

A Preacher in Captivity

by Keith Malcomson

Paul's sermon emphasizes the importance of entrusting the gospel to faithful men who will be able to teach others and preserve the truth in an hour of apostasy.

Topics: "Persevering Faith", "Apostolic Ministry"

Description

Keith Malcomson preaches on the challenges faced by the apostle Paul in his second letter to Timothy, highlighting Paul's physical and mental captivity, the turning away of believers in Asia, and the rise of false teachings and movements within the early church. Despite being deserted by some, Paul remains steadfast in his faith and urges Timothy to entrust the gospel to faithful men who will guard it against corruption and preserve it for future generations.

Transcript

II Tim.1:15, "...all they which are in Asia be turned away from me;"

This Second Epistle to Timothy is the last letter of Paul the apostle. This old warrior of the cross was like a colossal eagle ascending into the very heights of the heavens, from which vantage point he can behold all earthly things in life and ministry.

As a devout Pharisee he had been held captive in heart and mind to the law, sin and death, but from the point of his salvation Paul's captivity, was not of heart and spirit; his captivity was physical and a result of his faithful obedience to Christ. Few men have suffered such troubles, sufferings, slanders, beatings and imprisonments as this General of the gospel.

At the end of the Book of Acts, we read of Paul's confinement in Rome. After two years he was released in AD 63. For the next four to five years he again enjoyed his physical freedom during which time it seems that he visited Colossae, Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, Nicopolis, Militus and Troas (I Tim.1:3; II Tim.4:20; Tit.3:12). He also pioneered into new ground travelling to Crete with Titus and it would certainly seem that he fulfilled his desire to reach Spain (Tit.1:5; Rom.15:24, 28).

1. A Preacher in Captivity: Paul imprisoned in Rome a second time

Upon reaching Rome, Paul's situation was very different from his first imprisonment. Then, he had much freedom in his own hired house; now it was an absolute captivity with no rights. Then, he appealed to Caesar; now he awaits certain death. Then, his room was filled with young preachers making it his Head

Quarters for strengthening churches and pushing out in to new territories; now he was left alone, apart from faithful Luke.

He had often been a preacher in captivity but this time it came so quickly that this chained apostle had left behind his valuable "cloak" which would be needed to keep him warm in the darkness and coldness of captivity (II Tim 4:13). But Paul's captivity was not just physical. A thousand burdens weighed upon his mind which could have and would have easily broken the mental powers of the best of men. Such dark days await any genuine preacher. If he is not careful, a prison cell and chains may be a fitting picture of a captivity experienced in his own thoughts, emotions, desires, and expectations. Apart from the grace of God hope, love and faith may be hindered, halted and held in captivity to circumstances, situations and trials.

Sitting alone in that prison cell Paul thinks back almost ten years to AD 57 when he first entered the great city of Ephesus which was the capital of Asia. He remembers the 12 believers he met that day and their mighty baptism in the Holy Ghost when they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1-7). He remembers the ensuing revival that swept the city and the two years of ministry in the house of Tyrannus by which "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus. . . " (19:10). A result of that revival was that strong new churches were established in several major cities in the province of Asia.

But now the old General thinks of present circumstances, ". . . all they which are in Asia be turned away from me. . . "-- not from Christ but from Paul! They were still gathering as churches; still worshipping, preaching, evangelizing and doing the various activities which would mark them out as followers of Christ. But they had totally turned away from Paul; after such a short time they had turned their backs on this old fashioned preacher of the gospel. Paul had left young Timothy in Ephesus as his ambassador to oversee this work and by God's grace to preserve the church from all compromise and declension. It had been a hot, horrendous hounding fight for the young apostolic worker.

"Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica" (4:10). Demas had deserted Paul. He had been chosen by Paul as a companion in the work of the gospel and stood among other young men like Timothy and Titus. When writing from Rome during his first imprisonment Paul sent greetings to the believers at Colossae from the young preacher and when writing to Philemon called him a "fellowlabourer" along with Mark, Aristarchus and Luke the physician (Col.4:14-15; Phm.1:24). What a disappointment; a young preacher who Paul highly regarded had now deserted him and was found to have a deep burning love for the things of this world. How shocking. How would the believers in Thessalonica handle this? Would he lead others astray by his example?

In this last letter Paul warns Timothy of false teachers, (2:17-18) opposes of the gospel (4:14-15) and informs him of his utter desertion and isolation when "all men forsook me" (4:16). This was the sort of captivity with which his thoughts and emotions must contend. What a mental fight for such a godly, sensitive and upright man! This preacher had to suffer a greater captivity than prison walls and a greater burden than chains, yet he must preach on, write on, exhort on and labour on for his Master lest the trial of his captivity should engulf him.

2. The Church in Captivity

The church birthed in Jerusalem in AD 30 on bended knee, in holiness of heart, in the fires of revival, consumed with Christ's commission, in less than forty years had spread across the entire Roman Empire and was still advancing with speed, but strange new contemporary movements were beginning to appear

which were strangely out of step with the old white-haired preachers of the cross.

The old guard of apostles, preachers and warriors watched on as whole churches and provinces went into captivity. It was a captivity to compromise, sin, declension, heresy, apostasy, apathy, fables, lukewarmness, covetousness and legalism. It only took forty years for the revival fires to recede demanding a call to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). The same apostles and preachers who were eye witnesses of mighty outpourings of the Holy Ghost were now in danger of being ostracized by new young contemporary spiritual movements within the church. Has anything really changed?

First, there was the Balaam movement (II Pet.2:15; Jude 1:11; Rev.2:14). So widespread and influential was this movement that it is dealt with in three different books, by three different men, over a period of thirty years. This movement was nicknamed after the Old Testament character Balaam who was a false prophet and teacher and soothsayer (Num.22-24; 31:16; Josh.13:22). Balaam heard the voice of God, gave true prophecies, had angels visit him, was withheld from certain sins, showed signs of uprightness and would not curse Israel. Yet we are told that he "loved the wages of unrighteousness." Through his love and lust for money he compromised every principle.

The Balaamite Movement was the prosperity movement of the first century caught up in manifestations and prophetic leadings. We are told of those in the early church who "have forsaken the right way" and "ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward." Peter calls it a "way", Jude calls it an "error", and John calls it a "doctrine." This love of money was greater than love for Christ, holiness or truth.

Another movement was the Korah (Core) Movement (Jude 1:11). This new movement had infiltrated the early church and was marked by the same characteristics as Korah. You will remember that Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron along with "two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown." These men challenged the right and authority of Moses and Aaron to lead the people. They insinuated that these two men had exalted themselves over God's people and that the people were just as holy as them and that the Lord was also among them just as He was with Moses.

We are told that these so-called Christians caught up in this movement "perished in the gainsaying of Core." The word "gainsaying" means to dispute, contradict, reproach, answer again or answer back, to question, cause strife and to speak against. They stirred up dissatisfaction in the church. This was a movement which rejected God-ordained leadership. They refused to listen to Paul, Peter, Jude or John. They rejected the right of some to leadership and demanded that all believers stand on the same level of function as leadership. These men belittled true leadership yet made themselves leaders in a rebellion against it. This was the 'Organic Church' of the first century.

There was also a Cain Movement (Jude 1:11). There were those in the early church who had "gone in the way of Cain." They travelled along the same pathway. They rejected an absolute emphasis on the Blood of Jesus Christ and made much of the works of man's hand. They were haters of those who made much of the blood.

There was a Nicolaitan Movement (Rev.2:6, 15). The name means to be victorious over the people; to conquer them and subdue them. This was the beginning of a clergy separate and above the people which would eventually lead to titles, positions and special garments. It was the first shepherding movement and was the seed from which came the Catholic priesthood. Christ says twice over that He hates such.

Then last was the Jezebel Movement in the church of Thyatira (Rev.2:20-25). This church was tolerating, permitting and allowing this woman who called herself "a prophetess" to teach in the church and "to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols." John calls it "this doctrine" but her followers called it "knowing the depths of Satan." They professed to have special mysterious knowledge concerning Satan which other believers lacked. But in reality this movement through their teaching brought believers into spiritual fornication and adultery.

In response to these contemporary movements which began to arise in the early church in the latter half of the first century leading her into captivity, preachers like Paul, Peter, Jude and John rose up to name and diagnose them specifically, rebuke and warn pointedly, and to write with clarity and authority concerning them.

3. The Answer in Captivity

Please note that Paul was not in defeat. He had not gone down in discouragement. He could see and discern everything very clearly. He understood the hour he lived in. He was able to spiritually diagnose the condition of the church without excuse. His eagle eye was clear and penetrating. Only such realists have the answer for the hour. Nehemiah looked closely at the walls, diagnosed the situation then acted, as did Paul.

What is the answer in such an hour of declension? What is to be the chief task of an old preacher at the threshold of his departure from time into eternity? The last call and task of Elijah was to make sure an anointed leadership was in place before being taken. Moses must publically confer on Joshua the honour of leadership. Paul will give his last charge to young Timothy, pass the baton, hand over the mantle, entrust his old sword, and then depart.

Paul opens the letter by making mention of "the unfeigned faith" of Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (1:5). In chapter 3 he mentions "that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Timothy had received much spiritually from the previous two generations which had moulded him into a young preacher then a mature man of God who would be able to stand and preach in an hour of apostasy and hand the baton on to the next generation.

Paul now gives a very vital instruction: II Tim.2:2, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Paul mentions four generations here including two that will come after Timothy. This is the need of the hour, chosen preachers who will steer the church through this dark hour of apostasy and lead it back into genuine revival. Paul had been entrusted with the gospel; he had entrusted it to Timothy; Timothy must entrust it to others who will again entrust it to yet others (I Tim.1:1; 6:20). This is a spiritual gospel genealogy.

First Timothy must "entrust" and "commit" this gospel to others. These two words hold the meaning of depositing something. It is the placing of something in a bank or a place of safety in order to preserve it. This entrusting and committal is carried out through the process of "hearing" and "teaching" (2:2). This deposit is to be 'kept.' In other words it must be watched over, preserved and guarded from all damage, loss or corruption. This gospel of Christ must be defended and fought for. In an hour of declension Timothy must entrust it into the hands of "faithful men." This will be Timothy's great task in an hour of encroaching apostasy. Trustworthy men must be found who will guard the gospel as Paul and Timothy had. And then these faithful men must do the very same by entrusting it to other faithful men.

Paul gives three marks of these faithful men and how they can be identified. They will be dedicated like soldiers, they will be disciplined like athletes and they will be diligent like farmers (2:3-6). Compromisers, the lukewarm, inventors of new strategies and innovators of new ideas will not be needed in this spiritual relay race.

Timothy was Paul's estimate of a faithful man marked by dedication, discipline and diligence. He was a man nurtured and moulded by the written scriptures and who believed in their divine inspiration and reliability. He was faithful in studying them and in rightly dividing them. He was a preacher of the Word of God who would preach in season and out of season. Timothy would be faithful in an hour when many would no longer "endure sound doctrine" who being afflicted with "itching ears" would "turn away their ears from the truth" and "be turned unto fables." Only a faithful man would stand against such tornados of false doctrines and tsunamis of apostasy. Praise God for faithful men in such an hour.

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