The Epistle of 2nd Timothy

Chapter 4

We now come to the closing of this letter. Paul has been exhorting his disciple and loving companion Timothy, a young man Paul has nurtured since Timothy’s childhood, to carry on the work Paul has started. As we have studied these past few weeks, Paul is in the Mamertine prison in Rome for the second time at Emperor Nero’s orders, and this time he is not getting off. So, with his impending execution, recognizing that time is of the essence, sends off his, probably last letter (That we know of) to Timothy, in almost a plea to pick up the mantle of ministry and carry it on in Paul’s place.

Friends, I must add a note here, for the scholar who seriously studies the Scriptures. Did Paul write these letters? Many modern scholars seem to need to refute the Pauline authorship, mainly because of the content not matching earlier writings, or style of writing. How silly, Paul is old, Paul is in the Mamertine, in real chains this time, and Paul’s reason for this letter is much different than the other letters. Sure, writing styles and content are different. And again, as with all of Scripture, these letters are truly God Breathed. It could be, Paul’s faithful companion Luke was with him and could have acted as Amanuenses or secretary, and actually penned them as Paul dictated them. But most learned scholars to accept that these letters, and this one in particular, were from Paul and were his actual words.

Now as we finish up this letter, we must always keep in mind the conditions surrounding the Church and the believers. We must also keep in mind the dangers the Church leadership faced from not just the Romans and Jews, but the many heathen religions that surrounded them, and for many who came out of these religions, being tempted to return to them as hardships prevailed over them. Also as happens today, to many teachers begin to overthink a subject and begin to inject personal thoughts and their own clarifications of puzzling facts which in turn begins to change the message slowly over the years. Remember what the Pharisees had done over the hundreds of years to the Law in trying to ‘clarify’ areas of Law. This is a problem Paul had faced, and frankly too many purported scholars today, in seeking to ‘iron out the wrinkles’ wind up burning the shirt.

Let’s begin today’s lesson:

A] 2 Timothy 4: 1 through 5; (read)

1] “*I charge you therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearance and His Kingdom:”*

This is what I might call a deathbed ordination. Paul is ending this letter and the impending doom settles over Paul, knowing he, himself, will never preach, teach, or evangelize to the people again, it is now up to others, and Timothy is as close to Paul in knowledge and understanding as anyone. Paul’s companion, Luke, is not an evangelist or teacher, but the doctor, historian and secretary. It is now all up to Timothy, and don’t you kind of get the feeling, Timothy might be the quiet, timid, introspective sort, and Paul between the two letters seems to need to light a fire under him once in a while.

This is the power ordination: made before God Almighty and before Jesus the Messiah, Son of God and judge of all, so this charge is made in the most austere of company. The Judge when He comes back and then Judge before the great Throne.

2] “*Preach the Word!!! Be ready in season and out of season! Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching.”*

As Paul is ending up, we also have been told that many have departed the ministry, mostly out of fear, but mainly out of a lack of faith, and the ones who are left have double the job to do. So we have the intensity to get this Gospel of salvation OUT NOW!!! I added the exclamation points to the text, because it was so important. Be ready, Timothy be ready “24/7” to witness this Good News to all who will listen, time is fleeting, get busy. Are you getting the urgency in Paul’s tone?

I get it, that there is no central administrating with Paul imprisoned and we can rule out his ever coming back, so Timmy Please stand up, take charge, set the example in preaching and teaching that others can follow, and be most convincing when you do speak. Be the Fuller Brush salesman, of your day (reference to Billy Graham). The Church must accept the reality of preaching and teaching first and foremost, the whole of the gospel, and in preaching and teaching, must also live it, breath it, become it. This charge was for Timothy, but is also for us today.

3] “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;--”*

Tim you need to get busy now, because the time is coming when those who say they believe, or those who pretend to believe, will look for justification of their various prurient lifestyles and finding only condemnation of these sinful lifestyles and seek out teachers who will provide justification for what they are doing. The ‘itchy ears’ simply means they want to hear only what they want, and not truth in any form.

We are seeing that truth visibly in the church general today, where so many, for the sake of filling the pews and keeping the coffers flowing have brought the world into the church to make it popular. So many people think they don’t need to hear the words taught to them, but there are some who still yearn for the gospel to be taught.

4]--”*and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”*

What does happen is, as alien teachings are introduced into the Church, truth becomes altered into stories usually from the heathen religions, that they try to enter falsehood under the guise as truth. As history of the Church has shone, fables did come into the Church and as the Great Church fathers would gather at appointed times to see study and would publicly refute these fables, but once the little fly gets into the flour, some of the nits would be laid into the flour and the whole flour bin might be contaminated. Many Churches fell by the wayside because of the false fables that crept into the body and corrupted the work of the Holy Spirit. (Today, think Easter and Christmas)

5] “*But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.”*

What I also see is Paul presenting Timothy the ‘big picture’ so to speak. This is what I meant before when I talked about the administrative aspect of the ministry. Do you follow? Watch all things, see all of the ministry and all that needs to be done. He can’t just hone in on one aspect of the Christian ministry, he has to be involved in all different parts and this is where making disciples, using the talent he already has at his disposal, like the orchestra conductor cueing each instrument when to play its part. Part of the ministry of course is enduring the hardships of the ministry, whether disease, injury, or the attacks of the angry people for one reason or another.

B] 2 Timothy 4: 6 through 8; (read)

1] “*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.”*

Now we can feel some of the dread that comes over Paul, as I am sure he is not alone in that room, and as one by one, the sentence being cast, the condemned prisoners are taken out and if they are having their heads lopped off, he can hear the executioner drop the heavy blade and the thump of the head falling in to the basket, and the life blood pouring out onto the stone floor as the drink offering being poured over the sacrifice.---- I shudder myself at the picture presented.

2] “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

Now essentially, Paul is done, all he has left is to wait excruciatingly for the head-choppers call, but he consoles himself with the knowledge that he remained faithful to that call on the Damascus Road so many years ago, that he endured all the ridicule and naysayers, the stonings, beatings and whippings, the arrests, and shipwrecks, and now he is declaring himself finished, as he languishes chained to the stone seats in the Mamertine, and through all of this he has remained steadfast in the declaration of the Gospel of Salvation to all he encountered.

3] “*Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

Here is the one major consolation Paul has, as he sees the ending of this life, but he also see the new life he finally will have with Christ in His heaven with the victors crown, that crown of righteousness presented to him by that Righteous Judge, as opposed to the unrighteous judge who condemned him to death. And I believe Paul is stating this directly at Timothy as an encouragement, that Timothy is to take heart, because this is what the Christian movement is all about.

So, Timothy, don’t fear and don’t be sad, as Paul will be going to his reward, and one day you, Timothy, will join him and that righteous judge will indeed present you with the victor’s crown. Even today as those righteous church pastors and leaders maintain their convictions through the gospel of Jesus Christ, and will at their appointed time, be moving on to the hope God has promised, are there any Timothys out there to take their place?

C] 2 Timothy 4: 9 through 16; (read)

1] “*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.*

I do find it interesting that Paul wants Timothy to drop everything he is doing and report to Paul in prison, figuring that by the time Timothy gets this letter and makes the arrangements to go to Rome with whatever entourage is needed to go and at the same time, even with all the encouragement Paul has given, knowing that this prison is a deathtrap, and who in his right mind knowing full well Nero’s hatred of the Christian movement would even think of entering it. We can see the folks who are deserting the movement, Demas, Crescens, Titus, to name a few. Titus we already know of, a few years previous Paul had written to him which we will study later, so he was a very crucial part if the ministry. But sometimes when the pot of water gets hot, the frog can’t stand the heat and jumps out of the pot

2] “*Only Luke is with me, get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus”*

What I glean from this, the execution was not eminent, and Paul did have some time, so he is hoping Timothy can gather up at least Mark, and travel from the Asia Minor area all the way to Rome a distance about 1300 + miles either by boat by caravan, and it could take from a couple of weeks by boat to a month or so by caravan. And where would Mark have been? How much time would it have taken to find Mark? Therefore, with Luke ministering to him, and having sent Tychicus out to Ephesus, then where do you suppose Timothy was? And frankly, how does the courier go about finding someone in that vast land?

3] “*Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come; and the books, especially the parchments.”*

This then, brings in a new dimension, where Timothy has to make a variety of stops, one to collect Mark wherever he is, then stop at Troas and pick up a cloak left at a friend’s, and also pick up Paul’s personal library and bring this along. I sure hope Paul can last that long. I can’t imagine Paul, chained in the bloody floored Mamertine, wanting his reading material to get all soiled and stained, but he wants and so he gets.

Apparently, we are in the fall of the year, and winter approaches, and If Paul is to survive the bitter cold of a stone room in the winters in Rome, he will need his cloak and I glean from this, the Roman authorities do grant him some ‘luxuries.’ And while he awaits the court judgement, he wants to console himself with his reading material, wouldn’t you?

4] “*Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works.”*

We possibly, first met Alexander in Ephesus, in Acts 19: 21 through 41, where the metal crafters union staged a riot against Paul and the others and we then read about him in 1 Timothy 1: 20. These metalcrafters made their living making idols and images of all the various gods in Ephesus, and this new Christian movement was actually teaching against these. It was going to cost them a lot money if this Christian movement rose up and put the other religions out of business, by ending their idol worship. At first Alexander tacitly defended Paul and his companions, by trying to quell the emotional movement. But as time went on he began talking against Paul and the Christian ‘Way’. What he actually did to Paul is never explained, was it mental or physical.

5] “*You also, must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.”*

I find that the scholars are all over the place regarding Alexander, some as Bishop Ellicott and others have suggested, Alexander was from Ephesus, but traveled to Rome to witness against Paul, and was headed back to Ephesus, and this could be the damage. Some suggest he was, besides being a skilled coppersmith, was also a skilled orator and spoke often against the Christians.

6] “*At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.”*

A little history is in the offing. July 19 64 AD, there was a great fire in Rome (This is the imagined fable of Nero Fiddling while Rome burned.) That playing the fiddle never happened, but you know how fables are. What was truth though, was there was a great fire in Rome, near Circus Maximus and according to historians, fires like this were not unusual however during this fire Nero decides to use the fire as a reason to accuse the Christians for igniting the trouble that culminated in the great fire, thus beginning the Christian purge.

At this time Paul had been released from his first Roman imprisonment and it is not sure where he went, But eventually he was found and rearrested in AD 67 (thereabouts) and following Roman court rules, was presented to the court’s chief magistrate, with probably Alexander as chief witness against him, but because any Christian seen in the streets was liable to arrest, the defense stayed out of sight, and Paul was all alone and summarily convicted. Do we see why so many of these new Christian preachers left the ministry at that point?

D] 2 Timothy 4: 17 and 18; (read)

1] “*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. And the Lord will deliver me from the very evil work and preserve me for His Heavenly Kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever amen.*

Well, now we get some hope, here. Paul was able to bring the whole of the Christian message as his defense, which was his absolute right as a Roman citizen, to the entire Roman court. He was alone, but in these few verses we see he was never alone, was he?

E] 2 Timothy 4: 19 through 22; (read)

1] “*Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.*

These are the general Pauline greetings, but note the household of Onesiphorus, because they need that special blessing as Onesiphorus is or was with Paul in Rome, and may not be at home with his family. We recognize Prisca and Aquila, Erastus is a new name and Trophimus being left at Miletus, tells me Paul may have been in Miletus when he was arrested or in a nearby town.

2] “*Do your utmost to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, as well as Prudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brethren. The Lord Jesus Christ be with you spirit . Grace be to you. Amen.*

It would be fun, someday, to write down all the names Paul mentions in all of his letters. But suffice it to say, there IS a gathering of believers around Paul but evidently not so close. And he ends the letter with a generous blessing.