

The Difficulty and Delight of a Life Lived for Christ:

2 Timothy 4:9-22

To every believer who desires to finish their race well, Paul reveals what to expect.

LTS: Matt. 10:16-28

I want to talk with you this morning about expectations. When two people enter into a relationship each comes with certain unspoken assumptions about how the relationship will proceed. Husbands have unspoken expectations of their wives, and wives have unspoken expectations of their husbands.

Many vexing problems in relationships are owing to misplaced or unrealistic expectations. You think you walked into the relationship with eyes wide open, but now it seems you were blind to certain unwelcome realities in the other person. What results is disappointment, disillusionment, and perhaps discouragement. This dynamic is generally true in personal relationships, but it can also come about after a person happily throws him/herself into serving Christ with a whole heart.

Think about it. When you first embrace the gospel of Christ, you're eager to live for Him, take risks for him, and perhaps even suffer for him. You want to serve him and make an impact on the world in His name. You feel like there couldn't possibly be a better, more satisfying and fulfilling life than that of serving the Lord arm-in-arm with other members of Christ's body. But then, unexpectedly, something happens.

Perhaps one day you discover (to your unhappy surprise) that some people really aren't interested in hearing the "good news" that you are so eager to share. In fact, they are offended by what you have to say and become a bit hostile. Or perhaps, to your great shock, you discover that the dear saint you were so excited to serve the Lord with doesn't get along well with others. Or, worst of all, you learn that one of your former ministry team members has recently abandoned the faith. You're devastated by these things and overcome with disappointment.

Now, don't get me wrong. Serving the Lord on the mission field, or in pastoral ministry, or on the evangelism or counseling teams really can be some of the most delightful experiences of life. But if our expectations don't match reality, we can find

ourselves unnecessarily hurt, disappointed, and disillusioned. We might even quit serving altogether.

The reason I appreciate the passage this morning is that it kind of peals the rose colored lenses off our eyes and gives us a rather balanced and realistic view of what it's like when you are committed to living your life NOT for yourself, but for the glory of Christ.

Since we are talking about expectations this morning we might as well ask: What expectations should we have when we choose to live all-out for Jesus Christ. As we watch Paul interact with his circumstances, we discover five such expectations. But, before we consider them, let's take a moment to read our text for this morning.

Read 2 Tim. 4:6-22

I have entitled this message "The Difficulty and Delight of a Life Lived for Christ." What expectations should one have when he/she chooses to live all-out for Jesus Christ.

I. Expect the Shadow of Loneliness

Read v. 9

1. It goes without saying that Paul is in jail for the last time. He has been condemned by the emperor and he is sitting on death row and he is experiencing, among other things, loneliness. It's not that there are no other human beings around. I presume there are cellmates who are also condemned to die. But Paul is alone in the sense that he is removed from his brothers and sisters in Christ. He is separated from their fellowship and help.

2. This is how God wants the great apostle to the Gentiles to finish his race... alone. No one can help him now. No one can save him from the executioner's sword. Like Jesus before him, he will end his ministry and his life alone.

3. As you strive to live faithfully and biblically for Christ there are going to be occasions when feel very much alone.

- A. It may be because you are married to an unbeliever who cannot share the joy of fellowship in Jesus that you so long for.
- B. It may be because everyone you work with is an unbeliever leaving you to hold out your little light without the help of a fellow believer.

- C. It may be at school where the other kids make fun of you for being the only one stupid enough to believe in God.
 - D. Or, as a homeschool mom you may find yourself isolated from spiritual conversation with other godly women because of your commitment to serve Jesus by discipling your children at home.
 - E. You may be a pastor and find yourself in a church that has discovered that expository preaching or reformed doctrine is the last thing they expected to hear from the pulpit and not they are trying to force you out.
 - F. Then again, it may be God's call on your life to be single.
4. If these thoughts apply to your life, you may find it strangely encouraging to discover that Paul knows how you feel. In fact, one of the major purposes of the letter Paul is writing is to address his loneliness. He has a little time before his sentence will be carried out, so he is determined to try to get His beloved son in the Lord, Timothy, to come to him. He makes this clear back in chapter one. There at the beginning of the letter (1:4) he writes, "I long to see you that I may be filled with joy." Then here in chapter 4 he says (9), "Do Your best to come soon," (13) "When you come," (21) "Do your beast to come before winter." If you are sincerely striving to live for Jesus, there will be times when you really crave (and don't have) the fellowship that only Christians can share.
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who spent his share of time in Hitler's prisons, once wrote the following about fellowship:

It is true, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden under foot by those who have the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us... Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, [that] we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.¹

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (New York, Harper One, 1954), 20

5. Paul knew he would never be able to preach or minister in Ephesus, or Philippi, or even in the churches of Rome ever again. He was at the end of his life. He was alone. And he longed for fellowship.

6. We might ask: But why is Paul alone? He had more friends than probably any of us here today will ever have!

Where were they? That's a good question. Consider the following

A. Paul Lost Friendships Due to Sin

- 1) (v. 10) Demas, in love with this present world, deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica
 - I wonder: Why did he go to Thessalonica? Was there money there? Was there a woman? We don't know.
- 2) (v. 1:15-16) "All who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.
 - Asia was the Roman province in which Ephesus, Timothy's current place of service, was located. It seems that there were key people who could have supported Paul, perhaps at his arrest and imprisonment, but they failed to do so. Phygelus and Hermogenes were probably well-known associates of Paul.
- 3) (2:17-18) We learn that Hymenaeus and Philetus have swerved from the truth. They left Paul in a doctrinal kind of way. They have departed from the truth.
 - One of the most difficult things Chris and I have experienced in our quarter century of ministry is the loss of dear friends and co-laborers who either ship-wrecked their faith, or for some other reason have disqualified themselves from the ministry. Nothing has caused us more grief in ministry.
 - I heard about a famous preacher in our time who once said, "When I was a young preacher I wanted to do great things for God. I wanted to build a big ministry and impact the world for God. But I have seen so many dearly respected brothers ruin their lives and ministry by

personal sin and moral failing that now I simply pray, “O Lord, all I ask is that you enable me to cross the finish line without being disqualified. Paul lost some friends because of their sin.

B. Paul was Separated from friends due to Reassignment.

- 1) Crescens got assigned to Galatia (10)
- 2) Titus got assigned to Dalmatia(10)
- 3) Tuchicus got assigned to Ephesus (12)
 - a. And remember: There's No Social Media. No FaceTime, No Text Messaging, telephone or even reliable "snail mail."
 - b. Paul lamented (11), "Only Luke is with me" (poor Luke)
- 4) For my wife and I, some of the sweetest fellowship we have ever enjoyed has been with men and women whom we have labored with in ministry but whom we only see once or twice every decade or so. Some of Paul's friends were assigned to distant lands to further the gospel far away from him.

7. The point of all this is to say that one of the difficulties of living all-out for Christ is that sometimes its lonely business. So, Expect the Periodic Shadow of Loneliness. It's a normal dynamic in a life lived for God.

II. Expect the Necessity of Reading

Read v. 13

1. Now this is interesting. Here is Paul the apostle whom God has used to write inspired texts of Scripture. And yet, he was a reader. Now, I confess that I don't know what he means by "books and parchments." People have written doctoral dissertations on the subject and we still don't know. What I think we can infer from this verse is that Paul was comforted, instructed, and helped by reading and studying.
2. Listen carefully. I really want you to hear this. If you are going to serve Christ by ministering his word in any capacity, you need to be a reader! And I say that as a pastor who finds it rather difficult to read. I am a very slow reader, but where would I be as a pastor without books? And there is good precedent for that. Paul was a reader!

3. Charles Spurgeon once sorely chided his fellow pastors for thinking they can get behind the pulpit and preach a whole sermon without any study. In his inimitable style he writes:

Some of our... brethren think that a minister who reads books and studies [for] his sermon must be a very deplorable specimen of a preacher. A man who comes up into the pulpit, professes to take his text on the spot, and talks [about] any quantity of nonsense is the idol of many! If he will speak without premeditation, or pretend to do so, and never produce what they call a dish of dead men's brains—oh! that is the preacher.

[But] How rebuked are they by the apostle!

- He is inspired and yet he wants books!
- He has been preaching at least thirty years and yet he wants books!
- He had seen the Lord and yet he wants books!
- He had a wider experience than most men and yet he wants books!
- He had been caught up into the third heaven and had heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, yet he wants books!
- He had written the major part of the New Testament and yet he wants books!
- The apostle says to Timothy, and so he says to every preacher, “Give yourself unto reading.”²

4. But wait! Spurgeon continues:

The man who never reads will never be read. He who never quotes will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men's brains proves that he has no brains of his own. Brethren, what is true of ministers is true of all our people. You need to read.

Renounce as much as you [can] all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritan writers and expositions of the Bible. We are quite persuaded that the very best way for you to be spending your leisure time is to be either

² Spurgeon Gems online, <https://www.spurgeongems.org/>
A message on 2 Tim 4:13, *Paul, His Cloak and His Books*.

reading or praying... Paul cries, “Bring the books” [And I say] Join in the cry!³

5. Do not think you can grow as a Christian without reading. The Bible is first priority here, but read other books as well? Someone will say: But I don’t have time to read. To you I say, consider this: If you read a mere 10 pages per day, in 20 days you will have read a 200 page book! You can do this. And I want to challenge you to join me in this - to cut 20-30 minutes out of some unnecessary activity of your day and read 10 pages of something that will strengthen your soul. Paul loved his books. And if we are going to pursue a life lived for Christ, we should read as well. So, expect the necessity of reading books.

III. Expect to Make a Few Enemies:

Read v. 14-15

1. If you are going to pursue a life that is truly lived for Christ, you must brace yourself for the reality that some people will be offended by your life and by your words. In fact, Paul was emphatic on this point. He said (3:12) “All who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted.” Some people will simply turn their back on you and de-friend you. Others, however, will actively attempt to cause you harm.
2. Some believe that Alexander was like one of the merchants in Ephesus (Acts. 19) who made a living out of creating little replicas of the Temple of Artemis. When the gospel started changing lives the people began burning everything related to their former idolatry. This worried the local merchants. Listen to their logic (Act. 19:27),

Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.”⁴

³ Ibid

⁴ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Ac 19:27.

3. The truth of the matter was that they didn't really believe in the goddess. They were merely making a living off temple merchandise.

4. The result was that a riot broke out, and people were harmed. Back in the 1 chapter of 2 Tim, Paul said, "I was called to be a preacher of the gospel, which is why I suffer as I do" (1:12). In 3:8 Paul tells Timothy that this kind of trouble is nothing new (3:8), Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith."

5. The world we live in seems to me moving in a direction that will demand that believers be willing to personally suffer.

- A. Already, some have lost their businesses
- B. Already some of you have faced disciplined on the job.
- C. The history of the Christian church has been one of persecution, not so much in the U.S. but all around the world Christians suffer for following Christ. So don't be surprised if you make some enemies because of your moral convictions and your message.

6. If Paul were here today he would say,

- A. (2:3) "Share in suffering as a good soldier"
- B. (2:24) "The Lord's bondservant must patiently endure evil."

7. So don't be caught off guard as if suffering for Christ is something unusual. It is to be expected. So Expect to make a few enemies.

IV. Expect to be Strengthened by Christ:

Read 16-17

1. Notice Paul's repeated use of the term "The Lord." In v. 14 he trust that the Lord will repay his enemies (specifically, Alexander the Coppersmith) for his evil deeds.

2. More than that, however, Paul's testimony was that even though my enemies tried to harm me, and my friends failed me, the Lord was faithful. "The Lord stood by me

and strengthened me.” The Lord would not abandon his servant. It was the Lord, after all (Isa 41:10) who said, Isaiah 41:10 “fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

3. Paul had a long history of trusting in the Lord in times of trouble. And no doubt, that’s why he commanded Timothy back in 2:1 “to be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” In other words, be strengthened by the unmerited assistance that come to from Jesus.

- A. Why is it that when we find ourselves in a tight spot, we turn to almost anything and everything else first BEFORE we run to Christ?
- B. Paul is saying, turn to Christ. Expect that Jesus will be with you by his H.S. to help you, to comfort you, to give you the wisdom you require, and to fellowship with you.

4. Some of you may remember the biographical message I did on John Paton – Scottish Missionary to the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific. His work on the Island of Tana was death defying. He was attempting to reach a tribe of cannibals with the gospel. Toward the end of his time on the island things took a bad turn and the tribe started searching for him to kill him.

5. his friend Nowar urged him to hide himself in a chestnut tree while the natives were combing the jungle searching for him and the other missionaries. What would be going through your mind; what would your soul feel in those moments? Paton writes,

I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush. The hours I spent there live all before me as if it were but of yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets, and the yells of the Savages. Yet I sat there among the branches, as safe as in the arms of Jesus. Never, in all my sorrows, did my Lord draw nearer to me, and speak more soothingly in my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among those chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow, as I told all my heart to Jesus. Alone, yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship. If thus thrown back upon your own soul, alone, all alone, in the midnight, in the

bush, in the very embrace of death itself, have you a Friend that will not fail you then? ⁵

6. In Paul's day of trouble he leaned on Christ. And he firmly believed that even in his death the Lord's gospel to the Gentiles would continue to be proclaimed until they all had the opportunity to hear it.

Read 17b-18

7. The Lord had rescued him from the lion's mouth (past grace) and he would ultimately bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom (that's future grace). There he would receive the "crown of righteousness that the Lord (the righteous Judge) would award him on that day."

7. That's what you can expect as you strive for a life lived for Jesus. The Lord will be with you in the struggle. He will fellowship with you. He will strengthen you. And he will continue to advance the gospel through your life. So, expect to be strengthened by Christ. "To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen!"

V. Expect Rich Fellowship with the Faithful

1. While it is true that Paul was largely alone, there were some friends who were available and loyal. Luke the beloved physician was by his side. No one doubts that Timothy did everything he could to get there in time. And Paul instructed Timothy that as he made the journey he was to stop off and pick up John Mark and bring him along as well. Of this young man whom Paul once consider useless, he now says, "Bring mark, for he is VERY useful to me for ministry."

2. What a time they must have had as they gathered around Paul! These four men, Paul, Timothy, Luke and Mark were key players in the advancement of the gospel globally. Think about it. Timothy was to be the one to take Paul's place in ministry. And between Luke (who wrote two massive contributions to the N.T.), Mark who wrote the first of the four gospels, and Paul who wrote 13 inspired epistles... In that little meeting were the men who wrote more than half of the N.T. Can you imagine the fellowship they enjoyed? Can we even begin to imagine what Mark experienced as he was embrace and welcomed by Paul?

⁵ John G. Paton, autobiography, p. 200

3. And then there were all the other friends who probably would have been with Paul if they could have made the trip (v. 19:22)

- Prisca and Aquilla - fellow tent-makers, and missionaries.
- Onesiphorus (who had searched all over Rome until he found Paul in jail; a man who refreshed Paul when he arrived and was not ashamed of his chains).
- Erastus at Corinth
- Trophimus, whom Paul left sick in Miletus.
- Others who had already made it to Paul included Eubulus, Pudend, Linus and Claudia, and all the other brothers.

To every believer who desires to finish their race well, Paul reveals what to expect.