



Gleanings from Paul's Closing Words

Series: 2 Timothy: The Final Charge From a Faithful Apostle

2 Timothy 4:9-22

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Today marks our last sermon in 2 Timothy, in this last letter that Paul wrote before his martyrdom for Christ. Next to Jesus, of course, I love and respect Paul the most of any of the people whose lives are recorded for us in the Scriptures. He was the greatest Christian warrior in history and his life is a sterling example to us of what it means to live in the present with eyes firmly focused on the future glory of Christ to come.

Of all people, Paul truly lived according to his theology. He lived a life that faithfully reflected what he taught and professed. He lived certain of God's sovereignty over everything in the big sense and over every detail of his life, of His steadfast and unchanging love for His elect children, of His bounteous grace and forgiving mercy, of the sanctifying and ministry empowering might of Christ's Spirit in him, of the absolute truth and worth of His gospel, of Christ's eternal Lordship and everlasting glory. Paul was a man convinced that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21, ESV) And these convictions come through loud and clear in Paul's closing words this morning. I didn't outline this last sermon, because, to be honest, it seems more natural to simply look at his closing words and glean some last golden nuggets as we read them. Look with me starting in verse 9.

"Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus." (2 Timothy 4:9–12, ESV) These first few verses give us an insight into Paul that for some may be surprising. We have a tendency, I think, to look at Paul, a veteran of many spiritual battles, a hero in the Truth War, and view him as an "iron saint," as a "man of steel or stone." But these verses help us to see that though he is confident of the reward that waits him, confident in the face of encroaching death, confident, to use Paul's words, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7, ESV), the

circumstances of these final days of his life are weighing on him. He's lonely. He misses the fellowship of his brothers and sisters in Christ. He misses communion with the saints.

There are a couple of reasons for that. First, because of his own unselfishness. Paul understood that the gospel mission was greater than his own personal pleasure and comfort, he had sent Crescens, a heretofore unmentioned fellow servant, to go to Galatia to minister and to keep the Galatians faithful to the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and not works – something they had struggled with. He had sent Titus, a man who had finished the assignment of getting the church in Crete in order, to go and to do the same in Dalmatia. The only brother that he had left, that had labored with him as a fellow servant for an extended period of time, was Luke. Don't misunderstand here. It is not that Paul did not value Luke. It wasn't the sentiment that you see on tee-shirts like, "My parents went to Italy and all I got was this lousy tee-shirt." No, this was really a testimony to the faithfulness of Luke, to his unflinching loyalty as Paul's companion in his missionary journeys and as his "beloved physician" who kept Paul going despite his many ailments. It is testimony of Luke's "hanging in there" with Paul, especially when contrasted with Demas.

Prior to Demas' mention in 2 Timothy, Paul had called him a fellow worker, mentioning him both times in connection with Luke in the books of Philemon Colossians. You get the sense here that Paul expected that Luke and Demas would both stand with him, stay with him, encourage him and bear this burden of his incarceration for the sake of the gospel of Christ with him – at least as much as they could. But that sadly was not the case. Here Paul laments that Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. How are we to understand that?

Well first, I want you to see what a strong statement this was by Paul, especially in light of 1 John 2:15-16 where John writes, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world." (1 John 2:15–16, ESV) Paul had written to the Colossians saying, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." (Colossians 2:8, ESV) What are the elemental principles, the empty philosophies and human traditions, the desires of the flesh, the eyes and the pride of life that chokes out love for God?

There is much we can say. The elemental principles of this world are thoughts and convictions like: "I am my own authority. No one can tell me what to do. If it works out according to the way I want it to, it must be right. There are many ways to God. Truth is relative and elastic. My truth is as good as your truth. This life is all there is so live to make yourself happy in this life. Grab all you can get. Live for now. God wants me to be happy no matter what, and so if this makes me happy, it must be from God. The greatest love is to love yourself, accept yourself, to forgive yourself, to follow your heart and what seems right to you. As long as I can justify myself and my actions, that is all that matters. I must always do what is best for me. I must be popular. I am the most important person in the world. I have a right to the "good life." ..." and I'm sure you can think of thousand more.

We don't know what it was that squeezed out and diminished Demas' love for God in favor of the world. Perhaps he grew tired of Paul's hard stands on the truth, tired of his narrow insistence on the gospel and doctrine, submitting his life to the authority of Scripture and Christ's Lordship over every area, suffering for faithfulness to Christ, or being hated by the world. Whatever the reason, he abandoned Paul and deserted him, going instead to Thessalonica. Commentators point out that the fact that he chose Thessalonica, where there was a thriving church, and not some other city indicates that he probably wanted to remain outwardly a follower of Christ, but his passion and love for the Lord had grown cold. Whatever the case may be, this is the last that we hear of Demas. He is a picture of one who began well, who seemed to hold great promise for faithfulness to Christ and usefulness in His kingdom, but who drifted back into the world, seduced and deluded by the worldliness, becoming useless in the kingdom and for all we know apostatizing from the faith.

It was a great heartache to Paul. He writes this with a great sense of loss. I understand it. I can testify to you of the heartbreak of watching someone you love, someone who has given evidence of faithfully walking with Christ only to grow cold and spiritually deluded and lifeless, going back to the emptiness of the world and living according to his own wisdom and authority. It broke Paul's heart.

That's why he longs for Timothy to come and see him one last time before he dies, to see him and commune with him once more in this life before he is gathered to the saints who have gone before him. He wants to see his son in the faith and he wants him to bring with him,

Mark. You remember Mark. You remember from Acts 13 how when Paul and his missionary team had gone out to take the gospel to the Gentiles, Mark chose to turn back and return home and abandoned the mission. You remember how that made Paul angry and later it had caused a rift with Paul and Barnabas when Barnabas suggested that they take Mark with them on a subsequent mission, so much so that Paul and Barnabas separated. We don't know all that happened in the interim, but by this time we know that Mark had grown up in the Lord and Paul and Mark had been reconciled, so much so that Paul viewed him as very useful to me for ministry. In some ways, Mark was the anti-Demas, not so great a start, but a great finish. He even wrote one of the gospels.

What we see here is the longing of Paul for the fellowship of the brothers. You know, some super-spiritual people will say things like "I don't really need friends. I'm never lonely. Jesus satisfies my every need." But that wasn't Paul. He understood that human friendship, that partnership in the gospel, that communion and fellowship with fellow saints was gracious and loving gift from God, not one to be taken lightly. He pleads with Timothy to come soon, even sending Tychicus to serve in his place in Ephesus. But notice something else, when Timothy comes, Paul has a request for him. He knows that the route that Timothy will have to take is through Troas and so he says to him:

"When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments." (2 Timothy 4:13, ESV) Most likely when Paul was taken into custody by the Roman authorities it was so quick that he had to leave whatever belongings that he did not have on his person with Carpus there in Troas. Among them was a cloak – think of a sort of woolen poncho or something like that – that he would need as winter was approaching. But specifically he wants Timothy to bring the books and especially his parchments. The only real difference between books and parchments were that books were made of papyrus, ancient paper, and the parchments would have been made of specially prepared animal skins on which you could write with pen and ink. The books and parchments would have consisted most likely of Paul's Greek OT, no small thing to carry around, and all of his notes and writings that composed the vast theology that we have in his letters. Now what does this tell us about Paul?

It shows us the passionate desire of Paul to keep learning Christ, to keep filling his heart and mind with the Word of God, to feed his own soul and to continue to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, personally, and to be a blessing and a servant of the Lord and of his church, as a whole, up until the very end, leaving behind Scriptural instruction and

exhortation for the body of Christ. This is yet another example of Paul finishing strong. You know sometimes people get to a point where they think they have learned enough of Christ, or labored enough in the kingdom, or served Christ long enough, or grown in Christ enough, but not Paul. There is no thought of taking a break, or coasting to the finish line. He wants to be of use in the kingdom and growing in Christ up until the very end. And in this, he leaves for Timothy and for us a picture of what the faithful preacher and Christian does. He reads, studies, learns, writes and ministers until death, pouring himself out for Christ and for the church, always “press(ing) on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14, ESV)

Reminded that Timothy will need to go by way of Troas, he then gives him a word of warning. “Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.” (2 Timothy 4:14–15, ESV) Digging into this a little bit, we see that the phrase that Paul applies to Alexander, that he did me great harm, is a phrase that is used to speak of an informer. What Paul is saying, the intent of the Greek words that he uses, is that “Alexander informed many evil things about me.” He made false and slanderous accusations against Paul and the root of it was not simply personal malice toward and hatred of Paul. The root of it, as he tells Timothy, is that he strongly opposed our message. Alexander set himself against Paul’s preaching, against his message, against his proclamation of the gospel and set about trying to bring Paul down by slanderous accusations and twisted assertions about Paul’s message and character. Most commentators think that he was the one who actually facilitated Paul’s arrest.

Paul’s response to Alexander’s maneuvering is simply to say, the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Now understand, Paul is not calling down a curse on Alexander’s head, nor is he urging Timothy to get even with him for Paul’s sake. Instead Paul is trusting in the very words that he had written to the Romans where he says: “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”” (Romans 12:18b–19, ESV) Paul understood the seriousness of what Alexander had done. This was not a personal offense against Paul, though it was very personal. Ultimately this was an offense against God, against His gospel. In its scope, it was a kingdom offense and God would deal with Alexander in a way that Paul never could. Still, his message to Timothy was “Look out, be on guard for Alexander, he will destroy you if he can.”

By way of contrast, Paul then says: “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!” (2 Timothy 4:16, ESV) Paul recounts what took place when he first stood before Nero and the Romans when he was brought to Rome. He is making reference to prima action of his case, the preliminary investigation that preceded the actual trial. At that time, he says, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. Apparently Luke had not yet arrived at Rome when this took place, but the believers there in Rome were all gripped with fear and trepidation and so they purposely avoided Paul’s first hearing. It isn’t that they did not love Paul or Christ, they were afraid to be associated with Paul for the fear of losing their lives. They let him down and failed to support him when he needed them the most.

What a display of grace and mercy, by Paul, to say of them, May it not be charged against them! Rather than hold their abandonment against them, Paul forgives them and prays that God will do the same. Again, that Paul puts these two things together helps us to see the differentiation between what Alexander did and the failure of the Roman believers to stand with him before Nero. One, Alexander’s, he sees as a kingdom offense, an offense against Christ and against His gospel, far greater in scope and deliberate in purpose. The other, the Roman believers’ abandonment, he sees as a sin against himself personally which he can and does gladly and freely forgive. This takes wisdom and grace which Paul had in great supply and which we should seek ourselves.

Despite the Roman Christian’s abandonment, Paul says: “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.” (2 Timothy 4:17, ESV) Despite being abandoned by his friends, the Lord stood with Paul, strengthening him, emboldening him, encouraging him, fortifying him, and giving him the words to speak. In fact, here Paul gives us a picture of what it means to “preach the Word, in season and out of season.” It will never more out of season to preach the gospel than when you are on trial for your life for preaching the gospel. And yet, that is just what he did.

He proclaimed what he wrote of earlier in this letter. He preached of the power of God “who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...” (2 Timothy 1:9–10, ESV) He preached the good news of gospel in its fullness – that is the idea of the word here for message,

kerygma. He expounded the gospel of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, incarnate, crucified for the forgiveness of sins, buried, risen for the sinner's justification, reigning as sovereign Lord and coming again to judge the living and the dead and to receive His people to Himself and to cast all unbelievers into eternal hell. He preached it so that all the Gentiles could hear the truth.

So, he says, I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The lion he is speaking of, of course, is Nero, but even more it is Satan who is behind him and influencing Nero, the malevolent schemer who was behind all of the opposition to Paul. In fact, one commentator has pointed out, and I agree with his assessment that Paul must have been meditating on Psalm 22 as he faced the very real possibility of death in this first trial. The similarities are resounding. Verse 16, "all deserted me" alludes to Psalm 22:1, "why have you forsaken me?" Verse 16, "no one came to stand by me" echoes Psalm 22:11, "there is none to help." Verse 17, "I was rescued from the lion's mouth," alludes to Psalm 22:21, "Save me from the mouth of the lion." Verse 17, "all the Gentiles might hear it," is similar to Psalm 22:27, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord." And verse 18, which we will expound in a moment, "and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom," echoes Psalm 22:28, "kingship belongs to the Lord." Paul was so filled with the Word of God, so empowered by Christ's presence with him, that he was the real "lion" in the room, speaking on behalf of the Lion of Judah.

And so thrilled is Paul in telling the story that he says, "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." (2 Timothy 4:18, ESV) Paul was not expecting acquittal. He knew he was going to die for Christ, but he was confident of Christ's grace to him, that death by the sword would be the only death that he would ever see. He was confident that by God's grace, his faith would endure, his courage would hold, he would not shrink back, but would be delivered forever into the presence of Christ in heaven. What was the source of his confidence, just this, that Christ had died and risen for him, to save him and make him his own precious possession and that he would guard the faith and gospel that he had entrusted to Paul. Christ can be trusted. As he said earlier in the letter, "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." (2 Timothy 1:12, ESV) Paul is so filled with grace and gratitude that he cannot help praising the Lord. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Paul got the equation right. He had received grace from Christ, and to Him was all the glory. From him grace; to him glory.

From there, Paul makes mention of several believers by name, greeting them, sending greetings and giving updates on their well-being. “Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.” (2 Timothy 4:19–21, ESV) This is more than just the customary greeting and such that were part of every letter in those days. Paul never does something without a purpose and it is no different here. Paul had a gospel agenda in these words. He wants to build up the body of Christ – its cohesiveness, its fellowship, its communion, and its community. He genuinely loves the people of God and he wants them to love one another as well. He wants to build up love and gospel-community in the body of Christ. He wants them to see that they need each other, that they need Christ together, that their lives are inextricably linked. Even in this simple act, Paul is teaching these believers that there is no chance for them to finish well unless they invest their lives with fellow believers in the local congregation of Christ.

Finally we come to Paul’s closing words, words for Timothy and words for the church. He says: “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.” (2 Timothy 4:22, ESV) Think about this. Paul had given to Timothy a fourfold charge regarding the gospel – to guard it (because it is a priceless treasure), to suffer for it (because it is worth all of his life, the proud will hate it and the humble will receive it unto eternal life), to continue in it (for his own sake and for the sake of the church and future generations) and to preach it (because it is the truth of God and the good news of salvation). He was being called to be faithful in a faithless generation, to succeed where so many had failed, to hold fast to Christ despite the cost and you can see how Timothy would have thought, “How can I do this? Who is sufficient for this?” The answer Paul gives to Timothy is this, The Lord be with your spirit. It is word for Timothy alone – it is in the singular. The same Lord that has been with me, whom I have trusted, who has empowered me, who has blessed me and held fast to me will do the same for you. The Lord be with your spirit. “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13, ESV) And so can you Timothy, so can you.

Then he has a word for the church as a whole. Grace be with you. What do we need to remain faithful? What do we need to persevere? What do we need to live righteous lives in this present evil age? What do we need to keep our love for Christ from growing cold? What do we need to love one another and stir one another up to good works? What do we need? We need grace. That is Paul’s prayer for us and it is my prayer for you and I as we bring this study to a close.

My prayer for you is that God's grace in Christ, his unmerited favor, and forgiveness and enabling power, His sustaining presence, that grace would be with you, beloved, even as the world is falling headlong into greater and greater godlessness, even as you are engaged in the spiritual battle with the world, the flesh and the devil, that grace would be with you, from God your Father, through Christ your Lord, until the day that we all behold our Savior face to face.

Grace be with you.

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