**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message Of 2 Timothy (17): “Paul’s Last Words”**

**2 Timothy 4:14-22**

**August 13, 2023**

If there is anything we have learned from Paul’s last will and testament, it’s that Paul knew he could count on Timothy. In spite of his youth (1 Tim. 4:12), and his timidity (2 Tim. 1:7), and his frequent ailments (1 Tim. 5:23), Timothy was willing to be sent on difficult missions and to remain Christ’s faithful servant to the very end.

That’s why Paul has urged Timothy to do his very best to see him one last time (4:9), especially before winter (4:21). He was practically alone, and craved fellowship with his younger friend. He also needed the cloak for those cold days in the dungeon, as well as his books and his parchments.

Did Timothy ever get to Rome in time? Every Christian sincerely hopes that he did. But whether he actually saw Paul again is not recorded. However, that Timothy *tried* to see the apostle is certain. Yet before he would leave Ephesus, Paul has a few last words for him, and for the entire church.

*First*, he tells him that he has suffered from the opposition of a man named Alexander, and then warns Timothy to be on guard against him (vv. 14-15). *Second*, he informs Timothy about his first defense in Rome. None of his friends came to his aid or supported his cause. Yet he prayed that their failure would not be held against them. He had learned that he could always depend on the Lord’s strengthening presence (vv. 16-18). *Third*, he sends his final greetings (vv. 19-21) and closes with a personal farewell (v.22).

**A. Paul’s Human Opposition (vv. 14-15):** “*Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message*.” This incident is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament, so we know nothing further about Alexander (a common name in the New Testament) other than he was a “coppersmith” (NASB) or metalworker. We don’t know when, where, or in what way he did Paul “*a great deal of harm*.”

However, what we do know is that Paul was prepared to leave the punishment of those who opposed him to the Lord (“*the Lord will repay him*”). As he himself had advised the Roman church, “*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay says the Lord*.’” Wouldn’t it be wonderful if *all* Christians would be free from even the *desire* for personal revenge, knowing that such freedom is possible because God will right all wrongs on the Day of Judgment!

Nevertheless, Timothy is likely to come across Alexander in the near future (as we may reasonably infer from this verse), so Paul also thinks it is wise to warn him in advance – “*You too should be on guard against him . . .*” Whether Alexander had been in Ephesus (where Timothy was ministering), or in Troas (where Timothy would be collecting Paul’s cloak) or in Rome (where Timothy would be visiting Paul), Timothy needs to be on guard. Why? Because “to be forewarned is to be forearmed!” *Knowing who* the enemies of the gospel are goes a long way in *knowing how* to deal with them. Even in his last days, Paul’s concern for guarding the truth of the gospel message comes through loud and clear.

**B. Paul’s Divine Support (vv. 16-18):** “*At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.*”

After Paul’s arrest, he would have been given a preliminary hearing (due to his Roman citizenship). The charges against him would have been read and he would have been given opportunity to make an initial statement. If ever an accused man needed help it was now; but Paul had no one to defend him but himself. Not one of his friends in Rome showed up. (Luke may not have arrived in Rome on time.) Yet, in one of the most gracious statements in all of Scripture, Paul expresses nothing but forgiveness: “*May it not be held against them*.”

But even though he was terribly alone, Paul knew that Christ Jesus would never leave him nor forsake him: “*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength . . .*” This was not a new experience for Paul:

* When he had been discouraged in Corinth, the Lord came to him and said; “*Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack you and harm you, because I have many people in this city*” (Acts 18:9-10).
* After he had been arrested in Jerusalem, the Lord stood near Paul and said; “*Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome*” (Acts 23:11).
* During the terrible storm, when Paul was on board the ship that was carrying him to Rome, the Lord had also strengthened and encouraged him: “*Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you*” (Acts 27:23-24).

Here, Paul’s concern was *not* for his own safety or comfort. It was for the strength to preach the Word, “*so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it*.” “What a man!” writes Wiersbe, “His friends forsake him, and he prays that God will forgive them. His enemies try him, and he looks for opportunities to tell them how to be saved! What a difference it makes when the Holy Spirit controls your life.”

But when was Paul “*delivered from the lion’s mouth*?” This is a metaphor for a narrow escape from death (Cf. Psalm 22:21), and probably refers to his first hearing, when he was given a temporary reprieve. When he further writes, “*the Lord will rescue me from every evil attack*,” he did not mean that Christ would grant him a stay of execution. He had no doubt about the outcome of his trial (4:6). Rather, he believed that the Lord would be faithful to the end. Paul’s ultimate hope, and the hope of all of us who have come to faith in Christ, was that the Lord “*will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom*.”

**C. Paul’s Closing Greetings and Final Farewell (vv. 19-22):** “*Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you*.”

As I mentioned last week, it is encouraging to see how many people are mentioned in the closing verses of Paul’s final letter (v. 10ff). Paul knew he could not do what God had called him to do by himself. Here we learn more about the important friends, fellow-workers, and faithful companions who were in his life.

* *Priscilla and Aquila* were two of Paul’s oldest and most devoted friends. When he first arrived in Corinth, they provided him with housing and employment in their tent making business (Acts 18:2-3). When Paul left for Ephesus, he brought them with him (Acts 18:18-19). In 1 Corinthians 16:19, we find them joining Paul in sending greetings to the Corinthian church (from Ephesus), along with a church in Ephesus that was meeting in their house. Still later they seem to have been in Rome, as Paul sent greetings to them and referred to an occasion when they had “*had risked their lives for him*” (Rom. 16:3-4). But now they are once more in Ephesus, helping Timothy with his ministry. “It is wonderful when God’s people do their work regardless of who their leader is” (Wiersbe).
* *Onesiphorous* and his household. Paul has already referred to the faithful, behind-the-scenes ministry of this unsung hero (1:16-18). He was another member of the church at Ephesus, one who had traveled to Rome and searched hard to find Paul and assist him. Paul evidently knew that Onesiphorous had not returned to his household when he wrote these final words and thus does not include him in his greeting.
* *Erastus* might have been the same man who had ministered with Timothy in Ephesus (Acts 19:22), and who was now in Corinth. *Trophimus* was also from Ephesus and was a friend of Tychicus (Acts 20:4), whom Paul had sent to Ephesus as Timothy’s replacement (4:12). He had been serving in Miletus (near Ephesus), but now he was ill. **Q.** Why didn’t Paul heal him? **A.** Apparently, not everyone who is sick is supposed to be miraculously healed.

The other people Paul mentions are unknown to us, but they were members of the church at Rome and known to both Timothy and Paul: Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia (v. 21). What follows is Paul’s personal farewell, often found at the end of his letters:“*The Lord be with your spirit*” (singular, referring to Timothy alone), “*Grace be with you*” (plural, referring to the church at Ephesus).

Even though this letter was directed to Timothy, Paul also intended it to be read publicly to the assembly. It ought to be regarded, therefore, as one of our sacred treasures, in which the Lord has made *His* will known to *all* believers through His faithful apostle.

A great person’s last words are significant. They help us to look into his heart and to evaluate what’s important in his life. Such is the importance of Paul’s last will and testament to the church. He expresses no regrets. He never wishes that he had done anything differently. He was called to *guard* the gospel, to *suffer* for it, to *continue* in its truths, and to *proclaim* it. He was faithful in his generation. Where are the men and women who will be faithful in ours? They are *urgently needed* – and hopefully you and I are numbered among that company – by His grace and for His glory!