

When Prisons Become Pulpits

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me ...
2 Tim. 2:1-2

As we now turn to Paul's final words in the last letter he wrote before he was martyred – we see hope! In last week's passage Paul declared that he was ready for the end of his life here on earth. Then he detailed some physical needs and some challenges from certain men who had left him or treated him badly. Paul was reaching out to Timothy with cautions about these people, and perhaps Paul thought Timothy might be able to see him one last time, if he hurried. The trip would have taken several weeks, and there is no record of Timothy going to Rome at this time.

Yet Paul was not alone:

Luke was with him.

Most of all, the Lord was with him – strengthening, using and protecting Paul to the very end.

Several Christians besides Luke were there – probably of the Church at Rome.

Let's read Paul's last words of this second letter to Timothy.

READ 2 Timothy 4:17-22

Verse 17: *notwithstanding* – an emphatic “but” – Paul wanted to end on a note of victory and hope, for himself and for Timothy. The title of this lesson sums up Paul's whole life. Whatever his circumstances, he would fully preach to the gospel.

The Gentiles – God chose Paul to go to the Gentiles. When Jesus saved Paul and called him into the ministry, the Lord used Ananias to confirm the call on Paul's life.

*But the Lord said unto him [Ananias], Go thy way: for he [Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:
For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*

Acts 9:15-16

So we see that God called Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles all over the known world. This, his second imprisonment, was the ultimate fulfillment of that. Rome was the “center of the world” and its leaders were very influential.

Verse 17c-18: *the lion* – all danger, and perhaps specifically Nero. So far, Paul was safe – but Nero would soon execute him.

Evil work – here, the effects of evil intentions. So this referred to everything of evil that was thrown at Paul.

Deliver – rescue, bring to safety; ultimately this would be the Lord bringing Paul to safety in the Kingdom when he left this earth (verse 6).

This hope brought forth Paul’s doxology – praise to the Lord.

Verses 19-21: Details about fellow believers. We know a little about some of them, but there is much speculation in the commentaries and histories (best left for another day). Our study book had us look up those in verses 19-20, but we have no other Biblical record about those in verse 21.

In verse 19 Paul was saying, “say ‘hello’ for me” – to a few old friends. We see also a glimpse of everyday life for a Christian in this world. Friends come and go, and we all have various troubles. Paul was concerned about his friend Trophimus who had to be left behind because he was sick.

Verse 21: Then we get a glimpse of newer friends, probably part of the Church at Rome. They and *all the brethren* wanted to send a greeting to Timothy, too.

These things are typical of how Paul ended his letters – a bit chatty, newsy, and friendly.

Verse 22: But Paul’s final farewell was special here. It is two-fold:

First to Timothy: *The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit.*

Then to all who were with Timothy – the Church at Ephesus and other Christians who would read or hear this letter: *Grace be with you. Amen.*

Conclusion

The two letters Paul wrote to Timothy were very personal, yet also valuable instructions for Timothy, his church people, and for all Christians at that time and right up to us today.

First Timothy was Paul detailing to Timothy about how to lead the church: dealing with false teaching, keeping godly order in their gatherings, managing all the different personalities and their various functions in the church, and keeping his eye on Jesus at all times. This first letter must have been very helpful to Timothy and also instructive to his people. Paul certainly explained why things needed to be managed in the way that he instructed.

Second Timothy has a very different tone and subject matter. Paul was “passing the baton” to his dear son in the Lord. He tenderly and at times passionately appealed to Timothy to follow the Lord as he had, and to continue in the faith and work of the Lord.

*Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses,
the same commit thou to faithful men,
who shall be able to teach others also.*

2 Tim. 2:1-2

Paul wrote to him to do the work fully and pass it on! And it is by God’s grace.

Paul invested much in the Church at Ephesus:

He established the church, staying there for two years (Acts 19:10).

He went there a number of other times.

He warned the leaders daily for three years (Acts 20:31).

He wrote the two letters to Timothy, their pastor and watchman.

What happened? Revelation 2:1-7 was written by the Apostle John about 30 years after Paul wrote Second Timothy. It shows the strengths and the one weakness of those in the Church at Ephesus.

This gives us a glimpse – notice the details that relate to our study this year.

READ Rev. 2:1-7

Verse 1 shows us that our Lord Jesus holds the leaders of the churches in His right hand, and He is in the midst of the churches.

A quick look at the details of what they did right show that indeed they followed the teachings and warnings of Paul. [*Nicolaitans* – wanted to have power over the people.]

Yet in one big thing they fell. In verse 4 we see that their love had grown cold. And that love was for the Lord, and for His people and for the work of the Lord given to us. Those who were saved would not lose their salvation; but if the church stayed harsh and unloving, the Lord would remove from it the candlestick that gave it His life.

In verse 7 we see that the Lord called each individual within the Church of Ephesus to overcome and come back to that fervent love. It is a personal, individual call to each one. He does the same for every person who ever lived. As in that song about Him “calling us by name.”

Perhaps in knowing that the Church at Ephesus would leave their first love, the Lord inspired Paul to encourage their love, including their love for one another.

*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;
And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us,
and hath given himself for us
an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.*

Eph. 5:1-2

Ephesians 4:11-16 explains the source of *the unity of the faith* and *speaking the truth in love*. Jesus gave us leaders and teachers to guide us into it all.

READ Eph. 4:13-16

Paul had poured his heart into the Church at Ephesus and into Timothy. Now he was ready to leave this world. He had done what the Lord had for him to do, and now it was time for Timothy and others to take over. So to his dear son in the Lord and to the people of his church he wrote,

The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.
2 Tim 4:22