

It is the year 67 AD. In three years, the Temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed, but we do not know that. I have been working with Paul for about two decades, but he won't be alive much longer. My mother, Eunice, and my grandmother, Lois, have been dead for several years. On one hand, I am sad that I didn't get to see them very much over the last twenty years. On the other hand, I am glad that I have been living a life that they so wanted me to live.

I spent virtually all of the last twenty years establishing churches and helping them overcome problems. Most of my time has been spent in lands you know as Turkey, Greece, and Italy. In my time, Turkey was comprised of areas known as Asia, Galatia, Cilicia, Lycia and Cappadocia...and Greece was known by names such as Greece, Macedonia, and Achaia.

The Church faced a lot of problems over the last two decades. The first was settling the notion whether Christians did or did not have to follow the Laws of Moses. Fortunately, that was settled at the Council of Jerusalem; Christians did not have to follow the laws of Moses. However, over the last two decades many Jewish Christians continue to teach that Christians should follow at least some of those laws.

Another big problem was how Christians should behave. This wasn't a big problem as long as all Christians were Jews, because the Jews generally followed good rules of behavior as taught in the Old Testament. New believers that did not grow up as Jews had to be completely taught how to live godly lives.

The third big problem was the establishment of what is good doctrine and what is not. This had several facets. How much of Judaism should Christians follow, how much of Paul's teaching should be followed, and how much should teachings divergent from Paul's be followed? You might think that twenty years would be long enough to settle these issues, but you also know that two millennia has not been long enough. You current day Christians face quite a wide variety of teachers, all who claim to teach the truth.

All of these problems are in Paul's mind as he writes me the letter you know as *Second Timothy*. And whether by old age or execution, Paul knows he is nearing the end of his life, so this may very well be the last letter he writes to me. With that in mind, you can be assured that he is making the most of every word he writes.

Even though I have been faithful for twenty years, Paul wants to leave me with words of encouragement that will last the rest of my life. He knows that the level of persecution and false teachings will be greatly raised in future years. So, he starts his letter with words of

encouragement to stay faithful to God, the gospel, and to him. He reminds me that God gives us a spirit of power and love and self-control.

I am saddened to learn that people are starting to turn away from Paul. The false teachings and persecutions are already getting unbearable. But, I am glad to learn that others, such as Onesiphorus, are staying true to Paul and the Gospel.

Paul reminds me that he is suffering for the sake of the Gospel, and for the sake of people who need salvation. As I read his words, I realize that he is telling me that I will soon take his place, and that I will suffer as he is suffering...but the price of suffering is well worth the eternal rewards ahead of us.

Paul shares with me an image that will constantly be illustrated to me. In my life, I am constantly in view of Roman soldiers. Their only goal is to please their Emperor. Because of that, they don't let their lives get entangled in other things. I am to be the same way. My only goal is to be faithful to God, and I should live accordingly. In my case, faithfulness is measured by how I share the Gospel with others in such a way that they come to faith, too.

Paul encourages me to do my best to present myself to God as an approved worker who rightly handles the word of truth. His words remind me that not only am I the craftsmanship of God, but I am to be a craftsman with the Word of Truth.¹

As a soldier and a craftsman, I need to run from the passions that could entangle me, and pursue righteousness, faith and love. I need to flee false teachings that mislead, and pursue the true Gospel. And, when possible, I need to correct those who teach and follow incorrect words.

All of that may sound melodramatic to you. But it did not seem so to me. I can see the persecution with my own eyes. I also have a firm belief that Jesus could come back any day, and that persecution will increase as that day gets closer. To be honest, I am scared. I am not so arrogant as to believe that I may not fall away as others are doing. As I continue reading his letter, I think Paul must be reading my mind. He describes what I see happening, and, maybe, what you see happening around you.

As the last days approach, it will get more difficult. People will love themselves, love pleasure rather than love of God. They will appear to have godliness, but will deny the power of the Gospel. Teachers will creep into the lives of weak people and tell them what they want to hear. It is imperative to stay away from these kinds of people.

The key for faithful living is to remember that all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness. Those who use Scripture correctly will be complete, equipped for every good work. I am to preach the word, and be ready all the time to correct and rebuke false teachers.

¹ Ephesians 2:8-10

Sometimes, Paul uses the best word pictures. Here's one elaborated in my own words...The time is coming when people won't stand to hear truth, but will have an itch to hear only what they want to hear, and they will pay good money to hear what they want to hear. They will find teachers who use their words like long fingernails to reach inside and scratch their hearers' itching ears.

Rather than teaching that way, Paul says that he has been faithful to preach the truth, and the result is his nearing death. In a famous line, he says "I have fought the good fight, and finished the race by keeping the faith. So, there is a crown of righteousness waiting for me. And, those crowns await all those who are faithful and love his coming appearance."

Paul ends his letter talking about many people we both know – some people that you have met through *Acts* and Paul's other letters.

A few have become unfaithful. Demas has become in love with the world. Alexander the coppersmith who did great harm to Paul and opposed the true Gospel. Rather than being bitter, Paul says the Lord will take care of everything.

Many others have stayed faithful. You have met some of them. Titus has gone to Dalmatia to spread the Gospel. Luke is still with Paul. Tychicus is in Ephesus where Paul sent him. I am to greet Priscilla and Aquila. And, there is a long list of others that have remained faithful.

He tells me to come meet him and bring his scrolls and parchments. Have you ever wondered about Paul's financial situation? Was he rich or poor? These parting words to me may tell you something about that.

He worked as a tentmaker in Corinth until he received enough support to teach full-time. So, you can infer that Paul did not have much money. Over time, he must have acquired a number of scrolls and parchments. These were very valuable because of the precious materials and the cost of hand-writing them. Paul may have paid for many of these, but it is likely that he was gifted some of them, too.

What do you think will happen to these scrolls and parchments when Paul dies? You can be assured that his spiritual sons, Titus and I, want them. Certainly, Apollos will want them. But, here is my best guess. Luke will get them. He and Paul have plans for Luke to write more books about Jesus and the church, and he will need all the reference material he can get.