

TO MY SON

An Expositional Study of II Timothy

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN -

ON REMAND

II Timothy 4:13-18

13 The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:

15 Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

16 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

17 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

LET me remind you that, after his release from his first Roman imprisonment, Paul enjoyed three or four years of freedom to enjoy again his peripatetic ministry in the Gospel, after which he was re-arrested - perhaps at Troas - and it is out from this second imprisonment that Timothy comes. There seems to be some kind of a break after verse 8 of our present chapter, and verse 9 bears a disjointed appearance.

Dr. Eugene Stock, in his *Plain Talks on the Pastoral Epistles*, p. 306, gives reason for his inclining to the view that, at the conclusion of his writing verse 8, Paul was taken off to his trial in the Emperor's Court. There he had unexpectedly secured an adjournment, and was returned to his prison on remand.

He had imagined that he was to be immediately sent to his death, and the verses he had just finished have the air of a final farewell; but now a further breathing space is afforded him and, with the customary postponements of the then legal procedure, who knows how long that may be: there may yet be time for him to get one last loving visit from dear Timothy - so, once again, he turns to complete his Letter, speaking after a different fashion from what he had at first intended. He urges Timothy, as we saw last Lecture, to come to him as quickly as possible, and meanwhile tells him something of what had happened in Court. We are to think, then, of our

present passage as dictated while on remand, and it will remind us of

THE RIGOUR OF HIS CALL

How very different are his present conditions from those of his former detention can be estimated by reading Acts 28:30-31.

That had been a lenient imprisonment; but now, in the Mammertine Prison, he is in the underground dungeon - damp, and dark, and dismal, and dirty, and dreadfully cold. So he asks that Timothy will bring him some things that would alleviate his distress, things that he had hurriedly left behind, when, perhaps, he had been suddenly arrested at Troas, and given no time even to collect a bit of luggage. I cannot otherwise account for Paul leaving "**the parchments**" behind, as we shall see presently.

These things were in the care of Carpus - a gentleman about whom we know practically nothing. Evidently he was a friend of Paul's, and that's good enough: anyone who was a friend of his is one whom I should be proud to know. I love his name; it means, Fruit: one of the many "fruits" of Paul's ministry, I suppose. By the way, have you, my reader, any fruits of our service for GOD? So, In the house of this friend and fruit of his, were these things that Paul longed to have.

Dean Farrar, in his great book on the Apostle Paul, calls attention to the interesting similarity in the life of William Tyndale, who from his prison at Vilvorden, In 1535, asked for some warmer clothing, and above all for his Hebrew Bible, and grammar and dictionary. Well, our apostle asks for:

(a) Something to warm his body - "**the cloke.**" It was perishing cold in that cell, especially with winter approaching, as verse 21 reminds us. The word meant a circular garment, sleeveless, with a hole in the middle for slipping it over the head, like a bicycle cape. It would be made of the black goat's hair that was so familiar. I wonder where the apostle bought it? Or - perhaps he made it himself? Remember that tents were made of this same material; and Paul was a tent maker. Anyhow, it had been a great comfort to him on his travels, and if only he could get it now, it would wonderfully palliate the rigour of his cell. Do you wonder that the Bible should find room for the mention of such an ordinary everyday thing as the need of a cloke?

Bishop Moule would answer you that "the GOD of Scripture has room in His heart for every detail of human life." All the little things of your life are an interest to Him; all the little needs you have are a concern to Him - so don't hesitate to bring them to Him in your prayers. It became the fashion, in certain high ecclesiastical circles, to say that this cloke was a eucharistic vestment like a chasuble, and that Paul needed it for ritualistic purposes! An astounding suggestion", says Dr. Plummer; and Bishop Bernard, "a perverse idea." Next, Paul wanted:

(b) Something to occupy his mind - "**the books.**" They would be papyrus rolls. I wonder what were the subjects, and who the author? It would be fascinating to know what books he had thus collected and so greatly valued. Professor David Smith says they were "probably memoranda of his own." I do not know what right he has to say "probably"; perhaps we may be allowed to soften it, and say "possibly."

Doubtless the apostle kept records of things, and people, and sayings, and events, and it would be a great refreshment to him to go over these reminiscences. Perhaps the idea of getting the books was to be able to read through them with Dr. Luke, and to bequeath them to him on his death. In that case, they would be of inestimable value to the good doctor and author when he was compiling his book of Acts of Apostles. We know from Luke 1:1-4 that, speaking of the human side of the matter, it was by using the work of other writers, etc., that he constructed his own histories. Then Paul asked for:

(c) Something to feed his soul - "**the parchments.**" I take it, they would be parts of the Scriptures, and that was why he "**especially**" wanted them. But are you not surprised that a man like Paul should leave his Bible behind like that? That is what inclines me to accept the idea that he was arrested at Troas - perhaps somewhere in the street, and given no permission even to call at his lodgings to collect his belongings. Bundled oft in that fashion, he had perforce to leave behind his warm overcoat, little library of books, and, what mattered "**especially**" - his Bible.

I can imagine how insistently he would impress upon us the importance of always having our Bible near at hand and what is more important still, of always living our lives near to our Bible! And now, as he continues to dictate his Letter, there rises up before his mind

THE FIGURE OF HIS ADVERSARY

"**Alexander, the coppersmith**" - or, as it should be, just "**the smith,**" whether copper, or other. That must put out of court the old churchwarden's joke on counting the collection with a preponderance of the cheapest coins, "**Alexander the coppersmith has done us much evil**".

It was a feeble joke, and called for a quick death; but, but - in any case - why make jokes out of Bible things? Surely there are plenty of other places to get them from, without desecrating holy ground. I do most seriously protest that we Christians should refrain ourselves from any sort of flippant treatment of GOD's Book. And, having got that off my mind, let me invite you to consider the figure of this sinister personality who proved to be Paul's antagonist in chief at this time.

First notice

(a) His position in the matter - "**did me much evil.**" On this, Mr. Shaw Caldecott, in his *Synthetic Studies in Scripture*, says, "It has been left to a learned Indian Judge to discover that, in the words translated ' . . . **did me much evil,**' we have an old legal formula of Roman times, the modern equivalent of which is, ' . . . laid the information against me'. "It was on the sworn information of this man that the case proceeded. I find that Conybeare and Howson explain that the phrase implies, " . . . charge me with much evil": the same thing as His Honour the Judge said. What a dreadful reputation to have on the page of history to have been the initiating cause of the arrest, and trial, and martyrdom of the grand apostle. May it be ours, on the contrary, to be the initiating cause of much blessing, and many lives saved.

The next point to be considered about Alexander Smith is:

(b) His peril for believers - "**of whom be thou ware also, for he hath greatly withstood our**

words." If you turn to I Timothy 1:20, you will read of "**Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.**" We have no evidence either way, but I have a very distinct suspicion that this is the same Alexander. It was, of course, a quite common name, and there may have been two persons; but it would so fit into things if they were the same.

At the time of that earlier passage, he has been falling into such grave sin that Paul has felt compelled to deliver his body into Satan's hands that his soul may be saved.

Hymenaeus, you remember, is mentioned in our 2:17; and now, as I think, it is Alexander his companion in iniquity. He has had to wait a year or so for his revenge; and, at the time of this (4:14), his chance has come to get his own back for evil. Circumstances have arisen which the tortuous, and iniquitous, mind of Alexander can twist into a charge against the apostle, and so an "information" is laid with the raw authorities. Moreover, if our conjecture be right, this man had been one of the Christian company; he would know what was done, what was said, what was thought; he could as easily trap the other Christians as he had trapped Paul - therefore "**of whom be thou ware also.**"

Such a "worrying" sheep would always be a danger; but he would be all the more dangerous because he was at one time numbered among the flock. None is so fierce an enemy as an erstwhile friend.

Look, however, at:

(c) His punishment by GOD - "**the Lord reward him according to his works.**" Does that sound vindictive? Are you surprised that such a man as Paul should talk like that?

Well, it all depends upon whether he is thinking of Alexander's damage as being done to himself, or to the cause. The Master Himself observed that distinction. When did He ever reproach men for their doing harm to Himself personally? When, in our present passage, Paul speaks of those who have hurt him, his tone is very different, as we shall see presently in verse 16. It is the hurt he has done to the Cause, which calls forth this prayer from the apostle's outraged soul.

Note Paul's reference to "**our words**", as if he were speaking and thinking collectively, not "my words," as if he were considering the matter individually and personally. But if I do not in this carry you with me, let me invite your attention to the fact that it is not a prayer for GOD to do it, but a statement that He will do it! Psalm 62:12 had said, "**Thou renderest to every man according to his work.**" Here, then, is the man who started all the trouble. Consider, in the last place:

THE VIGOUR OF HIS DEFENCE

"**At my first answer**", he says in verse 16 - that is, his first answer to the charge brought against him. His second answer will be made after his remand, when the case comes up for resumed hearing. The astonishing fact was that

(a) No one would undertake his defence.

(i) *Professional pleaders refused the case* - "**no man stood with me**," the verb is used in a technical, legal sense, as of what we should call Defending Counsel. I suppose they were afraid of getting mixed up in such a charge, and being tarred with the same brush; for I have no doubt that, as the Jewish leaders did in all these cases against the Christians, they preferred here an accusation of sedition and treason. Why, they even did that in the case of our Lord: recall the words in Luke 23:2, "**We found this Fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is . . . a king.**"

It was, of course, a trumped-up charge; but the Roman authorities would never have listened to the real trouble, the religious question. The same thing happened with Paul at Thessalonica, in Acts 17:7, "**these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.**" I should think that once again the apostle was the victim of this fraudulent behaviour, and that is why no lawyer could be found to help him.

Moreover, it seems to me that even:

(ii) *Witnesses absented themselves* - "**all men forsook me**", all those, that is, that should have been there to testify in his favour. Their evidence might have been of enormous assistance; but they let him down - for the same reason, I presume, that had weighed with the lawyers. The accused man felt their defection very keenly; of course he did. But, as bearing out what we said earlier, will you note his reaction - "**I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.**" No shadow of vengefulness is here, but sweet prayerfulness.

But, where have I heard like words before? Where has Paul heard like words before? Ah yes - it was more than thirty years ago that, as a young leader, he had presided at a Christian's execution, and, as the cruel stones crushed the life out of the sufferer, the grand martyr, Stephen, had prayed, "**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge**", Acts 7:60.

That scene was one of the smarting stabs that (Acts 9:5) pricked his conscience; and those words had remained in his memory ever since, and only now, after thirty long years, and faced with his own martyrdom, did he get his own back against Stephen for good, by praying the same prayer for those who despitefully used him and persecuted him. They both caught that lovely spirit from the Saviour. even as we get all of good from Him, when He asked, "**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do**," Luke 23:34.

So here Paul is in the old Roman court, left all alone; and:

(b) He conducted his own defence. Never an easy thing to do; sometimes a dangerous thing to do; but, in this instance, there was no help for it. How typical it was of Paul that in this

(i) *He saw an opportunity* - "**That by me the preaching might be fully known**", instead of the bits and extracts, and rumours, of what he had taught that may have reached them, he could now give them a full account of his message.

The Acts of the Apostles shows us how he took the opportunity that his various Trials afforded him of making his message fully known, telling of JESUS of Nazareth as the Lord of Glory

come down to earth, Who went about doing good, Whom they crucified, but GOD raised Him, and all who believe on Him shall receive remission of sins, and be filled with the HOLY GHOST. Paul's defence would be the strangest that ever they had heard: there was practically nothing about himself, it was all about his Lord. "**And that all the Gentiles might hear,**" that is, all the Gentiles there in that court. There was Nero, or if he were absent (as some think he was at this time away on Imperial business in Greece) there was Burrus, the Prefect of the city of Rome, who acted for the Emperor in his absence.

Then there were all the court officials, and besides them the general public who would crowd the place upon such an occasion. What a chance, thinks Paul, that all these shall have a full explanation of the saving message. Don't you think it would be well if, every day of our lives, we were very definitely, and very earnestly, to ask GOD to help us to see, and to seize, opportunities? Biography is one of my hobbies; and out of a fairly wide acquaintance with the lives of successful servants of GOD, and ardent soul-winners, I should say that, in every case, a great part of their secret was this Alertness to sudden opportunity.

What now was the upshot of Paul's action?

(ii) *He secured a Remand* - "**I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.**" That old lion who, according to 1 Peter 5:8, "**goeth about seeking whom he may devour,**" was for the moment robbed of his prey. Dr. Plummer says that "the deliverance does not mean release from prison following upon acquittal, but temporary rescue from imminent danger."

Paul would not, however, have us forget that:

(c) The Lord was his defence - "**Nevertheless, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.**" His unfailing Presence, and His upholding Power, were at Paul's disposal, though all else fail. He, and we, can always rely on that, however lonely and deserted we may feel. One is reminded of what the Master said in John 16:32 about Himself, "**ye . . . shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.**" Alone; and yet not alone! And, thank GOD, what was His comfort is our comfort too, and was Paul's.

The teacher in a Sunday-school class was explaining to her scholars the words "**I will never leave thee**", in Hebrews 13:5, when one of the boys, a sparkling little Irishman, suddenly interrupted, "I see, teacher, I see what it means. What it means is, that when there's only one of us, there's always two of us!" Very Irish? Yes; but very true, and very precious.

Have you ever had to go and do some difficult piece of work, to bear some definite witness, when you were all alone, and feeling it? There was only one of you. No; two! Paul was seemingly all alone in that court, but he wasn't really alone: he was one, the mighty One was the other. And, as someone once said, "One with GOD is a majority."

That was, of course, the real reason why he secured a Remand; and, with the assurance of faith, he adds, "**And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work**", the corollary of which is that anything we are not delivered from is not, in true perspective, evil. The very same thing that he was spared on Remand, happened to him at his re-trial, so that by then it had assumed something of good, according to his own testimony in Romans 8:28. He knows that his Lord will

"**preserve**" him until the good time comes for his translation to "**His heavenly kingdom.**"

To that Lord he would give "Glory"; and to His will he would say "**Amen.**" The scholars have remarked on the similarity of this verse to the words of the Lord's Prayer; and, inasmuch as the Gospels had not by this time been written, they draw the conclusion that the Prayer had been widely taught orally, and was familiar to those early believers; and that, in the longer version that Matthew subsequently gave us, with the doxology, 6:13.

Be that as it may, we would close by inviting you to join in Paul's "**Amen**" to that "beautiful sweet will, that wonderful grand will," that "Will that willest good alone", as Tersteegen's hymn describes it. How Paul would re-echo the line, as he goes back on remand, and as he subsequently returns to trial again, "Upon GOD's will I lay me down."

~ end of chapter 17 ~
