

Paul Home at Last

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Date: 05 March 2017

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[0 : 00] 2 Timothy chapter 4. 2 Timothy, it's in the New Testament! 1 and 2 Thessalonians! For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day. And not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. 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.

[1 : 36] Alexander, the metal worker, did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him because he strongly opposed our message.

At my first defense, 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 forever and ever. Amen. But what about Paul? I put you off for one week to answer that question last week as we came to the end of the book, our study in the book of Acts.

[2 : 42] And we see that it ends on the triumphant note of Christ's gospel being preached, right without hindrance and boldly by the apostle Paul in Rome.

And so Luke has followed Jesus Christ building his church starting in the capital of Judea, Jerusalem, the very place where our Lord was crucified, and reaching all the way to the very capital city of the world empire that was Rome.

And there for two years Paul preaches the gospel and kingdom of Christ. And with that Luke puts down his pen, leaving many of our questions unanswered, like what happened to this great soldier of the cross?

We've seen him going to Rome. The last six chapters of the book intent on showing us that he must get to Rome and testify there. He has come to Rome.

Now, what happened? How did his trial go? How did he come to an end? It's only natural for us, having spent the last six months of our lives with this man, to want to know those answers.

[3 : 59] And so, having seen that wasn't Luke's purpose, obviously, in writing the book of Acts. We've seen his purpose is to show Christ building his church.

Yet, it is something that is worth asking and answering. Now, I want to be right up front with you and say that there is some disagreement about what happened to Paul after these two years in Rome. Not everyone puts the pieces of the puzzle together in the same way. There's not absolute clarity in the New Testament on all of this.

So, I'm going to tell you the story this morning as I best understand from the evidence that we do have. And though there is a degree of speculation involved in piecing the pieces together of these last years of Paul's life, I do believe our study this morning is not idle speculation, but rather will be of profit to us all.

Now, I give you then this morning the last three chapters on Paul's earthly life. The first is his first Roman imprisonment and release.

[5 : 17] Why is Paul in Rome at the end of the book of Acts? Well, you remember he appealed to have his case heard in Caesar's court, in the highest court of the land, to have Caesar hear it.

Not because any lower court had reached a verdict of guilty for the Apostle Paul. No, not at all. We've seen that from the very beginning, the arresting commander, Roman commander, had a problem figuring out what has he done wrong.

That was his big problem that he went from one thing to another, scratching his head. What am I going to write as the charge against him? He had trouble figuring it out.

Every Roman trial that we've seen in the book of Acts came to the same conclusion. As over and over, the judges who heard him said, This man has done nothing deserving of imprisonment or death.

King Agrippa said he could have been set free had he not appealed to Caesar. Nevertheless, the Jews just kept charging him with a crime worthy of death.

[6 : 23] And so finally, wanting to do the Jews a favor, the Roman governor, Festus, pressed for Paul to stand trial down in Jerusalem. And that's when Paul says, I appeal to Caesar's court.

He's a Roman citizen and he has the right to appeal to Caesar. Thinking that the Jews would get their way if they were in their home court advantage down in Jerusalem.

So he appealed to Caesar. And he's got there. And he's had two years of waiting. Now what happened after those two years? Well, it's my belief that after those two years, Paul was released.

He was let go. Let me give some of the reasons. Number one, Rome was not treating him as a dangerous criminal that deserved death, were they? He's in his own rented house.

He's under house arrest. And yes, he's chained to a soldier. But other than that, he's got freedoms. And he's allowed to entertain guests who come and to preach freely, boldly and without hindrance, the gospel and kingdom of Christ for two years.

[7 : 28] So he's hardly being treated even before the trial like a dangerous man. Secondly, if he even went to trial, there would not have been enough evidence to convict him.

If every lower Roman court had failed to find enough evidence to convict him as guilty, it would have been strange indeed to find that their highest court would overturn all that's been examined and find him guilty of death.

It's rather more likely that the Jews did not even press charges against Paul in Rome. And let me give you several reasons for coming to this conclusion, that the Jews didn't go ahead with pressing charges.

First, when Paul arrived at Rome, remember, he met with the Jewish leaders and they said, we haven't heard anything bad said about you.

No one from Jerusalem has sent a bad report and accusations of you. But we do want to hear what you're preaching because all over it's heard that people are speaking against this way of Christianity.

[8 : 34] But we've not heard any charges against you. So these Jews in Rome have not heard of the charges. Secondly, one writer argued that this two years in Rome was the legal length of time given for the prosecution to present their case against the prisoner.

You had two years to get your act together and to present your case to the court. And if no formal charges were made by the end of that two years, the prisoner by default would be set free.

If that were indeed the law of the land, then we can see why we would come to the conclusion that it appears that the Jews failed to make the charges.

Another reason for believing this is that the Jews were not the most popular people in Rome. Ten years earlier, the emperor Claudius, you can read this in Acts 18 and verse 2, had expelled the Jews from the capital city of Rome.

They were a troublesome lot. There's references to them as a troublesome pest, always arguing and striving together and with others.

[9 : 50] And so they were expelled from Rome. So the Jews are who are the ones pressing the charges are not very popular in Rome as a people.

And added to that, Caesar's high court in Rome dealt harshly with any prosecutors who bothered them with unfounded accusations that lacked solid evidence.

Well, as we've seen all along, these Jews have had problems setting forth a convincing case and evidence against Paul before any of the courts that he was tried in, as we've read in Acts.

And then these were still the nice years of Nero. Nero is the emperor. He's the Caesar that Paul's going to have to appear before. And some people say, well, wow, if it's Nero, he probably didn't survive.

But his first years were kind years. His first years saw many positive things done in his kingdom and were still within those nice years of Nero before the great persecution of Christians.

[10:51] And so for these reasons, I doubt that he was ever tried, but was let go by a lack of a case brought against him. One thing that is clear from Paul's writings at this time is that he was expecting to be released at the ends of these two years of house arrest.

Remember, he wrote his prison epistles at this time. He wrote to Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae and Philemon for prison epistles. And in his letter to the Philippians, Paul says, I know that through your prayers and the help given by the spirit of Jesus Christ, that what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

I'm expected to be delivered here as I'm waiting trial in Rome. He goes on to say later in the same letter, chapter one in verse 23 and 25 of Philippians.

I'm torn. I desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is better by far. But it's more necessary for you that I continue with you and remain in the body and convinced of this.

I know that I will remain and I will continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith. Paul has this confidence that he's going to be released even as he's writing during those two years of house arrest.

[12:17] To a friend, to his friend at Philemon, as he writes from prison. Who lives in Colossae, he comes to the end of the book and he says one more thing, the end of the letter.

One more thing, Philemon, prepare a guest room for me because I hope to be restored to you and answer to your prayers. There is the expectation, yea, the certainty that he he is going to be released at the end of these two years of house arrest.

So it's my contention that the time ran out, the Jews chickened out and Paul was let out. That the case was never brought against him and he was released.

Scholars put that somewhere around 63 A.D. So that's the first of the last three chapters of his life. He gets out of prison. This this this house arrest he's released. Secondly, we we come to his last years of freedom. So he's now free.

[13:22] What did Paul do? We're not sure how many years passed between Paul's first and second imprisonment at Rome. Probably around four years from 63 to 67 A.D.

Now, just what was Paul doing during these last years of freedom? What did he do when he was released from Rome? Well, first of all, he continued to write letters.

Two of them have been preserved in the New Testament. First Timothy, his first letter to Timothy and Titus, his letter to Titus. Timothy is in Ephesus and you remember Paul spent three years there and when he left, he spoke to the elders and he warned them about those false teachers that would arise from within them.

That's exactly what had happened. Timothy is now in Ephesus and he's trying to sort out these false teachers and and Paul writes to him and he tells him how to deal with false teachers and many other things.

He's instructing Timothy, his son in the faith. It's filled with first. Timothy is filled with passionate personal charges to Timothy to fight the good fight of the faith and to train himself to be godly, to guard the truth that has been entrusted to him, to set an example for the believers.

[14:42] So he's seeking to encourage the laborers in these various churches. He wrote a similar letter to Titus, Titus laboring on the island of Crete, and he's given instructions just as he gave instructions to Timothy on how to how to identify qualified elders in the church and deacons and and how to carry on worship.

And and what right doctrine to be preaching and and and practical living. We see that Paul is continuing to care for the churches of Jesus Christ during this time of freedom by writing letters to their leaders.

He wants to see them built up and strengthened in the faith and going on once he's gone. He's preparing his fellow laborers for his eventual departure. And so he's laying down abiding rules in the church of Jesus Christ.

He's an apostle. He's a sent one by Christ. And so he's laying down abiding rules and doctrines for the churches, assuring that they be properly instructed and organized.

He's he's not always going to be there for for for these workers to come and ask him or to send a servant. Go ask Paul. I think he's he's in prison in Rome. Go over there and visit. Ask him about this naughty problem that we're having in the church.

[16:05] Here at Ephesus that would not be able to be done once Paul's gone. And so he's writing it down in a permanent form. And isn't it good that he did? We're still profiting.

The church today is profiting from his labor between his first and second imprisonment in Rome. As we seek to recognize elders and deacons.

We have the words of the apostle of Jesus Christ. As we set out what is proper church order. We have these letters. And what is the truth as it is in Jesus?

So this is one thing that Paul was doing during this period of freedom. But we shouldn't think of him just kind of kicking back on some Mediterranean shore with a writing pad in his hand, sending out these letters as if that's how he spent the rest of his life.

No, he also went back out on the preaching trail. He preached the gospel near and far. He revisited some of the churches that he had planted or that others had planted and wanted to see them established.

[17:12] He also took the gospel to new areas where Christ had not yet been preached. Now, here's where we have the problem.

We don't have any maps to show you of Paul's missionary journeys during these four years. This period of his life. And the reason is that we're not sure about the order in which he visited each of these places.

We know some of the places he went, but we don't know the order of it. Let me illustrate it this way. Suppose I had a silver chain with 10 links at home.

It's made out of silver, but it's colored. Every 10 of the 10 links is colored a different color. All right. And so I'm at home and I take a picture of that 10 link chain with each color in the precise order.

Then I dismantle the chain and I bring to you the 10 links. And I say, put this chain in order. I want you to put it in the same order that I had it at home.

[18:18] What's the odds of you getting it right? It's not very big. But that's something of the problem that we have when we come to the scriptures. In this period of Paul's life, we can see that he was here.

He was there. He was there. He was here. But did he do this all in one big missionary journey or did he take several journeys? That's why we don't have a map marking out his missionary journeys like we did with the first three.

Those are recorded for us. We know the order. He went from this town to this town and we followed him right along the path. We can't do that with this period of his life. It has not been recorded the exact order of his visits.

So I'm going to leave it to others to try to piece it together in the order that he visited. But I would like to point out some of the places that he visited during this freedom.

If we could have the map at this time, please. Look at Titus chapter 1 and verse 5. Titus 1 and verse 5. Titus 1 and verse 5. Titus 1 and verse 5.

[19:30] Paul, again, this is written during this time of freedom. He writes to Titus and says, The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

Now, Paul had never gone to preach on the island of Crete on his first three missionary journeys. And that's why we say this happened during this period of his freedom.

Here's the island of Crete. He had taken other missionary journeys this way, over here, but he had never come down to Crete.

He'd been on Cyprus with Barnabas, but never to Crete. He was almost blown past the island during his journey by ship as he was going to Rome.

Remember when he was going to Rome? This actually is a chart of that journey to Rome. When the storm hit them here, it blew them to the south, not allowing them to go on this way.

[20:42] It blew them to the south. And as they came on the lee side of the island of Crete, there was a bit of a period there where they could get their act together with the ship and get it held together and ropes around it and anchors settled.

And they came to and just landed briefly at Fair Havens. Remember, the decision was made there. Should we just try to stay here for the winter or shall we try to get over here to Phoenix?

They said, oh, I think we can get to Phoenix. And they started out and then the storm hit. So it's just that brief stay over. That's the only time he was there. So we don't read of any ministry that happened there.

It was a very brief time. And they were back at the sea and was blown about on the storm as we studied it. So now when he says, I left you in Crete, Titus.

Now, if you leave someone somewhere, you've been there with them, right? So Paul was there with Titus and Paul left. And he left Titus there to straighten out the unfinished business of organizing the church with proper order of leaders and so on.

[21 : 48] It seems that others had labored there before Paul and Titus because we learned that when he left there, there were churches in every town. Every town on the island of Crete had churches.

And now, Titus, you're to finish up the business. Go back and see to it that they each have elders, plural, in each town, in each church there. And establish them in the sound doctrine and faithful practice of life.

Look at chapter 3 and verse 12 of Titus. Paul continues to write, As soon as I send Artemis and Ortychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis because I have decided to winter there. Paul had never been to Nicopolis on his earlier journeys. Nicopolis is over here. We don't read of him ever going to this side, the Ionian Sea here, going to this side of Greece.

He went to Athens, he went to Corinth, and now he is here in Nicopolis and he's saying, Try to come here, I'm going to spend the winter here.

[22 : 57] So, that's where Paul is at during this period. At least, we can't be absolutely sure, but we can see that it was at least clearly his plan.

He says, I have decided, come to me at Nicopolis because I have decided to winter there. That's where he's planned to spend the winter. Where else has Paul been?

Look at 1 Timothy chapter 1. Again, these are letters from this period in his life. 1 Timothy 1.3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.

This is not from any of his earlier visits to these places. He had been there earlier, but now this is a later period of time when he's left Timothy there in Ephesus.

And so it puts it clearly in this time of Paul's life. When I went into Macedonia. Macedonia is this region here.

[24 : 06] You remember, he had been there. He planted a church in Philippi, in Thessalonica, in Berea, all in Macedonia. And he is saying now that when I was there, I told you, Timothy, to stay in Ephesus.

So what happened after his imprisonment for two years? Well, he had written to the Philippians saying, I'm confident in the Lord that I'm going to be let go and I'm confident that I myself will come soon.

Philippians 2.24. So he's still in Rome. He's writing from his two-year house arrest. He's saying, I'm sure I'm getting out. And when I do, I'm going to make it over there to you at Philippi.

So now he's telling Timothy, I left you there in Ephesus when I went into Macedonia. So Paul visited the churches in Macedonia during this period, again, seeking to strengthen these churches that he had planted.

And then he tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 3.14, I hope to come to you soon. And until I come, devote yourselves to the public reading of Scripture and so on.

[25 : 16] So I'm hoping to come to you here in Ephesus where you're struggling with the false teachers. But until I come, carry on in the work and so on.

So it's likely that he visited Timothy in Ephesus. At least it was on his plan somewhere during this time. And then turn over to 2 Timothy. Though 2 Timothy was written during his second imprisonment in Rome, it sheds light on his travels during this present period of freedom that we're talking about.

And in verse 13 of chapter 4, Acts 4.13, Paul says to Timothy, When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

I left it all here at Troas. Now, Paul had been there on his earlier trips, but on this last trip, he left his cloak there and his books, his parchments. And so this is a recent time to Troas.

So he's also visited Troas. That's where the man fell out of the window and died. The young man died and Paul raised him back to life. He's revisiting that congregation. He'd like to see how Eutychus is after his fall.

[26 : 30] And he's encouraging the church at Troas. Paul made a trip there. Verse 20 of chapter 4.

Erastus stayed in Corinth. He says, Erastus stayed in Corinth and I left Trofimus sick in Miletus. Oh, so he left Erastus at Corinth and I left Trofimus sick at Miletus.

He's revisiting this area just to the south of Ephesus where he had been before, but now he's back there. That's where Miletus is. So we're recognizing places that Paul has been during this time of freedom.

He probably went to Philemon's house at Colossae as he told him to prepare a guest house because as soon as I get out of Rome here, I'm coming to see you. And then from an even earlier letter to Romans, to the Romans, he revealed his plan to go to Spain, places where Christ was not yet known in Romans 15.

He says, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. Now that's way off of our map. That's out here, another 800 miles to go to Spain.

[27 : 40] That's new territory where the gospel had not been. He was making plans for that. Did he ever get there? There is strong testimony among early church fathers that he did, in fact, get to Spain.

So here are some of the links in the chain, you see. Now, how we put them together and as to how he went from one to the next, we are not sure.

But one thing we are sure of, and that's that Paul is not kicking back in a rocking chair, spending his last sunset years in idleness.

No, that's not the picture we get at all. Here he is. He's an old man. That's what he calls himself in his letter to Philemon, an old man.

And for many years on end, he has endured a painful thorn in the flesh, which many commentators think that it was some physical problem that he had.

[28 : 41] And now he's feeling the aches and pains of old age compounded with the abuse of his body over his lifetime. I wonder, was he still suffering from the injuries of the time he was stoned and left for dead?

But you've heard of football injuries plaguing men at the end of their lives.

I wonder, was he still feeling those rocks, the wounds from those rocks? His body had been beaten with rods three times, beaten with fists as they tried to kill him in the mob, torn open with whips. Five times he received the 40 minus 1 lashes that would have laid open his back. He's gone without food, without sleep, without proper clothing to keep warm, in and out of prison, hardships of constant travel, pounding out the miles, shipwrecked four times, spent a night and a day floating on the sea.

Truly his body was wasting away. And I'll tell you, if that was me, and that was my ministry, and now I'm in Rome and I'm here in prison for two years, as soon as I'm out of here, I'm looking for a place with creature comforts to spend the twilight years of my life in restful ease.

[30 : 06] But not Paul. Not Paul. He's not consulting his creature comforts, but the good of Christ's churches. He's not having a job. The glory of Jesus Christ in the salvation of more sinners.

And so upon his release, he just throws himself right back into the work with renewed vigor. This weary old soldier is still pounding out the miles, preaching, struggling, fighting, instructing to the very end.

His hand is frozen to the sword, if you will. And he must be dragged from the battlefield by force. It's an old man working while it is still day because the night's coming when no man can work.

So I have a challenge for you, young men and young women. What of the years of your strength are you giving to serve the King of Kings?

Do you know that the years of your strength, your best years don't last forever? Talk to some of the older people around you. They'll tell you. There are limiting situations that come with old age.

[31 : 18] What are you doing with these years of youth and strength and vigor to serve the King of Kings? And older men and older women, there's a lesson here for us, isn't there?

What are you doing with the remaining strength of your life and of your years? It's still our duty to redeem the time and to make the most of every opportunity.

To redeem this period of our lives. To let no period of our lives slip by without redeeming it and using it to our utmost. Let none hear you idly saying there's nothing I can do while the sons of men are dying and the Master calls for you.

If you cannot cross the ocean and the heathen lands explore, you can find the heathen nearer. You can find them at your door. So with your prayers and with your bounties, you can do what God demands.

You can be like faithful Aaron holding up the prophet's hands. So let's learn from the age of the apostle to keep our hands to the plow all the way to the end.

[32 : 23] Not to grow weary in laboring for Christ and his church and to work while it's day until the night comes for us when we can work no more and we see the Lord Jesus face to face, the one who shed his blood for us and now lives for us.

Mr. Harris was a faithful minister in Hanwell, England for 40 years and on his deathbed, he said words that I've read several times from different servants of the Lord.

To those gathered around him as he was dying, he has said to them, assure yourselves that nothing will more trouble you when you come to die than that you have done no more for God who has done so much for you.

Let's stay in the harness with whatever strength God gives us until he takes us. That's the second chapter that we're seeing in these last chapters of Paul's life and now the last chapter itself.

His second Roman imprisonment and execution or martyrdom. Just where and when Paul was rearrested is not known, but most likely it was after 64 AD because that was the year that Rome's attitude towards Christians changed for the worst.

[33 : 51] In that year, there was a great fire that burned more than half of the city of Rome to the ground. And Nero's own citizens believed that Nero was responsible for it himself.

That he had deliberately set it on fire. You've perhaps heard of fiddling while Rome burns, that that's been attributed to Nero. Whether it's true or not, that's what his citizens thought. And whether it was fake news or real news, we don't know.

But we see that the citizens thought that was the case. And so Nero's under hot water. And to get the monkey off of his back, he blamed the Christians for setting the fire.

They're the enemy. And that began a great bloodbath as Nero persecuted the Christians in a rage of cruelty. They were accused of all kinds of crimes, rebellion against the states since they would not worship the emperor like everyone was required to do and say Caesar is Lord.

They would not do that. In fact, they said that somebody else was Lord. Jesus is Lord. And that was enough to bring you. Just to be a Christian, to bear the name of Jesus was enough to be marked for persecution in those days.

[35 : 13] Some were stretched on the rack. Others were crucified and thrown to the lions. Some were wrapped in skins of wild beasts and thrown to the savage dogs. Others were burnt alive to serve as torches in the night.

These were the years when the Christians hid in the intricate caves under Rome, the catacombs. You can still go and see these underground catacombs.

And these were the years when Christians were hiding for their lives. Nero's nice years gave way to the reign of his madness. Not only Christians, he murdered his own mother, his wife, his stepbrother, and many, many more.

So Rome's change of attitude toward Christians explains why when we read his letter from this second imprisonment, which is 2 Timothy, it's a different feel to his imprisonment.

It's much harsher. It's not the house arrest arrangement and people coming and going. No, it's a harsh... He's thrown into the common prison and he's suffering there in Rome.

[36 : 23] Not treated as anyone special, but a common criminal thrown in a Roman dungeon. And another difference from the first Roman imprisonment is the absence of the earlier confidence that Paul had of being released.

Remember, we saw that in his letter to the Philippians. I'm sure I'm going to be released. We saw it. Prepare a room for me, Philemon. I'm coming. I'm going to get out. Release is nowhere in sight in 2 Timothy.

Rather, Paul is convinced he's about to die. And so this last letter to Timothy lets us right into the skin of a man who's staring death in the face. What is Paul thinking now?

What is he feeling? This letter opens up so much of that. Just look at the first words of 2 Timothy. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.

How fitting is it that a prisoner facing death should have his eyes fixed on the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. What would you be thinking of if you're facing death in the face?

[37 : 35] The promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. Who according to verse 10 has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

And then he says in verse 8 as he writes to Timothy, don't be ashamed to testify about our Lord or ashamed of me, his prisoner. There's a lot going on in Rome and in the Roman Empire now that would make a man ashamed to identify with Jesus Christ and with the persecuted apostle.

And so Paul is telling his son in the faith, don't be ashamed to testify. Paul never loses sight of God's sovereign control over his life.

Don't be ashamed of me, his prisoner. I'm not Nero's prisoner. I'm his prisoner. Yes, in one sense, he's Nero's prisoner.

But Paul looks beyond the second cause and he traces it right back to his sovereign Savior. I am his prisoner. One eight. I'm here by his sovereign will.

[38 : 41] And on that, Paul rests. He's willing to rest on that. I'm here because of him. Those who deny the absolute sovereignty of God over every situation in life rob themselves of one of the sweetest comforts in life and in death.

And that's that the Lord Christ omnipotent reigns. My Savior reigns over my situation, all of it. And I'm his prisoner here in Rome.

That's what he's thinking of. And throughout the letter, we find Paul challenging Timothy not to cave in to fear because of the hot persecution, but to boldly testify about the Lord, to join with me.

Come on in. The water's fine. To join in with suffering for the gospel. To endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. To expect persecution for living a godly life in Christ Jesus.

To go on preaching the word in season and out of season. No matter what's happening. Just to go on preaching the word. These are the things that Paul is challenging Timothy with. And we can't help but hear a note of loneliness in this last letter.

[39 : 52] It's there. It's unmistakable. There's this longing for human friendship. There's not nearly so many coming and going as at his house arrest.

His first imprisonment. Remember, they came to him. Large numbers. Many came to him. Coming and going. We don't see that happening in the common prison that he's in now.

It seems rather that many were ashamed of him. And were even fearful of identifying with the apostle. He even has to urge his friend and son in the faith, Timothy, to not be ashamed of him.

He tells him in verse 15 of chapter 1, You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me. Including Phygelus and Hermogenes. Of all men.

Wouldn't have thought they would. They did too. They've all deserted me. You sense the loneliness? He has one bright exception to this rule and it's Onesiphorus from Ephesus.

[40 : 51] He says, He often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, even when I was in Rome, he searched hard until he found me. Found me. Down here in this dark dungeon.

And refreshed me. Even an apostle needs to be refreshed. And Onesiphorus was like a breath of fresh air in a stale prison when everyone else was deserting. Onesiphorus was searching for him.

And he encouraged him with his very presence. But that was earlier during this Roman imprisonment. For now, he says in verse 11 of chapter 4, the last chapter in verse 4, 11.

Now, only Luke is with me. The beloved physician, Luke, the writer of the second gospel, the writer of the book of Acts.

He's still with Paul. Paul. Nearly everyone else has left. Some had gone to other places of ministry. Crescens had gone over to Galatia to minister there.

[41 : 53] Titus has gone to Dalmatia. He sent Tychicus over to Ephesus to help there. In other words, Paul's not hoarding his fellow workers to himself. He's sending them out for the good of the church.

And then this sad note about Demas, a much-loved fellow laborer, Demas. He's not gone off to labor in another field, but rather has deserted me because he loved this present world.

He valued the things of this world more than the kingdom of Christ and his gospel. So, except for Luke, Paul is alone.

No wonder he says in verse 9, chapter 4, do your best to come to me quickly. Why he says in chapter 1 and verse 9, I long to see you. I long to see you.

Do you know even the Lord Jesus longed for human friends to be near him as he faced his final hour. He's in Gethsemane and he's facing the cross and he wants his disciples near him.

[42 : 57] Stay with me. Watch and pray while I go just a little further. He wants them near him. That's nothing sinful.

God made us for society. God made us for friendship. That's what the body of Christ is all about. Paul is no angel. He's no disembodied. He longs for human fellowship and he's now nearly alone. And so he's asking, come as fast as you can. And he says, when you come, bring John Mark. Let me just pause to say this, that not only were we made for human friendship, but Jesus Christ knows what it feels to be without it.

He's been there. His disciples all forsook him and fled. And in some ways, Paul's end is like his Lord's. Are you alone? Is your heart long for friendship?

And you don't have what you would like? Jesus knows. Jesus understands. And Paul can say, though they all forsook me, the Lord stood with me.

[44 : 06] Ah, there's help. There's help. The Lord stood with me. So when you come, come quickly. And when you come, bring John Mark along because he's helpful to me.

And when you come, bring my cloak because it's damp in this dungeon and winter's coming and my poor body with poor circulation needs more warmth. Bring my cloak. I left it there in Troas.

And my scrolls too, especially the parchments. Probably the scriptures and the sayings of Christ that were written down. And this is not a young man that's preparing for a lifetime of ministry and so he's searching the scriptures.

I want to be prepared. No, this is a man who knows he's just about out of this world. And he still wants the books and the parchments. It's like an old race horse.

The longer he runs, the thirstier he is. Thirsty to know Christ. And where do you get to know Christ? In the scriptures.

[45 : 11] Bring the script. Bring the parchments. Bring the books. He's studying right up to the end. There's more of Christ to know than what I've come to know.

I want to know Christ. He can write to the Philippians from his first imprisonment. And he can write from his second and last imprisonment. Bring the books. I still want to know Christ.

Do you? Are you still reading an older person? Are you committed to getting to know Christ better and better? Paul was not in doubt about what was going to happen to him.

He knows his execution was drawing near. He speaks of it in two pictures in chapter 4 and verse 6. He says, I'm already being poured out like a drink offering and the time of my departure has come. Two pictures of the end for Paul. I'm being poured out like a drink offering. That was the final act in the entire sacrificial ceremony of the old covenant.

[46 : 13] Many things to be done but the last thing to be done was to pour out the drink offering. And Paul says, that's where I'm at. My entire life has been presented to God as a living sacrifice but I'm down to the end and I'm now ready to be poured out.

Having glorified God in death it was now his to glorify him or in life it was now his to glorify him in death in this final sacrificial act. And the other picture not only being poured out like a drink offering. The other is my departure. The time has come for my departure for my loosing. It's taken from the life of a sailor. It's what they did when they had docked in a port and what do you do when you bring the ship in?

You put those huge ropes around something solid and you fasten it there so that the tides and the wind and the waves don't take it off. But when it's time to leave you you loosen the ropes. And Paul is saying the time has come for the loosening of my ropes.

It's all that has held me here. It's time to loosen them because I'm headed to another harbor. It's time for my departure to that heavenly shore.

[47 : 30] So I fought the good fight past tense. It's over. He knows it's over. I have finished the race. I've run the last leg. It's over. I have kept the faith past tense.

Now there is in store for me as he's looking what's next for me? The crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will give to me on that day and not only to me but to all those also have

who have longed for his coming.

His faith is steadfast to the end. His eye is fixed on his Savior and his confidence is sure. And so he says in 418 the Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom to him be glory forever and ever.

Amen. He's going to get me all the way home to the harbor of the kingdom of heaven. So here's a man who's ready to die isn't he? He's quite ready to be loosed to be poured out.

I wonder if you are. Are you ready to die? You know if you're not ready to die you're not fit to live. A man is only free to live as we were meant to live when we know for sure that Jesus has paid for our sins on Calvary and I am not a guilty man anymore.

[48 : 51] I'm forgiven. I'm his. Well then I'm freed you see to live for him which is what I was meant to do. Are you ready to die? If you had to come to your last hour and were staring into the jaws of death and execution could you have this confidence that Paul has about the next step where what's next for you?

Oh the crown of righteousness everlasting life kingdom of heaven forever and ever with my king. You say not yet.

I wouldn't be ready for that if it was today. Friend you'll never be ready until you belong to Jesus Christ and he has taken your sins away washed clean so that there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Cry out to him for mercy. That's the gospel that Paul spent his life preaching. Call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved. Put your trust in this Savior and no one else and in nothing else so that when it comes your time to die you will have nothing to do but die and fall into the arms the kind arms of Jesus.

That's what we see here. We don't know if Timothy ever made it to Paul in time or not. Come quickly Timothy.

[50 : 12] Did he make it? Tradition says we don't know but tradition says that Paul was beheaded in 67 AD about three miles outside of Rome on the Ostian Way and indeed as a Roman citizen he would be exempt from the lowest form of execution being crucifixion which means he would have been beheaded.

whenever it was the day finally dawned when they brought Paul out and he would have been stripped to the waist and knelt over a short pillar that he would be securely tied to and then the executioner would lift his two-handed sword to behead him.

What's he thinking of now? What's he thinking of in these last moments? I think his letters at least point us in the direction don't they?

For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's gain. We're confident I say and would prefer to be away from the body and to be home with the Lord.

And I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[51 : 42] And now we see through a glass darkly but then face to face face to face and in a moment in a twinkling of an eye Paul was home at last face to face with the Lord Jesus whom he had persecuted and sought to extinguish his church face to face with him who was the same Lord who had gone to the cross and died for his sins all of them and had risen for Paul and was reigning for Paul and was helping Paul all through his ministry the same Lord that he served for so many years pounding out the miles to preach the gospel yes that that savior face to face with him fellow believer that's going to happen to you one day face to face let that be a spur in your side to be faithful in your service to him all the way home there was a

Roman emperor I can't give you the dates I didn't look it up but he he was Julian the apostate I believe and he he had professed some kind of faith in Christianity and then he abandoned his profession and with a vengeance persecuted the Christians and he was struck in war and had a mortal wound and he's riding his horse and he knows he's face to face with death and as he's riding for his last few moments he grabs hold of some of his own blood and throws it heavenward and says thou has conquered oh Nazarene I've been fighting against you and you have conquered I'm lost I'm undone I face an eternity without you what a difference is the apostle Paul who at the end of his life can look up and know that you're my savior who suffered all that I deserve for what I did against you and now I'm

I'm waiting for you to give to me the crown of righteousness that which you have won for me and it gives him such confidence in his his last moments well may the Lord strengthen our confidence in

the Lord Jesus as we stand this morning and we look at another soldier of Christ who's gone before us and know that the same savior that he trusted in is our savior by grace 437 a worthy song for life and a worthy song for the time of death 437 are these words yours could these be your words as you face your last end let's stand and sing them if they are your testimony if they're not cry out for the Lord to save you even as we sing we thank you father for a servant like Paul one who had sinned high sins against heaven and yet goes out of this world with such confidence that the crown of righteousness was awaiting him from that very savior he rebelled against where where do we find such confidence only in the Lord Jesus your son so we thank you for him and all of his work that he's done on behalf of us poor sinners don't let us get to our final day full of regrets for having done so little for this one who has done so much for us but help us to feel something of that prod of his love compelling us to no longer live for ourselves but to go on living every day every moment that you give us breath for him we ask this help we ask this strength and we ask for him to be glorified in Jesus name amen