

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/13/92
II Timothy 4:16-22 "Dealing With the Pain of Loneliness"

Intro:

Illust: Back in July, while on vacation with my family, I spent a couple of days in Kent, Ohio, the home of Kent State University. It was there of course that 22 years ago, on May 4, 1970, 4 students were killed and 9 wounded by State Guardsmen during an anti-war protest on the campus. I wanted to see the spot where it happened. I wondered how the event would be preserved. After all, the tragedy was the result of rebellion. How would such an event be remembered?

We drove all over the campus the first evening, and saw nothing. The next morning, I jogged through the campus. I asked one person where the students had been killed. She didn't know. The second I found pointed me in the right direction. I came to a small hill, to a small wooded area. Here's what I saw: 4 large, unmarked granite memorial stones. The atmosphere was very solemn and serious. Next to the granite disks was a 22' plaza. In front of the plaza was a 48' bench. I looked carefully for an inscription, a message somewhere. What I eventually found struck me by its brevity. Etched in the plaza's stone threshold were 3 words: "Inquire, Learn, Reflect."

Most of us spend very little time in reflection. We reflect too little.

Illust: Sociologist Tony Campollo referred to a survey of 50 people over the age of 95. They were asked the question, "If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently?" Three dominant answers: Reflect more. Risk more. Do more things that would live on after we were dead."

This morning, we will return for the last time to a letter written by a man who knew how to reflect on the meaning of life. When Paul wrote II Timothy, he was within weeks, if not days, of his death.

For over 30 years, Paul had served God and his fellow man by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. He had traveled literally thousands of miles throughout the known world of his day. He impacted hundreds, even thousands of people. He had led multitudes to Jesus Christ. He had disciplined scores of people.

But listen. When Paul came to the end of his life, he was alone. Alone!

Loneliness is a painful condition. Have you ever been lonely? Perhaps you are now.

Q: How do you deal with the pain of loneliness?

Proposition: Paul's final words of testimony in II Timothy 4:16-22 offer us a practical model for how to deal with the pain of loneliness.

I. Paul's Reflection (16-18)

A. The Pain of Loneliness (16)

B. The Presence of the Lord (17-18)

1. The Past (17)

2. The Future (18)

II. Paul's Requests (19-22)

The entire letter of II Tim is strikingly personal. General Paul gave the final marching orders to Lieutenant Timothy. 4 key instructions:

Ch 1 Protect the Gospel. (1:13)

Ch 2 Preserve the Gospel--How? Be a leader. And train leaders. (2:1-2)

Ch 3 Persevere in the Gospel. (3:14)

Ch 4 Preach the Gospel. (4:2)

Now we've come to the final words of a faithful man. You know often, you save the best for last. When you conclude a letter, your final words are the ones you want to stick with your reader.

Notice what Paul did as he concluded...

I. Paul's Reflection (16-18)

Paul reflected. He certainly had the time for reflection! And he certainly had much about which he could reflect!

Q: Like what? About what did Paul reflect in vv 16-18? Two things...

A. The Pain of Loneliness (16)

V 16 "At my first defense no man stood with me..."

Did you sense the pain of loneliness in those words? Do you feel the personal rejection Paul felt? Can you relate to his awareness of isolation?

Q: When did this happen to Paul? At his "first defense."

Q: When was that?

Remember, Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome for the sake of the gospel. The first time is described in the end of Acts. During his first Roman imprisonment, Paul was under house arrest, and had limited freedom. He wrote the prison epistles like Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Then around 7 years later, Paul was arrested again. This time he was chained in a Roman dungeon.

Some suggest that Paul's "first defense" refers to that first imprisonment. I don't think so. Tim already knew all about that.

You need to know the legal procedures in the Roman empire. Before the actual trial, there were preliminary hearings. At such hearings, it was common to hear the testimony of advocates for the accused person.

Now watch this. Paul had been arrested. His preliminary hearing date was set. The opportunity was given for friends to come and testify in his defense.

Guess who came? NOONE!

V 16 "At my first defense, no man stood with me, but all forsook me."

You say, "Why didn't anyone come to help Paul? After all he'd done!"

1. People wanted to "keep their noses clean." After all, it's not good P.R. to be associated with a felon!

Problem: We're influenced too often by what people may think, instead of what God wants! (eg--parents influencing children to pursue careers that make lots of money, instead of serving Christ)

2. It was dangerous to be a Christian in AD 67. Remember Emperor Nero burnt down half the city of Rome just 3 years earlier, and blamed the Christians. He made Christians scapegoats, and even tortured them.

Whatever the reason, noone showed up in Paul's behalf. Just think of that. Many people today say Paul is their favorite Bible character. God used him to help many, many people in his day, and since. But when HE needed help, when he needed a witness to stand by him in the Roman court, not one could be found.

Paul knew firsthand the pain of Loneliness.

Illust: Do you remember the tragic story of Kitty Genovese?...

Q: What attitude did Paul have towards the people that let him down? Was he bitter? Vengeful? Vindictive?

A: V 16b "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."

Do you know who Paul sounds like with those words?

1. Stephen--Acts 7:60 "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."
2. Christ--Lk 23:34 "Father forgive them for they know not what..."

Application: I'm talking to some here today who have been wounded deeply in the past. Perhaps a parent let you down when you needed him/her the most. Perhaps a spouse wounded you. Right now you are in bondage to your hatred. You're obsessed by the pain of rejection. What must you do? What Paul did. Turn the matter over to God--"I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."

You say, "I can't do that! It's too hard."

Q: How did Paul do it? What was the secret to his ministry?

A: V 17 reveals it.

V 17 "Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me..."

Paul reflected. First on the pain of his loneliness. Second on the...

B. The Presence of the Lord (17-18)

What was Paul's secret? His secret is profound by its simplicity. Paul admitted he was totally DEPENDENT on the strength of God. Not partially, but totally. Not sometimes, but always.

What did Jesus say in Jn 15:5 "Without Me you can do NOTHING."

Write this down...

Quote: H. Hendricks, "When I try, I fail. When I trust, He succeeds."

Think about that. Friends, I believe this with all my heart.

**The Christian life is not difficult. It's impossible.

The Christian life is not natural. It is supernatural. We can't overcome the pain of loneliness or any other problem on our own strength. We need divine help! And it is available through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Illust:

I want you to notice what the presence of the Lord meant to Paul in 2 senses:

1. The Past (17)

Notice the strong contrast--"notwithstanding." People let Paul down. People hurt Paul. So how did he cope with that past pain? Notice 2 things:

--Notice the emphasis on "the Lord" in these final verses:

V 14 "the Lord reward him"

V 17 "the Lord stood with me"

V 18 "the Lord shall deliver me"

V 22 "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit."

--Notice the personal pronouns.

V 16 "At MY defense...with ME"

V 17 "The Lord stood with ME...strengthened ME...ME...I..."

V 18 "...ME..."

Here's the point. Let it sink in. Did you realize that the God of the universe, the Lord of all creation, the Almighty King delights in being personally involved in our lives! The God who is THERE is the God who is HERE! Think of what that means?!

Are you lonely? If so, the loving Lord of the Bible longs to dispel your loneliness. In fact, right now, He is personally involved in your life. He is in control. Do you know what He wants us to do? Trust Him!

Q: What did Paul say the Lord did for him in the past?

1. The Lord stood with me.

Men didn't. But God did.

2. The Lord strengthened me.

Ph 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

3. The Lord delivered me (note passive verb).

Observation: Not referring to execution by lion. Roman citizens were not executed in that manner, but by beheading. Referring perhaps to Satan (called a lion in I Pt 5). Probably used symbolically to refer to death (see Ps 22:21; Dan 6:22).

What a difference the presence of the Lord makes when we're experiencing the pain of loneliness! Men rejected Paul. But God stood by him. Men sought to execute Paul. But God delivered him.

Ps 16:8 "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand"

Ps 18:2 "I love thee O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

That's what God's presence meant to Paul in the past.

2. *The Future (18)*

V 18 "And the Lord SHALL deliver me..."

Two things Paul knew God's presence meant for him in the future:

1. He shall deliver me. (not that he would escape execution, but...)

2. He will preserve me...

Q: What does the presence of God mean practically?

A: That I am secure! Eternally secure! (Ph 1:6)

Poem: "If God Should Go on Strike"

Q: Why did God help Paul? Why does God invite us to trust Him?
A: So He can accomplish His purpose in and through us.
V 17 "that by me the preaching might be fully known..."
And then what happens? He receives the Glory He deserves.
V 18 "to Whom be glory."
Challenge: When we don't trust God, we rob Him of the glory due to Him.
Illust:

Tran: How do you deal with the pain of loneliness? Here's how Paul did it. He practiced the presence of God.

"Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim You, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord." Ps 89:15 (NIV)

Q: How practically does God fill the void of our loneliness? Look secondly at

II. Paul's Requests (19-22)

God uses people. We need people! Paul had been burnt by people, burnt badly. He could have thrown in the towel. He could have retreated into his fortress of isolation, never to be let down by people again. But he didn't.

I mentioned last week that Paul listed the names of nearly 20 people in the closing chapter of this letter. Some 100 people are mentioned in association with Paul in the NT. Right here we see 9 people--Prisca, Aquila, Onesiphorus' household, Erastus, Trophimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia.

With people in mind, notice Paul's requests. I see two...

A. Request for Himself

V 21 "Do thy diligence to come before winter..."

Come Timothy! Now Paul's either being redundant, or he was really in need! He already asked Tim to come to Rome in 4:9.

Why before winter? One, cold weather was coming and Paul needed the cloak he left at Troas (13). And two, because he knew if Tim didn't come before winter the sailing conditions on the Adriatic Sea would prevent him from traveling until the following Spring. And that would be too late.

Paul wanted Tim to come ASAP. Why?

1:4 "that I may be filled with joy"

B. Request for Others

V 19 "Greet..."

V 20 "Erastus I left..."

This week, while listening to CDR radio, I heard Chuck Swindoll mention a book by John Powell. Powell says there are 5 levels of communication. Tragically, most people never get past the first level ...

5. Cliche'--How's it going? How are you? {not that we care!}
4. Report Facts--Were'd you go on vacation? What do you do at work?
3. Ideas and Judgments--What do you think about discipling children?

2. Feelings--How did you feel when you found out your daughter preg?
1. Peak, Intimate Communication--Absolute Openness

Most of us, men in particular, live at the cliché level, or perhaps the reporting of facts level. Our relationships are shallow, hollow. Our communication is surfacy and trivial.

Listen. As Christians, we have the capacity for meaningful relationships. We have the ability to cultivate Christ-honoring, fulfilling relationships. Paul did. I'm not talking about relationships where we GET, but where we can GIVE too.

Illust:

Notice Paul's final request. In fact his last recorded words...
V 22 "The Lord Jesus be with thy spirit..."

- a. A request for Timothy ("thy"--singular)

Q: What in the world could Paul give Timothy that could help him? He had no money. He had no phone. All he could do was write. What could he possibly give to Tim?

A: He could give Tim the TRUTH. He could remind Tim of God's eternal truth. That's what he did--v 22 "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit."

Tim's greatest need was internal, spiritual. He needed fortitude, wisdom, power, courage. In his spirit.

Listen. The Lord's presence gave Tim all of this! But not just Tim...

- b. A request for all Christians

V 22 "Grace be with YOU."

"you"--is plural. Paul intended the Christians in Ephesus where Tim ministered to read and benefit from this letter. Though Paul wrote this letter 2000 years ago to Tim, we can benefit from it today.

What's available to us? "Grace"--God's unmerited favor and provision

These are the last recorded words of the apostle Paul. What fitting words. "Grace be with you." We could not be saved apart from Grace (Eph 2:8). We could never live the Christian life apart from grace (II Pt 3:18). We could never serve God apart from Grace (Eph 3:7).

But Grace is available to us. Abundant grace. Amazing grace. There is grace that can enable us to overcome the pain of loneliness. Grace that can restore a broken relationship. Grace that can give us peace of mind. Grace through Jesus Christ.

Illust:

I want you to stop right now and reflect. Reflect on your life.

Quote: "Only one life, twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."