

## Paul: The Lord Stood by Me

*Locked Up with Nowhere to Go*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Timothy 4:9-18  
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*Gracious God and ever blessed Father, we thank you for the Scriptures. You haven't left us to our own devices but holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. We pray, Father, that you would now speak to us in the Scriptures as we study them together. Speak, Lord, your servant is listening. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Now this morning we continue in our series which we've called "Locked Up with Nowhere to Go," and we've been looking at a number of characters who found themselves in prison, from Joseph and Samson to Jeremiah and Daniel and Jonah and John the Baptist and the Apostle Peter and John last week, and today we are with the Apostle Paul at the very end of his life, this 2 Timothy 4:9 is the beginning point of our reading this morning. We have at least two more to go and next week we'll go to the Apostle John again but this time in Patmos, the island of Patmos, and then we will also look at Jesus the week after that when he was imprisoned within a tomb.

Now our reading this morning is from 2 Timothy 4 and beginning at verse 9. This is Paul speaking now to Timothy.

9 Do your best to come to me soon. 10 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. 12 Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. 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. 16 At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! 17 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.

Now as I was saying, this is Paul's swansong. He is imprisoned in Rome. This is not the imprisonment that we read of at the end of the book of Acts when technically he was under house arrest in Rome and he mentions that at the close of Ephesians and Colossians. He was probably released from that house arrest and made his way, according to tradition, as far as Spain and was then re-arrested and brought back to Rome. Some of us perhaps have been to Rome, as I have, and been to the location that historians think is the tomb, the prison, and it was like a tomb. It's an underground cave with no windows and it would have been dark and damp and cold, and we'll see in a minute that Paul is fearing that he's going to have to spend winter in this prison.

It was difficult to find, he mentions in chapter 1 of 2 Timothy. Onesiphorus went looking for him and no public records, of course, that he could access, no internet to access as to the location of the Apostle Paul and apparently he was, his place of captivity was difficult to find. And what is Paul doing in this prison? Well, he's writing this letter, 2 Timothy, to his prodigal son and Paul would have been like a father figure to Timothy, Timothy raised in that godly home with a godly mother and a godly grandmother, and partly Jewish and partly Gentile in that home. And Timothy has been given a charge which is what 2 Timothy is. He tells us in the first chapter, he tells Timothy to guard and defend the Gospel at all costs, and then in the second chapter to be ready to suffer for the Gospel, and in chapter 3 to pursue a life of godliness, but especially to continue in what Paul calls the sound preaching of the Gospel and to preach the word. And now here in chapter 4, he's giving some final personal charges to Timothy relating to his imprisonment.

His imprisonment has come about because of Emperor Nero and Nero was in Antium, what is today Anzio, when the fires broke out in the mid-60s in Rome. Some are of the opinion, some historians are of the opinion that Nero instigated these fires; he wanted to completely redo the center of Rome, and he had huge architectural plans and they were realized because most of the inner city was burned with fire. And it doesn't take a great deal of insight to see how Nero could blame the Christians for these fires, after all, when the fires broke out Christians were probably saying things like this is the judgment of God, and other Christians would be saying that this is the beginning of the end; that this is the precursor to the coming of the kingdom in its full and complete and end time form, and perhaps when they heard Christians saying things like that, they drew the dots, as it were, they joined the dots and perhaps suggested that Christians had actually instigated and brought on the end, as it were, by setting fire to the city of Rome. And Christians were harshly treated. They were sent into the amphitheater. Nero in order to distract public opinion from the fires and so on, instigated games in the amphitheater. Christians were dressed in skins of animals and dogs would be sent in to kill them, and much more. And there were crucifixions and historians Tacitus and Suetonius, Roman historians, tell us that at night instead of lighting pillars, they would put some flammable material on the Christians on poles and just set them alight to provide light for the amphitheater. And as a part of all that, the Apostle Paul was arrested.

Now he wasn't sent into the amphitheater because he was a Roman citizen, unlike the Apostle Peter, and it's unlikely that Peter and Paul were killed at the same time, although some histories suggest that. Peter was not a Roman citizen, he was a fisherman from

Galilee and he was crucified and he was crucified at his own request upside down because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified in the same manner as the Lord Jesus. But the Apostle Paul was a Roman citizen. He could appeal directly to Caesar, to Nero, for a trial but in the end he was taken out of this prison in Rome, this cave in Rome, and on the third mile marker outside of the city, according to history, he was beheaded and buried, and this is Paul writing perhaps months before his own crucifixion.

And I want us to see in this closing swansong of the Apostle Paul four things that he draws attention to and the first is company, because he's alone in this prison for weeks and perhaps longer. No one could find him. Onesiphorus couldn't even find his location. And the Christians in Rome were rightly afraid of being associated now with the Apostle Paul lest they also be arrested and killed, and he mentions a lot of names here: Eubulus, Pudens and Linus in verse 21 at the end. There was a Linus that Eusebius, a later scholar and preacher, tells us that this man, Linus, was the first sort of bishop or the first minister, if you like, in the church of Rome.

Rome is becoming more and more important. After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, Rome would become more and more important. Now that hasn't taken place yet but its imminent, and as Christians withdrew from Judaism and from the synagogues, the church in Rome and the city of Rome would become more and more important.

There's a mention of a woman here called Claudia, and then he mentions all the brethren, and unlike the first time when he was under house arrest, conditions now were much worse and he wants company but he's probably also in need of food. You have to imagine not 21<sup>st</sup> century prisons and three square meals a day. The food that the Apostle Paul would have access to would probably have been quite awful to eat. And when Onesiphorus finds him, no doubt he brought him food, but he misses people and he mentions four in particular that I want to draw attention to.

The first is Demas and Demas whom he describes elsewhere as a fellow worker with the Apostle Paul, Demas has forsaken him having fallen in love with this present evil world, and the text seems to imply that this Demas has committed apostasy; that he's walked away from the faith. Elsewhere in the New Testament we read of Demas working alongside Luke but as A. W. Tozer says of Demas, "All I can say is that the last time we see Demas, he was walking in the wrong direction." He was walking in the wrong direction. He had fallen in love with this present evil world and, my friends, that's like a dagger in Paul's heart. He had loved Demas. He had worked with Demas. Demas had made a profession of faith but now it looks as though that profession was disingenuous, that it wasn't the real thing. We don't know for sure where Demas actually ended up but as Tozer says, the last time we hear about him, he's walking in the wrong direction. And if that's you this morning and you've just happened to turn in to this webcast of our church service this morning, if that's you and you made a profession of faith but now you're walking in the wrong direction, you need to turn, you need to turn around and go back to where you were and embrace the Lord Jesus and call upon him and ask him for forgiveness and ask him for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Well, then a second person is Crescens, who is not named elsewhere but has evidently gone to Galatia and presumably to the churches in Galatia. And then Titus who has finished his task in Crete where Titus was ministering, and has traveled to Dalmatia on the Adriatic coast. And then Tychicus has been sent to Ephesus where Timothy was and is now probably replacing Timothy, and Paul describes Tychicus as a beloved brother and faithful minister. And it was Tychicus who elsewhere carried Paul's prison letters from his house arrest days at the end of Acts and we're talking about the epistle of Ephesians and the epistle to the church at Colossae and so on, and this man Tychicus was the one who carried those epistles of Paul to those churches.

And you have a little glimpse here of just how busy the church actually is and how ministry is continuing and how the church is continuing to grow even amidst all of the difficulties and the riots and the burnings that are taking place in the city of Rome, but what especially we should remember is that he asks Timothy to bring John Mark. Now you remember the story about John Mark. This is the John Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark, and you remember in the first missionary journey John Mark and Paul went to Cyprus, but John Mark left, he went home. He failed. It was a horrible failure on the part of John Mark and if it hadn't been for Barnabas, we may never have heard anymore about John Mark. But here at the end of Paul's life, he's made up with John Mark because Paul did not want John Mark to go on the second missionary journey because of the failure of his first missionary journey, and there was obviously some kind of rift between John Mark and the Apostle Paul. It's not hard to understand. Paul was probably a very difficult man to work with. He was always right about everything. He had an opinion about everything. He had like a Type A personality when you think of the Apostle Paul, but it's a beautiful thing to behold here that at the end of Paul's life it's time, it's time to make up now. It's time to put an end to hostility and forgive and restore, and it's wonderful to see the Apostle Paul speaking of John Mark here in such beautiful tones.

So that's the first thing, people. He misses people. You miss people. I miss people. I miss you. I miss seeing you. This is the strangest period in my entire life. I cannot recall a time in my life to compare to what we're experiencing right now, but we miss you and I know that you miss being here and soon you will be back here and worshipping with God's people, and even if it is with social distancing, at least you'll be able to see them and speak to them. And we love you and we miss you, and Paul misses, that's the one thing that's on his mind in this lock down of his, he misses people and he wants to see people and he wants to have fellowship with fellow Christians.

Well, the second thing is a very practical thing and it's clothes, and it seems as though Paul wants Timothy to bring him his favorite cloak. Now we all have favorite clothes, especially in the pandemic they've been very casual clothes, I'm sure, and clothes that are comfortable and clothes that fit, and clothes that we've worn many a time, and Paul has a favorite cloak and he's left it at Troas. It was probably where he was when he was arrested and taken to Rome, and perhaps there was no time to gather the cloak, and perhaps it was summertime and now winter is coming and he's cold and he wants this cloak and he's asking Timothy to send him this cloak. It's probably more like what we

would call a poncho, like a blanket with a hole in the middle that you sort of put around to your head in some way.

And things were getting worse for Paul. The cold. The damp. The lack of nutrition. Aches and pains in his body. It's fascinating to think of William Tyndale in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and William Tyndale translating, of course, the New Testament and was arrested, and he sends a letter to the lieutenant and asks for a cap. His head is cold and he's suffering from catarrh and so on, and shortness of breath, and it's cold and it's damp and he wants a cap to pull around his head to keep his head warm, and he wants a warmer coat because it's cold. Then especially, he asks for his Hebrew Bible and a Hebrew lexicon that he might further his studies. Of course, William Tyndale was taken out of prison and burned at the stake, and don't know whether he actually received that cap or not but there's an extant letter that exists saying something very similar to the Apostle Paul.

Paul in this epistle has said those famous words, "I'm ready to depart." He's ready to depart but he's also practical. He knows he's going to heaven. He knows in his heart of hearts that he probably won't get out of this prison alive and he knows that the end is now near, but he's also very practical because winter is coming and he doesn't know how long this person is going to take and he asks Timothy for clothes. Christianity is practical. It's not just spiritual, it's not just having warm and fuzzy feelings about Jesus, it's also very very practical.

The third thing that he mentions are books, parchments, codices. These are collections of papyri, sheets with a cover, something like a notebook. And Paul needs his books, he needs his Old Testament and probably the Old Testament that Paul would have been using as is clear in the quotations that he often cites, is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, what we call the Septuagint. He's in prison and he knows he's going to die but he wants his books. He wants the time to be useful. He has more to contribute. He has more to write.

The parchments, think of it like a notebook and there were half-written letters there, sayings of Jesus. The New Testament, of course, doesn't exist as yet. His letters will become the New Testament. But in the period of time from the death of Jesus to now and we're talking of approximately 30 years or so, the statements of Jesus, the sayings of Jesus were written down. There would have been an oral tradition at first and then I think they would have been written down, and Paul would have written these down and they were contained in his parchments and he wants to read them, he wants a Bible, he wants the Scriptures, he wants to be useful in his final days. I wonder how much of these days in this pandemic that we've perhaps wasted instead of using usefully for kingdom work and Gospel work. Reading. Reading the Bible. Learning some Psalms. Reading books that we've said for years, "I'm gonna read that book." Well, now's the time to read it and profit from it.

So he misses people, he misses his clothes, he misses his books, but then, fourthly, he says God is with him. Verse 18, "the Lord stood by me," verse 17, "the Lord stood by

me," and in verse 18, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom." The Lord stood by him.

Now first of all, he mentions Alexander the coppersmith in verse 14, "did me great harm," and the word for "harm" in Greek, deleterous, is a word that is also employed elsewhere for an accuser, and it just might be, it's exegetically possible that what Paul is saying is that Alexander the coppersmith was the one who betrayed him and Timothy is going to be in Alexander the coppersmith's presence possibly, and he wants Timothy to know that you can't trust this man. This man betrayed him. This man accused him. This man was the one who told the authorities about Paul perhaps, and Paul is warning Timothy, "Stay away from Alexander the coppersmith. He's a betrayer. He's an accuser, an informer."

Then in verse 17 Paul says, "I was rescued from the lion's mouth." Nero was often called the lion and it may be a tangential reference to the fact that so far he's been rescued from the lion's mouth, but Paul is also realistic. He has no specific promise that he's going to survive, no word of prophecy has come to him that he's going to get out of this, but Paul has an absolute conviction that the Lord will stand by him and the Lord will deliver him if necessary to heaven.

That's Paul's assurance. The Lord stood by him. That's a wonderful assurance to have, isn't it? When you find yourself in trouble, when you find yourself in circumstances that you wouldn't wish on anyone, that the Lord will stand by you. People may betray you, friends may betray you, your own family may betray you, your loved one whom you loved at one time with all your heart has betrayed you, but the Lord will stand by you always. "He will never leave you nor forsake you." When you're wrestling with sin and temptation, the Lord will stand by you. Not if you're doing a Demas. Not if you're walking with absolute resolve in the wrong direction. God may let you walk until you fall off the cliff. No, you have to want him, you have to desire him. In your weakness, in your brokenness, when all you can do is cry out, "Lord, help me just now!" He will stand by you because that's the kind of God he is. He's the God who sent his only begotten Son to die for you, to shed his blood for you, to be crucified for you, to be dead and buried for you, to be raised for you.

He will stand by you and even if the promise is not that you will live another five years or 10 years or 20 years, as it wasn't for the Apostle Paul, he has this immovable assurance and confidence that God will deliver him into his heavenly kingdom. "Nothing shall separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am, there you may be also." And Paul has already said this in 2 Timothy, "I'm ready to depart. A crown of righteousness awaits me. The sound of angels awaits me. The beautiful face of the Lord Jesus awaits me. Believers who have died before me await me." And that's a beautiful assurance to have. May it be yours today.

*Father, we thank you for your word. We bless you for it. We thank you that it's infallible and inerrant, it's able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let our church family right now, every single one of them, draw near. Stand by them, we pray, and deliver them now and forever. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*