

## But the Lord Stood By Me

2 Timothy 4:9-22

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn to HCC on 10/23/2011

### Introduction

- ❖ *“No believer traverses all the road to Heaven in company. Though the greater part of our heavenward pilgrimage is made cheerful by the society of fellow travelers, there must be lonely spots here and there.”* Those are the words of Charles Spurgeon in a famous sermon he preached called “Christ’s Loneliness and Ours” (John 16:31-32).
  - Spurgeon was touching upon a truth highlighted in this morning’s passage – **the truth that every Christian, as we faithfully try to run the course marked out for us, will at times find ourselves without the company of fellow travelers.**
    - As we’re trying to finish the race like Paul, there are times we’ll come to discover we’re running alone. As we’re trying to fight the good fight, we might find ourselves outnumbered and abandoned.
  
- ❖ **Moses** enjoyed the fellowship of Aaron and Joshua, yet there were many days when he had to climb that mountain all by himself, all alone. **David** had his mighty men and close advisors, yet there was a season where he found himself on the run, not knowing who to trust, scared and all alone. **Elijah** was accompanied by servants and his disciple Elisha, yet at times he left like he was the only one left still faithful to the Lord – all alone. **Jesus** had the Twelve, yet where were they as he wept in the Garden all alone?
  - If there is one lesson we can learn from these biblical examples – including Paul’s in today’s text – is that **ministry faithfulness does not promise you will never be left alone.** Just because you’re committed to following God and faithful in doing so, there is no guarantee that you won’t experience loneliness in your life and ministry.
    - *“No believer traverses all the road to Heaven in company.”* There will be lonely spots here and there. We have to come to grips with this reality.

### Context

- ❖ This morning’s passage is the conclusion of Paul’s letter to Timothy, and thus the conclusion of our sermon series through 2 Timothy. Now if we had to pick a verse that captures the thrust of the letter, it would have to be chapter 1:8, *“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.”*
  - If you recall, Timothy was commissioned by Paul to pastor the church in Ephesus, which was going through a difficult season. From the outside, opponents of the gospel message were persecuting the church. From within, false teachers were trying to tweak and adjust the message, thereby swerving from the gospel.
    - So Paul fills this letter with personal exhortations for Timothy to guard the gospel (1:13), to faithfully pass it on (2:2), to rightly handle the word of truth (2:15), to gently correct his opponents (2:25).
      - And then in chapter 4:1-2, he issues a charge to Timothy to preach the word in every season, no matter the circumstances. Whether people love you or hate you, just preach the word.

- ❖ Now last week we considered vv6-8 where Paul tells Timothy that he will soon be martyred for the faith. He is sure that the time of his departure has come.
  - So the urgency of this charge to preach the word is elevated by the impending death of the Apostle. Someone has to take up the torch and carry it forward. *“Timothy, I have finished my race. Now you, take the gospel you’ve been entrusted with, go forth, and preach it. Fulfill your ministry.”*
- ❖ And now in the conclusion of his letter, Paul gives first-hand testimony of what the faithful in Christ can expect if we keep the charge to preach the word, in season and out. Through these personal, closing words to a dear friend, Paul indirectly teaches us that faithfulness in the Christian life and in gospel ministry can very well be a lonely charge.
  - In these last verses, we observe requests (vv9-13), a warning (vv14-18), greetings (vv19-21) and a benediction (v22). Now you might be wondering how concluding remarks in a personal letter between Paul and Timothy could have any relevance to you. Stick with me and I’ll show you.

### **Paul’s Requests and His Loneliness**

- ❖ In your outline, I’ve given you three questions to ask of the text. **1) What can we learn from Paul’s requests and his loneliness?** Look with me at vv9-13 and notice the requests that Paul makes: He asks Timothy to visit him soon. He asks him to bring Mark along. He asks him to bring a cloak and as well some books and parchments. Simply put, Paul is requesting a) company and b) personal items.
  - ❖ **a) Paul asks for company.** *“Do your best to come to me soon.”* Timothy was in Ephesus but where was Paul you might ask? Church tradition tells us that he was in a dungeon in Rome called the Mamertine prison. I mentioned last week that it still exists. If you visit Rome, it’s just north of the Forum ruins, which used to be the ancient city center.
    - It’s clearly marked on a map today, but in Paul’s day it was not easily found. In chapter 1, we read of how Onesiphorus had to search for him earnestly. You have to imagine an underground prison hidden from plain sight.
      - Picture a damp, dark, cold dungeon. Rats scurrying about. The rotten stench of human filth hangs in the air. Cells full of prisoners locked up in chains. And in one of those cells, under one of those chains, is the Apostle Paul.
- ❖ Now in his first Roman imprisonment, as recorded at the end of Acts, he was under house arrest, since he was a Roman citizen accused of a non-serious crime. So his friends came and went as they pleased, strengthening him with food and supplies.
  - But this time around, he was thrown in a dungeon reserved for common criminals. He was most likely accused of sedition. That’s why many people, even in the church, were ashamed of him and his chains (cf. 1:15-16).

- ❖ It would be similar to a pastor being arrested today for treason, for plotting a rebellion against the state. But actually it was worse than that. The early Christians had a bad rap among the Romans. There were so many false rumors and accusations going around.
  - The book of Jude mentions ‘love feasts’ (1:12) that believers would partake in (a reference to the Lord’s Supper), but rumors spread saying these were orgies, and that Christians were incestuous since they kept calling each other brother and sister.
    - They were also accused of cannibalism since they talked of eating the flesh and blood of their Master. And ironically, they were labeled by the general public as ‘atheists’ since they denied the Roman Pantheon of gods and goddesses – calling them false.
      - And of course, they were accused of sedition, of betraying Caesar, since they claimed to follow and worship another king.
  
- ❖ Unfortunately, the general public in Rome believed the rumors, **so you can see why so many were ashamed and afraid to associate with Paul, an imprisoned leader of this seditious, incestuous, blood-thirsty, atheistic cult called Christianity.**
  - So many deserted him. Paul already mentioned Phygelus and Hermogenes in chapter 1:15, and here in v10 he names **Demas**. Paul and Demas were, at one point, close associates and traveling companions.
  
- ❖ Demas is mentioned in Colossians (4:14) and Philemon (1:24) as one of Paul’s co-workers. But according to Paul, he was still “*in love with this present world*” as opposed to being in love with Christ and “*his appearing*” (mentioned two verses earlier). So he abandoned Paul.
  - He goes on to mention two other companions who have gone – **Crescens** to Galatia and **Titus** to Dalmatia. Now looking at it grammatically and contextually, there is no reason to assume that they left on bad terms as well. They were most likely sent by Paul to continue their missionary work. In v12, he also mentions **Tychicus** whom he sent to Ephesus. Most commentators think he was to one who hand delivered this letter to Timothy and was to fill in as pastor while Timothy was gone to visit Paul.
  
- ❖ **So the loss of close friends, on good terms or bad, led to a profound sense of loneliness for Paul and a desire for companionship** – especially from Timothy, his son in the faith.
  - Fortunately, **Luke** was still with Paul. This was the Luke who wrote the third Gospel and the book of Acts. In fact, he likely penned this letter, as dictated by Paul who was hindered by chains. Scripture also tells us Luke was a physician (Col. 4:14), so it made sense for him to stay behind to tend to Paul.
  
- ❖ He goes on to ask that Timothy bring **Mark** along with him. This is the author of the second Gospel, who years ago deserted Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:13).
  - But at some point Paul and Mark were reconciled, since here Paul says that Mark is very useful to him for ministry (v11). This just proves that there is hope yet for Demas.

- Like Mark, he deserted Paul and the gospel ministry, and hopefully like Mark, he'll come to repent and receive the grace of God. Friends, the grace of God abounds – even if we are faithless, he remains faithful still (2:13).
  
- ❖ Now I'm going to let my imagination run wild here. Once Timothy and Mark arrive to join Paul and Luke, there in one prison cell is a gathering of three biblical authors – who account for half of the Gospels, and almost 60% of the New Testament. Can you imagine what they must have talked about? No wonder Paul asks for books and parchment!
  
- ❖ **b) Paul asks for personal items.** He first asks for Timothy to pass through Troas on his way to Rome and pick up the **cloak** he left with a man named Carpus. The commentaries describe this cloak as “an outer garment of heavy material, circular in shape with a hole in the middle for the head”. I'm thinking that's a poncho – Paul wants his poncho!
  - Paul was an old man, cold and shivering in a dark, damp, underground cell. In v21, he asks Timothy to come before winter. Not only because it's getting colder, but you can't sail in the winter and for Timothy to wait until the spring might be too late.
  
- ❖ He also asks Timothy to grab his “**books and above all the parchments**”. The word for books refer to papyrus scrolls. These could be unused scrolls he could use as writing material, or they could have been personal letters. The parchments were bounded sheets of specially prepared animal skins. Some commentators guess that he was talking about his copy of the Septuagint (Greek OT) or perhaps documents of the Lord's sayings or early narratives of Jesus' life. You can only imagine what kind of conversations transpired in that prison cell.
  
- ❖ *So what can we learn from Paul's requests, which proceeded from his feelings of loneliness?* **We learn this: Paul is giving voice to real human needs and desires, and there is nothing unspiritual about having them or expressing them.** He was lonely and longing for company. He was cold and uncomfortable. He was bored and wanted something to read.
  - **Some Christians give off the impression that because of their faith, they're no longer burden with such 'worldly' needs.** They're filled with Jesus so they never feel lonely, they're never uncomfortable, they're never bored. The suggestion is that the really spiritual are above all this. They just need Jesus.
  
- ❖ But Paul is demonstrating that the dual longing for the coming of Jesus in his appearing AND the coming of a friend in Timothy is not incompatible. **That is, you can be totally satisfied in Jesus and still want and need human company.** There is nothing ungodly or unspiritual about feeling lonely and wanting companionship – that is part of the image of God in you.
  - In Genesis 2 before Eve was formed, Adam and God shared perfect communion unhindered by sin, yet Adam longed for companionship and God even said, “*It is not good that the man should be alone*” (Gen. 2:18). Adam walked and talked with God and yet, in a one sense, Scripture says he was alone – that is, until God brought him Eve.

- ❖ **So in one sense, Jesus is all you need.** All you need for salvation, to have your sins forgiven, to be reconciled to God. **But in another sense, you still need human companionship. And there is nothing wrong with that.**
  - Making this very observation, John Stott wrote, *“When our spirit is lonely, we need friends. When our body is cold, we need clothing. When our mind is bored, we need books. To admit this is not unspiritual; it is human.”*
- ❖ **Friends, don’t let anyone condemn you for feeling lonely or for wanting companionship.** That’s human of you. Perhaps you are longing for a spouse, you desire to have closer friends, or you just want greater depth in your present relationships. These are human, mortal needs. To have them, to voice them, is not unspiritual.
  - No doubt the Lord is sufficient for us, no doubt without Him we’ll always be empty and feel a profound sense of loneliness. But even though the Apostle was well aware of the Lord’s presence in his life, yet that did not negate or diminish his desire for Timothy’s company.
    - In fact, this is why God saved us – not for isolation with him – but for community – first with the Truine God and second with his Church.

### **Paul’s Warning and His Hope**

- ❖ But having just affirmed how natural and good it is to long for community, **I want to reaffirm the reality that faithfulness to Christ will sometimes lead you down a lonely road.** Many of you are trying to maintain a consistent Christian witness in your workplace. Many of you students want to be faithful to Jesus but you’re in an environment hostile to faith. Some of you are in a marriage or a family where you’re the only believer – what a lonely place that can be!
  - Well in vv14-18, Paul warns that ministry faithfulness sometimes leads to ministry loneliness. He reminds us that, *“No believer traverses all the road to Heaven in company.”* Yet he also expresses his hope and implicitly urges us to share in it. So let’s ask **2) What can we learn from Paul’s warning and his hope?**
- ❖ In v14, he begins by warning Timothy of **Alexander the coppersmith** who *“did me great harm”*. Now Alexander is a pretty common name, so this may be a different Alexander than the heretic mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20. Most likely this Alexander is the one who turned Paul over to the authorities. The phrase *“did me great harm”* could also mean *“informed against me”* – in other words, he was the informant that led to Paul’s arrest. That’s why Timothy should beware of Alexander himself. He was very much against *“our message (logos)”* – the word we’ve been charged to preach.
  - Now that clause, *“the Lord will repay him according to his deeds”* should be read in light of Paul’s earlier comments about that Day when the Lord will appear again to judge the living and the dead. And based on the Greek, this statement should not be read as a prayer or wish but more as a prophecy or statement of fact.

- ❖ Paul then goes on to recall his first defense and how he was deserted by all his friends. “*No one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.*” Roman law permitted a defendant to call upon witnesses or to employ an advocate (like a lawyer), but no Christian in all of Rome was willing to stand by his side, to speak on his behalf, to vouch for Paul.
  - Granted, they were scared. With all the false rumors and accusations against the early church, I’m sure some of these charges were being leveled against Paul. So his brothers and sisters in Christ were scared, they were ashamed, they abandoned him. **Bottom line, the Church failed Paul. She let him down at his moment of need.**
  
- ❖ I know there are a number of people – some here today – who have been burned by the Church. Perhaps you grew up in the church, in a Christian home, and instead seeing the beauty of Christian love and grace you witnessed the ugliness of Christian pride and selfishness. Some of you have been betrayed by Christian friends, abandoned at your moment of greatest need. **Just like what she did to Paul, the Church deserted you.**
  - But I want you to notice Paul’s response. Notice how he did not respond with bitterness or bad-mouthing. Look at what he says in v16, “*May it not be charged against them!*” Do you see that? **He pleads for mercy on behalf of the Church. He loves her still even though she deserted him!** Why? How can this be?
    - Because he’s imitating his Savior. **Remember, Jesus loved the Church even though she deserted him at his moment of greatest need.** The Gospels record that his disciples completely abandoned him in the Garden upon his arrest. At his trial, no one stood by his side. No one spoke up in his defense.
  
- ❖ The Church deserted him – and yet he loved her. And as he hung there alone on the cross, he asked the Father to forgive them, for they know not what they do (Lk. 23:34). Yes, he was praying for his enemies, and yet at the same time he was praying for his friends who ran away. He was pleading for mercy on behalf of the Church.
  - Why? How can this be? **Because Jesus knew that even though he was alone, he was not alone.** Even though he was abandoned, he was not abandoned. In **John 16:32**, speaking to his disciples Jesus said, “*Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.*”
    - You will leave me alone, yet I am not alone. For God the Father is with me.
  
- ❖ **Friends, we learned from Paul’s loneliness that we were made to live and to flourish in community.** No man is an island. **Yet we learn from Paul’s warning that every man is a sinner and prone to fail each another.** Your family, your friends, your church – they are prone to fail you, to hurt you, to desert you.
  
- ❖ But, friends, what we learn from Paul’s hope is this: **Even if your friends abandon you, even if the Church deserts you – you are not alone.** Even if no one is willing to stand by you – there is One who stands by you.

- ❖ The same Greek word for ‘desert’ is the word ‘forsake’, which is found in that amazing gospel promise Jesus made to his Bride (the Church), “*Never will I leave. Never will I forsake you.*” (Heb. 13:5).
  - **Sadly, we have all deserted Jesus, yet he did not desert us. Instead he died for his elect.** He laid down his life for his Bride. And he covenants to never leave her. He promises to be with us always, even to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20).
  
- ❖ The Lord kept his promise to Paul at his first defense. Though no one stood by him, the Lord stood by him and strengthened him. Paul was facing the highest court in the Roman Empire, possibly standing before the Emperor himself. Yet instead of witnessing to his innocence, he seized the moment to witness to Christ. Instead of pleading his own case, he pleads the case for Christ.
  - **If ever there was an ‘out of season’ moment to preach the word, this was it!** Yet the Lord strengthened him to preach “*the message*” – that is the gospel message. Paul proclaimed the gospel in a public hearing, in the emperor’s court, in the heart of the Gentile world. That’s why he could honestly say he finished his race (4:7). He actually fulfilled his ministry as a preacher to the Gentiles (cf. 1 Tim. 2:7).
  
- ❖ He goes on to say that he was “*rescued from the lion’s mouth*”. He probably wasn’t referring to actual lions since a Roman citizen would have been spared such a fate. He probably meant that figuratively and was referring either to Nero or Satan. Regardless, he goes on to say in v18, “*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.*”
  - Notice how he’s confident that the Lord will rescue him from “*every evil deed*”, but he doesn’t mean from every danger or even from death itself because Paul is already confident he will soon die and be brought safely into God’s heavenly kingdom.
    - **So what he means is that every evil deed or evil intention that either Nero or Satan has crafted against Paul will ultimately fail.** “No power of hell, no scheme of man / Can ever pluck me from His hand / ‘Till he returns or calls me home / Here in the power of Christ [Paul] stands”
  
- ❖ **For Paul, death is not something he needs to be rescued from.** He knew the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection and therefore he had “no guilt in life and no fear in death”. For him, death is simply a departure to a better land, to a heavenly kingdom.
  - Apparently thinking about the glory to come, led Paul to launch into a doxology at the end of v18, “*To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*”
  
- ❖ ***Friends, do you share in this hope?*** I know many of you are experiencing a profound sense of loneliness. You’re trying to stay faithful to Christ, you don’t want to compromise your convictions, you don’t want to disobey your Lord. But making that kind of commitment has led you down a lonely road. Well know this: **Even though you are alone, you’re not alone. Though no one stands by you, the Lord stands by you. The Lord will never leave you. He will never forsake you.**

## Paul's Greetings and His Benediction

- ❖ In the remaining verses, Paul ends his letter with personal greetings. **Prisca** (Priscilla) and **Aquila** were his close associates and the last we read of them in Acts (18:26) they're still in Ephesus. He is also mindful to send greetings to the **household of Onesiphorus**, having recently been refreshed by him.
  - **Erastus** is mentioned at the end of Paul's letter to the Romans (16:23), where it says he's the city treasurer of Corinth. And **Trophimus** we're told in Acts (21:29) is a native of Ephesus, so I'm sure the Ephesian church was concerned for his welfare.
    - Paul then passes on greetings from believers in the church in Rome: **Eubulus, Pudens, Linus** and **Claudia**. The only known name is Linus, who we learn from early church fathers became the first bishop of Rome following Peter and Paul's martyrdom.
  
- ❖ **3) What can we learn from Paul's greetings?** Think about it: Here we have a man in chains, in a dungeon, soon to be executed, abandoned, deserted, left alone. If anyone had an excuse to feel sorry for himself, if anyone had a reason to be self-absorbed, it would be a man in Paul's shoes.
  - Yet he takes the time as the end of this letter to think of those he has probably been thanking God for every time he remembers them in prayer. **The point is that Paul values his friendships. He is man who is satisfied in Christ, yet he is a man who loves and values relationships.**
    - May we imitate him as he imitates Christ. May the Lord be gracious and grant us freedom from the bondage of self-pity and self-absorption, and may he turn out hearts outwards towards others – prioritizing and valuing the friends and companions he's brought into our lives and ministries.
  
- ❖ Friends, I hope you've been as blessed by our study of 2 Timothy as I have been. Paul wrote this letter, perhaps his last, to charge Timothy to guard the gospel, to suffer for it as a good soldier, to continue in it, to proclaim it, to be faithful in his generation, to fulfill his ministry no matter what lonely road he has to walk.
  - ***Where are the faithful of this generation?*** Where are the men and women of faith who will fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith? I know, for many of you, your heart's desire is to raise your hand, but naturally, you may be wondering to yourself, "*Who is sufficient for these things?*" How in the world can I follow in the footsteps of Paul and Timothy?
  
- ❖ **This is where we can learn from Paul's benediction in v22, "*The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.*"** The 'your' in "*your spirit*" is singular. He's entreating the Lord to be with Timothy, to stand by Timothy as the Lord stood by him.
  - But the 'you' in "*Grace be with you*" is plural. That indicates that this letter was meant to be read publicly to the congregation. So all the charges Paul gave to Timothy are applicable to all believers in the congregation. And the point is: You have to lean upon God's grace to keep you faithful to the charge to your dying day.