

Paul's Final Words

- 2 Timothy 4:14-22
- In this final part of Paul's letter, he does a few things that we should pay attention to. He gives a final warning. He gives testimony to the grace of God. He sends greetings.
- First, the warning. Watch out for Alexander the coppersmith. This is most likely not Alexander the heretic, mentioned in 1 Timothy. This is Alexander the coppersmith, as opposed to Alexander the fisherman or Alexander the tentmaker or any other Alexander: it was a common name. It is this Alexander who Paul says, "did me great harm." Demas may have deserted Paul, and that was bad, and Demas needed prayer, but this character Alexander had done much worse, and Paul in effect says to Timothy, "be very careful around this guy." Some believe that it was Alexander who turned Paul over to the authorities. Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome; after the first time he was released and traveled more, a 4th missionary journey, if you will, and then he was most likely arrested again in Troas. Which would explain why he had to leave there quickly without his cloak and his books and parchments. Which would explain why he says to Timothy, "Hey when you go to Troas to get my stuff, stay away from this Alexander character!" But here's the thing. Paul warns Timothy not because he is trying to get revenge on Alexander. In fact, he says, "the Lord will repay him according to his deeds." May I encourage myself and all of you NOT to rehearse with our friends the harms that others have done to us? Instead, give it to the Lord, who will repay. David wrote, "Once God has spoken, twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God, and that to You, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For You will render to a man according to his work." (Ps. 62:11-12). And here's the real deal with Paul: he is most concerned about the Gospel. Alexander is a threat, not to Paul, but to the Gospel message. "Beware of him yourself, because he strongly opposed our message." We must also beware of any in the church or the culture who "oppose the Gospel." The founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, was clear in his opposition to the Gospel, saying, "If it is not true for you, it isn't true." It was one of the most popular ads on the Super Bowl last Sunday, and the last statement of the ad was, "the one thing that's true is what's true for you." That kind of thinking clearly opposes the Gospel. But listen, saints. We must be careful to make a distinction between those who OPPOSE the Gospel, and those who simply describe the Gospel in terms that we are not comfortable with or those who preach the Gospel differently than we might preach it. You may have heard the story about the two preachers were on the side of the road holding signs. One read, "The End is Near!" The other read, "Turn around now before it's too late!" One driver flew past and yelled, "Get a job, losers!" followed closely by another who yelled "Leave us alone, you religious nuts." Right after that the preachers heard the screech of brakes and then two loud splashes. One preacher said to the other, "Do you think we should change our signs to say "Bridge Out"? I may not like the way some seeker-sensitive pastors preach the Gospel. You may not like the way an author writes about faith. But the issue there is with methods, not message. We must not label them as heretics who are OPPOSED to the Gospel. Alexander was. He strongly opposed the message of the Gospel!
- Second, the testimony. Look again at **verse 16**. No one stood with him at his first defense. Think of this like a Grand Jury hearing, what the Romans called a "first action." It would be a preliminary hearing in front of the Emperor or one of his appointees. The charges would have been brought against Paul, and he would have an opportunity to respond to them. But he would also have the chance to call on witnesses who could testify on his behalf. There was no one to call. He looked around and found himself all alone. Either they could not be with him, because they were on a mission perhaps that Paul had sent them on, or they would not, because they were afraid of the climate in Rome and the very real possibility that if they stood beside him in the courtroom they would be sharing the prison cell with him next. But think about this. NOT ONE believer was there to support Paul. John Stott: "This moment, one might cautiously say, was Paul's Gethsemane." He

was left alone, just as Jesus was, to face His accusers. Mark 14:50 said about Jesus in the garden, "And they all left Him and fled."

- Here's the glorious testimony. Paul says, "May it not be charged against them!" I couldn't help but think about Paul's picture of what love looks like and how love behaves in different circumstances, as he described it in 1 Cor. 13. You remember, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast..." and so on. Verse 5, "**(Love is not) rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.**" Some versions say, "**it does not keep a record of wrongs.**" Abraham Lincoln had an acquaintance who thought very little of him. The man's name was Stanton. He once described Lincoln as "a low, cunning clown." He nicknamed Lincoln, "the original gorilla." When Stanton heard that a man was going to Africa to find a gorilla to study, Stanton said he didn't need to do that. "You can more easily find one in Springfield, Illinois!" When Abe Lincoln was elected President in 1860, he asked this man, Edwin Stanton, to be his Secretary of War. Lincoln's friends were flabbergasted. "How could you possibly appoint this man who calls you the original gorilla to be your Secretary of War?" Lincoln replied, "He is the best man for the job. I will treat him with every courtesy." Although Stanton was often at odds with the President, Lincoln refused to replace him. After Lincoln was shot in Ford Theatre and taken to the stateroom. Stanton was with him as his president breathed his last. The history books record that Stanton said, sobbing, "There lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen. Now he belongs to the ages." Love does not keep a record of wrongs. Paul could say, "May it not be charged against them," because he was a man who had learned how to love. And he was completely settled in the truth that he was never alone, even when no one was there with him. Jesus said it like this:
- John 16:32, "Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave Me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me." **Look at verse 17. Saints, this is great news.** You and I are never alone. And when we feel betrayed and abandoned by those we thought were standing with us, we can also say, "May it not be charged against them." Because we are never alone. Jesus stood right there by our side when others betrayed us. He could have stopped them from running away but He didn't. We can trust Him. Not only that, we can be at perfect peace, for the same reason that Paul was. He says, "The Lord stood by me and strengthened me." A.T. Robertson translates it, "The Lord stood by me and poured power into me." Like Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who pours power into me." Why would Jesus do that for Paul? Because He loves Him and because, as Paul said, "so that the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it." It's the same reason why Jesus does that for you and for me and for all who love His appearing. **Because** He loves us, and **because** He wants the message of the cross to be fully proclaimed, He pours His power into us!
- This is an amazing testimony of Paul, who goes on to proclaim that the Lord rescued him from the lion's mouth and that the Lord would rescue him from EVERY evil deed and bring him safely home, to heaven. Do you see that? Paul is not claiming that God will rescue him from the executioner's sword. He KNOWS he is about to be beheaded. Notice that he doesn't ask Timothy to gather the church quickly and pray that Paul would not be persecuted any more.
- I read in one of Jim Denison's reports this week the following: "More than a million Cubans have come to Christ in the last ten years. Many refer to the spiritual awakening going on there as the "Cuban miracle." Churches are packed with worshippers; Christians share their faith openly and boldly; new believers are baptized despite the pressures they will face for making public their commitment to Jesus." Then he wrote, "During one of my first trips to the island, I told a pastor that I would pray for persecution against his people to lessen. He asked me not to, explaining that their suffering had birthed their revival. Then he confided that he and other Cubans were praying for increased persecution to come against America's Christians, so that we might be strengthened in our faith as well."

- Paul breaks out into praise at even the thought of God’s enduring promise and eternal power to rescue His people. He will rescue you and me and all of His children, from every evil deed that is outside His permitted will. Oh, praise God. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!
- So, we have seen the warning and the testimony...finally,
- The greetings. As Scott said last week, we tend to skip over the greetings, don’t we? About as much as we skip over the “begets” in the genealogies. But we shouldn’t and today we won’t. Because there is something significant in the way Paul ends his letters. These last four verses are not throw-away lines or words just to fill up the bottom of the page of Paul’s stationery. No, **these names belong to people** who mean something to Paul. He mentions nine of them. In my very unofficial count, Paul greeted more than 65 people in his letters. They were important to him and he calls them by name. He greets Prisca and Aquila. What an incredible couple they were, mighty in God. These two were the ones who pulled Apollos aside and “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). Sometimes they are mentioned as Aquila and Priscilla, the husband first, and sometimes Priscilla (or Prisca) and Aquila. Sometimes we say “Mark and Hope,” and sometimes we say, “Hope and Mark!” Either way, they are a couple greatly used by God, as we could say about MANY in this fellowship. Then, the household of Onesiphorus. Why the household? Perhaps this dear man who had sought Paul out in Rome and refreshed him, as we read about in chapter 1, died on his way back home. Then, Erastus, who remained at Corinth. But Paul “left Trophimus, who was ill, in Miletus.” This is the man who, when the Jews in Jerusalem saw him with Paul, assumed wrongly that Paul had taken a Gentile into the temple. They seized Paul and started beating him and would have killed him if the tribune of that area hadn’t heard and run down there with soldiers to stop it. But now Trophimus is sick and Paul was just with him? Hey, what happened to the handkerchiefs and aprons we read about in Acts 19 that had touched Paul’s skin and people would take them to their sick relatives and the sick relatives were healed? Trophimus, like Epaphroditus, like Timothy, even like Paul himself, suffered sickness and God chose not to heal in the way we are taught God sometimes heals. I like the way Alistair Begg addresses this topic: “Miracles of healing were never at the command of their performers. Human experience and the biblical record make it perfectly clear that there are reasons in the divine counsel of God for a believer’s sickness as well as for a believer’s health. And to teach other than that is to teach from an empty head and a closed Bible.” Then Paul mentions people that must have been in Rome recently. He sends greetings from people named Eubulus, and Pudens, Linus and Claudia. We don’t know anything for sure about these four people. But they were contemporaries of Paul and they were serving the Lord Jesus faithfully. Isn’t that the way it is with us? History books will not record any of our names, perhaps, but the Lord does. Every word and deed done in His name.
- Paul closes with a personal message for Timothy; the pronoun is singular: “The Lord be with your spirit.” It is a final prayer from Paul to Jesus for Timothy. Do you think Timothy remembered this? In the days ahead as the church struggled with ongoing persecution and Christians walking away from the battle like Demas did, I think Timothy’s mind must have gone back over and over to Paul’s encouragement and instruction, but mostly to his final sentence to the young pastor: “The Lord be with your spirit.” Then with a collective blessing; the pronoun is plural: “Grace be with you.” It was a message for the whole church. It is a message for us.
- May God make us all people of the book. And people of this letter, which is part of the book. That we would preserve and promote sound doctrine. And in doing so, we would fight the good fight of faith, finish the race, and keep the faith. From Him, grace. To Him, glory. Both now and forever.