

Relationships

The closing words of 2 Timothy are sad and beautiful and full of brokenhearted hope. If those words “sad”, “beautiful”, “heartbroken” and “hopeful”, sound incompatible to you, you may have some hard yet helpful experiences to live through. Some things in life become more clear with age.

As I prayed and studied and sought the Lord, I asked what lesson God has for us in these last verses of 2 Timothy, and some things began to take form in my mind. The text itself seems to me to be broken-up or disjointed. It is a collection of Paul's assorted personal concerns, like “Do your best to come to me soon ... before winter” in verses 9 and 21. “Bring the cloak that I left” in verse 13. “Alexander the coppersmith ... Beware of him...” as we read in verse 15. “At my first defense no one came to stand by me” in the following verse 16. Paul continues writing, “But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me” in verse 17. Paul gives greetings and voices concerns, “Greet Prisca (pris·kah) and Aquila” and “I left Trophimus (trof·ee·mos), who was ill” in verses 19 and 20. He finishes with “Eubulus (yoo·boo·los) sends greetings to you ... and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

I have tried to discern what I should say from all this disjointed and broken-up text and I believe it might be all right to have a broken-up and somewhat disjointed sermon. So just as Paul poured out an assortment of concerns into these last verses, here is my assortment of applications to us, as a people, as believers, seeking the wisdom God gave Paul in writing these last verses.

I think the overall impact that Paul wanted in these final verses was to encourage

Timothy and help him understand that no matter how hard ministry is, the Lord Jesus is true and reliable. Verses 17 and 18 are surely the deepest and most hopeful in this passage, “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.” To understand the full force of these beautiful words, we need to see some of the sad assortment of Paul’s burdens that surround these words. Here then is my attempt to capture some of the sadness and beauty and heartbreaking hope God wants us to understand.

Relationships Are Hard

Christian ministry is relationally hard. I mean this especially for Paul and Timothy and all vocational ministers and missionaries. I also mean it for all of you, because you are all ministers to each other and to the unbelievers you know. Christian ministry or Christians living for the good of others through the truth of Scripture is relationally hard. Paul seems to want Timothy and the readers of this letter, that means you and me, to understand Christian relationships are not easy. If this were not true, Paul would not have given us these examples to learn from. I am going to give some illustrations of how hard ministry is relationally and the work that must go into relationships and friendships.

Read with me verse 10, “For Demas (day·mas), in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Demas seems to have been a faithful partner in the past. Listen as I read what Paul wrote in Colossians 4:14, “Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.” Demas was with Paul and Luke, but now has forsaken them. Being betrayed or forsaken by someone you consider a friend is hard. Serving alone without support is also difficult, it was difficult for Paul and it

was difficult for Joyce and I during our time in Papua New Guinea. Ministry is relationally hard.

Now continuing in verse 10, “**Crescens (krace-kace) has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia (dal-mat-ee-ah).** ¹¹ **Luke alone is with me.**” Paul had a team, but they have scattered for various reasons and now it is he and Luke. Not only has his team dwindled to one, but also there are those that are actively working to hurt Paul. Reading at verse 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.**” Ministry is relationally hard not just because of loneliness and abandonment but also because of personal opposition from outside by those who belong to the world system. Each day when we experience unexpected silence from those we consider friends or gossip that damages us or verbal and/or physical attack from our enemies, a toll is taken on our spirit. You see ministry is relationally hard.

Perhaps the saddest sentence is verse 16, “**At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.**” I will come back to this in more detail. But for now, I want you to imagine yourself in Paul’s place and feel the impact, the disappointment and pain of being deserted at your time of deep need. Ministry is hard relationally.

Finally, we come to verses 20 and 21, “**Erastus (er-as-tos) remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus (trof-ee-mos), who was ill, at Miletus (mil-ay-tos).** ²¹ **Do your best to come before winter.**”

At times, as with any special operations unit, as were Paul’s commandos of the gospel, there needs to be strategic deployments to accomplish the mission and this takes away our friends. Sometimes sickness interrupts a partnership. Sometimes seasonal changes make aloneness all the more difficult. “**Do your best to come before winter.**” For winter is dark and cold just as Paul’s prison cell. Paul mentions

all these things, it seems, because he wants Timothy to know how hard ministry is relationally and for him to remain faithful, as Christ is forever faithful.

Friends in the ministry can let you down and never care for you again. Reading verse 10, “**For Demas (day·mas), in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.**” I do not know if he ever repented. There is no evidence that Demas does and we certainly know of ministers who have had partners who leave the ministry and the faith, and as far as we know never come back. Paul wants to prepare Timothy for the sorrow of those in his life that will prove unfaithful. Paul does this because he does not want these disappointments to discourage Timothy from fulfilling his calling in ministry. Demas followed Paul for a season but he did not set aside his love for the world and it gained ground in his heart until he abandoned ministry for the world. A love for the world makes ministry impossible for one cannot serve two masters. Jesus so accurately taught, “**No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.**” (Matthew 6:24) Demas chose the world.

Both young and old culture-embracing, world-embracing Christians need to ponder this a long time. There is a love for the world, a love of this present age that leads to God-ignoring, God-denying, God-demeaning, Christ-distorting thought and behavior that leads one to abandon God, even if one claims to be Christian. There is a love for this world that is irreconcilable with the ministry of exposing the world’s sin and witnessing to the world and rescuing people from the world, and if possible, changing the world to see Christ one person at a time.

Paul is saying, young Timothy and young Canyon Bible Church remember more people leave Christ and leave the Church and leave ministry and leave the hope of heaven because of their love for this world than anything else. I wondered as I read Paul’s statement, “**Demas (day·mas), in love with this present world, has deserted me**

and gone to Thessalonica.” Why Thessalonica? Was it a woman? Was it his home and perhaps he grew up there? Was it a business opportunity? Was it just far away from the pressures of being with this utterly committed apostle Paul? What we know is, Demas did not leave in order to follow Jesus. He left Jesus to embrace the pleasures of the world. If this happens to your friends in ministry and to those you call brother and sister, we need to know some of them may never come back.

On the other hand, good friends in ministry can let you down and still be good friends. There are two things in verse 11 that are striking in this regard. “Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.” First, consider Mark, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me.” Remember Mark had abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. We read this in Acts, “John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.” (Acts 13:13) Because of this Paul refused to take John Mark on his next missionary journey as we also read from Acts, “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 (pam·fool·ee·ah) and had not gone with them to the work.” (Acts 15:37–38) Now here at the end of his life, something has changed, Paul says, bring Mark. You see, good friends can get crossways with each other and let you down, but through the love of Christ reconcile at a later date and remain friends.

Then, consider Luke, verse 11 reads, “Luke alone is with me.” Luke has been with Paul, it seems, ever since he was in Troas on the second missionary journey as is stated in Acts 16 and from Troas they sailed to Macedonia. Luke was Paul’s disciple, friend, personal physician and biographer and the writer the Book of Acts. He is with Paul as his closest friend in Rome. Understanding this we have to sit back and think about verse 16, “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them.” No one stood with Paul.

Now we have to be careful here. Maybe Luke was on a trip. Maybe he was very sick. We do not know why Luke was absent, but he was not at Paul's trial.

What about the brothers and sisters mentioned in verse 21? “Eubulus (yoo·boo·los) sends greetings to you, as do Pudens (poo·dace) and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.” Here are people who Paul considers faithful enough to send greetings as Christian friends to Timothy; but none of them showed up to stand with Paul in court. They did not come through, we do not know why, but they were not there.

What is Paul's response, “May it not be charged against them.” This means that Paul was not going to hold this against them and he does not want Timothy to either. He sends their greetings in his own letter. He didn't say to Eubulus (yoo·boo·los) and to the others, “Write your own letter!” remember you failed me! Redeemed people let each other down in relationship and even in ministry. There can be unknown circumstances that impact why a person lets you down and doesn't show up in your time of need. We must be so careful not to assume the worst. We should seek them to understand why. In fact, Paul shows us we need to think the very best of each other until there is proof otherwise.

After twenty-one years in ministry, you know one of my sorrows? There may be some who could say to me, “You didn't show up. You didn't come to the hospital. You didn't come to the funeral. You didn't come to my wedding. Bill wasn't there in our crisis. You did not stay with us long enough in Papua New Guinea or Pakistan or the Sudan where we needed you. How about those of you here? Women, you might say of your husband, “If he loved me, he could not have said that or he would not have forgotten that day, our special day.” Or you might say of your teenage child, “If he had any respect for me, any affection for me, he would not act like this. He wouldn't treat me like a leper, he wouldn't forsake me.” But, then we must pause and think back to the scriptures.

Relationships Require Forgiveness

On the basis of what Paul does here and what Christ has done for us on the cross, and even for Peter who denied Him and for the eleven whom all abandoned Him at His hour of need. We see how Christ has forgiven and Paul has forgiven and we are to forgive. It is very simplistic to say, “If they were real Christians, they would have stood by me.” Human souls, and human circumstances are not that simple. It is possible to love someone deeply and let them down. To my shame, I know. Do not be so ready to take offense for you have offended. Do not be unforgiving. Say to yourself and to God over and over about the believers who have hurt you, “**May it not be charged against them!**” Not by my heart. Not by God’s heart. Good friends in ministry can let you down and still be good friends. Luke and Eubulus (**yoo·boo·los**) and Pudens (**poo·dace**) and Linus and Claudia did not show up at Paul’s trial and still Paul sends their greetings to Timothy.

Jesus never intended that the enjoyment of His presence would replace the enjoyment of the presence of Christian friends. When Christ died so that you could enjoy Him supremely and forever, He did not nullify the fellowship of believers because He created it. Christ always intended that your friendship with him would be the heartbeat of your friendships with others. His presence is the central joy of all Christian friendships. The joy of Christ-centered friendship magnifies the worth of Christ as our common treasure. You might be asking, pastor, were do we see this in 2 Timothy, chapter 4?

Look at verse 17. Even though everyone one else failed to show up at my trial, nevertheless, the “**Lord stood by me and strengthened me.**” If this is all we had to go on we might say, “See, when you have Jesus, you have one who never fails you and so you don’t need those fallible, finite and failing people who called themselves friend.” Let’s go back to verse 9, “**Do your best to come to me soon.**” and verse 21,

“Do your best to come before winter.” Paul wants Timothy to come to him and for them to be together again. Paul wants this so much he longs that it will happen. Paul’s desire for his friend and brother Timothy is not the exception, for Paul often spoke of his desire for deep relationships with others. To the Christian brethren in Rome he wrote, “For I long to see you...” and “I have longed for many years to come to you...” (Romans 1:11 and 15:23) In his letter to the Philippians we read, “...my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown...” (Philippians 4:1) To his brothers and sisters in Christ living in Thessalonica, “...being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

Even though, mere humans are fickle, finite, fallen, fallible and failing friends, while Jesus was never failing, Paul cherished his imperfect human friendships. Jesus never intended that the enjoyment of His presence would replace the enjoyment of the presence of other Christians. Christ did not die to create individuals who worship in isolation. He died to create Christ-exalting friendships. He died and rose again to create the Church, a community of people living in friendship centered in Christ.

Jesus is the only totally reliable friend for sinners. He is the only flawless friend. Therefore, He is the only all-satisfying friend and the only friend who can make other friendships eternal. The sweetest and deepest words of this text are verses 17 and 18, “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.” As much as you may love your earthly friends and family, they cannot do this for you. They cannot do verse 18. They cannot “rescue me you from every evil

deed and bring me you safely into his heavenly kingdom.” There is only one friend who can do that and that is Jesus.

Demas did not understand Jesus’s love and did not know what the “love for the present world” in verse 10 was going to cost him. James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4) For Demas and all people of the world, it is only Jesus who can rescue you and bring you safely to heaven. I would have liked to ask Demas what insanity is making you walk away from Jesus and heaven?

My beloved, by all means, plead with your Timothy, your friend, to come before winter. Seek Christian friendships, deep friendships. But when they fail and when they do not show up for your trial or at your hospital bed or in your time of crisis; do not turn their failure into a hopeless rejection of the one true friend, Jesus, who is always there and will bring you finally into everlasting friendship with Himself and with the most wonderful, perfected human beings you could ever wish to know.

My next point is closeness to God at the end of ones life does not remove the need or the desire to read and be spiritually nourished. Verse 13 reads, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus (kar·pos) at Troas (tro·as), also the books, and above all the parchments.” We do not know what was in these books and parchments. The fact that both are plural suggests these are probably more than the Scriptures themselves. Perhaps they included some of Paul’s notes and writings. But the least we can say is that here is an apostle, an inspired spokesman of the living God, who was enjoying Jesus standing by him in his last days and this man, in this condition had this sweet fellowship with the living Christ and he wanted to be reading and thinking of Christ all the way to the very end.

Some people, might ask, if I am about to die and will see Jesus in a few months,

weeks or days, why should I try to know or learn or see anything more, since I am going to know Christ even as I am known by Him. As Paul wrote, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Why would one continue to study God’s Word? Because reading and thinking over what you read is how God speaks to you now in this life and how He makes himself known to you. God speaks and reveals himself in both His inspired Word and through spiritual teachers dead and alive. Reading and thinking over what you read is how God nourishes and strengthens the soul for living daily and for dying. One also reads and thinks over what they read because it is the way worship is ignited and joy is increased and peace with God is sustained for the journey of this life and for the final journey home!

My beloved, form the habit of reading every day and do not ever think you can do without it. If your eyes fail you and all your friends have failed you, take your money and if you must pay to have the Bible read to you. Paul is saying, Timothy, my time of departure is near “When you come, bring ... the books, and above all the parchments.” (2 Timothy 4:13) Paul needs these! He needs to hear the written word of God in his ears and in his soul!

My last thought from today’s text - people with great influence and great authority do not need great possessions. Look one last time with me at verse 13, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus (kar·pos) at Troas” (2 Timothy 4:13)

My first reaction was, seriously? The most revered and renowned Christian spiritual leader in the world at that time wants Timothy to bring his cloak from a thousand miles away. Paul a man of your stature, do you not have money to buy another cloak? Is there no one in Rome who could give you a cloak? Paul raised a great amount of money during his ministry but his attitude was, it was the Lord’s money

and it was for His ministry, so he kept very little for himself. Paul's approach to money was quite different than that of TV evangelists. Paul's example causes us to reflect. If God has given you the ability to make a fair amount of money or even a lot of money and as Americans and by the world's standards we make a lot of money, beware how much you keep. Do not lay-up for yourselves treasures on earth but invest in Christ's advancing mission. He will bring you safely into his heavenly kingdom.

Paul's life example reminds me of a short closing story. William Tyndale ('tin-dəl), a year before he was strangled and burned at the stake in 1536 for giving us the Bible in the English language, wrote from his prison just north of Brussels. What he wrote sounds so similar to Paul's closing words of 2 Timothy. Tyndale wrote, "I beg your lordship ... that if I am to remain here (*in prison*) through the winter, you will request the *delegate and* commissary to have the kindness to send me, from the goods of mine which he has ... a warmer coat also, for this which I have is very thin; a piece of cloth too to patch my leggings. ... But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study." (William Tyndale: "Apostle of England" by David B. Calhoun) Great men of God have always found purpose, strength and comfort by studying the inspired words of God. I pray you may also find your purpose and receive strength and comfort by the time spent with God in His word! May this morning's message bless you as it did me in my preparation! Amen.