

Abandoned by Men, Strengthened by God

Call to Worship: Psalm 75
1st Scripture: Psalm 34
2nd Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:14-18

Hymn #681- *I Will Sing of My Redeemer*
Hymn Insert- *The Power of the Cross*
Hymn #579- *Be Still My Soul*

Introduction

As we have seen and noted throughout the course of this letter, Paul is imprisoned at Rome, and preparing to face His ultimate execution and martyrdom at some point in the not too distant future. He knows that this is the end of the road for him, and the sealing of his Apostolic ministry. The finish line is in view. He has fought the good fight, and he now prepares to enter into the joy of the Lord, where a crown of righteousness awaits him.

Before coming to the final greetings of his letter, Paul informs Timothy about some of the circumstances that have surrounded his preliminary trial and hearing, specifically concerning three responses which were triggered by it. The first response comes from the opposition, which had stood against and opposed Paul at the trial. The second response comes from Paul's allies, who had forsaken him and let him down, when he was called to give his initial defense. And the third and final response comes from Paul's God, who though invisible, alone stood with Paul throughout the hearing. For this morning, we will consider these three responses, as the main topic of our consideration.

I. Alexander the Coppersmith Opposes Paul (vs. 14-15)

“Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words” (vs. 14-15).

And so, here Paul warns Timothy about a man named, Alexander, who has opposed and done him harm at his preliminary hearing. And the implication here is that this man stood up and spoke against Paul, as an opposing witness, aiding to convince the Roman court of Paul's guilt and worthiness of condemnation for the alleged charges that have been brought against him. We know the harm done Paul, by Alexander, involved affirming accusations made against Paul at the trial, because in verse 16, Paul continues the thought by saying, “At my first defense no one

stood with me...etc.” And furthermore, Paul speaks of Alexander as “resisting” (or opposing) Paul’s (and his co-laborer’s) words. And so, Alexander had harmed Paul by deceptively and cunningly, bearing witness against Paul, at the preliminary hearing, as Paul’s accusers sought to convince the Roman court to bring Paul to trial, with the hope of seeing him found guilty and condemned. And the implication of Paul being harmed, and recognizing that his end is near, tells us that Alexander’s testimony had a significant impact on the decision at the preliminary trial, convincing the court that there was sufficient evidence to secure Paul’s guilt.

Now, it is also worthy of note that when Paul calls Alexander, “Alexander *the Coppersmith*,” the very clear implication is that Timothy knew who this man was. And when Paul cautions Timothy to beware of him, as one who resisted their words, he is stating that this man is deceptive and not who he pretends to be. His true colors have been revealed at Paul’s trial. He is a traitor of some sort, and maybe even a former professor of the faith, who has gone apostate, and who was now being used to testify against Paul at Rome. [Note: Some think this is the same Alexander, who Paul delivered over to Satan for blasphemy, back in 1 Timothy 1:18-20, which is a possibility. Read now.] [Others think this is the same Alexander who was present at the riot that took place at the theater in Ephesus (Ephesus was where Timothy was often stationed, making the warning more relevant) Read Acts 19:23-41].

Needless to say, we can at least be certain that Alexander was known to both Timothy and Paul, and he was used to effectively testify against Paul at his preliminary hearing. More than likely, he was a traitor of some sort, and so, Paul cautions Timothy to beware of him. Paul wants Timothy to understand that Alexander is no friend of the kingdom of God. And furthermore, Paul expressed his desire to see the Lord intervene by repaying Alexander according to the evil works that he had done in resisting the gospel and in contending with the kingdom of Christ, by standing against Paul, Christ’s representative (vs. 14b).

II. Many of Paul’s Companions Oppose Paul (vs. 16)

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

Sadly, while Alexander stood against Paul, no one stood with Paul; no one stood at his defense, at his preliminary hearing. Apparently, out of fear for their own lives, Paul's companions stood down, and did not attempt to provide him with a supportive defense. Indeed, we are told that all "forsook" Paul. Perhaps, in some way, at least at this point, Paul could relate to our Lord Jesus Christ, whose disciples abandoned him, following Judas's betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And while this was certainly hurtful and unhelpful to Paul, Paul adds, "May it not be charged against them." Contrasting this with Paul's desire for Alexander (who opposed him), that God would repay him according to his works, we find Paul less vindictive toward the brethren who forsook him, desiring that God would extend His grace toward them, in spite of their wavering faith and cowardly withdrawal. Though deserving of some form of judgment or chastisement from God, Paul had hoped that God would not hold the guilt of their sin against them.

III. The Lord Strengthens and Stands With Paul (vs. 17)

However, even though Paul was opposed by Alexander and abandoned by his companions, we learn of the encouraging news, that One, indeed, did stand with Paul, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ!

"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" (vs. 17).

You see, ultimately Paul was not alone, even when every one of his companions forsook him. The Invisible, but very real presence of Christ was with Him. And how did he know this? Because, he was supernaturally equipped with boldness and strength, enabling him to proclaim the gospel even at his preliminary trial. Paul knew very well that it was not within him to, in the face of a Roman court (which scared everyone else away, and which was under the authority of a tyrannical Caesar Nero), proclaim the gospel with boldness and confidence. And yet, he was empowered to do so. When everyone else ran away, he stood, not only to defend himself, but also to proclaim the gospel in the presence of the court and his accusers. He knew, by the

supernatural confidence he had in the promises of Christ, and by the boldness of speech given him by Christ, that Christ was right there with him. In Acts 9:15, following the conversion of Paul, the Lord told Ananias (concerning Paul), “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” And here, we find that promise further affirmed, when Paul states, “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.”

And further affirming the presence of the Lord with him, Paul adds, “Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.” Now, more than likely here, Paul is not speaking about being delivered from death, because that will soon take place. However, in context, what I believe he means, is that, he was delivered out of the mouth of Satan (who is that roaring, raging lion who seeks to devour the people of God, by tempting them astray). In other words, Paul was kept from denying the Lord, and further strengthened to proclaim the gospel, even in the presence of all the gentiles at his trial, such that Satan failed in his design to lead Paul to stumble in his faith. With an opposing Alexander, and having been forsaken by his companions, Paul yet, remained bold, and fulfilled the mission to which God had called him. He did not succumb to the temptations of Satan, in spite of his many weaknesses, because the Lord was with him. The Lord was his strength, when there was no other strength or help to be found. And he overcame. He remained faithful.

And finally, he adds an additional doxological statement, concerning what he anticipates and expects, going forward, in the remaining days leading into his death and departure to glory: “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!” (vs. 18). Again, Paul is not referring to being kept from dying or persecution or suffering, here. In keeping with the context, he is stating that God will deliver him from all of the enemy’s wicked attacks, preserving him perfectly until he is soon received up in glory. This is another way of Paul stating what Jude says in his benediction, but in a personal way, “Now to Him who is able to keep (*me*) from stumbling, and to present (*me*) faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.”

Paul has run a very difficult, long and laborious race, full of many trials, persecutions, temptations and tribulations, and God has brought him through them all, not only preventing all opposition from hindering God's work through Paul, but furthermore, actually accomplishing all that He has intended with Paul, by means of that very opposition as well. And so, Paul can confidently presume that God, who cannot lie, will continue to uphold him, safely to the end, even as He has already done, the whole way up to the present. The lion (Satan in this case) is no match for the Lord Jesus Christ! And that is why Paul concludes this statement with these words, "To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen." The Lord gets all the glory!

IV. Concluding Thoughts and Applications

1) Brethren, let us recognize the difference between those who directly oppose the gospel and those who fall short in their striving to be faithful to the gospel. While Alexander and Paul's companions (who forsook Paul when he needed them) both sinned against Paul, and more importantly, against Christ, there was a critical difference in the nature of their sins, which warranted different responses from Paul. Alexander was a traitor and a hypocrite, who actually opposed Paul and did him harm. Those who forsook Paul, fearing for their lives, let the enemy get the best of them, and wavered in their faith. In the first case, the sin is far more serious, posing a direct, conscious attack against the gospel.

I say this to encourage us to remember that even our close brethren will fail us at times, as we will them, because we still have a sin nature, which is vulnerable to falling into temptation and being of "little faith" at times. Remember, pretty much all of our Lord's closest disciples forsook Him in the Garden, and Peter denied Him three times! And so, let us adopt the heart and mindset of Paul, who while yet hurt and offended by those who forsook him, still desired that God would not charge them with the guilt of leaving Paul and not taking a stand at his defense. Sadly, though saved and redeemed by our blessed Savior, we can and do, still fail Him, succumbing to a fear of man. Our faith can waver, at times, and rather than condemn one another for this, we must extend grace, remembering that we are all still a work in progress. There are different degrees of sin, and certain sins are more intentional and premeditated than others. And so, we don't want to label every breach of faith as apostasy.

2) Brethren, let us be encouraged to see here, how Christ is always with His people. Even when those closest to us, fail us or forsake us, He will never leave us nor forsake us. Even if you're locked up alone, in a prison cell, for your faith, He will be there with you, and He will give you the grace and strength to faithfully represent Him in circumstances that would normally be impossible for you to bear. And so, the confidence that we have, which would drive us to take risks for the sake of Christ, and which would compel us to remain faithful at all costs, is the certain promise that we have from our Lord, that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Now, while we might not be able to imagine enduring such difficulties when we are presently enjoying freedom from them, we have to recognize that the grace of His presence and strength will be there, right when we need it. [Terrible sickness, mental illness, trials...etc] [Read Psalm 121]

And brethren, consider this. We have this guarantee because our Lord was ultimately forsaken, so that we would never be forsaken. You see, while everyone left Paul alone in the circumstances mentioned in our text, the Lord was present with Paul, but when Christ was forsaken by all, and when He bore our sins on the cross, one of the most painful experiences of His suffering was that the supporting presence of His Father was *not* with Him. What is the greatest outcry of Psalm 22? Is it not that Jesus was abandoned by His God... "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken Me?" And as He described the conditions of His agony and the surrounding persecutions which oppressed Him, what was the greatest remorse, found in the expression of His agony? [Read Psalm 22:1-21; emphasize **1-2, 11, 19 & 21 (the resurrection)**]

You see, Paul experienced the very opposite, when his companions forsook him. He knew and sensed, and was empowered by the presence of God! And brethren, such is the same with us, because Christ was indeed forsaken, not only by His closest friends, but by His God and Father!

3) If Paul could stand trial and even face death because of the relationship he had with his God, through Jesus Christ, where does that leave those of you who have never been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ? Where does that leave those of you who are still in your sin? The Gospel!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25