

## Paul and His Companions

- 2 Timothy 4:9-13
- Last week we looked at Paul's epitaph. The great apostle, near the end of his life, speaks those words that we would all do well to have etched on our tombstones: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Triumphant words! And we might hear those and be tempted to think that Paul was not a man like us, that Paul didn't really have any needs. But as James said about Elijah, Paul "was a man with a nature like ours." And we see this in the passage today. His thoughts have moved from the triumphant reflection on his past and the glory that awaits him in his future, to where he is right now, and where he is right now is prison, and what is happening right now is, he is lonely. We see in this passage what Paul is wanting in these last months of his life. He needs the companionship of friends, the warmth of his coat, and the encouragement of his books.
- First, and most important, Paul longs for his friends. Companions. In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul says, "For even when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more." (2 Cor. 7:5-7) Forgive me for another illustration involving the Ariels, but it is fresh on my mind. We brought in 8 tubs of supplies to the Ariels, thanks to your generosity and thanks to the hard work of Nathan and Julie Heafner to organize it all. The Ariels were very grateful for those things, and very excited about things like Nutella and Peanut Butter and Rainbow sandals and school supplies. But those things in the tubs were not what Nate and Tara and their children had longed for. They had longed for their friends, their companions, their brothers and sisters from their home church. They will enjoy the food and the clothes and the pots and pans. But they will *treasure* the photos and the memories of being together. So will we. That's why Paul says to Timothy, "Do your best to come to me soon." And at the end of the chapter, "Do your best to come before winter." He wants a coat and some books, but Paul LONGS for his friend Timothy. Part of Paul's loneliness has to do with the fact that four of his companions have departed, three for good reasons. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia, and Tychicus has been sent to Ephesus. All three have departed presumably because they are doing missionary work in those areas. But Demas, Paul says, "has deserted me." Not only that, but Demas, "in love with this present world, has deserted me." Demas is mentioned in Colossians 4 and in Philemon as one of Paul's companions. Some have made a case that Demas was never a believer, but one of those people, and there are many, who hang around the godly but never surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves. But the truth is, we cannot say for sure. It may be that Demas simply gave in to fear and told Paul, I'm out of here. Or, instead of setting his eyes on things above, he started looking at things below. One thing we know. It was painful to Paul. He took it personally: "Demas has deserted me." The church is not for the fainthearted, is it, saints? Sometimes we can send out a Crescens, a Titus, and a Tychicus and we rejoice over that, even though we miss their fellowship. But when one walks off and deserts us, it is painful. People sometimes say, "Don't take it personally." But that's like telling a husband whose wife just walked out on him, "Don't take it personally." What we must do is not become bitter. We have to forgive, just like Jesus. But it will hurt. And the sting will be personal.
- Paul mentions three close companions; one is with him. He wants the other two to come soon. I noticed recently for the first time something when I was reading in Job. Job 2:11 says, "Now when Job's three friends heard..." It doesn't say, "When three of Job's friends heard."

Did Job just have three friends? Or, was it that he had three **close** friends, which are more than most men have? I thought about the Lord Jesus, who also had three close friends, Peter, James and John, though Jesus had MANY friends. He was a friend of sinners. He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother. But as a man, on the earth, Jesus had three close friends. Who are the three men you men would call “close friends?” The ones who, if you were stuck in a cold prison cell like Paul was, you would want to come and be with you? Speaking of Job’s friends, I have heard that they were great friends to him until they opened their mouths to speak. But here we have Paul, calling for his close friends to come and be with him We can learn something about friendship with each one.

- Timothy is Paul’s spiritual son, a friend he has invested in through teaching, prayer, and ministry side by side. There is no one he loves more. He told the church in Philippi that he was hoping to send Timothy to them because, “I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.” (Phil. 4:20) Even though they were usually separated by the miles because God had them serving in different places, their friendship did not diminish at all.
- Luke is Paul’s constant companion, and the only one who is with him now. Luke is the beloved physician who accompanied Paul on his last missionary journey. You will notice the narration of the book of Acts changes from “they” to “we” in chapter 21. Luke was with Paul during some of his greatest struggles, and Luke was with Paul in prison. Not in the cell with him, but there for him every day. As I think about Luke, he was never mentioned by Paul as a great evangelist or an effective Bible teacher. He would not be remembered for that. He would be remembered for his ministry of presence and his acts of service. Paul says, “Only Luke is with me.” Luke was beloved because Luke was there. He was helping Paul just by being there.
- Mark is useful to Paul in the ministry. Really, Paul? Mark? This is the same young man who left you and Barnabas on the first mission trip and when Barnabas wanted to take his cousin on the second journey, you said, “no way!” And then you and Barnabas split up. Is that right, Paul? Is this the same guy? Paul might have said, “Let’s just say that he’s not the same guy. And neither am I. God has changed both of us. Listen, this is an encouragement to me and it should be to all of us, because we all have our John Mark stories where we have failed miserably. Or someone else has been a John Mark and has failed us. Even though John Mark quit on Paul, he didn’t quit on God. And God certainly didn’t quit on him! And then years later he is with Paul in Rome during Paul’s first imprisonment. Paul writes in Colossians 4:10, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas...” Then later he is with Peter in Rome, and Peter calls Mark his son, in 1 Peter 5:13. There is traditional thought that the preaching of Peter in Rome, and his close relationship with Mark, led to the writing of Mark’s Gospel. After Peter is martyred, it appears that Mark became Paul’s assistant. So, this young man who was seen as anything BUT useful in the first missionary journey now is one of whom Paul commands Timothy, “Get Mark and bring him with you.”
- Paul longs for his close companions.
- Second, Paul longs for his warm cloak! The word here indicates a blanket of coarse wool that had a hole cut in the center and so was worn like a poncho. Paul needed his friends to protect him against the loneliness of the prison. He needed his cloak to protect him against the cold, damp dungeon, with winter coming. Again, as superhuman as we like to make Paul out to be, he was a man with a nature like ours. He got cold.
- Third, Paul longs for his reading materials. The friends to protect him from loneliness. The cloak to protect him from the cold. His books and parchments to protect him from the sheer boredom of long days with nothing to do and nothing to read. Much has been written about what these reading materials were, including doctoral dissertations, but as one man said, “If you laid every idea end to end, you wouldn’t be able to reach a conclusion.” The truth is, we

don't know. The best guesses are that Paul, the prisoner of the Lord Jesus, wanted his copy of the Old Testament. Or the words of Jesus that someone had written down. But we don't know. It is interesting, though, that many centuries later another prisoner of the Lord Jesus asked for three things in the view of approaching winter: William Tyndale, the well-known Bible translator, wrote from prison and asked that his "cloak, woolen shirt, warm cap, and most of all, his Hebrew Bible, grammar and vocabulary" be brought to him.

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