

When Life Is Hard – 2 Timothy 4:9-22

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Intro – Sounds kind of like a tangled mess of unrelated thought, doesn't it?

Like the husband who's on his way out the door in the a.m., and says to his wife . . .

“Hey, want to meet me for lunch?” And before she can answer he's like . . .

“And pick up my shirts from the cleaners, will you?”

“But avoid 18th street like the plague, it's a nightmare”

“And don't forget to say hi to your mom for me, while you're at it”

“Drive safe! Love you!”

Doesn't it kind of sound like that?

I know it did when *I* first read it – and to some extent it is

But when you consider the difficulty of Paul's situation, you begin to see that there's a very *practical* example found here . . .

In how to respond to life when it's just plain hard

Responses we'd do well to embrace for ourselves, when a hard-knock life comes knocking

The first of which is . . .

Call on friends to counter the loneliness (v9-12)

A hard life and loneliness often go hand in hand

If you haven't yet experienced it, you will

And it usually sets in for one of 3 reasons:

A. You're obnoxious, and nobody wants to be around you

The cure for which, is some serious introspection and honesty before God . . .

So that you stop thinking that your loneliness is everybody else's fault, and start admitting that it's yours

B. People *desert* you for the *wrong* reasons

Like Demas here in v10, who was *in love with this present world* – referring to the ungodliness and sinful passions of this present age (Titus 2:11-14)

Which must have been crushing for Paul by the way, b/c he considered Demas to be a *fellow worker* in Phlm 24

C. You send them away for the *right* reasons

Like Paul did w/ Tychicus in sending him to Ephesus (12) – presumably to help further the work of ministry there

Which is probably the case with Titus and Crescens as well

Most likely he sent them away for the right reasons

Which left Paul lonely

And explains his sense of urgency in v9, for Timothy to come *soon*

Only Luke was still there from his inner circle, so he basically sends out an SOS

And not just to Timothy, but to Mark as well

The same Mark who wrote the gospel that bears his name . . .

Who traveled with Paul on his first missionary journey . . .

And who served time with him in prison

You can see why Paul considered him *very useful* for ministry

He was a true friend, who had been with Paul through thick and thin

- If you're going to counter the loneliness of a hard time, a hard life – call on your friends
Don't wait for them to call you; Don't expect them to know how you're feeling
Call on them, and ask them to spend some time with you
There's no excuse for loneliness in the body of Christ

Call them for coffee; Call them to pray together; Or call them to just hang out for a while

But whatever you do, don't make your loneliness worse by waiting for them to call you

Take the initiative and call on your friends to counter the loneliness of a hard time

The second response we learn from Paul's example here, is to . . .

Ask for help to offset the hardship (v13)

That's what Paul did in v13

One of the reasons Paul's life was hard was b/c he lacked proper clothing

With *winter* temperatures in the 50's, and a damp dungeon in the *summer* – he needed a coat, and asked for Timothy's help to get it

It's a wonder we don't find a whole list of things like that here

But evidently this was one need he couldn't meet himself

- He also asked for his *books, and above all the parchments*
Neither of which we know anything about
Books is a generic word for, books – which covered everything from personal writings to collections of writings like you might find in a library
And *parchments* was a writing material made from the skin of sheep or goats

Obviously, Paul wanted to read or re-read the things he or someone else had written . . .

And probably use the parchments to do some more writing himself

Without which, he couldn't do his job; he couldn't keep on with his work of ministry

So he asked for help – he set aside his pride, and asked

And we'd do well to do the same

When life is hard, when you don't have the things you need – set aside your pride, and ask for help to offset the hardship

You never know what a blessing it's going to be for you, *and* for those who respond

- I love the recent account of Dave and Melissa Williamson in that respect
They're one of our global partners in Papua Indonesia, and were just through here on furlough a few months back
And shortly after they left, Dave came down with malaria while visiting a church in Mississippi, and couldn't make the drive back to San Diego where they're based
Nor did they have the money to fly and get their van back
So they asked for help, starting with ideas as to what to do

Which is like throwing gas on a fire for Dave Merrifield, our Director of GO

He got on the phone with Shadow Mountain in San Diego, another one of their sending churches . . .

Explained the situation to them, suggested we split their airfare to get them back . . .

And then called the church in Mississippi to see if someone could drive their van back,
if we paid for their return ticket

Lo and behold, somebody stepped up, we bought the tickets, and it all happened in a
matter of days

B/c the Williamson's asked for help to offset the hardship

I hesitate to think how much of God's goodness and creativity we miss, b/c we don't ask
When life is hard, ask for help to offset the hardship

Rely on God to repay your enemies (v14-15)

14-15; When life is hard and it's somebody's fault, what's your first inclination?

To beat the tar out of 'em, right? To extract a pound of flesh; To exact vengeance

"They caused me pain, I'm causing them pain"

"They ruined my life, I'm gonna ruin theirs"

That's our tendency isn't it? An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth

But Jesus laid down a different standard for his followers

A better way, in **Mt 5:38-39** . . .

*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'*³⁹ *But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

And a few verses later (**Mt 5:43-45**) . . .

*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*⁴⁴ *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*

And then Paul pulls it all together in **Rom 12:19** saying . . .

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Quoting Deut 32:35

Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord

That's why Paul could say with such confidence in v14 – *the Lord will repay him according to his deeds*, referring to Alexander

And that's why we too can rely on God to repay *our* enemies

B/c Jesus set a different standard, which the apostles caught, and then taught

- And notice here, that though he told Timothy to leave "repayment" up to the Lord, he didn't keep silent about what Alexander did
Rather, he *warned* Timothy about him, for the purpose of helping him to avoid some of the same opposition Paul himself had faced

That's key – just b/c you rely on God to repay your enemies, doesn't mean you should keep silent about them

Especially if they pose a similar threat to your brothers and sisters in Christ

Warn them; Speak up; It's okay; Not for the purpose of gossip, but for the purpose of sparing them unnecessary hardship

I'm not talking about a business owner who did you wrong

Or a neighbor who offended you; Or a co-worker you don't like

I'm talking about someone like Alexander, who opposes you for your faith, or antagonizes you for your witness, or tries to stop you from spreading the word

Like the people who repeatedly stole our Rock the River signs a few weeks back, until we saw them one night and ran them off

If I knew who they were, I'd warn you about them

Or the people who spray-painted our sign when we first moved in here

If I knew who they were, I'd warn you about them

Why? B/c they caused us harm in our efforts to advance the gospel and build our church, and I don't want you to suffer the same

Short of that kind of opposition, however, you need to be quick to show grace, and slow to speak up

And in all cases, rely on *God* to repay your enemies, instead of taking matters into your own hands

- Does that mean you should never call the police when someone harms you or steals from you? Not at all
Or completely avoid the courts when justice has been perverted? No
God has put the government in place, including the police and courts, to punish evil doers and protect us from further harm
And it's often the instrument of repayment/punishment that he uses this side of eternity

But *personal* vengeance is out

Warn your brothers and sisters in Christ, and seek justice when necessary . . .

But rely on *God* to repay them

Trust the Lord to carry you through (v16-18)

V16-17

We can't be sure what Paul is referring to in these verses . . .

Most likely it's a preliminary hearing that was common in the Roman court system . . .

Designed to gather information and seek public input – a kind of grand jury of sorts

At which, Paul was apparently abandoned – at the very point of his need for support, nobody showed up in his defense, not even for moral support

But he doesn't hold it against them, b/c he the *Lord stood by me* he says; The Lord

How comforting is that?

His presence is not dependent on your flaky friends

His presence is not dependent on your flaky faith

His presence is dependent on his firm promise – his promise to never leave you

Which means that as a follower of Christ, he'll always be there to carry you through

Like he did for Paul, rescuing him from *the lion's mouth* – a commonly used metaphor in the Bible, for *danger*

Meaning that the danger was avoided, subverted, or diminished – so he could continue his ministry of preaching the gospel, that *all the Gentiles* might hear

And I'm sure it wasn't lost on Paul that he was doing so from the *center* of the world's dominant power
He trusted the Lord to carry him through

- And then, having reflected on these *past* events, he looks confidently to the future and generalizes his experience, saying (read v18a – *every*) . . .
The Lord will rescue him, *not* from death – b/c remember, he just said in 4:6 that his time of departure, his death, *has come*
Nor from any and all hardship or pain – b/c he says elsewhere that we will suffer as believers in this present life, including himself

Rather, he was saying that the Lord would rescue him from *every evil deed* that threatens the fulfillment of his ministry
And, that he would usher him safely into his heavenly kingdom – his very presence
At which point Paul can't help but erupt in praise/worship to the one who does such things (Read 18b)

- Despite the fact that his life was hard, Paul trusted the Lord to carry him through
And since the grace that saved him, is the *same* grace that saved us . . .
And the Jesus who was with him, is the *same* Jesus who is with us . . .
We too can trust the Lord to carry *us* through

He's been faithful in the past, and he'll be faithful in the future
He's given you strength, and he always will (17a)
He's used you before, and he'll use you again (17b)
He's rescued you before, and he'll rescue you again (17c-18)
Until you're finally home, secure in his presence, for all eternity
You can trust the Lord to carry you through – he's able

Do you know that song? *He's Able* . . .
That's the essence of Paul's final words here
That when life is hard – you can trust the Lord to carry you through, b/c he's able

And finally . . .

Be a blessing to those you love (v19-22)

No matter how hard life gets, don't miss the opp to be a blessing to those you love

Paul could have said a lot of things in these last few verses
He could've highlighted his difficult life in Christ
He could've reiterated the main points of his letter
He could've touted his accomplishments
He could've said a lot of things, but he didn't
Instead, he chose to use his last words, hardship or not, to be a blessing to those he loved

Sometimes it's a simple greeting, like in v19
A warm greeting, whether at the end of worship, or during the week in SG . . .
Is a blessing to those you love

Or, it could be a simple exchange of information (20-21)

News of those you love is *always* welcome, and *often* encouraging . . .
Fueling your prayers, and filling your praise

- *And note the mention of Trophimus here
One of the many examples in Scripture that healing on demand is not a biblical teaching
If it were, i.e. if it were possible, then Paul of all people, counted among the apostles, would *not* have left Trophimus sick – he would have healed him
- That aside, you can be a blessing with a simple greeting, an exchange of information, and last . . .
You can especially be a blessing to those you love by extending grace to them (22)

Paul was beheaded the next spring
And the last words with which he leaves us . . .
Is his desire for us to always know the presence of Jesus deep within our soul
And that God's grace, his unmerited favor, would never be absent from our life

That's a blessing – something you too, can extend to those *you* love, hard life or not
Don't miss the opportunity