rome...to the very center of the Gentile world and I'll be with you. So don't be afraid. I will never leave you or forsake you. And so Timothy, now that you are here, I need to say much the same kind of thing to you. You are not quite through. So here...take the gospel and see just how far as you can go...and when you feel yourself near the end stop hand it off to someone else.'"

Let's pray.