

Never Alone • 2 Timothy 4:16-18

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Setting The Scene*

1. The sound of the wooden beam that bars the door to Paul's prison cell being lifted out of its slot disturbs the apostle's prayer.
2. Slowly the door creaks open as the jailor steps in and motions him it's time to go.
3. Paul stands up and the jailor hands him a large ring of iron keys.
4. He finds the one that fits the chain secured to his ankle and turns the lock.
5. Handing the keys back to the jailor, he follows him out of the cell and down the narrow passageway toward the main room of the prison.
6. There he's met by 4 Romans soldiers – Praetorian guards from the palace.
7. They will escort him to the first phase of his trial for treason against the Empire.
8. The detachment with Paul in tow winds its way through the labyrinth that is the streets of Rome until it arrives at the courthouse.
9. The trial has been widely publicized and the gallery is full of spectators.
10. As a leader of the hated sect of *Christians*, Paul is well known and there are many who are anxious to see him convicted and put to death.

B. *Disappointment*

1. During this first phase, the charges against him will be read and Paul will have a chance to defend himself
 - a. the prosecutor will make accusations, and whatever evidence there is against him will be presented
 - b. Paul's defense will be character witnesses who will describe what kind of a person he is and what kind of life he's lived that refute the charges
 - c. the success of Paul's defense rests solely in the number and strength of these witnesses

2. Knowing this, it's with great disappointment we read the words of v. 16 . . .

II. TEXT

A. V. 16

16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

***** no one stood with me, but all forsook me.**

1. These words shake us to the core because of who we know Paul is
2. He is the great apostle to the Gentiles, the man who almost single-handedly took the gospel out of the districts of the middle east and spread it throughout Asia and Europe
3. This is the man who so eloquently expresses the Gospel of Grace and penned a good part of the NT!
4. How is it, that when it all comes down to the end, he is left *alone* – forsaken by his friends and those he's been a spiritual father to for years?
5. We know when Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, Luke and a man named Onesiphorus were with him.
6. But they had arrived *after* Paul's first hearing.
7. When it came to that crucial moment in the trial when the judge called for Paul to answer the charges and present his case, Paul had merely stood up and used the opportunity to preach the gospel once more.
 - a. if he was going to be executed for preaching, then he wanted to make sure everyone knew what it was he preached
 - b. but as for witnesses, as for those who could come to his defense and give testimony on what kind of a man Paul was and how his life and message had effected great change for the good – not a soul could be found.
 - c. they'd all fled – less the Imperial eye of suspicion fall on them and they be caught up in the purge of Christians that was even then sweeping Rome.
 - d. no one – not one of the leaders of the Roman church, would stand up and speak out in Paul's defense.
8. How lonely Paul must have felt – how betrayed!
9. He had spent the last decade of his life enduring hardship,

persecution, poverty, and all kinds of pains, both emotional and physical, for the sake of others – that they might hear the gospel and grow in the grace of God.

10. Listen to what he tells the Corinthians he had endured . . .

24 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26 *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;

27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

11. Paul had lived his life in the service of the Lord by serving others and counted every hardship small compared to the gift of love and life he had received from the Lord.

12. This man, who had lived so faithfully for others, when his moment of trial came, *literally*, was forsaken by all – all but One.

13. But notice Paul's attitude toward all those who *could* have stood with him but didn't.

May it not be charged against them.

14. There's a very good chance that from a purely human perspective, these potential witnesses held Paul's life in their hands.

a. a dozen people whose lives had been dramatically turned around by the message he preached could have come and given their testimony

b. some of the Roman officials Paul had won to faith could have spoken out

- c. their testimony would have gone far indeed
 - d. Paul knows this and while he's certainly disappointed, he's not *bitter* or *resentful*.
15. On the contrary, he's generous and forgiving – just as Jesus was from the cross when He looked down at those who had just placed Him there and prayed, “Father, forgive, they know not what they do.”
 16. Paul remembers the words of Stephen, the first martyr of the church, over whose stoning Paul had presided.
 - a. as his life was pouring out of his body
 - b. Stephen said, “Lord, do not lay this to their account.”
 17. Now it's Paul's turn to face death, and as he does, he shows himself to be a man who has truly understood grace and forgiveness by *being* gracious and forgiving.

B. V. 17

17 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. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

1. While everyone else had forsaken Paul, there was One who stood with him and never left his side – Jesus!
2. Three times prior to this the Lord had come to Paul and offered Him comfort.
 - a. when distressed over the heated opposition he was facing at Corinth the Lord appeared to Paul and told him to take courage. [Acts 18]
 - b. in Jerusalem after being beaten up by the Jewish mob in the temple and arrested by the Roman guard, Jesus appeared to him and told him to take courage and that he was being sent to Rome to bear witness of Christ to kings and those in authority. [Acts 23]
 - c. then, on the way to Rome, the ship he was on was caught in a fierce storm and it looked like all would perish. Again, the Lord stood by his side and told him they would be safe. [Acts 27]
3. As Paul stood before that Roman tribunal, with Nero in all

- likelihood being a part of the panel, he knew he was not alone.
4. Jesus stood there with him!
 5. Paul may not have people there to be witnesses for *him* – But *he* would be a witness for Christ!
 6. The Apostle understood that this was not really a case to determine *his* fate; his future had already been sealed in eternity through his faith in Christ.
 7. It wasn't *Paul* who was on trial here – it was the men who constituted that Roman court.
 8. And their fate would be determined by their reaction, not to the evidence of witnesses for Paul, but by their reaction to the evidence Paul brought through the gospel and his witness for Christ.
 9. I love the picture Paul paints in v. 17
 - a. see the Roman tribunal sitting there on a raised dais
 - b. the other three sides of the room - a gallery packed with spectators
 - c. in the center of the room is an open area in which a lone figure stands
 - d. it is Paul, and out of respect he is facing the judges with a posture of humility
 - e. but his back is straight, his head is high and his eyes are clear
 - f. his hands are stretched out, not with a pointing finger of intimidation; trying to scare the judges with the fear that if they touch him they will know God's wrath
 - g. but his hands are outstretched in the posture of pleading, not for mercy for himself, but that they may cast *themselves* on the mercy *of God* and receive His gift of grace through faith in Jesus.
 - h. I like what Warren Wiersbe says,
“What a man Paul is! His friends *forsake* him, and he prays that God will forgive them. His enemies *try* him, and he looks for opportunities to tell them how to be saved! What a difference it makes when the Holy Spirit controls your life.”

17 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. Also I was delivered

out of the mouth of the lion.

10. You have to admire Paul's boldness
 - a. why was he arrested and why did he now stand before this court?
 - b. for preaching the gospel!
 - c. so what does he do when on trial for preaching the gospel?
 - d. he preaches the gospel!
11. And why did he preach the gospel, knowing that this is the very thing that in these men's eyes would condemn him?
12. BECAUSE JESUS STOOD WITH HIM AND STRENGTHENED HIM!
13. Paul knew the many promises of God to His people, that He will not forsake them
 - a. Hebrews 13:5-6

5 God Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

6 So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

- b. Matthew 28:19-20

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- 1) this is precisely what Paul had done his whole life since his conversion
 - 2) he went everywhere making disciples
 - 3) and now that he stood in Rome before this court, he was still doing it -
 - 4) trusting Jesus was doing just what He said He would do – being there to strengthen him.
- c. Deuteronomy 31:6

6 Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor

be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”

d. Psalm 37:39-40

39 The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble.

40 And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, And save them, Because they trust in Him.

14. In Matthew 10, Jesus told the disciples what they were to do when they stood in just such a place as Paul now stood . . .

19 When they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;

20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

15. As Paul looks back now on his first trial, he can see clearly how the Lord stood with him and gave him strength to preach the gospel.

16. His head had been in the proverbial lion’s mouth at that trial – but the lion never bit!

17. The Lord rescued him just as He’d rescued Daniel.

18. By lion, Paul means the *imperial power of Rome*

a. in scripture, the lion is often a figure for the power of the king

b. to be delivered from the lion’s mouth means to be rescued from the hostility and opposition of the throne

19. Though Paul had brought no witnesses in his defense, and though he had actually *confirmed* the charges against him by preaching, the Roman authorities were reluctant to pass an instant guilty verdict.

20. That would await the second phase of the trial in which the actual sentence would be carried out

21. Paul knew full well what the sentence would be – death!

22. Still, he writes . . .

C. V. 18

18 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!

1. By delivery from 'every evil work' Paul doesn't mean that he will be saved from execution.
2. In v. 6 of this chapter he's already said that he knows his blood will be shed and he will offer himself to the Lord as a sacrifice.
3. Paul doesn't see his death as an evil thing – it's a holy sacrifice.
4. He's lived as a living sacrifice, now he has the privilege of taking it all the way.
5. By 'evil work' Paul means the attempt of the enemy to shake Paul's faith and throw him a curve at the last minute that would cause Paul to deny the Lord and chicken out.
6. Paul is far more apprehensive of his own weakness than he is of the executioner's blade.
7. But he is totally confident of the Lord's ability to stand with him and give him the grace and strength he needs to resist the devil and endure the ordeal before him.
8. So he says with confidence –

the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom

9. Just as Paul had lived boldly for the Kingdom of God *on earth*, now he would cross the line between this earth and heaven and enter the Kingdom of God in glory.
10. He ends with this triumphant cry!

To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen!

D. No Victim

1. This is the real end of the letter
2. Vs. 19-22 are a postscript of greetings to various people in Ephesus.
3. V. 18 is Paul real last words

To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen!

4. Tell me, are these the words of a victim or a victor?

5. Is this a cry of defeat or a triumphant victory shout?
6. Paul never saw himself as a *victim*.
 - a. even when all forsook him and he stood alone, he rested securely in the promise and presence of God
 - b. when arrested and hauled before the highest court in the world of that day for treason, *still* he was no victim
 - c. he was doing what the highest Judge of all had called and commanded him to do.
 - d. and he knew that whatever sentence that court in Rome passed would ultimately be part of the plan of God for his life.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Victims or Victors*

1. Paul was no victim and he would never let his thinking run there
2. All that happened to him he knew had one of two goals . . .
 - a. either to make him more like Jesus
 - b. or to advance the kingdom of God among the lost
3. So Paul is utterly *victorious!*
4. Notice the title he gives to God in vs. 16-18;
 - a. twice he calls Him, “Lord.”
 - b. Master!
5. Paul is so submitted to the Lord that he commits *everything* into his hand, including his very life!
6. Paul is a servant, and a servant cannot be a victim because a servant’s task is to serve in whatever capacity his or her master requires.
7. As the servant of the Lord, Paul is confident that all he’s been called to endure is part of his service – so he is no victim and he never questions the Lord’s wisdom, power, or presence.
8. He is far more concerned with his own careful attention to the Lord’s work than his own defense or rights.
9. That is a servant! And as a servant, Paul only wants to be faithful.
10. Because that was his heart’s desire, the Lord empowered him to live faithfully
11. And now Paul looks to the ending of his hardships and his entrance into rest in heaven.

B. *Your Trial*

1. I don't know what trial you are enduring, what hardship you find yourself in the midst of
2. But whatever it is, I doubt that it is as difficult or as potentially lonely as what Paul was enduring when he penned these words.
3. Let his example encourage you.
4. Let the truths that supported him in his time of need, come now to your aid and strengthen you.
5. You are NEVER ALONE!
 - a. no matter how dark the night or deep the water – God is there
 - b. no matter how hot the fiery trial that tests you – God is there
 - c. He is there with you as He was with Shadrach, Mesheck, and Abed-Nego in the furnace
 - d. just as he was there with Paul at his trial
6. Let the words of Isaiah 43:1-2 be like a staff in your hand upon which you can lean your weight

1 Thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You are Mine.

2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

7. Wrap the words of Isaiah 41:10-13 around you like a warm, comforting blanket that will keep at bay the icy chill of doubt

10 Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

11 “Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; They shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish.

12 You shall seek them and not find them—Those who contended with you. Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a nonexistent thing.

13 For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'

8. When we throw ourselves a pity-party and start seeing ourselves as victims, we have effectively denied the love and sovereignty of God.
9. My friend – you are never alone!
10. Where ever you are, God is there
11. Whatever is happening, He is at your side to give you strength to endure.
12. And all things are working together for your good!

C. Pray!

Psalm 139

- 1 O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.
- 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.
- 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 For *there is* not a word on my tongue, *But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
- 5 You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.
- 6 *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot *attain* it.
- 7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?
- 8 If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*.
- 9 *If* I take the wings of the morning, *And* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me;
- 12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light *are* both alike *to You*.

- 13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb.
- 14 I will praise You, for ● I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well.
- 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
- 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When *as yet there were* none of them.
- 17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!
- 18 *If* I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You.