



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

Deserted Yet Not Alone 2 Timothy 4:9-22

I am reading from 2nd Timothy 4:9-22.

This is what God's Word says:

ESV 2 Timothy 4:9...Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. ¹² Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵ Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. 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.

The 2nd Letter to Timothy written by the Apostle Paul is without question one of the most famous prison letters every written. In one sense, it is pretty much the archetype or pattern upon which later prison letters, especially those of Tyndale and Bonhoeffer, were to be fashioned. The letter itself is a plea written by the Apostle Paul to a timid, young gospel minister, Timothy, to take his rightful place as the Apostle Paul's replacement. The letter is filled with practical advice about how Timothy ought to conduct his ministry, about how he ought to live his life, and about how he ought to stay focused on what was really important...the preaching of the Word.

That is, the letter is like that until the last couple of paragraphs.

The last couple of paragraphs are different from all the other paragraphs in the letter. They are extraordinarily personal. They are filled with extraordinary emotion. The last couple of paragraphs of 2nd Timothy are a lot more like a letter between a father and a son or mother and her daughter than they are a letter between a master and his apprentice. And the reason for that is because that is exactly what the 2nd Letter to Timothy is. It is a letter from a father to his son, a spiritual father to his spiritual son. By my count, Paul refers to Timothy as his beloved child in the Lord four times in the New Testament: once in 1 Corinthians 4, twice in 1st Timothy, and one final time here in 2nd Timothy. Still, there is a sense in which a careful reader could easily discern that that was the kind of relationship the two men had even if Paul never used that sort of language.

Still, Paul does use that kind of language and that kind of emotion.

It is a fact that a few commentators find a bit embarrassing. In fact, a number of scholars question whether or not 2 Timothy 4:9-22 has anything whatsoever to say to us.¹ They question whether all Paul's talk about cloaks and parchments and the like has any real meaning for us today. Some even wonder whether or not 2nd Timothy 4 might not have just as easily been left out of the Bible? Some wonder whether we might be just as well off without it?

I, for one, think that the Word of God would have suffered a dreadful blow had it been left out of our Bibles. I think the Word of God here in the closing paragraphs of 2nd Timothy is absolutely essential to the proper growth and sanctification of God's people. You see it is essential because it communicates not just the intellectual aspect of the importance and centrality of the Word of God for the life of the church but also the emotive importance and centrality of the Word of God as well.

You see what these last three paragraphs tell us is that, **"The relationships we have with one another are important. But if we rely on those relationships alone to give us comfort and endurance, we will be sorely disappointed."** The reason that is true is because we lack the ability and insight to tell in advance who will remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of those we just knew in our heart of hearts would stick, won't stick. Some of those we knew for sure in our heart of hearts would fall away won't fall away. They will instead somehow manage to just keep on going. The last couple of paragraphs of 2nd Timothy also tell us that some of those that love us will always love us. Just as they tell us that some of those that hate us will always hate us. But in the end the thing the last couple of paragraphs of 2nd Timothy tell us that matters most, the thing that

ultimately gives meaning to a life of Christian faithfulness and service is the enduring faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ and his Word.

Let me see if I can say that a little more simply.

The relationships we possess in this life as Christians, both good and bad, are very important. But the thing that matters most...the thing that gives those relationships genuine meaning is the enduring faithfulness of the Lord Jesus and our commitment to the proclamation of the Word of God.

Now let's look at the text together and see if all that is true.

Now to start, I should tell that the close of the Apostle Paul's second letter to Timothy is framed by the phrase, **"Do you best to come to me soon."** That is, the phrase **"Do your best to come to me soon"** is used at the beginning of Paul's final three paragraphs in verse nine, and it is used at the end of the next to last paragraph in verse 21. Paul changes the phrase slightly the second time he uses it in verse 21 to, **"Do your best to come before winter."** But you can see that the sentiment is the same. Paul urges Timothy to make haste in coming to see him, and the underlying reason for that is that Paul did not expect to live much longer.

The point that Paul didn't expect to live much longer has already been established earlier in the text. He says just that in 2nd Timothy 4:6:

ESV 2 Timothy 4:6...For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

And he continues the idea in verses 7-8:

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:7**...I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

When he comes at last to his command to Timothy in verse nine and says...

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:9**...Do your best to come to me soon.

It seems to me that he is committing to Timothy both his ministry and the stewardship of his few remaining possessions and perhaps even the responsibility to tend to his body after his death.

That's why verse 21 is so poignant, so moving. You see when Paul repeats himself and says, "**Do your best to come before winter,**" it is probably an implication that he didn't expect to live till the spring. Paul knew experientially just as did everyone else back how long it took the wheels of Roman justice back then to turn. And Paul also knew perfectly well how dangerous the ancient shipping routes in the Mediterranean were. The Book of Acts bears that out very well. And he knew that the shipping routes in the Mediterranean were for all practical purposes almost completely shut down late in the fall.

I think Paul reasoned that if Timothy didn't manage to catch a ship to Rome before winter, he might never get to see his face again. And the one earthly desire Paul could not shake was the desire to see Timothy one last time.

You see Paul viewed Timothy as his beloved son...his child in the gospel. He and Timothy shared a kind of pastoral common experience that almost no one else could share. They thought the same way. I can imagine that they cried at the same ideas...that they laughed at the same stories...that there were certain words that stuck in both of their throats. And now that Paul sat chained in darkness in the Mamertine Prison, the thought of seeing his beloved son one last time made his heart soar like an eagle. And so he asked Timothy to hurry, to come to him soon.

No doubt part of Paul's desire to see Timothy stemmed from the fact that he was lonely. Humanly speaking, Paul was almost completely isolated. A number of the men who had been with left Paul had left him in order to care for their ministries. And one of them, a man named Demas, had left Paul because he had given up on the gospel. Look with me at verse 10.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:10**...For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Demas is mentioned three times in Paul's letters. He is mentioned here in 2nd Timothy, in Colossians 4 and in the Letter to Philemon. In the other two places places, he is referred to as a friend and cohort.² But here in 2 Timothy 4, Paul calls him a deserter. And Paul even gives the reason why Demas has deserted him. Paul says Demas has done so because of his love for this present world. Now I think it goes without saying that Demas didn't simply desert Paul alone.

Demas' real sin was his desertion of the Lord Jesus himself. Demas left Paul hanging out to dry, but really and truly his worse sin was that he abandoned the gospel and the Lord Jesus himself.

It is a dreadful thing for any minister or for that matter any Christian to see another Christian give up the faith or to turn to a life that is so disobedient that the way they live pretty much amounts to just about the same thing as abandonment.

That is especially true when a good man turns aside to love the world and the things of the world.

I have a friend, whom I will always love dearly, who after thirty plus years of ministry decided that he could no longer abide being married to the wife of his youth, and so he has thrown away his reputation and standing as a minister of the gospel and did so for the sake of that mystical thing he seeks called "happiness." The real reason he did so, of course, is because he loved this present evil age more than he loved the honor of Christ. He did so because he wanted the woman that he wanted more than he wanted Christ. Of all the heartbreaks and pains I have ever suffered in ministry, I have to say his turning away has hurt the most. It has hurt the most because of all the common suffering we shared together in seminary. It has hurt the most because of the pain and poverty we shared along the way. It has hurt the most because of the victories we shared together.

And the strangest irony of all that is that when we were in Bible College together he used to quote the lines of this hymn all the time to others whenever he shared the gospel with them.

It's called the *Hidden Line* and is written by J.A. Alexander.

The Hidden Line (The Destiny of Men)

*There is a time, we know not when,
A point we know not where,
That marks the destiny of men
To glory or despair.*

*There is a line by us unseen,
That crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and his wrath.*

*Oh, where is this mysterious bourn
By which our path is crossed;
Beyond which God himself hath sworn,
That he who goes is lost.*

*An answer from the skies is sent,
"Ye that from God depart,
While it is called today, repent,
And harden not your heart."*

Of course neither my friend nor I ever bore the kind of ministerial weight or responsibility Paul did. Our lives were never on the front line in the way that Paul and Timothy's lives were. Still, the relationship we had makes it quite easy for me to imagine just how terribly Demas' defection must have broken Paul's heart.

But it wasn't just Demas' desertion alone that made Paul's loneliness hard to bear. The other men with him had gone away as well. Of course, they hadn't actually abandoned him. Their departures were departures of a different kind. Their departures were necessary to fulfill their ministries. Their departures marked their commitment and faithfulness to their ministerial duties. The text

tells us that Crescens had gone off to Galatia, and that Titus had gone off to Dalmatia, modern day Bosnia.

Paul was all alone except...except for Luke. Look at the first half of verse 11.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:11**...Luke alone is with me.

Luke was just one of those men that endured. Luke was faithful to the core and faithful to the end. I suppose that is the reason that he was the perfect person to author the Gospel of Luke. He was always there. He was always ready to serve. He paid careful attention to the details.

No doubt you've had one or two people like that in your life. I know I've had a number of people like that enter my life over the course of my ministry. I remember once years ago, I was involved in a dreadful church split. It was for me a time of terrible emotional turmoil and strife. It just about pushed me over the edge. I finally decided there was no way to reconcile the conflict and resigned my position. The very next day, one of the families that had supported my position in the conflict, showed up and in an act of extraordinary kindness gave Beverly and I a thousand dollars cash to live on. They promised their continued prayer and their support, and they were thoughtful enough to open themselves to being God's instrument to encourage Beverly and me to keep on going. I have never forgotten the moment. I never will.

It was the kind of act that gave us the prospect of endurance; it gave us an ability to see beyond ourselves. Luke's companionship with Paul seems to have had just that kind of effect on Paul in the second half of verse 11.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:11**...Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

Now I expect that most of you already know the story about Paul's relationship with Mark. Mark had been the companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. But somewhere along the way, Mark gave up and went home. When Paul and Barnabas finally made it back to Antioch, Barnabas somehow managed to reclaim Mark. When they got ready to start off on their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along with them but Paul refused to allow Mark to come with them. The fought over the fact that Paul wouldn't let Mark come along, but Paul put his foot down. His refusal to allow Barnabas to bring Mark along broke the team apart and in the end Barnabas and Mark went one way while Paul and his new partner Silas went another.

Now I don't know about you but I think if I had been rejected by the Apostle Paul, I think I might have just quit altogether. I mean if Paul didn't think I was going to make it, why in the world should I think I am going to make it? But here at the end of Paul's life, Paul had changed his mind even about that...about Mark. He now thought of him as valuable both to him personally and to his work of the ministry.³

That tells me that even men with an extraordinary sort of biblical wisdom and insight are going to get it wrong from time to time. Men who are gifted and dedicated and sold out to the gospel do occasionally get things wrong. Paul was willing to concede the point, and that too was a sign of his greatness. He was willing to confront Peter when Peter got it wrong at Galatia, and he is willing to admit here that he himself had it wrong with Mark.

“Bring Mark along with you when you come,” he says. **“He is useful to me in the ministry.”**

It is an extraordinary to imagine those three men together, Paul, Luke, and Mark...sitting alone in the dark together in Paul’s prison cell in Rome knowing that the Holy Spirit would use those three men to compose some sixty to seventy percent of the New Testament. I can’t imagine that they anywhere near a full sense of their significance for the future of the church.

To the guards at the Mamertine they must have looked like three regular sort of chaps that had fallen foul of the Roman government. Looking back on their real significance in the history of the church we see them for what they are three titans.

Of course, Paul wasn’t just lonely. He also suffered from physical privation and from boredom. Look at what he says verses twelve and thirteen.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:12**...Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.

It is hard for us to imagine as moderns the physical privation Paul must have suffered in prison. Tradition says that Paul was imprisoned in the infamous Mamertine prison in Rome when he wrote 2nd Timothy. It was essentially an underground cave or dungeon. It was a dreadful place, dark, wet, and cold. It would have been a terrible place filled with groans, and hopelessness and the stench of human excrement. Those visiting the Mamertine today, cleaned up as it is for tourists, still marvel just how cold and dreadful the place is.

The cloak Paul refers to here in verse thirteen was a large heavy piece of cloth with a hole in the center of it that fit over the wearer's head. It was something like what we here in Texas call a pancho. It was designed especially for winter to ward off the cold. A person could use for a coat during the day and a blanket at night. Paul, the old man, was worried about the impending winter and the cold. But Paul was just worried about the cold. He was also worried about idling away the hours in hours of relentless boredom. That's the reason, I think, he asks for the books and parchments.

It is impossible to know for sure just what kind of books Paul is referring to here but I think that Paul's emphasis on the Word of God in 2nd Timothy makes it likely that they were either copies of Scripture or other helps to study Scripture. Some scholars think that the books may have been Paul's copies of the Old Testament cut into sheets and bound in a codex or book form. The parchments would have been pages of leather, probably sheep skin, either in scrolls or bound in a notebook or codex form. They were especially important to Paul. They very well may have been copies of his letters or letters from others.

I would give just about all I own or ever hope to own just to have gotten a glimpse of Paul's essential library. The one thing that is clear is that it is not the quantity of books that a man owns that build up his soul. Rather it is the kind of books a man owns and actually uses that sustain his soul.

I mentioned earlier that Paul's letter to 2nd Timothy is pretty much the archetype upon which all such future prison letters are constructed. Listen for a moment to a portion of the letter William Tyndale wrote some fifteen hundred years after Paul when he was imprisoned in Belgium. It is easy to see how Paul influenced

Tyndale's writing. Tyndale's letter is written to the warden of the prison where he was being kept until he was to be executed.

I believe, most excellent Sir, that you are not unacquainted with the decision reached concerning me. On which account, I beseech your lordship, even by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to pass the winter here...to send me from my possessions...a warmer cap, for I suffer greatly from cold in the head...which is aggravated in this prison vault. A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin. Also cloth for repairing my leggings. My overcoat is worn out; the shirts also are worn out. He has a woolen shirt of mine, if he will please send it. I have also with him leggings of heavier cloth for overwear. He likewise has warmer nightcaps: I also ask for leave to use a lamp in the evening, for it is tiresome to sit alone in the dark. But above all, I beg and entreat your clemency earnestly to...allow me the use of my Hebrew Bible, Grammar, and Lexicon...that I might employ my time with...study...But if, before the end of winter, a different decision be reached concerning me, I shall be patient, and submit to the will of God to the glory of the grace of Jesus Christ my Lord, whose spirit may ever direct your heart. Amen. *W. Tyndale.*⁴

Isn't that the loveliest thing ever? Tyndale in a sense had become Paul. He had read Paul and lived with Paul so long in his proclamation of the gospel he had even begun to think and sound like Paul.

In addition to some warmer clothing and his books, Paul also longed for fellowship. He longed for a measure of respite from the physical privation he suffered. He also longed to be able to keep himself busy...to be doing or studying instead of just sitting. He longed for some good conversation. He longed to see his friends. All those things were important to Paul but those things were not in the end what really sustained Paul. The thing that sustained Paul in the midst of so much bleakness and deprivation was the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ and the enduring hope of the gospel as contained in the Word of God.

Look down to verse sixteen where Paul begins to recall the things that had led to his being in prison in Rome.

^{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.

You see it was the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus and his intention that the Word of God be faithfully proclaimed that sustained Paul. It was what caused the Lord Jesus to strengthen him to the point that he could forgive those that had deserted him. It was what caused the Lord Jesus to sustain him in loneliness and heartache. It was as Paul puts it in verse seventeen the very reason the Lord Jesus stood by him and strengthened him. That is, the reason the Lord Jesus stood by Paul and strengthened him was so that the message of the gospel might be fully proclaimed and heard. That was why Paul felt as if he had been rescued from the lion's mouth. Now we ought to read that too literally. Paul had not been dragged out into an arena somewhere and been set on by some roaring lion only to have the lion's mouth stopped. It is not that I don't think that was possible. It is rather that Paul is simply using a biblical allusion.

What other biblical character was rescued from the lion's mouth?

Yes. It was Daniel of course. And why was Daniel in prison in the first place? He was there because he maintained his faithfulness to the God of Israel even when everyone else folded up.

God delivered him from the lion's mouth.⁵ Paul says the same sort of thing had happened to him. But now Paul sees that his time is coming to an end. And that was, I think, the reason Paul longed to see Timothy's face one last time. It was the reason he longed for Timothy to come before winter. He wanted to see him one last time. He wanted to hand off his work to Timothy...to make sure that the faithful proclamation of the Word of God kept on going, and so it did. And so it has.

Let's pray.

¹ F.W. Newman, *Phases of Faith*, (London: Trubner and Company, 1874), 19. Newman who later abandoned the faith wrote this about his meeting with John Nelson Darby:

Never before had I seen a man so resolved that no word of the New Testament should be a dead letter to him. I once said; "But do you really think that no part of the New Testament may have been temporary in its object? For instance – What should we have lost if St. Paul had never written, "The cloak that I left at Troas bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments ..."?

He answered with the greatest promptitude, "I should have lost something, for it was exactly that verse which alone saved me from selling my little library.* No! every word, depend upon it, is from the Spirit, and is for eternal service".

² **ESV Colossians 4:14**...Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.

ESV Philemon 22...At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you. ²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

³ **ESV Acts 15:37**...Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

⁴ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/tyndale3.html>

⁵ **ESV Daniel 6:16**...Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" ¹⁷

And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. ¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. ¹⁹ Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. ²⁰ As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." ²³ Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. ²⁴ And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions-- they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.