

In the context of coppersmiths

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 July 2024

Preacher: Phil Martin

- [0 : 0 0] The reading can be found in 2 Timothy chapter 4 and it's on page 1199. That's 2 Timothy chapter 4 starting at verse 9.
- Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.
- Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia, Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.
- Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.
- Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he is strongly opposed to our message.
- [1 : 1 8] At my first defence, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them. 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. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever.
- Amen. Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Insephorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus.
- Do your best to come before winter. Ebulus sends greetings to you, as to Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.
- The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Morning, everyone.
- [2 : 3 4] Let's see if I can get this down. Can I get this down? Up. That's better. Shall we pray? Heavenly Father, we thank you for this morning, and the chance to gather together, and to listen to your word.
- Lord Jesus, we long to, like Paul, to pour out our lives for you. And we long to fight the good fight, and to finish the race, and to keep the faith for your glory.
- And as we come to look at the end of this letter and Paul's example, we long, Lord Jesus, that you would show us what that looks like and inspire us by your spirit.
- Please be our teacher this morning. And we ask it in your name. Amen. Well, here we are at the final send-off of 2 Timothy.
- As we've been saying, it's been a letter about guarding the gospel. So you'll see that in 1 verse 14, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit.
- [3 : 5 9] I think it's, I think you can probably sort of break it down into sort of three. It's a charge to guard the gospel. It's a manual to guard the gospel.
- It's how to, and it's an inspiration. Why to? What will enable us to share in the suffering of Christ and to guard the gospel?
- So through this letter, God charges us, Christian leaders and churches, in our generation to guard the gospel. He shows us how.

How do we guard the gospel? By passing it on. We've seen that, haven't we? And also, he inspires us and motivates us to guard the gospel. Chiefly, I think, by pointing us to the future glory to come.

The promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. You see that in chapter 1, verse 1. The promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. Now, we've come to, perhaps, I think, the most moving part of the letter.

[5 : 03] The last words of the Apostle Paul that we have before he died. As Bruce mentioned, there are many famous last words. You will know, probably, you may know of Latimer and Ridley in this country.

Be of good Latimer to Ridley as they were tied to the stake. Be of good cheer, Ridley, and play the man. We shall, by God's grace, light up such a candle in England as I trust will never be put out.

Slightly less famously, John Rogers, who's the vicar of the church in the city right next to where I serve, St. Botolph's, is reported to have said this as he was on the block.

That which I have preached, I seal with my blood. Now, these aren't the words of the Apostle Paul on the block, but they are the final words that God, in his wisdom, has ordained us to have from him before he was executed.

They are moving and they are inspiring. Just look at verse 18, which is the climax, I think, of his final words. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

[6 : 23] The final words of the Apostle Paul. I take it that these last few words there are here as a final example to Timothy and to us.

As the great Apostle stares at his own death, this then is how he died. He died deserted, but confident.

Deserted by many of his friends, verse 16. All deserted me. Lonely. But full of confidence and faith in Jesus, verse 18.

The Lord will rescue me. Deserted by man, but not by the Lord Jesus. What is it going to mean for us to be faithful to the Lord Jesus and to guard the gospel in our generation?

Well, a final word to us from Paul's final words. We must be prepared to stand alone. Like Paul.

[7 : 29] We must be prepared to go on proclaiming Christ until the bitter end. Like Paul. And all the while knowing that we're not alone.

But the one we proclaim is with us in a much closer way than we can imagine. So firstly, prepare to stand alone. Paul was on trial in Rome.

He sees himself as being in the lion's den. You can see that in verse 17. I was rescued from the lion's mouth. I think here with a deliberate reference to Daniel in the lion's den.

Daniel thrown to the lions by a powerful dictator for his faithfulness to God. Paul is in the same situation. He is comparing Nero's Rome to the lion's den.

It's the same thing. As we've said, up until around about AD 64, the Christian faith was tolerated by Rome and the state as a kind of as a weird thing, but not to be feared.

[8 : 37] In around AD 64, everything changed. And Nero brought the first actual manhunt of Christians. And that's what's happening.

That's the context here. And Nero started sewing up Christians in animals while the dogs surrounded them and leaving them to die.

Burning them. Finding all sorts of ways to kill them. And this was the persecution. And this persecution spread around the whole empire. But to be in Rome was to be in the lion's den.

At this point, Paul was not only deserted by all in Asia and Turkey, as we've seen in chapter one, but also, it seems, by the church in Rome.

And people who had been close Christian friends and fellow workers started, if you like, jumping out of the frying pan, left, right, and center.

[9 : 42] Disowning him. Going to ground. You can see that. It's painful reading, isn't it? In verse 10. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Crescens has gone to Galatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Verse 16. At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. It seems that there were two slightly different kinds of desertions going on here.

On the one hand, there was Demas in love with this present world. Now, Demas is coupled with Luke's name two years earlier in the letter to the Colossians.

He was a close and trusted fellow worker with Paul, a good man. His motives for running away, it seems, were clear enough to Paul that Paul can say, Demas is in love with this present world.

We don't get any more details. Perhaps Demas came to Paul and said, you're too extreme. Perhaps Demas simply said, look, I don't want to do this anymore.

[10 : 55] Under the glare, under the glare of death. Demas' desertion of Paul seems also to have been a desertion of Christ. Remember, this is the, this is pressure that very few of us have ever known.

Death for Christ. Demas chose the world. But Paul also names Crescens and Titus.

Now, I think there is probably here a second category of deserters, which is good Christians who have not deserted Christ, but have gone to ground, if you like, are steering clear of Paul when they should be standing with him.

They're ashamed of his chains. This is the Titus, it seems, that Paul writes to in the letter to Titus. Paul doesn't expand on their motives, which is important, I think.

But in the context, it's still not good. Titus has made his excuses and left. And you can hear, I think, Paul's sigh as he said, as he says, Luke alone is with me.

[12 : 18] This second category of desertion, I think, explains the slight puzzle that he says in verse 16 that no one came to stand by me, that's the church in Rome, yet he sends greetings from some of the church in Rome in verse 21.

Do you see that? Greetings from Pudence, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers. That is, Paul, I don't think is saying that there are no longer any Christians in Rome, and yet at the same time, they have not come to stand by him in his time of need, which is why, I take it, Paul says in love, in verse 16, may it not be charged against them.

But the result is the same, that Paul is standing alone before the highest court in the Roman Empire, no one at his side.

Isn't it extraordinary? Historians tell us that it is possible that Nero himself would have been there at this kind of trial, and in fact, the early church records suggest that he was.

Certainly, there would have been representatives from the whole world present. It is the most public possible trial you can imagine televised globally.

[13 : 42] And look at what happened at this trial in verse 17. Paul says, 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.

Paul had, it seems, perhaps one last chance here to proclaim publicly that he stood on trial for the sake of Jesus, the Saviour of the world, who died for sin, who rose again as Lord of all, and who would soon return to judge the living and the dead.

I don't know if you've ever felt tension in a room, but perhaps particularly as the Gospel is being preached. I don't think any of us have ever felt the tension that would have been in that room.

There is a greater king than Nero, Paul declared at this trial. Paul was deserted in his time of need.

He stood alone. In every generation, there will be a loneliness to faithful Gospel ministry. or to put it another way, guarding the Gospel means being prepared to stand alone.

[15 : 16] Now, it's important here to say it's not that we want to be alone any more than Paul wanted to be alone. It's not some kind of proud bravado going on.

But we must be prepared to stand alone for Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Of course, to stand alone is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus at the cross.

Do you see any resonances here with Jesus at Gethsemane and the cross? Lonely, deserted, faithful. This, I take it, is part of God's design.

How he will guard his Gospel as men and women are prepared to stand alone in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. And in fact, throughout history, that has been the case, both in big moments that we know about and presumably in countless smaller moments that we don't.

Athanasius against the world, *contramundum*. That's right, isn't it, Charlie? Latin. Is that Latin? *Contramundum*.

[16 : 23] Sounds roughly right, yeah. Athanasius against the world as he stood in that moment in the fourth century for the divinity of Christ.

Martin Luther, here I stand, a lonely voice at the Diet of Worms and as he defended the Gospel of Grace, prepared to stand alone.

In fact, the phrase prepared to stand alone I've actually borrowed from the title of a recent biography of J.C. Ryle, who was a lonely evangelical bishop in the Church of England in the 19th century.

Think of Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany and countless others. Those who have done most to guard the Gospel will no doubt have been those who have been prepared to stand alone in their generation, watching with sadness perhaps as dear friends give up and others go to ground, deserted by many who should have been with them.

There will be a loneliness to faithful Gospel ministry, it seems, in every generation. It is just normal.

[17 : 42] It's God's way. We will all feel this loneliness at times, whether it's corporate, being part of a church, in Dulwich, part of a church that is in a sense trying to stand alone in Dulwich.

I'm only quite new in Dulwich so I might be getting this horrendously wrong but it seems that way. And there's lots that we'll be getting wrong as a church, don't mishear me, we'll be getting all kinds of things wrong I'm sure.

But we're not exactly surrounded by churches that want to have much to do with us. We don't want this to be the case that we have to be prepared to stand alone.

Or at the individual level, in our school, in our workplace, or our group of friends, many of us will be one in a thousand perhaps.

Even other Christians not wanting to stand with us. Only one. Just a word, it may be the other way round for some of us. Some of us may know of someone in our workplace or our school actually who is really standing openly and proclaiming Christ and we actually should be the ones coming to their side as Timothy should have come to the side of Paul and was being charged to do in verse 9.

[19 : 07] So firstly, prepare to stand alone and we're not alone. That's the main thing, we're going to come to that in just a second, we're not alone.

But in passing, we should also see one other thing, and that's our second point, which is that Paul proclaimed Christ to the bitter end. Can you see that? I think this is an emphasis of these verses.

Just look at verse 11, what's on his mind. Get Mark, who is the Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark. Get Mark and bring him with you. Why?

He's very useful for ministry to me. It is Paul in his last few days alive. What's Timothy to bring? Oh yeah, bring my cloak. But above all, bring the parchments that I can write letters on of encouragement to the churches.

Bring the books. books. Now, Paul could have taken a break at this point, I think, 30 years of faithful gospel ministry. He's been stoned, shipwrecked, and all the rest.

[20 : 12] He's got a few days, maybe weeks left. Surely, sitting on death row, he could think, at least I can just relax. But Paul loved his Lord Jesus, and he knew his task, and he kept proclaiming him to the bitter end.

Do you see that? Will we follow his example? This is the granny in the old people's home, not long to live perhaps, texting her daughter to say, please bring cake, but whatever you do, don't forget my gospel tracts, and my word one-to-one booklets.

It's the retired person who says, no, I'm not going to be like Demas, in love with this present world. and seek a bit of well-earned comfort in my final years.

But I'm going to give myself to active gospel ministry until the bitter end, because the finish line is not retirement, but to depart and be with Christ.

Actually, I was chatting to a retiring minister the other day, very sporty guy. He could easily spend his retirement working on his golf handicap. And when we asked him what he was going to do, he said, actually, I'm going to spend my retirement encouraging and training younger preachers and church leaders.

[21 : 38] If I may speak for a moment to my elders and betters, who perhaps are drawing near to that point or in retirement, I think here there is a word for you.

Will you follow Paul's example? Paul's example and not Demas. Thirdly, Paul was prepared to stand alone, proclaiming Christ to the end, but he was not alone.

Just look at verse 17. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me. Deserted by man, but not by the Lord Jesus.

Did you notice four ways in which Jesus was with him? First, as his friend, he stood by me, close, like a friend, personal, intimate.

Paul was prepared to stand alone in the lion's den, but he was not alone and not a bad friend to have in a courtroom.

[22 : 46] He had the Lord and judge of the living and the dead stood next to him as his friend. Imagine being in the magistrate's courtroom under some kind of charge of condemnation, the magistrate sitting over you, but then sat next to you is King Charles, the prime minister, all the high court judges, all the king's councils all rolled into one on your side.

The Lord and the judge stood next to him as his friend, but also to strengthen him. Did you see that in verse 17? He stood by me and strengthened me. I think we get a sense here of the humanness of Paul.

He did not in himself have the courage to stand up and proclaim Jesus in front of these people. But Jesus was with him to strengthen him for that task.

so that, did you see verse 17, the gospel message might be fully proclaimed to all the Gentiles. Well, I take it this is a comfort for us.

We don't have to do it on our own. In fact, we can't. As we seek to proclaim Jesus, he will strengthen us for this conversation and for that, for whatever occasion.

[24 : 09] He is with us as a friend. He is with us as a strengthener. And thirdly, he is with us as our rescuer. Verse 18, the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed.

But here, not in the way that we normally talk about Jesus being a rescuer. So not only does Jesus rescue us from death and judgment, and that is the great rescue.

But do you see here, Paul's not talking quite about that here. But about Jesus, our rescuer from every situation in this life. From every evil deed.

Now, I've been thinking about this, because what exactly does Paul mean here in verse 18? Because obviously, he says, obviously not from every evil deed, because he's about to get his head chopped off successfully.

Secondly, he has also been stoned almost successfully. What does Paul mean here? Well, I think the point Paul's making is that as long as the Lord Jesus has worked for us on earth for him to do, he will rescue us.

[25 : 15] Notice, not insulate us, subtle difference there, but rescue us from every evil deed, from every human and spiritual plot to thwart us. How he rescues us will be in his own wise ways, but we'll always be able to look back with thanksgiving.

So I think I mentioned the lady who came to faith in the city a couple of years ago, who started telling her colleagues straight away and promptly got sacked two weeks later.

And now she's happily working in another job, actually for a Christian organisation and rooted in her church. She can look back with thanksgiving. The Lord has rescued her from every evil deed.

His definition of rescue will be better than ours. He won't leave our side. He will look after us through this life. He won't allow us to be stopped in our proclamation of him.

And then, finally, when our work for him is done, do you see that in verse 18? When our work for him is done, he will bring us safely into his heavenly kingdom.

[26 : 27] Well, we've seen from this letter that it is Jesus past, Jesus present, and Jesus future that will keep us going faithfully, guarding his gospel. Jesus past, 1 verse 10, who appeared in history and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Jesus future, 4 verse 1, who will appear again, same words, and stands ready to return and to judge the living and the dead. Jesus past, Jesus future, and then we come to the end of the letter, Jesus present.

And I wonder if we may think less about this one sometimes than the other two. We may think less about his presence with us in the present, but that is what Paul is talking about here.

As we seek to give our lives to Jesus' work, he stands by us as our friend. He strengthens us, he rescues us from every evil deed, and he brings us safely into his heavenly kingdom.

And so no wonder, in verse 18, Paul says, to him be the glory forever and ever. Let us therefore give our lives to proclaiming him.

[27 : 45] Well, as we conclude, the temperature in the UK is rising, probably. We may not be quite in the lion's den yet.

Certainly feels like the den is being prepared, perhaps, even if the lions haven't yet been thrown in. 2 Timothy chapter 4, a final lesson from this letter.

If we are going to guard the gospel and be faithful to the Lord Jesus, we must be prepared to stand alone. Not that we want to. We must be prepared to.

Proclaiming Christ till the end. But we are not alone. Jesus is with us. Last thing I'm going to mention from the text.

Did you see that? Did you see that, what Paul says to Timothy in verse 9? The application. Do your best to come to me.

[28 : 48] Now, they seem like fairly innocuous words. What's Paul asking Timothy to do? To come and join him in the lion's den. Timothy had a choice.

He could go to ground and keep his distance, like so many others, and be ashamed of Paul's chains. Or he could join him in the lion's den and risk his own life.

That is what Paul was asking him to do. And that is what the Holy Spirit, through these words to us today, is prompting us.

Are we prepared to join Paul, as it were, in the lion's den, for the sake of Jesus? Prepare to stand alone. Prepare to keep preaching him to the very end.

And he will be with us and bringing us safely into his heavenly kingdom. Well, lots for us to think about. Chew on. Let's pray as we close.

[29 : 50] Father, we thank you so much that Jesus is with us as our friend.

Thank you that he is with us as our strengthener. Father, that he strengthens us to preach, to proclaim him. Thank you that he is with us as our rescuer through this life.

That he will rescue us from every evil deed. And thank you that he is with us as our bringer into his eternal kingdom.

Thank you so much, Father, that in the end there is nothing that can go wrong. Because Jesus is with us. And we long, Father, that you might grow us each individually and as a church to be more like Paul, to follow in his example for the glory of Jesus.

And so we say to him, to Jesus, be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[31 : 21] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.