

I'll Never Walk Alone

II Timothy 4:9-22

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now turn with me to II Timothy, chapter four, and we'll be reading from the ninth verse through to the end of the chapter. This will bring to a conclusion this series of sermons on the Pastoral Epistles, and as you were told a little earlier this morning, it is Dr. Duncan's aim to move after this to the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Before we read the passage together, let's come before God in prayer.

Once again, O Lord, we bow in Your presence. We acknowledge that this is Your word. We are utterly dependent on it for every aspect of our live, and of our existence. We need You to come, Holy Spirit, and to grant us illumination, that that which we read might also be to our profit; that we might read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Hear the word of God, beginning at the ninth verse of II Timothy, chapter four.

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth; but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Amen. And may God add His blessing to the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

These are Paul's very last words.

You remember at the end of Colossians and Ephesians, Paul is in prison. He's under house arrest in Rome. He is expecting a trial—a trial that he expects to occur very shortly. He asks, you remember, for prayer; he expresses a desire that he might visit the brethren in Macedonia and in Asia once again. Those letters were written around the year 60 A.D. Tradition has it that Paul was executed later, following the fires of Rome in A.D. 64. Tradition therefore says that Paul was actually released from that imprisonment that we've been reading of in Ephesians and Colossians, and at the end of The Acts of the Apostles, and no doubt went on some more missionary work. We're not clear where he went. Perhaps, as we shall see in a minute, he passed through Troas once again.

He was evidently rearrested and brought this time not to house arrest in Rome, but brought to a prison—a prison evidently that was difficult to find. Onesiphorus has to take great pains to find the Apostle Paul. (Some of you were name-dropping in between services and saying that it was probably the Marmetine Prison, and that you had been there. Well, I will be there in two weeks, God willing, so there!)

If indeed it was that prison, it was a dungeon, it was a cave; there would probably be a hole in the roof from which the prisoner would be let down. It would be almost impossible for anyone now to come and visit him, and therefore the circumstances in which the Apostle Paul now finds himself are probably very grim.

The fires of Rome occurred in A.D. 64. Nero wasn't there; he was at Antium, what we now call Anzio. He made his way back in a hurry. He engaged in some relief work for the city. Gossip was that Nero had actually begun these fires because of the craze of an emperor to want to rebuild the central part of the city. A fire would accomplish some of that end. Nero needed someone to blame for the fires: Christians were the ones that he blamed. Christians were probably saying things like 'This is the judgment of God.' Some were perhaps saying 'This is the evidence that the end is in fact near.'

And Nero began his conflagration of the city, arresting Christians, having some of them dressed in fresh animal skins daubed with blood and sent into the amphitheaters with wild dogs, and maybe lions. Others were set alight as human torches to provide light in the entrance points to the city at night. Paul was not dealt with in that way, because Paul was a Roman citizen. Tradition has it that Paul would be taken out of this prison and he would be executed in the Roman

way; that is, he would be decapitated.

Tradition also says that Peter was executed on the same day. That's unlikely to be true, although it probably was in and around that period. It is unlikely that Peter was in the same prison as Paul; otherwise Paul would have mentioned him. Peter was not a Roman citizen: he was therefore crucified; and by his own request, according to tradition, he was crucified upside down.

Now Paul is expressing his final words before his execution, and four things come to the surface by way of four requests...or, three requests and one assertion that Paul makes in these closing verses: A request for human company; a request for warm clothing; a request for books (which rings in my heart!); and an assertion of the presence of His Lord. Let's look at them in that order.

The first is the request for human company. It's not the typical portrait of Paul. You might think of Paul as somewhat aloof. I certainly think Paul was a difficult man to get on with...he was one of those people who always thought he was right! Evidence the disagreement with John Mark; evidence somewhat of the disagreement with Barnabas and Peter. It's a beautiful thing that Paul now seems to have made up with John Mark, and we'll get to that in a moment, but it is wonderful to see in these closing verses how important other people are, and how important other Christians are to the Apostle Paul. Paul has evidently had some visitors...whether they would have been able to come right down to him in this prison cell is difficult to say, but he mentions some of them. Maybe these are members, of course, of the church in Rome. He mentions Eubulus and Pudens and Linus. Shortly after Paul and Peter were martyred, Linus...there was a Linus...who became the Bishop of Rome. Rome assumed an enormous amount of importance once Jerusalem fell (somewhat four, five years now into the future, as Paul is writing). Once Jerusalem had fallen, then Rome would automatically assume a greater importance, and therefore this Linus character from the church of Rome is a significant person.

He mentions one woman, a woman by the name of Claudia. And then, "all the brethren" from the church in Rome are sending their greetings to Timothy. Timothy is, of course, in Ephesus.

Now, unlike the first time that Paul was under house arrest in Rome, the conditions now are probably very dire. He mentions earlier on in the epistle—you remember how Onesiphorus had made great pains to try and find him—and that he wasn't afraid of Paul's chains (a reference to the fact that associating yourself with the Apostle Paul in this prison could probably get you locked up, and could probably incur your death).

He says that he misses four people in particular: Demas, Crescens, Titus, and Tychicus.

Demas was a fellow worker of the Apostle Paul. He's mentioned in Colossians and in Philemon, but he has fallen in love with the present world. Perhaps the threat of persecution and death was too much for Demas, and he has gone. It pains the Apostle Paul. Bishop Ryle says of Demas that 'he was smitten with cowardice in that region of terror.'

Two others have left him, but not in any way like Demas. Crescens is not named elsewhere, but he has gone to Galatia, and Titus, who's now finished his work in Crete, has gone to Dalmatia, which is on the Adriatic Coast.

And then, Tychicus has been sent to Ephesus. If Timothy is going to come from Ephesus to Rome, which is Paul's request, then he's sending Tychicus to take charge of things in Ephesus once Timothy is gone.

Paul is lonely, and he wants Timothy to come to him. Luke is evidently there. "Do your best to come to me quickly," he says in verse 9. And then in verse 21 he says, "Do your best to come to me before winter, and bring John Mark with you." Now, that's a beautiful thing, because by all accounts Paul and John Mark had not hit it off. There had been a disagreement between them. Paul was deeply let down by John Mark when John Mark, on the Island of Cyprus on that first missionary journey, went home instead of going on with Paul. You remember that when it came to the second missionary journey, Paul did not want to take John Mark with him, and if it hadn't been for Barnabas, 'the son of encouragement,' if it hadn't been for Barnabas, who knows what would have happened to John Mark. But now at the end of Paul's life, that rift—whoever's fault it was—that rift has been healed. There's a lesson! There's a lesson! That rift has been healed, and he says to Timothy, 'Come before winter, and bring John Mark with you, because I want to see him just one more time.'

Armand Walker was a student in the Jefferson Medical College, and he heard a very famous sermon on this passage preached by Dr. Clarence McCartney, and the text was "Do thy diligence to come before winter, and bring John Mark with you." And the text lingered in his mind as he walked home that Sunday afternoon, and after lunch he said to himself, "I had better write a letter now to my mother. Perhaps the winter of death is near her." Evidently there were things he needed to say to her. Perhaps there was an apology that he needed to express to her. And so he sat down and he wrote his letter. Two days later he was in class, and a telegram comes. And it's his mother, and she is gravely ill. And when he gets to his mother, he says...hurriedly he went to the country where his mother was still living, and he says a smile of recognition and satisfaction was on her face, and under her pillow lay a treasured possession: the loving letter her son had written after the Sunday service. It cheered and comforted her as she entered the valley of the shadow of death.

Many of us (and I'm certainly one of them) have regrets when loved ones have

died and we haven't been there. We haven't been able to say those last things we wanted to say. What an opportunity this afternoon perhaps, to write that letter to someone in your family...to someone perhaps with whom you've had disagreements...before winter comes, before it's too late to write that little word and do what Paul is desirous here...to see John Mark once again before it is too late....Paul's desire for human company.

Secondly, his desire for warm clothes. Isn't that a strange thing? That the Apostle Paul, amongst his dying words, would say 'Bring me that overcoat.' He's in this prison...it's cold. Those of you who have been to the Marmetine Prison in Rome (and you can imagine it even if you haven't been there)...in an underground cavern of some kind where there's no sunlight, it's probably very damp and very cold; the kind of chill, you know, that gets right into the bones, and once it gets in there, it doesn't get out. And Paul, even though he has expressed in this very chapter that he has finished the course and that he is ready, as it were, to go to his heavenly Father, yet he just may last through another winter.

Evidently some trial has already taken place. He tells us that he has been delivered from the lion (and he's not speaking of the amphitheater, he's probably speaking of the Emperor Nero). He's been brought, probably, before some magistrate in the first round of trials that would take place; and his conclusion from that evidently is that he is a condemned man and that he really has no future in this world, but he just may last through another winter. 'And Timothy...Timothy, if you're going to be able to come and see me before winter if possible, when you pass through Troas....' Was that the place that Paul was finally arrested and brought again to Rome?...because that's where he left his cloak...it would have been a poncho, circular with a hole in the middle that you put round your head, and it would be made of a material that would keep you warm in winter. What does that say to us?

Doesn't it say to us how practical a man the Apostle Paul is? Here is this man who has written half the New Testament, this man who writes on doctrines that thousands and thousands and thousands of books in RTS library are unable to fully explain, this man who has traveled all around the world, and he's concerned about a coat? An overcoat? It's saying that true godliness and true spirituality has a practical dimension to it.

You're thinking of going on a mission trip? Then pack some Tylenol™! Put some Imodium™ in there! Don't drink the water! Christianity is practical.

And then a third thing: books! I can hear seminary students and would-be ministers and others just ring with this: "Bring the books, and especially the parchments." Isn't that an extraordinary thing? The Apostle Paul is in the Marmetine Prison; he may well be chained to soldiers; the conditions are probably disgusting; his life is almost certainly now at an end; there is probably very little light; his ability to read and study and write would almost certainly be

curtailed, and he is concerned about books, or parchments—and codices...that is, a collection of papyrus sheets with a cover, rather than a scroll. What were these? What did they contain?

Some have conjectured that they might have been Greek philosophers...I hardly think so. Some have conjectured — artsy types have thought that Paul might be in need of books and poetry...I don't think so. Some have conjectured that it was probably the Greek Old Testament that he wanted. And if Paul hadn't had time to bring that with him when he was finally arrested, certainly that would be one of the things that the Apostle Paul wants: the Greek Old Testament.

But he'd also want those notebooks, those parchments in which there might well have been half-written letters, notes that he had written on union with Christ and the doctrine of the resurrection...all kinds of sayings of Jesus that had been passed down by oral tradition, and he had scribbled them on this papyrus. Bring them to me, he says.

Listen to Spurgeon...a very famous sermon of Charles Haddon Spurgeon on this text:

Even an apostle must read. Some of our very ultra-Calvinistic brethren think that a minister who reads books and studies his sermons 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 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 bones'—"Oh, that is the preacher!" How rebuked are they by the Apostle. He is inspired, and yet he wants books. He has been preaching at least for thirty years, and yet he wants books. He has seen the Lord, and yet he wants books. He's 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, and 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 thyself unto reading."

Well, there's a fourth thing that the apostle alludes to in these closing words. Not just his desire for good friends to be with him; not just a desire for warm clothes to keep him warm in winter; not just the desire for good reading and writing materials; but he gives a glowing testimony to the divine presence that sustains him.

He mentions first of all Alexander the coppersmith, a metalworker who did him much harm, and he warns Timothy about him. The Greek word can well mean 'the accuser', and it may well have been this man Alexander who betrayed him to the Roman authorities...a Judas-like figure, then...and he warns Timothy of him.

He probably lives in Troas, and Timothy is going to go through Troas to get the cloak. But you notice what he says: “The Lord stood by me” (vs. 17); and again in vs. 18, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil....”; and then in the closing benediction he says, “The Lord be with your spirit.”

Here is the Apostle Paul, and he's in this terrible, terrible condition. He's in this prison, this dungeon beneath the streets of Rome. He's going to be executed shortly, and what is the source of all his comfort? What is the source of all of his reassurance? “The Lord is with me.” No matter how dark, and no matter how difficult, no matter how trying the circumstances may be, ‘The Lord is with me, and He will be with you,’ he says.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? As we think this morning, we're not in Paul's condition, to be sure. Many of you dear people have trials and tribulations. Many a cloud has descended upon your hearts, and the reassurance that is yours in the midst of the unfolding providence of God is the same as it was for the Apostle Paul: that the Lord is with you; that He will strengthen you; that He will enable you just as He had enabled the Apostle Paul at that first trial to give a good account of himself, and so further the kingdom of God; just as the Apostle Paul desires books so that he might be once more useful in the kingdom of God by the strength of God and the reassurance of the presence of God.

And with some words of greeting to friends in Ephesus — Priscilla and Aquila — and some instructions to Timothy about certain folks: Erastus, who stayed in Corinth; and Trophimus...and note that...Trophimus whom he has left behind sick in Miletus; (now, there's the death-knell to the ‘health and wealth’ gospellers: that the Apostle Paul could not heal Trophimus, but had to leave him behind in Miletus); Paul brings his epistle to a close with the words of a benediction: “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

And my friends, that's the reassurance that means everything to us who know Jesus Christ this morning: that the Lord is with us, and that the grace of God can enable us to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think.

Let's sing to God's praise from hymn No. 384, [*Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing*].

Now receive the Lord's benediction.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

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