

## 9. Learning How to Be Strengthened in Testing

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to finish well. In order for this to happen in our own lives and the lives of our children, we must make the choice to finish well by asking the Lord to give us His strength moment by moment throughout the remainder of our lives. As we yield to the Lord moment by moment, He will give us His strength to finish well. In our topic today, we will see how the Lord worked in the life of Paul to strengthen him right up to the time of his death. We can learn many lessons from his life for our own lives and for the lives of our children.

In 2 Timothy 4:9-13 we read, “Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica--Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come--and the books, especially the parchments.” In these verses, we see that Paul was going through a final period of testing before his death. During this time of testing, Paul wanted very much to see Timothy for one last time. As a result, he asked Timothy to do his best to come to him quickly.

We see that one of the tests that Paul faced was the fact that one of his close co-workers had deserted him. Demas is mentioned in Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24 as one of the companions with Paul when he wrote those two letters. Here we see that he had deserted Paul and gone to Thessalonica. The word that is translated “deserted” means *to totally abandon or forsake*. It is the word that Christ used on the cross in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 where we read, “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” At the very time that Paul faced death, Demas had chosen to totally forsake him. The reason for this abandonment is also given. We see that Demas loved this present world. The word translated “love” here is the same word Christ used to describe His love for us. It is also the word Christ used in the new commandment.

Paul had sent his other companions to minister in other places. Crescens had gone to the region of Galatia. Titus had been sent to Dalmatia. Tychicus had been sent to Ephesus. As a result, the only person that was still with him, in Rome where he was a prisoner, was Luke. Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark with him, because he said that Mark would be helpful to him in his ministry. At a much earlier time, Paul and Barnabas had divided into two different teams because of Mark. Acts 15:37-39 says, “Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.” Now Paul had come to realize that Mark would be a great help to him during these last few months as he faced death. We can thank the Lord for men like Barnabas who gave Mark a second opportunity and helped him to grow spiritually.

Paul asked Timothy to bring three things with him when he came. First, Paul wanted him to bring the cloak (a heavy coat to protect a person in cold weather and it was also used as a blanket).

Second, Paul wanted Timothy to bring the books. The books were probably his personal copies of books (scrolls) of Old Testament books. Third, Paul wanted Timothy to bring the parchments. The word translated “parchments” was the word that described animal skins that had been prepared so that important things could be written on them. As a result, they were very expensive. Paul used parchments to write the various books that he wrote to the churches.

In 2 Timothy 4:14-15 we read, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.” Here, we see that Alexander had done much to hinder the work of Paul. 1 Timothy 1:19-20 says, “Having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” Here, we see that Alexander had been opposing Paul already at the time Paul had written his first letter to Timothy. Paul knew that the Lord would be the One who would judge Alexander. However, Paul warned Timothy to watch out for him because he had set himself against Paul and Timothy and really opposed them.

Paul went on to speak about his first defense before the Roman leaders. 2 Timothy 4:16-18 says, “At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom. To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen!” Here, we see how the Roman courts worked. They had a first hearing to decide whether there was evidence for which a person could be brought to trial. That was the first defense. If the hearing decided that there was enough evidence for a trial, then the second defense was the trial.

At the first appearance Paul made in the Roman court, we see that no one stood with Paul. The word that is translated “stood with” is only used one other time in the New Testament. Luke 23:48 says, “And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.” Here, the word is translated “came together”. In this verse, the crowd came to see Christ as He hung on the cross but none of the crowd stood with Christ. Just as Demas had forsaken Paul in verse ten, we see that everyone forsook Paul at the time of the first court appearance of Paul. Here, we see what can happen even to Christians when they are controlled by fear.

Christ told Peter in Luke 22:31-32, “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.’” Here, Christ warned Peter that although he would forsake and deny Christ that night Christ had already prayed for him. We see that Paul followed the example of Christ and prayed for the Christians that had forsaken him at his first court appearance.

However, Paul realized that he was not alone even though the Christians had avoided that first court appearance because of fear. Paul said that the Lord did three things for him. First, the Lord

stood with him. Hebrews 13:5-6 says, “*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’* So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” Paul knew that the Lord had stood with him as he made that court appearance.

Second, the Lord strengthened him. The word that is translated “strengthened” is also used in Philippians 4:13 where we read, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Here, we see that the Lord gave him the strength so that the message of the Gospel could be explained fully through Paul to the Roman judges at the first court appearance. The Lord had told Paul several years earlier in Acts 23:11, “But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.’” The Lord had told Ananias many years earlier in Acts 9:15-16, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.’” It was the plan of God for Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles and the Lord fully carried out His plan for the life of Paul.

Third, the Lord delivered Paul out of the mouth of the lion. Here, we see that Paul explained the real source of the opposition against him and the Gospel. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” Paul knew that he had experienced the presence of the Lord as he faced the opposition of Satan. He also knew that the Lord would continue to deliver him and preserve him for eternal life.

Paul also sent greetings to several Christians and from several Christians as he concluded his letter. 2 Timothy 4:19-22 says, “Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick. Do your utmost to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, as well as Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brethren. The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.” Here, we see that Paul used each letter that he wrote to build stronger relationships between the Christians in different areas. In the same way, we want to help Christians build good relationships with Christians in other areas.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how Paul knew that the Lord strengthened him during this time of testing that came during the last few months of his life. We can know that the Lord will also give us strength as we face testing. We want our children to understand that the Lord will also give them His strength as they go through times of testing in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to learn how to be strengthened during times of testing.