

COME BEFORE WINTER

2 Timothy 4

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2 Timothy 4:1–22 (NIV)

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and

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gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

The phrase that the Scripture uses of itself and which may be rightly used of Paul and also, God helping, of us: “It will accomplish the purpose for which it has been sent” (Isaiah 55:11). God brings His purposes to pass. As we come to this last letter which Paul wrote, written approximately 67 A.D., we find a man who has walked with the Lord for nearly thirty-five years. Thirty to thirty-five years of following Christ.

When Paul first came to the Lord it was revealed to Ananias, the man who laid hands on him that Saul (Paul) might be released of his blindness—Ananias was given the vision that God had chosen Paul in order that he might be God's messenger before Gentiles, before kings, and before his own chosen people. Then the Lord went on that He would show him “how much he must suffer for the sake of My name” (Acts 9:16).

Now Paul looks back, and that word which was spoken at the genesis of Paul's calling to be a Christian is coming to its hour of completion. If in the Scriptures one goes from Genesis to Revelation, so there is from Acts 9, the genesis of Paul's call, to 2 Timothy 4, the revelation, the completing of his work. At the beginning it is noted that Paul would bring the message before kings, before Gentiles, before Jews. He has completed that task except for one dimension. He has not yet himself stood personally before the emperor. Evidently, at the court of the highest

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tribunal, and it had been God's will that even Nero himself would hear the gospel. So Paul is now straining at the bit in order that his mission might be accomplished in life, the mission for which he had been sent. God had completed, was in the process of completing, that thing which He had begun.

As we open to these last words of Paul in 2 Timothy 4, we find some final things. A final charge to Timothy in the first five verses. A charge related to his preaching ministry and to his totality of ministry. There is also a final life review in verses 6–8. Indeed, in those three verses I think are some of the most deeply moving and inspiring verses in all of Scripture. There are some final requests which Paul gives in verses 9–18 and then there is a final greeting which he makes in verses 19–22.

I. Paul gives Timothy a final charge.

First, the final charge. “Charge” has been a popular word with Paul in these letters to Timothy. Also the companion letter to Titus. It can be used as a military term—charging someone to do something. Of course, we recognize that these five verses in 2 Timothy 4 are almost always used in ordaining persons into ministry. These are words, however, which apply not only to ordain a minister but, in a sense, to us all. Since we may legitimately be called, in our own right, ministers.

There is a solemnity to the charge. I think Paul here is conscious of the fact that now within days or weeks that the office which he has as an apostle is going to cease its early function and the faith is going to rest now in another generation. So he brings Timothy face-to-face with his most heavy responsibilities. Thus, the charge is not undertaken lightly. It is in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. And also the charge which is coming is to be reckoned with the fact that Jesus

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Christ himself, who will judge the living and the dead, will soon make His appearing and bring His final and eternal kingdom.

That word which is used here in the text in verse 1 for “his appearing” is the word “epiphany.” It could be used to describe in the Roman world what the task would be of someone who would be a forerunner to an emperor. There would be advance men from the emperor’s staff who would say, “The emperor is going to make an appearance!” and there would be much preparation for the emperor’s coming. Particularly if a person were directly responsible to him governmentally, he’d want at that point to be able to give a good account to the emperor of what he had done.

Jesus is seen as the Emperor and Lord of the universe who is soon to make an appearance, soon to judge the living and the dead. In light of that, a ministry must be conducted. A ministry which recognizes that time cannot be treated casually, that life does have an ending. But eternity also is imminent and is on the verge of breaking in. So, get ready for the king. In light of the person of Jesus Christ himself and the soon activity of bringing in His appearing and His kingdom, do these things. These are standing orders for the gospel. Standing orders for ministers of the gospel.

A. “Preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2). The word “preach” is one of those words that have suffered much in the English language. It has been used to describe, on some occasions, a particular kind of tonal accent so that we know for example when a person is preaching by the particular kind of singsong that he may adapt to his voice. As a person who does a lot of speaking, I know how easy it is to slip into that. So we sometimes identify preaching as that. Or preaching as a rousement. Or it is so easy also to think that preaching is simply the opinions of a man who is standing behind the pulpit.

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But the word has obviously a far deeper and more true and profound meaning than the ones I've just described. This word "preach" was in existence as a word in the Greek language before the Christian messengers ever came along. It was used to describe, for example, a town crier, or a town city official who would proclaim that a meeting was to take place. He announced a fact that was soon to come.

One of the beautiful pictures I like is that the word was also used to describe an imperial herald who was a spokesman for the emperor and proclaimed in a formal, grave and authoritative manner the things which must be listened to. The things which the emperor himself had spoken and must be declared. Preaching therefore is no less than declaring on behalf of God what God has said. That is the foundation of the Church. That is the foundation of the gospel. If we take preaching, the declaration of what God says to our lives, out of our fellowship, then we cease to be nothing but a social organization.

A high calling to preach. But not to preach one's opinions. But to preach the Word. I'm grateful that as a messenger of the gospel I do not need to rely on my own intelligence and insight to be able to stand up Sunday after Sunday and say, "Thus sayeth the Lord." But that there is the Book, the Word which gives us the pattern by which to live. The preacher has never the option of choosing his message. The message has chosen him. God has chosen me. God has chosen you to be heralds, proclaimers of His message. Preach the Word. Activity which must go on and continue until the Lord returns.

B. Not only is preaching of the Word preeminent, but also Timothy is told in regard to his verbal ministry to "be prepared in season and out of season" (verse 2). That simply means that Timothy is to be guarding against a ministry which is motivated by feelings. It's so easy to develop this. "I'll do this for the Lord if I feel like it." It may be a ministry within the church like teaching a

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Sunday School class or leading a group. It may be something regarding an ordained minister who says, “At a set time I do that, but on my off-hours you can’t expect me to do certain kinds of things.” But, rather, it’s to be ready at any moment as the opportunity may present itself or as the opportunity might not present itself. It should be urgent in season and out of season. It’s to be at the task—ready. And to be at that task even when persons may not care to listen or even when persons may listen. Be ready. Be instant.

C. A third word that is given to Timothy is that he must “convince” (verse 2, Amplified Bible) in his personal life and in his word and his doctrine. There is that convicting power of the Word. “To convince” means literally “to reprove or to correct.” The Word of God finds often areas in our life which are wrong. It is a faultfinder, in a good sense of the word, so that we may be corrected of what we are doing that is out of harmony with the Lord. And the task of the minister sometimes is to reprove.

D. “Rebuke” (verse 2) also is a task that is given to Timothy. That is taking reproof to a deeper level. It involved public censure of someone who had up to that time refused to change his ways. We see Paul in these letters giving public censure towards certain individuals. Like, for example, Demas. Or Alexander the coppersmith. Or Hymenaeus in the first letter. Persons who had wandered away from the faith, or swerved and made a shipwreck of their faith.

E. But the word also given to Timothy is “exhort” (verse 2) which means to encourage and help one along. That is also a function of ministry, to encourage.

F. All of these things —preach the word, be instant, to convince, to rebuke and to exhort—are to be done with a kind of patience and also teaching. Tools are needed in the administration of each of these responsibilities. Pastors, in a sense, are a combination of prophets and priests. Here is the task of a prophet where God speaks to man. Often that is such a troubling message because it

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really convicts us and shows us where we're wrong. Because the prophet sees more than anyone else the wrong, he can become so caught up in pointing out the wrong that he may not see the priestly function which is to represent the people to God and to ask God for His intercession and His mercy. I think somehow in the pastoral office comes those mediating principles of both prophetic and priestly responsibilities. Saying, "Thus says the Lord." But as a priest also we come to the Lord and say, "God have mercy upon us."

G. So correction, preaching, is to be done with great deal of patience. But also it's to be done with foundation of doctrine, which underlies it. The word for "teaching" is "doctrine" (verse 3). The reasons for this specific charge to Timothy in regard to the Word is that the time comes when persons will accumulate to themselves, literally accumulate in piles, teachers which they like. Who tell them what they want to hear, but not what they need to know and to understand. Itching ears. A delightful sensation in a message which is not troubling, a message which is not focused upon the Word, a message which is not focused upon the theme of convincing or rebuking. To come to the Lord Jesus Christ involves coming to Him and obeying also what He tells us to do.

If our response to the Word of God is such that we only want to respond to the things we like, and don't want to take the things we don't like, we're in real deep trouble.

There are two crucial steps in coming to the Lord. Very simple but very crucial, very life changing. One is the step of confession, where we confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. And we also confess our sins. But the other step is repentance. Repentance literally means to change our mind, to substitute God's judgment for our own judgment. It may be that the particular kind of thing that we like to do, that we know from God is clearly wrong. If we're to experience God's salvation and His mercy, we must change our mind. We must literally repent

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in order to be whole and to be saved. There is no such thing as an easy conversion. Because all of our conversion not only involves to genuinely confess. It means to genuinely change. The kind of teaching and the kind of preaching which does not emphasize that we must bring our sins to the foot of the cross and confess them and change is only a kind of teaching which is for itching ears. God help us to look within and find whether or not we follow a view and a way of life that is comfortable to us but does not demand that we change.

H. There is in Timothy's totality of ministry, in verse 5, some general admonitions. Always be steady. Literally the word is "sober." It means keep a tight grip on reality and responsibility. This theme, always be steady, be sober, is the kind of a person who can look at an impending crisis and hang with it. A calmness in the midst of danger and crisis.

Not only that, but endure suffering. And do the work of an evangelist. Paul is deathly afraid—for himself, I think, his own ministry, for Timothy and for us—that our Christian commitment should only be to one another. There is a responsibility beyond that. That is to win the lost. Win those who are without Christ. Whenever I or we as a church cease to be concerned with the evangelization of men and women who are without the Lord, then the death sentence has been written on our lives as effective servants of the Lord.

Evangelism may not be Timothy's forte. Someone has called him timid Timothy. I'm not sure that's exactly true, but he at least did not have the bombastic personality of Paul. But nevertheless, even in his pastoral responsibilities, he must emphasize that work of evangelism.

Another word, which has been a strong word to me, is "fulfill your ministry" (verse 5). That literally means to complete your task. All of us know how easy it is to begin things, but then midstream, lose interest. Paul is concerned that Timothy be this completing kind of a person.

He's concerned that we be this kind of a person. Complete what you're doing. You've started out

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to serve the Lord, and the going gets tough and you feel like dropping out. Fulfill the commitment! You've started a marriage with good intentions, but then there are crises and you don't know if you're going to fulfill the goal and dream you had for the marriage and you feel like dropping out. You can't! Fulfill the ministry God has called you to. If you're in a particular task the Lord has assigned you and you feel like turning back on it, no, fulfill what God has given to you.

Paul has a great concern for things that are begun but not finished. God help us to finish the things which we begin.

II. Paul offers a final review of his life and ministry.

In verses 6–8 there is a final review of the life of the apostle Paul. In verse 6 Paul looks to the present. In verse 7 he looks to the past. In verse 8, to the future. It's a time diagram of his life.

In looking to the present, he says this: "I am already at the point of being sacrificed. The time of my departure has come." "Point of sacrifice" is literally the point of being poured out as a libation. A libation was a term used to refer to a particular kind of sacrificial offering that was offered to the gods. For example, most Roman meals concluded with a cup of wine that was in honor of a god, and the wine was poured out as a drink offering or a libation in honor of the god. Pagan sacrifices and even the sacrifices in the Jewish temple had drink offerings in which the fruit of the vine would be lifted as an offering then poured out. Symbolizing the pouring out of life to a deity.

Paul is facing now as a condemned criminal a certain prospect of death. He knows that as a Roman citizen he cannot be crucified. It's against the law to crucify a Roman citizen. It's against the law also to put a Roman citizen in the coliseum to be eaten up by the lions or to face the gladiators. So Paul symbolically will say later, "I was delivered from the lion's mouth" (verse

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17). The method of execution probably facing the apostle Paul is decapitation. As he faces that prospect he is willing to think of himself as a sacrifice. He is, in effect, saying, “All my life has been poured out to God. So I am willing at the very end that my last blood should be poured out as well.”

One writer has said, ever since his conversion Paul has offered everything to God—his money, his scholarship, his strength, his time, the vigor of his body, the acuteness of his mind, the devotion of his passionate heart. Only life itself was left to offer. And gladly Paul was going to lay life down.

What a beautiful way to look at life. That life is poured out as an offering to God. If we have talents that can be poured out, fine. If when we have run out of talents we have only life itself to give then that itself can be something that can be looked forward to with hope rather than a grimace.

“The point of my departure is at hand. I’m ready to be poured out.” The time of departure is literally a loosening. It was used to describe a ship which hoisted anchor and began to sail away. It loosened its mooring and took off. It was used to describe someone who had a tent, a soldier, and the time had come to strike the tent so he loosened the tent cords. That word would be used to describe the tent.

Now Paul is saying, “My life, I detect the loosening. The ropes are being loosened, the anchor is being lifted. And I’m ready. My departure is at hand.” So he faces this time of impending death with just kind of a matter-of-factness and beauty to it.

He then moves to the past. In three statements he describes what his life has been. “I have fought the good fight.” A boxing allusion. And he had said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:12, “Fight the good fight of faith.” Now he’s able to say, “I have done it myself. I’ve never told you to do

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anything I have not done. Fight the good fight.” The word for “fight” is “agonize.” It literally could be translated, “I’ve agonized the agony.”

The gospel, Paul continued to see as a warfare. Now he recognized that his boxing days were over, spiritually speaking. He had kept going. He had finished. One needs a special stamina and training to keep going. Here again is this theme that Paul is indicating in this letter to Timothy: It’s easy to begin, but the important thing is to finish.

He then goes to a racing allusion, a footrace. “I have finished the race.” The running is over. He doesn’t say he won the race, although he certainly implied that. But “I have finished. I’ve lasted.”

I thought, as I looked at that, these things are true about the Christian life and about finishing the race. No one has ever finished who has escaped testing. You will never finish the race of your Christian life except you be tested. No one has ever finished the race who at some point in the race hasn’t felt like dropping out.

If you were to ask me, “When do you think the apostle Paul felt like dropping out?” I would probably take you to Acts 15 and 16 where Paul, at the beginning of the second missionary journey, has a falling out with his favorite person, Barnabas. He disagrees over John Mark. He sets out on his missionary journey, doesn’t appear to be getting anywhere. Walks with three companions four to six hundred miles. Doesn’t know where he’s going. I think that time of indecision and loss of direction would have been the time when Paul would have been most likely tempted to call it quits and throw in the towel.

I don’t think Paul felt like throwing in the towel when he was persecuted. The more you hit him, the more he sang. Put him in jail, feed him real bad, and in the middle of the night he’s praising God. He seemed to thrive on persecution. But disorient him, put him in a time when he doesn’t

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know where he's going, I think that's the kind of time that got him down. But he's able now to say, "I have finished. There was a time when I felt like dropping out, but I can't."

And "I have kept the faith." Paul is so concerned here about losing the faith. Faith here is seen as a trust that God has placed in us to transmit to other persons. He continually, in these letters, exhorted Timothy, keep the faith that has been given to him. But now he says, "I myself have kept it. The life of Christ and the teaching of Christ, I have kept within my own life."

Jim Elliott, martyr to the Auca Indians, said, "He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." He gave his life, but he got something more eternal in return.

God help us to sense the feeling and the need to know that when we're involved with the Lord Jesus Christ it is not only the greatest joy but it's also a great struggle. There are immense testings which come. But I want to be the kind of person who can say, "I have finished."

Paul then looks forward in verse 8 to the future. As he faces the prospect of decapitation he says, "They may physically take my head, but God has a crown for me nevertheless. The crown of righteousness." In the Bible there are two words that can be used for "crown." One of the words, "diadem," which is used of a king or a queen. A bejeweled type of a crown that signifies reigning and ruling authority. Another kind of crown that is used is a laurel wreath crown that is given to a runner of a race. It was a symbol of triumph and a job well one. That's the kind that Paul is talking about here. He's not asking for a governmental post in the Kingdom to come. He's simply saying there's a recognition that comes when you have finished the race. It's not only the recognition that I myself will enjoy. But it will be a recognition that all who have loved and looked forward to the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ will themselves experience.

Paul looks at the past, present and future. He's calm and confident as he faces these moments.

Great moments and a great testimony. I think that we know something about the Christian faith

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when we see how a Christian handles death and how a non-Christian handles death. There is such a serenity and calmness and boldness that comes in the face of that moment which we all must face, that is such a convicting witness of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. Paul makes some final requests and offers final greetings.

There are some final requests that Paul makes which show us basic needs of life, which we ourselves have continually. Paul is the kind of person who needs others. That's his first need. He wants company. So in verses 9–22 there are some seventeen different names of persons mentioned. People who are on his mind. People who have been good to him and people who have betrayed him. Demas has betrayed him. “Demas having loved this present world” (verse 10), Demas who was with him as a fellow worker when Paul was in prison, the first Roman imprisonment described in Colossians and Philemon, now this same Demas having loved the present world. We don't know if “loved the present world” means he totally turned away from Christ or simply turned away from the dangerous prospects of possible martyrdom in Rome and fled to Thessalonica where he might get out of the thick of the trouble. But, nevertheless, it was a loving of the world rather than a loving of the way of the Lord. Therefore Paul says, “I need you, Timothy. Come.”

Then he begins to recite what others of his co-workers were doing. We find as we go through the New Testament that Paul had kind of a portable seminary that traveled with him. The gospel must be caught as well as taught. He was letting people catch it by being around him. Crescens, we don't know anything about him. He either went to Galatia or Gaul. The text is uncertain at that point. Titus, fellow worker, was now ministering on the eastern side of the Adriatic across from Italy. Luke the physician—if he could only have one person with him, let it be Luke who could prescribe some of the things he might need to get through. Mark was needed. “Mark is useful to

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me. Bring him” (verse 11). That is a story in itself. The grace of this man to admit that he’d made a mistake. One of the finest attributes of the Christian person is to be able to say when they have erred, “I have erred.” And Paul erred in respect to Mark. Mark had been with him when Paul first took off on the first missionary journey. At the very outset of it Mark had evidently gotten scared and took off for home. The next time they want to go out, Barnabas says, “Let’s give Mark another chance.” Paul says, “No. We gave him one chance and he failed.” But there are those people in the body of Christ who were willing to take a second chance on people. If there weren’t, there wouldn’t be a lot of us here. So Barnabas, departing with his cousin John Mark, gave him a second chance. Now Paul is saying, “I remember Mark. I remember how he turned back. But I know how Mark has overcome that fear in his life.” It’s great to know that as a Christian you can grow and actually overcome your fears. Things you thought you’d never win the victory over, it’s possible to come out of and win. John Mark is an example of a person who overcame. His great fear was people and being persecuted for the faith and the unknown. But now he’s willing to walk into Rome in the midst of the worst unknown that there could be and be with Paul.

Paul goes on to indicate “Tychicus, I have sent to Ephesus” (verse 12). This is evidently a replacement for Timothy to let Timothy come and join him. This man had been the bearer of the Colossian and the Ephesian letters. Paul’s very concerned here about a man by the name of Alexander, the coppersmith. He could be one of three people. There was an Alexander in Acts 19 who had taken a stand against the gospel. There was an Alexander in 1 Timothy 1 who had been a Christian leader in the church, who’d rejected conscience to make a shipwreck of his faith. Which one of these, if any, that Paul is referring to we don’t know. But it’s evident that this person had done one of two things. Either he had been responsible for a great deal of trouble in

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the church through heretical teaching and living. Or he had been perhaps a prosecution witness against Paul at his first defense in Rome. And had caused great damage to Paul because of the incendiary things he had accused Paul of. But Paul, interestingly enough, did not let the opposition of Alexander nor the betrayal of Demas slow his faith or keep him from continuing strong ties with others.

Have you ever been hurt by anyone? If you've ever been severely, seriously hurt by another person you'll go through two temptations. One, to blame God and say, "Why did God let me go through this?" A second, not ever want to trust another human being in your life. We see how important it is that we not be swamped by that kind of thing, that we continue to have faith in the Lord and faith in others. Paul exemplifies this. I need others. I can't live the Christian life alone, and I don't believe you can live it alone. It gives me a great deal of comfort to think that if so great a man as the apostle Paul couldn't live the Christian life alone, he needed other people, then there's some hope for me.

Paul also needed something else. He needed the books. "Bring the books and the parchments." The books are literally those writings which are written on cheaper and perishable paper. The parchments were those documents or books which were written on vellum which were skins of animals, like sheep, goats, antelopes. The parchments were far more expensive. They didn't have printing presses and paper like we have today. Different substances were used. Generally the Old Testament Scriptures would be on the vellum or the more costly parchment. They were regarded as more valuable. This text recognizes that Paul had a portable library that he carried with him. When I read that verse it makes me realize that Paul had a deep intellectual quest. He regarded the feeding of his mind as an important discipline even as feeding his spirit and soul. Paul not only prayed, but he read. What this text reflects—"bring the books and the parchments"—I think

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it defeats several assumptions that I sometimes hear kicked around in the body of Christ. One, that the only reason for studying is some specific purpose. Utilitarian. For example, if you're a student you read the book because it's required in the course and you have to read it to pass the exam. Instead of just reading it for the sheer enjoyment of it. But I think Paul's ministry at this point has come to an end. He's not getting ready for sermons on Sundays. He's locked up. He doesn't need to read because he needs new material in order to get more stuff out. He wants to just because he has a deep thirst for knowledge.

This text also defeats the assumption that the more ignorant you are the more God can use you. Paul's life is a flat denial of that. I think if we'd be wise enough to look at the history of the church we'd find that there's denial of that. Certainly God uses men who are not formally schooled, as far as the world regards formal schooling. But He puts within them a divine training and a wisdom. Paul certainly shows that he would never have been regarded as an ignorant person.

Another assumption that this text defeats is that one should only read the Bible. Paul was reading books in addition to the Scripture. He was learning from them.

Another assumption that this text defeats is that the Bible grows old. It never grows old. Paul says, "I need to be nurtured by the Scriptures. Bring the parchments. I want to read again the holy Word. I want to read again the words that give me courage, that speak to me of God, that speak to me of my life. No matter how many times I've read them, no matter if I've memorized them all, I need the parchments. Bring them. The Word does not grow old."

Then a most touching need which Paul has. He needs physically as well. And Paul had a need physically. He said to Timothy, "Bring the cloak which I left with Carpus at Troas." The cloak indicates here that Paul is facing a time when he is impoverished. He does not have enough to

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supply simple, elemental, physical needs. Can you imagine the sort of bitterness potential that was possible for the apostle at this point in his life? Here he is in a prison, awaiting death, winter is coming. In the Mediterranean shipping is closed down in the winter months. Paul is concerned that Timothy get on a ship at Ephesus and get there before the sea-lanes close for the winter. And while he's on the way, get the cloak! The cloak was a circular, goat hair, thick substance which when one put it on it had a hole in the center and just draped over you and hung down to the floor. It was very warm. At the end of his life Paul did not have enough money to have someone buy one for him in Rome. But his own special cloak he wants. He implores Timothy, "Come before winter!" Signifying he needs it before the winter months (verse 21). Like a dying man who knows his time has come but he's not sure but he might get a few more months to live. If he's going to live let him at least live them with friends who can share with him his needs. Let him live it with some books to feed his mind. Let him at least keep warm. Simple needs.

The potential for being bitter. I would think that anybody who had ever served God that deserved a retirement plan was the apostle Paul. A guaranteed income of some kind. At the end of his life this man is kind of cast aside without any plan for his retirement. Not only that, but he's facing the loss of some people he'd been close to.

But does it get him down? No. Somehow the Lord stood by him and gave him strength. Which is a way of saying even though Paul is able to declare, "I finished the race," he never is saying, "I finished it by myself." Rather, "I needed the Lord. The Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the Word fully" (verse 17).

As I look back over this man's life I see that from his conversion to his first missionary journey, or his first relationships that impact us as Christians, was a period of fourteen years

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approximately. From the time he was saved until he began to really move out in areas where God can use him.

From the time of his first missionary journey until the writing of this letter it is twenty years. In twenty years' time Paul accomplished his major life work. It is a great thing to recognize that one's ministry might only be beginning at forty-five. That's when Paul's ministry actually began to get underway. At forty-five. I take enormous comfort from that. It's a tremendous thing to recognize in the midstream of life that one can be used of the Lord in dimensions never used before.

In our Christian lives, we get restless in the time of development. I think the most frustrating years of my life were the years as a student. But there is a time when we literally put the seed into the soil, a time of fermentation. Therefore, for those twenty years to be effective, Paul needed fourteen years as a Christian to get ready for them. In his life he demonstrates some things which are crucial. Paul could say something to us about the grace of God. He knew God's grace not simply as a theory but as a fact. He had killed Christians, he had persecuted Christ. The Lord had come to him and called him and saved him and then trusted him.

If someone has done something wrong to you and comes and asks for your forgiveness, because you're a big person you'd say, "I forgive." But it's quite another thing for a person to say, "I not only forgive you, but here are the keys to my house, my car, my office. And here is my checkbook. And take what I have to give you. I trust you as I'd trust myself." That's grace.

Paul experienced that. The great grace of God. An unbeatable combination. When the grace of God is coupled with our discipline, that is unbeatable. The Holy Spirit wants us to be both filled with the grace of God and filled with discipline so that those two lines in our lives can merge, and come together.

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May God help us to finish things which we have begun. I think of things I have begun and the Lord has spoken to me through this Scripture to finish. I feel that, as a church, as a whole, there are some things which we have begun that the Lord would have us finish. The time is at hand to stretch and continue the race. To not drop out but to go on and to finish the work that God has called us to.

Closing Prayer

I think, Lord, of the hymn writer who said, “Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease? While others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?” Forgive us, Lord, for asking that the way be easy when others have had it so hard. Forgive us for thinking that somehow You were forgetting us because one small thing went wrong, when we can look in others’ lives and see how much pressure and suffering and pain they went through and how they were sustained all day long by You. Lord, I pray for those in the body today who feel perhaps powerless. They feel like Paul, locked up in a prison. Maybe even, like Paul, wondering if their prayers are being answered. In that time when we’re shut up and we don’t see or feel our prayers are being answered, there’s a special need that we have for You to stand by us and give us courage and strength. I ask, Lord Jesus, that You would help us to sense and visualize Your presence standing right beside us giving us courage, holding us up, supporting us, sheltering us in Your arms. I pray, Lord Jesus, for us as people individually and as a body that You would help us to cut our goals sufficiently so that we could really do the things that we have begun. That we would not become lost in a lot of lost causes. That we would not become dissipated by trying to do so much that we do nothing. Help us, Lord, to finish what we began. Especially I pray for Christians here—believers who, having begun their walk with You, have faced moments of looking back, moments of recklessness, moments of combat. Lord, renew them by Your Spirit so

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that there's energy to stand. And Lord, the last lap of the race is always maybe the quickest. Because it's as we near the goal that we step up our pace. Lord, help us, quicken us to sense when the time for things is so that we may move in Your timing and do Your will in Your time. And that as we near the completion of those tasks You give to us we may with quickened pace complete rather than simply barely finishing them. Give us authority and power in Your name to do Your will and be people who bring pleasure to You and to one another. Give us grace and peace and mercy. We thank You that all these things are ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.