

MBC – 6/27/2021 Pastor Doug Thompson preaching
2 TIMOTHY – THE LAST WORDS OF PAUL
“Come Before Winter”
2 Timothy 4:9-22

We looked at 4:6-8 last Sunday which is the mountain peak of this little letter. This last section might seem like Paul’s random thoughts before he signs off. But I love this passage because it reveals so much about Paul as a flesh and blood person, just like us – he had very human needs and very human emotions as he faced death. As we read it together, I want you to see what you observe about Paul in the very last words he ever wrote—

- 2 Timothy 4:9–22 ⁹Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. ¹²Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. ¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. ¹⁶At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! ¹⁷But 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. ¹⁸The 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. ⁹Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. ²¹Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. (And the very last recorded words of the Apostle Paul) ²²The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

I. Paul and people.

But as we read this passage, did you notice something mentioned in practically every verse? People. Good people, bad people, faithful people, unfaithful people, friends and enemies, but Paul’s entire life and Gospel ministry were *all* about people. This is so important, I want to take a minute to show you what I mean. Turn with me to Romans 16—Just glance over this chapter.

Paul wraps up his deepest, most theological book by naming 35 specific people – 35 brothers and sisters in Christ – 35 people you and I will see in heaven (assuming you’re there!) That’s really amazing. It shows how important people were to the Apostle. And just imagine what it meant to these ordinary Christians that Paul would mention by name, when the letter was read in church.

Paul was obsessed with people. And what is amazing is that he’s greeting these people by name, in a city he had not yet been to – how did he even know them? Good question—

Because of the Pax Romana – the Peace of Rome – people were able to travel easily throughout the Roman Empire, by land and by sea. Paul was a celebrity to the early church, and Christians would have traveled just to meet him and sit at his feet. After Paul finally made it to Rome – as a prisoner, at the end of Acts, we read this—

- ACT 28:30,31 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, *and was welcoming all who came to him*, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

He had a steady stream of visitors during this time. He led people to Christ while he was there: one was a runaway slave named Onesimus, and there were many others. And there was so much communication going back and forth. Turn with me to Col.4, I want to show you how people obsessed he was, even under house arrest—

- Colossians 4:7–15 ⁷Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. ¹⁰Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹²Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. (Keep that name in mind) ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

It sounds like he had an office and a full staff! But he didn't. He couldn't go to his *Contacts* on his iPhone and text people. He didn't even have a Rolodex with their names on little cards. People were a top priority in his life and ministry, so he worked to know their names and their needs. He had memorized the names of dozens, maybe hundreds of people, because he cared about them.

Even many, whom he had never met! Now how do you pull that off – sometimes I have trouble remembering the names of people I see all the time – right? Let alone people I've never met. Let me show you how he did it—

- Colossians 2:1 (he's in jail, writing to a church he's never met) ¹For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face. . . . He is struggling, laboring for their sanctification – how?
- Colossians 1:3 ³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,
- Colossians 1:9 ⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you. . .

Back to list of 35 people in Rom.16 – many of whom Paul had never met, we read this—

- Romans 1:9–10 ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

He wanted to finally meet those saints he had been praying for, but had never met. But he already loved them because *you will grow to love those whom you pray for. Even if they are people you don't like!*

Beloved, every Christian is to be a people person: you can't grow without other people, and you can't obey Christ apart from other people: most of the commands in the NT are *relational* – the way we treat each other! We need godly friends to encourage us, we annoying people to stretch us – but people must be a top priority in our lives – if we are to be biblical Christians.

And if you need a place to start: pray for others! Talk to God about people, and then talk to them about God. Let's look at the people Paul thinks about in his final hours, and what affect they had on him. First, is the—

A. Most faithful – Timothy.

You can hear the emotion in Paul's voice as he is dictating these words—

- ⁹Do your best to come to me soon.

Paul doesn't want to die alone, and if he is ever going to see Timothy again this side of heaven, he has to come soon—²¹*Do your best to come before winter.*

There was no sea travel during the winter months, so Paul is pleading with Timothy not to hesitate, but to come see him. Don't minimize this. Paul longed to see Jesus, but he also longed to see his earthly son in the faith Timothy. The two aren't mutually exclusive:

Christians *need* godly friends. They aren't optional. They push us closer to Jesus. They help us see our strengths, and also our weaknesses. When we are struggling, they help lighten our burden, and when we are happy, they share our joy. But God is the one who said, *"It's not good for man to be alone."* And He has set up His world such that He meets so many – *most* – of our needs *through* other people – isn't that true? We are like a body, right? The different parts of the body are all necessary to every other part. We *need* each other. If we aren't connected and in relationship with the other parts, we're not healthy, we can not be complete as Christians – and we handicap the rest of the body. Paul said at the beginning of this letter—

- 2 Timothy 1:4 ⁴As I remember your tears (tears of sadness that Timothy shed over being separated from Paul, he says), I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.

Paul needed Timothy's likeminded friendship. He told the Philippians: *"I have no one like him."* Paul was old, cold, lonely, and facing the executioner's axe. He desperately needs his friend: *"Do whatever you can to come here soon. Please, come before winter."*

But the contrast to faithful Timothy was the—

B. Least faithful – Demas.

- vv.9-10: Do your best to come to me soon, for (because) Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Those are such sad words! As much as Timothy encouraged and supported Paul, Demas utterly broke Paul's heart. Demas was mentioned earlier in Colossians as one of Paul's fellow-workers during his first

imprisonment, and he's with him again for this last imprisonment. But something happened to Demas. Paul says, "*he deserted me.*" This is the same Gk. word used when Jesus cried out from the cross: "*My God. My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" *Abandoned Me.*

That's just what Demas did to Paul – when he needed his friend the most, he turned his back on his and left him cold. Demas was like Judas to Paul. And what really hurt was *why* Demas abandoned Paul. It would have been one thing if he had an illness, or a family emergency. But it was because he was "*in love with this present world.*" I think he said this—

- "It's gettin' way too dangerous to be around you Paul. You're kryptonite, man. And too many sacrifices. I'm givin' up a whole lot more than I'm getting in return for this Gospel ministry stuff. I did my gig, but now I'm headed to Vegas for some well-deserved R&R."

And we see this all the time, don't we? And every time it hurts. And so often, the people who stab you in the back are the ones you opened up your hearts and lives to the most. Rachel and Evan had that happen to them at their church in Iowa. They took a young family under their wings; spent hours with them as friends, discipling them, babysitting for them; getting them involved in the church. A few months ago, they had some petty gripe, left the church, wouldn't speak to Rach and Evan, and bad-mouthed them and the church to everyone in the community.

Our only counsel was: "Be hurt, but don't be shocked – it's part of ministry."

- Is there a spiritual lesson here? Yes: people will hurt you deeply. Be ready for it. I mean it happened to Paul – beloved, it happened to Jesus! It will happen to you and me. But the solution is never to separate yourself from people to avoid the possibility of pain. That's not an option. I've told people before, "If your life goal is to avoid emotional pain, have more time, more money, and maximum freedom – don't have a family." Some of the greatest pain, sadness, and sacrifices in your life come because of family, But also, *hands down*, the greatest happiness and fulfillment in your life also come from family. Would any of us here give up the joys of our family to have a little more money or freedom? Put your hands down, please . . .

But back to Demas. What do we do with a guy like this who served faithfully alongside Paul and then deserted him for the world? I mean, was he even really saved? I say no, because of two passages—

- 1 John 2:15 ¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

That's what John says. True believers love Jesus. They "love His appearing." The world had Demas' heart.

- Matthew 13:22 (Jesus' parable about how the Gospel falls on men's hearts) ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

And no fruit means no root, means never was saved. I could be wrong. Maybe by God's grace, we will see Demas in heaven. But he didn't fight the good fight, finish his course or keep the faith. But Demas brings to mind other friends who were—

C. Faithful, but not all with him.

- He's sad when he says. . . Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. ¹²Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

Thinking about Demas reminds him of other friends who have left also, and even though it was for ministry, it still makes him sad—

- We don't know anything about Crescens, but he must have gone to Galatia for ministry.
- Titus pastored the church in Crete, and was with Paul in Rome until he was called to serve the church in Dalmatia.
- "Luke alone is with me." I don't think Paul says this with a sigh: "I've only got Luke. . ." Luke was a dear, loyal friend of Paul's – we saw in Acts that he accompanied Paul on many of his journeys, and now is still with Paul in his final hours, probably also caring for his health since he was a doctor. And it could be that Paul dictated this letter by the hand of Luke. He was a good and faithful man. Then he says—
- *Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.*

This is John Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark. But his name should ring a bell, again, from our study in Acts. If you remember, this young man was travelling with Paul, and his cousin Barnabas when he got cold feet when they were about to enter a dangerous territory – and he left them and went home. Later when Barnabas wanted Mark to join them again – Paul said "Oh no," and they had a "*bitter disagreement*," so much that it split the team: Barnabas took Mark and went one way, Paul went another way. Pretty big deal.

- But then we read this: "Timothy, bring Mark with you when you come – he is very useful to me for ministry!" What that says about John Mark is that he was a man who bounced back and proved himself to be faithful to Christ. What it says about Paul is that he wasn't a man who held grudges, right? He was eager to forgive and restore. He didn't cross his arms and let his pride get in the way.

*How about you? How do you treat people who have offended you? Never get it locked in your mind that people can't change! Don't put them in some sort of a box that they can never get out of. God doesn't do that with you, does He? He forgives and restores, over and over. Always hold out hope that God can change hearts – and *you* be ready to forgive and restore. "*Love covers a multitude of sins.*" That puts the Gospel on display!

Finally, he says, "*Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.*" He means is that he was sending Tychicus to Ephesus, with this letter. There was no mail service in those days – you had to hire your own messengers to deliver your correspondence, or trust a friend. Tychicus must have a very trustworthy man since he delivered Paul's letters to Ephesus, Colossae, and maybe even his letter to Titus. But when Paul sent him off, it would be one less friend to be with him. It made him sad.

Paul needed human warmth, but he also needed physical warmth—

II. Paul's very human needs.

A. He was cold – he needed his coat.

- ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas,

I think Paul was arrested in Troas, at the house of Carpus – I'll explain that in a minute – but as they hauled him off in chains, he didn't have time to grab his coat which was a large, heavy, wool robe. It wasn't just expensive, it was necessary as Paul faced the winter. Prisons in those days didn't provide prisoners with anything. You only had what your friends brought to you.

- *To me, this is really sad and touching, to think of this great man, this spiritual giant, so humbled, shivering in the cold. It makes you shiver to read it! Paul didn't go out in splendor and comfort. He went out like Jesus, lonely and cold. But that's what all Christians sign up for: to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. The Son of Man had no place to lay His head. But Jesus never asks us to do anything He didn't do Himself.

And he asks for one more thing—

B. He was bored – he needed his books and parchments.

- also the books, and above all the parchments.

“And one of those clip-on reading lights too, okay?” This is amazing. This old Apostle still wanted to study! He wanted to be productive in his final hours. They didn't have bound books with pages in those days. The books he is talking about would have been scrolls, and the parchments were also rolled up scrolls. The difference was that the books were probably papyrus, and the scrolls were made of animal skins and much more expensive.

These were probably portions of the OT Scriptures – maybe Paul's own translations into Greek. But what an example he sets for us – until the day we die, we must keep reading and growing. Some of you older MBC saints are such an encouragement: you still come to Sunday School, Bible studies – you take notes and ask questions – God bless you.

Ed Breazeale was just like that. Always reading his Bible and other books too. The last time I saw old Ed at his care center in SR his eyes are so bad he can't read anymore, but he was listening to CD's of the Bible. He had already listened to the entire NT *several times* that month.

- That's like Paul. A young pastor asked me awhile back, “What is the secret to being a pastor for 37 years?” I didn't even have to think about it: “Keep studying, learning, and growing. That's the only way to stay fresh and excited about the Word.” I can't expect you folks to grow if I'm not growing. You know I read through the Bible every year – I recently had a little time on my hands, so I finished the NT 6 months early. And as I get older, I have to keep learning because I keep forgetting!

In 1535, William Tyndale – who was executed for translating the Bible into English – wrote this to the jail warden—

- “I entreat your lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I must remain here for the winter you would beg the Commissary to be so kind as to send me, from the things of mine which he has, a warmer cap; I feel the cold painfully in my head. Also a warmer cloak, for the cloak I have is very thin. He has a woollen shirt of mine, if he will send it. But most of all, my Hebrew Bible, Grammar and Vocabulary, that I may spend my time in that pursuit.”

Never think that if you’re godly, your human needs disappear: Christians still get lonely and sad; they get cold and hungry; they rest and down time. Jesus fought for time alone to spend with His Father. That’s not a weakness, that’s a necessity. And all of us need time in God’s Word to keep fighting the good fight. If it was true for Paul, it’s true for you and me. But then a danger pops into Paul’s mind. He needs to warn Timothy about a certain man—

II. An enemy of the Gospel.

- ¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

Who is this guy and what did he do to Paul? I believe this is the same Alexander Paul mentioned in—

- 1 Timothy 1:19–20 . . . some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Alexander was a heretic in the church at Ephesus where Timothy was, and Paul excommunicated him. He must have been humiliated and furious. But he didn’t go away, and when he had the opportunity to get his revenge on Paul – he did. Look again at—

- ¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith *did* me great harm. . .

That little word “*did*” was a legal term that meant to *inform against*. Alexander was the one who ratted Paul out to the Roman authorities who arrested him at the house of Carpus in Troas – before he could even grab his coat and his books. And Paul says he “*strongly opposed our message*” – he was an enemy of Christ and the Gospel. Evil man. And the reason Paul brings him up in his final few words is that Timothy needs to be aware that he could be Alexander’s next victim, and his neck might be the next on the chopping block!

- Paul is thinking about Timothy’s safety in his last hours. And warning him to be on guard. Reminds me of Jesus making provision for His mother, Mary, from the cross –

But in v. 16, Paul begins to describe what was probably the greatest Gospel opportunity of his lifetime—

III. His greatest Gospel opportunity.

A. Deserted at the first hearing.

- ¹⁶At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.

After Paul was arrested and hauled off to Rome a date was set for him to appear before the Roman authorities to hear the charges against him. This was called the *prima actio* – the preliminary hearing before the formal trial. And I want you to understand what a huge deal this was: This is when the persecution of Christians under Nero was in full swing. Roman writers like Pliny and Tacitus tell us that Christians were accused of horrible crimes: they were called atheists because they didn't worship the gods. They were called cannibals because they talked about eating flesh and drinking blood. They were accused of incest because they called each other brother and sister. . .

- And now they have the most famous Christian in the world – Paul – in their custody. So when Paul appears before this “grand jury” it's like the OJ trial: everyone wanted to see and hear this man! Some think that it was held at the Roman forum and there might have been thousands of people there, including, Nero himself. Paul had the legal right to have an attorney to represent him before the tribunal, but what does he say? “*At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.*”

He was *all alone* – no one was there to defend him – to speak up for him. Why? Because Christians were *terrified* to be associated with Paul. They could end up like him. Jesus' Disciples scattered when He was arrested, didn't they? So when he needed them the most, Paul's friends were no where to be found. You say, “What about Luke, and Tychicus?” Doesn't say. I'd like to think that they hadn't arrived at Rome yet – not that they were cowards. But as hurt as Paul was, and as abandoned as he felt, look at his reaction. It's amazing—

- “May it not be charged against them!”

These words should sound familiar: Jesus at the cross? – Stephen as he was being stoned to death? “Lord, forgive. Show mercy, not judgment.” No vindictiveness. No animosity. What a Christlike man. Isn't that the way we should respond when we are hurt or betrayed? When Christ has forgiven all your sins, you can forgive others. But one Person didn't leave Paul—

B. But Jesus didn't desert him!

- ¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me,

Maybe Jesus literally appeared to Paul – he did that more than once in Acts – to personally comfort Paul. And everyone Jesus did that, it was for a Gospel purpose—

- *so that* through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

Underline this verse. We saw in Acts that there were times when Paul was cut off or interrupted and didn't get to deliver the whole Gospel message, but not this time: the Gospel was “*fully proclaimed*,” every point, with illustrations and conclusion! And who heard it? “All the Gentiles” = *all the nations* = *panta ta ethne*). Rome was an international city, Paul was literally proclaiming the whole Gospel to every nation, tribe and tongue! I believe this was the lifetime highpoint of Paul's Gospel ministry – tucked away in v.17!

- And here's the point for Timothy: Paul did what Timothy must continue to do: preach the Word in season, and out of season! He goes on—

- “So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. (Just like Daniel, right? That wasn’t his time to go.)
¹⁸The Lord (Jesus) will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. (Death would be Paul’s ticket into the heavenly kingdom!) To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen!

He is worshipping God! He’s practically in heaven already, right? What a way to face death. You would think the letter would end right there, but Paul still has some more people on his heart—

IV. Final greetings.

⁹Greet Prisca and Aquila, (We ran into them in Acts – they’re back in Ephesus) and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus remained at Corinth, (now look at this) *and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus.* (Underline that in your Bible!)

- This one verse proves the awful lie of the prosperity Gospel that says it’s always God’s will that you are healthy. No, sometimes God wants you sick. Sometimes, God wants you dead!

Spurgeon did a whole sermon on this entitled: “***The sick man left behind.***” Let me just read you the beginning—

“From the fact that Paul left Trophimus at Miletus sick, we learn that it is the will of God that some holy men should be sick. Whatever the malady may have been which affected Trophimus, Paul could certainly have healed him if God had permitted him. Paul had raised up Eutychus from death, and he had given the use of his limbs to the cripple at Lystra.

Not so, however, had the Lord willed; the good fruit-bearing vine must be pruned—and Trophimus must suffer. There were holy ends to be answered by his sickness, which could not be achieved by his health. *Instantaneous restoration could have been given, but it was withheld under divine direction.* – Illness and suffering are part of God’s will for His children!

And then he thinks again of Timothy—

- ²¹Do your best to come before winter. (Then he ends by sending greetings from some other believers who were with him in Rome) Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.

* * *

So what?

1.) Make personal relationships a lifetime priority. It’s just not optional for a Christian. Maybe you consider yourself an introvert, or shy – then hang out with other shy people, but you can’t fulfill the command to love others as yourself, to love your brothers and sisters unless it is a lifetime priority.

- Find ways to love and serve others that fit your own gifts and your life situation. Some of you knew George Fox, a British pastor and teacher who passed away a few years ago. His wife, Mamselle, had a stroke back in the 90’s that left her in a wheelchair – later, she couldn’t walk at all, or hardly even speak. But if you ever saw Mamselle in her wheelchair, she was working on a

stack of cards that she would send out to encourage people and let them know she was praying for them.

If you keep people at an arm's length to avoid pain and hurt and inconvenience – they will also be at arm's length when you need them the most. I can tell you that the older you get, and the closer you get to your home-going, the more you are going to need friends.

2.) Never think it's unspiritual to have human needs: for friendships, for physical comfort: rest, down-time. We are weak, frail creatures. We are made of dust! You are the most good for the Gospel when you are a good steward of your body and soul. And *always* be reading, learning, and growing in God's Word until your last breath.

3.) Always be ready to proclaim the Gospel! Only a few are called to "preach the Word, in season and out of season," but all of us are called by Christ to be "*always prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.*"

Pray:

Benediction: For our benediction this morning, let's end with the very last recorded words of the Apostle Paul)

²²The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you!