

Safely to his heavenly kingdom

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[0 : 00] So this morning we are finishing off our series looking at Paul's second letter to Timothy. And we're going to look at the last few verses of chapter 4 today and that will be us done with this letter.

So if you've got a Bible there, if you'd turn please to 2 Timothy chapter 4 and our reading will start at verse 9 today. 2 Timothy chapter 4 from verse 9 and Ella Chu is going to read that for us today. Okay, so today is reading us from 2 Timothy 4 verses 9 to 22. Do your best to come to me quickly for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas and my scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander the metal worker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done.

[1 : 09] You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. At my first offence 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 to his heavenly kingdom.

To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Oniphorus. Erastus, stay in Corinth, and I left Trophimus in Miletus.

Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens. Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all. I wonder how many of you have ever thought about how you would want to spend the last few months of your life.

Maybe you've got something of a bucket list, a selection of places you want to go, and experiences to have, and you'll try and get through as many of them as you can whilst you have time.

[2 : 19] Or maybe it's going to be all about family. You'll be keen to ensure that you've spent every possible moment surrounded by those you love, passing on your wisdom even, before it is too late.

Or maybe there's, I don't know, the book you've been writing for decades, that you'll need to knuckle down and get it finished and ready. Maybe that's a morbid question to be thinking about this morning.

But it is helpful to think about such things from time to time. Not only in order that we make sure we've made a practical provision for such an eventuality, but also because thinking about these kinds of questions helps us to assess our present priorities in light of the future.

And that situation of just a few months left to live, that's the situation Paul is in here in these closing verses of his letter to Timothy. These are Paul's last surviving written words.

Remember back in verse 6 he said, Paul knows that his current imprisonment, there's not going to be any release from that.

[3 : 27] This will be the end. That coming reality of his execution, it's so near to him that here in verse 6 it's spoken of in the present tense. And it's coloured everything about how he's written this letter.

Verse 9 actually gives us kind of the principal reason for writing this letter in the first place. Do your best to come to me quickly. This letter is a summons to Timothy to come and meet Paul in his prison cell.

And that's repeated in verse 21 with even more urgency. And these circumstances, the reality of Paul's imprisonment and his desire for Timothy to come, it's coloured the whole of the content of

this letter.

Why in chapter 1 is it vital for Timothy to guard the treasure of the gospel? Well in no small part because Paul's not going to be around to do it anymore. Why does Timothy need chapter 2 to entrust what he has heard to reliable witnesses who will be qualified to teach others?

Because Paul is keen for the good news to continue to be proclaimed indefinitely. Chapter 3, Timothy's being warned about the coming terrible times when people will suffer from disordered love, love of money and pleasure instead of God and neighbour.

[4 : 44] Why that warning? Because Paul wants Timothy to weather these circumstances in his absence. And in fact whilst Paul is writing this letter to ask Timothy to come and visit him, he puts in these key truths and pieces of advice woven through the letter.

I presume because Paul is not confident that Timothy will be able to make it in time. What if the letter's delayed and Timothy can't make it before winter? Well Timothy still needs to know these things.

And in the providence of God. Therefore because Paul passed them on in a letter to Timothy, then they're recorded here for our benefit as well. So as Paul closes out this letter, as he knows he's nearing the end, what does he choose to focus on?

Well he's in prison, so a tour to see the sights, the bucket list isn't really on the cards. But here in these verses I think we can see him doing three things. At first we see him seeking comfort.

Wrong key, sorry. We see Paul seeking comfort. We see him planning for the future. And we see him sustained by Christ.

[5 : 56] And I trust that as we consider these desires that Paul had, these things that exercised the Apostle in his last months of life, I trust that we will find here much to profit us.

However far from the end we ourselves may or may not be. So we consider Paul in these verses seeking comfort. When Paul here asks Timothy to come, I'm sure he does want to see Timothy in order to further equip and encourage him for his ongoing ministry.

But that isn't the reason that's at the forefront of his mind at this point, is it? This isn't like Yoda in The Empire Strikes Back warning Luke not to leave before Yoda's had a chance to fully impart his wisdom.

Paul's not in that position here. He doesn't say, Do your best to come to me quickly because I need to explain the gospel to you more fully. No, the resounding message of this letter has been, Timothy already knows the gospel.

He is fully equipped for the work ahead of him. All he needs to do is stand firm in what he's already believed, whatever opposition and persecution might come.

[7 : 02] So this isn't primarily a desire to impart wisdom. No, Paul wants Timothy to come, verse 10, So Timothy, do your best to get here before winter.

Paul summons Timothy in no small part because he's lonely. He wants the warmth of human companionship. He wants a friend. He's feeling abandoned.

Maybe Demas comes first because Demas' departure is the hardest for Paul to stomach. Because Demas left because he loved this world. And that stands in contrast to verse 8, where Paul speaks of the crown of righteousness that awaits those who have longed for Christ's appearing.

The longing of verse 8 and the love of verse 10, that's the same word, but faced in opposite directions. One towards love of God and one towards love of the world.

For Demas, the love of this world had to a great extent, perhaps even completely, had replaced the love of Christ's appearing. Like the seed that falls among the thorns in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Demas has been led astray by the deceitfulness of wealth, by the allure of an easy life, far from persecution.

[8 : 40] Despite the fact that Demas was commended as Paul's co-worker in the earlier letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, Demas has not endured to the end. The pain here, the pain for the Apostle Paul, the pain of being abandoned by his beloved companions, this shouldn't be underestimated.

And folks, we should be realistic enough to recognise that it's all too possible that we will know that pain. That the ministers who brought us up in the faith might turn away from it and leave us feeling bereft.

That those who we have laboured alongside, whether formally or informally, might love this world more than the appearing of Christ. We might follow in Paul's footsteps in respect of knowing this

pain.

And perhaps even more, we should be on our guard that we do not follow in Demas' footsteps. That however well we think we stand now, that we take care lest we fall.

Well, Crescens and Titus and Erastus and Trophimus, the others named in verse 10 and 20, as being separated from Paul, these guys seem to be absent for good and for valid reasons.

[10:00] Whether they're on mission trips or unwell, no censure is attached to their absence. But Paul still feels the pain of being apart from them. It's a good reason why they've gone away, but that doesn't make it less hard to be apart.

And therefore, Paul wants Timothy and Mark to come and to join him. And it's interesting that Mark is kind of an opposite case to Demas.

Paul calls for Mark to come here, and this is surprising because the book of Acts records Mark's desertion on Paul's first missionary journey and a sharp disagreement over whether Mark could rejoin or not.

But then here in 2 Timothy, and in several other letters as well, Mark is recorded as being restored to usefulness. The fracture between these two servants has been healed.

Paul wants Mark to be with him. Paul wants his friends with him. Paul's completely clear in verse 8 that he has set his love and his hope upon the coming of Christ, but he also longs for his friends.

[11:15] Chapter 1, verse 4, I long to see you so I may be filled with joy. And here again, he longs for Timothy and Mark to be there. And these two longings for the appearing of Christ and for the presence of his friends, these are not in any way incompatible.

Stott says, One sometimes meets super-spiritual people who claim that they never feel lonely and have no need of human friends for the companionship of Christ satisfies all their needs.

But human friendship is the loving provision of God for mankind. It was God himself who said in the beginning, It is not good that the man should be alone.

Wonderful as are both the presence of the Lord Jesus every day and the prospect of his coming on the last day. They are not intended to be a substitute for human friendships.

Yes, folks, we affirm Christ is enough. Yes, in solitary confinement, you are not alone. But in normal circumstances, the means by which God provides for his people's need of companionship, in normal circumstances, the means of provision is practical and visible.

[12:30] Psalm 68, verse 6, God sets the lonely in families. We're not meant to be alone. Let me say, If you are feeling the pain of not having found the husband or the wife of your dreams, or feeling the pain of childlessness, or the pain of bereavement, without in any way wanting to minimize that pain, it is real, and it is a great difficulty to bear.

But let me also say that those things, the unavailability of that companionship, that sort of family, that does not exclude the possibility of close and loving relationships.

I think we could do with a revitalization of deep friendship in much of the Western world. Paul is a single man as he writes this letter. Indeed, there's debate whether he was ever married and was widowed, or whether he was single throughout his life.

In any case, he is not married at this point. So he wants his friends with him. Jesus was never married, but he lived a full and rich human life.

Friends, you may or may not be able to control whether or not you're married, but what you can control is seeking out good and godly friendships. And it is certainly not unspiritual to do so.

[13:56] So as Paul seeks comfort in these last months of his life, it's primarily people that he looks to. But that's not all, is it? Notice also verse 13.

When you come, bring the cloaks that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. Folks, some people point to this verse and they say, if you want proof that Paul really did write this letter, not an imposter in later centuries with his own agenda, what more proof could you want that it's really Paul than the utter mundanity of this verse?

Who would make up something like this? It's a reasonable point, I think. But this verse might be mundane, but it's not irrelevant to us.

There is a lesson for us in its very down-to-earth nature. Paul needs a cloak because winter's coming and prison cells are not known for their high-quality insulation. Last week, we looked, didn't we, at the Lord's Prayer, and we noted the legitimacy of praying for our physical needs.

Well, here we have the legitimacy of taking practical steps to meet our physical needs. How is Paul going to keep warm? Well, not only by praying to God to provide warmth, but also by putting a coat

on.

[15 : 15] Furthermore, the scrolls and the parchments. We see Paul's desire to be meaningfully employed up to the very end of his life. We don't know the precise nature of these scrolls or books and parchments, and we don't know whether this is kind of sections of the Old Testament, records of Jesus' life, perhaps some of Paul's own notebooks, things that he's thought particularly worth noting down, or even the writings of other of his contemporaries.

We don't know what of these things it is. But what we do see is that he wants to be busy. He wants to be active. He wants to be learning, perhaps to be teaching. Maybe he intends to write more letters once he's got these resources brought to him.

Though if that was his plan, either it didn't work, or they haven't survived the years. This is the last letter of his that we have. But he wants to be busy. I think it's fair to draw two applications from Paul's desire here.

Firstly, it seems to me this commends to us some kind of useful activity, for as long as it can be realistically maintained in our lives. Folks, if work is part of God's good design for his creation, and if the examples we see in Scripture are of men and women expending themselves in his service, then I think it's fair to say that retirement, as we presently understand it, retirement as an excuse to switch off, is not the model we see here.

It doesn't mean it's wrong to retire from the work that you have been doing, but I think it does say it's wrong to take that as an excuse to then do nothing.

[16 : 59] Folks, I say this cautiously, as a young man certainly not wanting to be berating my elders. And of course there are frustrations of diminishing physical and mental capacity for many of us as we age.

So there are limitations, and we don't do well to berate one another. But we do also note that Paul is usefully employed in the last months of his life, and that there may be something for us in that. I think secondly, in addition to that kind of towards-the-end focus, there's an implicit commendation of study here for all of us, isn't there? John Calvin says this refutes the madness of those men who, despising books and condemning all reading, boast of nothing but their own divine inspirations. But let us know that this passage gives to all believers a recommendation of constant reading, that they may profit by it. There's something to this, I think.

It's hard to say that one loves Christ if there is no evidence that we earnestly desire to know him better, to study his word more and more day by day, and not only the simple reading thereof, but gathering the additional insight that we have available to us from others in their own writings that will help us to think deeply about what we are reading, rather than allowing it to just go in one eye and out the other.

[18 : 34] That being said, 2,000 years after Paul and 500 years after Calvin, we could note that there are other means available to you and to me of achieving that same end, because we now have access to the insights of others, not only by hearing them in person or by reading what they have written in books, but also in shorter form perhaps in blog articles, and in the form of podcasts and videos, in a way that Paul and Calvin certainly didn't.

And maybe for some of us that is a more natural means of learning, an easier way of gathering those insights, where we find ploughing through the written word more challenging.

The principle is the same, isn't it? Whatever the means. That we seek out that which will point us more and more to Christ. That we put some effort in, because it's greatly worthwhile to increase in knowledge of our Saviour and our God.

Okay, let's move along. Secondly, in these verses we see Paul planning for the future. Verse 14, we encounter Alexander the metal worker. This is a common enough name that we don't have any basis for assuming that this is the same person as any of the various other Alexanders mentioned in the New Testament, including the one excommunicated in 1 Timothy.

We don't know anything about this Alexander beyond these two verses. And maybe he's mentioned here kind of to add to Paul's general sense of being attacked and abandoned and friendless.

[20 : 15] I don't think that's his primary purpose in bringing up Alexander. Paul, I don't think, is surprised by Alexander's behaviour. But what he says here is that Timothy needs to know about him.

Timothy needs to be on his guard. Verse 15. Possibly Alexander's in Rome, where Paul is, or he's in Ephesus, where Timothy is. But most likely, Alexander's in Troas, where Timothy needs to go

and collect the cloak and the parchments.

We can't know for sure, because we're not told here. But it is very plausible that when Paul says he did great harm to him, that what he means is Alexander is the informant, the reason why Paul is in prison.

Alexander brought the accusations, turned him in to the authorities. And Paul's cloak is in Troas, because that's where he was arrested, and Paul didn't have a chance to pick it up, and the parchments and so on, that normally he would have travelled with.

He was taken off in chains, so he didn't get to go and get his cloak. As I say, we can't be certain of this, but it seems to me a very plausible scenario.

[21 : 26] And what Paul mostly regrets is not the harm to himself, but that he has strongly opposed the message. And therefore, because of this situation, because Paul needs to send Timothy to this place where perhaps Alexander is, Paul plans for the future.

He does his best to keep Timothy free from prison himself, active in the proclamation of the gospel message. Paul's desire for the gospel to be guarded after his passing, and that's going to be hampered if Timothy falls foul of the same snare.

And whilst Timothy is called earlier in this letter to be firm in his opposition of false teaching, it's still wise for him to be circumspect, circumspect to avoid drawing the ire of those who will seek to do him personal harm because of their rejection of Jesus, as Alexander surely would.

So Timothy needs to be on his guard. But there's another dimension as well, I think, in the second sentence there of verse 14. Timothy should avoid being attacked himself, but also implicitly here in verse 14, Timothy should avoid an inclination to seek vengeance himself.

See, when Paul says the Lord will repay Alexander, that's not Paul calling down curses. It isn't something that Paul is wishing for, but rather this is a simple statement of what he knows will be the case.

[22 : 53] Numerous times in the Old Testament we're told the Lord will repay. Proverbs 24, for instance, will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?

And the same comes through in the New Testament, in Romans chapter 2, Matthew chapter 16, for instance. One of the principal reasons why God tells his people that he will repay is so that they, so that we, may be confident in justice being done.

And another reason is to warn us not to take it into our own hands. So I think that's why Paul points out to Timothy that God will repay Alexander.

Timothy doesn't need to seek vengeance for the injustice done to his mentor. So we've seen Paul seeking comfort. We've seen him making provision for the future.

Thirdly, in these verses, we see him sustained by Christ. Again, here in verse 16, the theme of abandonment resurfaces. Many commentators note here close links with how Paul describes his own experience and the words of Psalm 22.

[24 : 03] My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Those words famously found on Jesus' lips as he hung on the cross. And there's other less immediately obvious parallels here between Paul's experience and Psalm 22 and Jesus' own experience as well.

See, Paul's suffering, his abandonment, his impending death, all of this, it fits the mould of Jesus' own life. And we don't point this out to say that Paul is going beyond Christ's experience or adding anything to what Jesus has done.

But what we can and should see in these verses is a picture, perhaps even a deliberately emphasised picture, a picture of what it looks like to embrace the cruciform life, to take up the cross and follow Jesus as we are commanded.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes, follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. Well, this is what that looks like.

Abandoned as Christ was and Paul was. Suffering as Christ did and Paul did. And heading for death as Christ did and Paul did.

[25 : 21] We are called to follow this path. And yet wonderfully, wonderfully, Paul knows that even in this total isolation, even abandoned by all of his friends with no one to speak on his behalf, yet he was not alone.

The Lord himself stood at his side and gave him strength, the result of which was not only that he was sustained, but that the message was once again proclaimed with boldness in order that the Gentiles might hear.

It would be hard to imagine an occasion more apparently out of season for preaching than when on trial facing execution. But Paul knew the emboldening spirit.

He seized the moment. He was utterly confident in the Lord who had sustained him in the past, who was sustaining him at that very moment, and who he knew, verse 18, would rescue him from every evil attack and bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom.

To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. See, Paul is very confident that his life is being poured out. He knows execution is around the corner, and yet he also knows nothing can harm him.

[26 : 42] As William Hendrickson puts it, in the past Paul had been rescued from death. Now he will be rescued by means of death. In neither case does his soul perish.

He is never separated from the love of God in Christ. Friends, this is how Paul is brought safely to the heavenly kingdom. Not by escaping torment.

Not by divorcing his spirit from his body. But rather because his absolute confidence in God's saving power gives him this confidence to face abandonment by his friends, even as he longs for companionship.

To work hard and to make provision for the future, even as he recognizes that there is no future on this earth for him. And this confidence, this knowledge of how he is being brought home, it leads inevitably to this declaration of praise, to doxology, to giving God the glory that is due his name.

The end of verse 18, to him be glory forever and ever. Amen. And his confidence in God's saving power demonstrated in his own life.

[27 : 48] It leads him to pray similarly for Timothy and for his church, to pronounce God's blessing upon them. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.

Friends, that, that is how you live the last few months of your life. That is how you come safely to Christ's heavenly kingdom. Amen.