



2 TIMOTHY 4:9-22

“The Lord Stood By Me”: The Christian’s True Hope and Help

5TH SUNDAY DURING LENT – APRIL 2, 2017 (AM)

Lord God, our Rock and Redeemer, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight. Through Christ Jesus, our risen Lord. Amen.

One of the remarkable things about the concluding verses of 2 Tim,¹ and of the letter as a whole, is how clear a window we get onto Paul’s circumstances on the eve of his death.² It is rare in Paul’s letters to find such specific, concrete description of his situation as he writes. Most of the time, we can only infer very general details about the when and where of Paul’s writing. Second Timothy allows us to set the scene with much more specificity.

So, for example, several times in the letter we are told that Paul is in prison.³ He is locked up by the Roman Empire as a political criminal because he had, among other things, committed the high treason of proclaiming throughout the world that Jesus is Lord. Everyone knew that Caesar is Lord. There can’t be two “Lords”! Well that was precisely Paul’s point as he proclaimed the good news. And he wound up in a Roman prison cell.⁴

In our passage this morning, we are clued off to the fact that the imprisoned Paul is awaiting a second legal hearing in Rome. Paul refers in v. 16 to his “first defense”; the clear implication is that he has a second defense, a second court date, on the horizon.⁵ It’s a bit debated, but I think Paul’s “first defense” was an initial hearing before a Roman judge to determine whether the charges against him were clear and compelling enough to execute him right away, or whether the matter was sufficiently complex to require a more careful weighing of the evidence at a formal trial.⁶ As Paul says in vv. 16–17, everyone who might have supported him at this first hearing abandoned him, but the Lord stood by him and “rescued [him] from

the lion's mouth." In other words, the first legal hearing ended favorably for Paul; he was rescued from immediate execution.⁷ Now he awaits his second, more formal trial.

But Paul doesn't seem to have much confidence that he'll make it through his second defense alive. As he looks to the immediate future, he speaks in v. 18 of being brought "safely into [Christ's] heavenly kingdom"⁸—that is, into the kingdom that is to come.⁹ Paul knows that martyrdom is on the horizon as a result of his second defense. So he urges Timothy to make haste to come visit him in v. 9. Earlier in this chapter, in v. 6, he says that he is "already being poured out as a drink offering." His time of "departure [i.e., death] has come." He has fought the good fight and finished the race. Paul knows that the end, for him, is near.

Paul's death is near, and he is more or less alone as he waits for it. Nearly all of his companions have left for various reasons. Titus and Crescens, mentioned in v. 10, left Paul, apparently because the Lord called them to other regions.¹⁰ According to v. 12, Paul sent Tychicus on an important task to Ephesus, probably to carry this letter to Timothy.¹¹ Titus, Crescens, Tychicus—these were good friends whose departure was surely no easy pill to swallow for Paul with only an empty prison cell to turn to. For those whose earnest aspiration is to see Christ named where he is not named, life will be full of many bittersweet goodbyes as God's call will take us and our friends and family along different paths. Paul writes this letter from prison, having just experienced some particularly bittersweet goodbyes.

And Paul has also experienced a much more painful separation. From other NT books,¹² we know that Demas in v. 10 was a close partner with Paul in gospel labors. But it seems that idols laid hold of Demas's heart, stealing his affections away from Christ. And having grown cold to Christ, Demas grew cold toward his brother in Christ, Paul, and he left Paul in a lurch.¹³ This isn't simply two friends experiencing a sorrowful separation because of different callings; this is a friendship ending, a desertion by a close companion in a moment of great need.

In his first defense, Paul was abandoned by all who might have supported him. Now he has been abandoned by his one-time close friend Demas. And other dear partners in the work of the Lord have also left him. It is true that Paul expected Mark to come to his aid, as v. 11 suggests. And the beloved Timothy himself would, Lord willing, soon visit, as Paul urges him to do. And it's true that Paul wasn't completely alone. According

to v. 11, Luke still stood faithfully by him.¹⁴ But the “alone” in that verse is striking: “Luke alone is with me.” Everyone else is gone. Please hurry, Timothy. The imprisoned Paul, at the end of his life, battles great loneliness.

And to make matters worse, it’s getting colder outside. In v. 9, Paul tells Timothy to come quickly.¹⁵ In v. 21, he again urges, “Do your best to come,” and adds, “before winter.” Winter is coming. And there’s a very practical reason why Timothy must get there before winter.¹⁶ Through a set of circumstances unknown to us,¹⁷ Paul had left his cloak in Troas. For “cloak,” read “winter coat.”¹⁸ Paul wants the first-century Greco-Roman equivalent to a parka, because winter is coming and Roman prisons weren’t known for their great central heating.¹⁹

On top of all the other troubles Paul faces, he is also deeply anxious for his son in the Lord, Timothy. His deep, heart-wrenching anxiety for Timothy jumps off every page.²⁰ Paul is concerned that Timothy might become ashamed of Christ. Paul is worried that Timothy might be led astray by youthful passions. Paul is anxious because Timothy could be thwarted by opponents such as Alexander, whom Paul warns Timothy of in our passage in vv. 14–15.²¹ The end of 2 Tim enables us to paint a uniquely vivid picture of the circumstances and state of soul that Paul is in as he writes this letter. The scene, with all of Paul’s difficulty and heartache, is easy for us to picture in our mind’s eye.²² This is a deeply human experience and hardship; it’s easy for us to imagine and easy, I think, for most to identify with at some level.²³

But Paul’s behavior in his great hardship may be harder to identify with. In this respect, Paul is quite strange. Here he is in no small amount of turmoil of soul and circumstance, with heavy burdens pressing down upon him, with tons of reasons for anxiety and frustration and despair. And what is he spending his time doing? He’s writing a letter to encourage Timothy. He’s thinking of and passing on good wishes to Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus in v. 19. He’s noticing others and doing what he can for their good. And more remarkably, Paul is also extending mercy to those who have wronged him. We see it in v. 16. At his first legal hearing, everyone who might have supported him in fact deserted him. But what does Paul say? “May it not be charged against them!” May they find mercy before the Lord! May their failures and wrongs be forgiven them!²⁴ It would be understandable if Paul held a grudge toward those who wronged him. But he doesn’t. We would sympathize if Paul wallowed in self-pity and cut himself off from others. But he doesn’t. While he acknowledges his grief and concern, he is not so blinded by it that he cannot look to the

needs and the good of others. In his very poignant experience of disappointment and abandonment and fear and frustration and physical cold and emotional concern for the future, he still loves others and forgives.

And I say this makes Paul strange, because it's a far cry from what I would do in Paul's position. (I define strange or abnormal as anything different from me, since I am the definition of normal.) Paul does the opposite of what I tend to do with hardship and anxiety. What do I tend to do in those circumstances? I wallow in self-pity. I complain. I fix my eyes squarely on my problems. The good of others is the last thing that comes to mind when I encounter some great difficulty. In fact, when I experience hardship and frustration, abandonment and anxiety, I almost instinctively cut myself off from everyone else. Others only tend to intensify my sense of despair. Everything's going well for them. Their joys are an offense to me, spotlighting my lack of joy. Or the troubles of others are not really as bad as mine, and I get bitter that no one else realizes that. I say, "They don't know how hard it is for me." No one really has a clue about the impossibility I'm in. In hardship and frustration, I'm more inclined to complain about how little others care about me than I am to care about others.

And I am certainly not ready to extend forgiveness and mercy to those whom I think have played a part in my hardship. It's much easier to hold grudges, to harbor resentment and bitterness. Or in self-righteousness to be only conditionally merciful and forgiving: I'll forgive you, alright, just as soon as I know that you know how awful you've been, only when I am satisfied that you have suffered enough for the suffering you have inflicted on me.

Paul seems strange to me because he doesn't respond to his hardships in the way normal human beings do, or at least in the way sinful, self-preoccupied people do.²⁵ So what is it that makes Paul so strange? Well, let's consider the most theologically profound verses of our passage, vv. 17–18. Everyone deserted Paul at his first defense, but, Paul says in v. 17, "the Lord stood by me and strengthened me," and Paul boldly proclaimed the gospel to the Roman court.²⁶ The Lord stood by Paul. What's more, this same Lord, Paul says in v. 18, "will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom." As profound and rich as these verses are, I have a very easy, elementary question about them. The "Lord" whom Paul speaks of is clearly Jesus.²⁷ This is the same Jesus who a few decades earlier was condemned to death, who was executed as a Roman political criminal, who bled and suffocated to death on a cross and whose

mutilated corpse was buried in a tomb outside of Jerusalem. How is it possible for that Jesus to “stand by” Paul several decades later in Rome and to deliver Paul in the future? I said it’s a very easy question. Don’t overthink it. The reason why a crucified and dead Jesus can be with Paul and can be counted on to deliver Paul in the future is because this Jesus is no longer dead. He arose from the grave. He was resurrected from the dead to new, indestructible life. He is still alive and active today, and will be forever and ever.

Christ must be resurrected and alive in order for Paul to have the experience he had in v. 17 and the hope he has in v. 18. Christ’s resurrection is the basic but crucial assumption, the crucial fact, that stands behind Paul’s words here at the end of 2 Tim. It’s the crucial reality that makes Paul so different. Christ’s resurrection enables Paul to persevere through hardship, and even, in hardship, to care for others and extend mercy to those who have hurt him. Christ is risen! And that makes all the difference in the world on Paul’s actual experience of suffering.

It can also make all the difference in the world on our experience of suffering.²⁸ If Paul’s letter indicates that the resurrection of Christ changes him, then the promise is that it will do so for us as well. But how? We’ll spend the rest of our time trying to answer that question. Specifically, I want to suggest three ways in which Christ’s resurrection changes and impacts us, three ways in which Christ’s resurrection made Paul new and can also make us new.

First, Christ’s resurrection objectively transforms us. Or better, Christ’s resurrection unleashes an objective power that does something to us, makes us new people. The simplest way to get at this is to recall how the story of Jesus goes. Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, on the third day he rose again. Then what did he do? He poured out his Spirit on us. It’s the first royal act that the risen Jesus performs when he ascends to his cosmic throne: he gives his own Spirit to the church at Pentecost.²⁹ The resurrection of Jesus opens the floodgates of heaven, as it were, so that the Spirit of the resurrected Christ might be showered on us, his bride. And the Spirit of the resurrected Christ changes and transforms us; he makes us new.

To say it more precisely, the Spirit of Christ makes us more like Christ. The Spirit of Christ breaks into a life and begins to shape that life into Christ’s image. In this light, consider again Paul’s experience at the end of 2 Tim. He was abandoned by his friends. Who else was deserted by his friends in his hour of greatest need? It was, of course, Jesus, who saw, one after another, his closest companions abandon him, betray him, deny

him. Paul is being molded into the image of Christ. Paul is tried before the Roman authorities as a political criminal; so was Christ, who was tried before the Roman governor Pilate. Paul finds himself cloak-less, but he is only doing so after his Lord was stripped of his garments and strung up naked on the cross. And if Paul can pray for mercy for those who have sinned against him, “May it not be charged against them!” it is because he is being conformed into the image of One who prayed for his persecutors, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” Paul’s life, Paul’s mercy, Paul’s love is being made to reflect Christ,³⁰ by the power of Christ’s own Spirit given to Paul and to the church because of and through Christ’s resurrection.

So the first way in which Christ’s resurrection impacts our lives is that it unleashes the Spirit who transforms us into Christ’s image. By the power of the Spirit, we become like Christ, persevering and even loving others through suffering.³¹ A second way in which the resurrection impacts our lives is this: it gives us something to set our hope on. Christ’s resurrection reveals to us our true hope so that we may bank on it while sojourning through this vale of tears, so that by hope we might persevere through suffering. It is hope in our true destiny, revealed in Christ’s resurrection, that changes us; hope strengthens our hearts to persevere and love.³² Let’s spend some time unpacking this point.

We’ve already noted that the Spirit of Christ is conforming our lives into Christ’s image. Here is one last crucial way in which we will become like Christ: Jesus suffered the supremest hardship and sorrow and pain—the sufferings and death of the cross—but he was delivered on the far side of his suffering. But how was he delivered? By being raised from the dead. Christ was resurrected. If Paul is in Jesus by faith, then Paul can be sure that his ultimate fate will be what Jesus experienced: he, too, will be raised from the dead on the far side of suffering. Suffering and death was not the end of Christ’s story, neither will it be the end of the story for Paul or anyone else who is in Christ and whom the Spirit is making like Christ. Christ’s resurrection reveals our truest destiny, which is nothing less than the resurrection of our bodies. It is in this destiny, this deliverance, this ultimate rescue that we can now set our hope.

What does Paul say in our passage? Paul suffers now, but he is confident, v. 18 says, that in the future he will be rescued from all his sufferings into Christ’s heavenly kingdom. He will be rescued from his sufferings in the same way Jesus was rescued from suffering—by being raised from the dead. Resurrection is the rescue that Paul eagerly anticipates at the end of 2 Tim. The language of being rescued into a “heavenly kingdom”

in v. 18 might sound to us like some disembodied existence in an ethereal realm called “heaven.”³³ But make no mistake about it: the true hope of the Christian is not escape from earth into heaven; the true hope of the Christian is that heaven would invade this earth and make all of it new³⁴—rocks and trees and skies and seas, cultures and cities and gardens and food, air and light and sound and our bodies. When Paul sets his hope on deliverance into Christ’s heavenly kingdom, he is not hoping to escape this created world and his created body. He is hoping in resurrection.

And Paul has the audacity to hope in his resurrection, because Christ’s resurrection guarantees that Paul and every Christian will be raised to new life as Christ was. Christ’s resurrection is the paradigm for our hope. In fact, one of the main aims of Paul in writing this letter was to help Timothy, and us, set our hope on Christ’s resurrection. In the middle of the letter, in perhaps the most important paragraph of the letter, 2:8–13, what does Paul exhort Timothy to do? Chapter 2, verse 8: “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.” Timothy, Timothy, Church of God, remember one thing: the resurrection of Jesus who gave his life for your life. Let the good news form and sustain your hope, because if the suffering Christ was raised from the dead, then so too will all who love and follow him be raised from the dead after their suffering. The promise is clear just a few verses later, in v. 11: “If we have died with him, we will also live with him.”³⁵ We will be raised to new life as Christ was. And the promise is not only at the center of the letter, but also at the beginning and end. What are the opening words in 2 Tim 1:1? “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.” The first sentence of the letter shows us why Paul writes to Timothy: so that he and we might hope in the promise of resurrection life. And Paul concludes the letter by setting the same hope before us: we will be delivered into Christ’s heavenly kingdom, into the new heavens and the new earth, in fully resurrected bodies to join with our risen Lord Jesus. Then, in the end, we will find that all will be made right. Every hurt will be healed, every fear will be forgotten, all disease and decay will be done away with, abandonment will give way to loyalty and fellowship, all hunger will give way to feasting. We will be welcomed to dine at our King’s table, and, best of all, our King will be present to us and for us, sitting down at table with us to feast on his unending goodness. Christ’s resurrection is God’s promise to us that in the end we will reign with Christ in life; his resurrection is the guarantee of our hope.

And this hope, when it grips our hearts, changes us. Christ's resurrection assures us that our story will end not in death but in resurrection life, and such assurance strengthens and motivates us to persevere and even love through hardship. By laying hold of our true hope of resurrection, we are empowered to endure suffering and freed to love.

Laying hold of our true hope is what strengthens us to patiently endure suffering now, confident that any suffering, any loss, any anguish and pain of soul and body now will be restored a thousandfold in the age to come with resurrection life.

Laying hold of resurrection hope is what frees us to love others. A great obstacle to love is anxiety over our own good and life: if we're worried about our needs, then of course we will have a hard time noticing the needs of others around us. But if Christ is risen, then we can be sure that in the end resurrection life and joy will be ours. Our ultimate good and life is secure. We will experience loss and isolation and abandonment and the frustration of our plans and a world of anguish and pain, but the promise still holds. I mean, what's the worst that can happen to us? We can die. That's it! We might think to ourselves, "That's a huge problem." And it is ... if our God does not raise the dead. If our hope is in this life only, then we are most of all to be pitied. But our hope is not in this life only; this life only is not even the fullness of what true life is. Our hope is in the resurrection life to come, in the God who can and will raise us to that new life. When our anxious hearts find rest in God's sure promise of resurrection life, then we are freed to look beyond the threat of suffering now to the needs of others around us. We are freed to love others, even in the midst of hardship, by laying hold of our sure hope.

By laying hold of our resurrection hope in Christ, we are even freed to forgive those who sin against us. I believe it is, in part, hope in the resurrection that enables Paul to extend mercy to those who abandoned him at his first trial. Paul knows that at the resurrection, God will establish perfect justice. He will right every wrong; he will judge wrong-doers perfectly; he will vindicate those who have been wronged.³⁶ In hope, Paul lays aside his urges for vindication now and lets go of bitterness and the maddening urge to see those who have hurt him get their comeuppance. It doesn't cost us anything to let mercy dissolve our grievances;

or whatever we think it costs us now will be more than repaid in the end. Paul's hope in the resurrection and the righting of all wrongs at the end of days frees him to be merciful in his present affliction.³⁷

When we lay hold of resurrection hope in Christ, it changes us, strengthens us, impels us to love, frees us to forgive. That's what happens when we set our eyes on our truest hope.

But a problem arises. It is often hard to set our eyes on our truest hope. Our truest hope often seems vague and dim and distant to us, and our pain now seems enormous. In 2 Cor 4, Paul says, "Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." I want to say to Paul, "Paul, are you blind? Light affliction? Is abandonment by your friends 'light'? Is the certainty of martyrdom 'light'? Is imprisonment in a cold cell without sufficient clothing 'light'?" Is Paul delusional? Does he have nothing to offer but frothy ideas and pious abstractions that, at the end of the day, have no correspondence to the real world? Paul's afflictions were anything but light. And my afflictions and your afflictions do not feel light. We can talk about the greatness of our future hope till we're blue in the face; but it does not change how great and huge and weighty our present sorrows seem to us.

Part of the problem here is a matter of perspective. It's like this. I'm driving west to the Rockies on I-76, and I begin to see the vague, shadowy form of mountains on the horizon. While I'm still a hundred miles away in Fort Morgan, CO, the mountains I see look way smaller than the iPhone that is sitting on the dash of my car. The mountains look dim and dull and small; my iPhone looks huge and bright and glorious. That is reality for me in the moment; at least, it's my perception of reality. Now this should go without saying (perhaps): the mountains are way bigger, way more glorious, way more breathtaking than an iPhone. From my perspective in Fort Morgan, it doesn't look that way; not even close. But that's not because the mountains are actually dwarfed by my iPhone. It's because, at so great a distance from the mountains, I can't see them clearly, can't sense their proper shape and size and grandeur, and can't discern the true insignificance of the iPhone. If I could hold them up side-by-side, there would be no contest. The greatness and weightiness of the phone that I feel now would be forgotten.

That's how it is with the eternal weight of glory, the resurrection life, that is promised to us. If we could hold it up side-by-side, as it were, with our present sufferings, there would be no contest. We would say, with

Paul, that our sufferings, intense as they are in the fervor of the present, are in the whole scheme of things momentary and light. Present despair, present physical pain, present loneliness and abandonment, present anxieties, even death—it's all light in comparison to entering resurrection life in God's heavenly kingdom as his resurrected sons and daughters. If we could see them side-by-side, it would be plain as day to us. But we can't. We can't pull the future into the present to set next to our present hardships. Scripture gives us some clues to paint a bit of a picture of our future hope, but the picture is still fuzzy, vague, seemingly distant. And it's awfully hard, in any case, to call it all to mind in the moment of intense trial. We can't pull the future into the present. So what does God do? He sends a little part of the future, the best part of the future, into the present so that we can taste and see. Our future hope is resurrection: the Father sends the Son, before the final resurrection, to be raised from the dead ahead of time to reveal our true hope. God doesn't say, "In your hardships, try to comprehend all of your future hope in one shot." What he says, through the Apostle Paul, is, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead."³⁸ He is the future broken into the present. He is the guarantee of our future hope. He is the mountain peak sent to us before we reach the eternal Rockies, to help us realize the true nature of reality and to help us fight the good fight of faith till our faith turns into sight. Our glorious future may at times seem dim; it might appear distant and fuzzy and small in comparison with our present hardship. But the tomb is empty. Our future is secure. Our Lord lives, and so shall we. Our Lord lives; indeed, he is present with us and near to us even now.

And this is the third and final way in which Christ's resurrection makes a practical impact on our sorrow-filled lives today. If Christ has risen to new, everlasting life, then he can be, and is, present with us here and now, in our hardships whatever they may be. God has sent a foretaste of the future, a foretaste of our resurrection hope, into the present, and that resurrection hope is ultimately not a thing but a Person, not an idea but a Companion, not a fix to an impersonal problem but a Friend to stand with us and hold us through the storm.

Recently, we've sung together words that Ada Habershon penned over a century ago: Christ will hold me fast. He will hold me fast, for my Savior loves me so. He will hold me fast.³⁹ She could have simply used the abstraction: "my Savior loves me so." But she insists upon the very concrete image of being held in Christ's arms. Why does she use that metaphor? I think she's tapping into a profound human truth: to be held is to have someone present to us; in fact, to be held is to find healing. There is healing and renewal in the simple presence and embrace of loved ones. There is something mysteriously restorative in being held by one who

loves us. Children know it. When one of my kids cracks their head against a wall (I have no idea how they manage to do it every day), where do they run immediately? To their mom and dad for a hug. When a loved one dies, we yearn for and need the embrace of those closest to us. By some deep magic in the universe, the presence and embrace of those who love us is a healing balm.

And the One who loves us most, the One who loves us perfectly, so perfectly he gave his life for our life—this One has risen to new life and is now present with us and even embraces us, wrapping around us the very Spirit of his love.⁴⁰ Christ himself promises, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” He promises to be present with us and for us in the communion meal we are about to enjoy together, lifting us up by the power of his Spirit to know his nearness and his embrace. And those who turn to him, who seek his presence, find that his presence and embrace is enough. It doesn’t answer every anguished question we have. It doesn’t cause our sorrows to evaporate. But the embrace of our present Lord Jesus is enough to get us through this day (which is the only day we are right now responsible for).

Paul knew sorrow and hardship. He knew difficulty and despair and anxiety and anguish. He felt greatly abandoned by others, and he was greatly abandoned. But not utterly. “The Lord stood by me.” The risen Lord was there by his side throughout the ordeal, and he was the truest of friends, the closest of brothers, the greatest of all companions, and the strongest of all helpers. The risen Jesus stood by Paul and strengthened him to persevere through his ordeal. And he can and will do so for us. Let us turn to him in hope.

Most merciful God and heavenly Father, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that, by faith in him who suffered on the cross and triumphed over death, we may suffer faithfully triumph in the power of his victory. By your Spirit, transform us into Christ’s image; calm our anxious hearts with our true hope, so that we might be strengthened to persevere and love others; and comfort us with your nearness, we pray, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

NOTES:

¹ Second Timothy was perhaps the very last letter Paul wrote in his lifetime; it's almost certainly the latest written letter of his that we have in our Bibles. So we can say not only that we arrive this morning at the end of 2 Tim but also at the end of all of Paul's letters. And I mean "end" both temporally and logically, for the goal of Paul's letters is to proclaim the good news of the risen Christ for the transformed lives of his people.

For discussion of the chronology and relationship of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus (likely written in between the first two, but appearing canonically after 2 Timothy), as well as a plausible (though inescapably speculative) historical reconstruction, see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, liv–lxiv. In what follows, I assume the basic rightness of the belief that Paul was released from the imprisonment narrated at the end of Acts and ministered for another couple or few years before a second imprisonment and eventually death in Rome (this is more or less in keeping with the tradition passed on by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.22.7–8, though Paul may have been martyred earlier than the date [AD 67] Eusebius sets). I do not believe that the "first defense" referred to in v. 16 is the first Roman imprisonment but an initial hearing during Paul's second Roman imprisonment (see below).

² Johnson identifies "the literary functions of 2 Timothy's final section" as follows: "Paul touches on the movements of his delegates [i.e., logistics for the mission], communicates greetings [i.e., builds/strengthens ties in the Christian community], and reinforces his main argument. He does the last by continuing to present himself as a model for Timothy" (Timothy, 446).

³ See 2 Tim 1:8, 17; 2:9.

⁴ Paul had been arrested by Rome earlier in his life, which we read about at the end of the book of Acts, and that time of imprisonment was relatively comfortable in comparison (Acts 28 indicates that he apparently could have visitors and had several associates with him, he had some freedom of movement, etc.). As our passage in 2 Tim indicates (and as is hinted at in various places throughout the letter), Paul is in a much

harsher second imprisonment most likely a few years after the imprisonment narrated at the end of Acts. See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, lxii.

⁵ Johnson, *Timothy*, 442.

⁶ On this, and on the more traditional view that reference is here being made to Paul's first Roman imprisonment), see the helpful discussion of Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 594–95.

⁷ There is good reason to believe that "rescue from the lion's mouth" refers to a positive initial hearing before the Roman judge (see *ibid.*, 595, 597).

⁸ Grammatically, it is unclear whether εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπουράνιον in v. 18 denotes purpose (i.e., save me in order for continued kingdom labor) or destination (i.e., save me into his kingdom) (see Johnson, *Timothy*, 443). However, it is clear from the context that Paul does not expect an extension of his kingdom labor on earth. Johnson very helpfully compares and contrasts the shift in mood and tone (corresponding to the shift in circumstances) from Phil 1 to 2 Tim 4 (*ibid.*, 450–51).

⁹ As will become clear below when speaking of Paul's resurrection hope, I am convinced that the spatially oriented term "heavenly" has a primarily future reference when used in Scripture. In this instance, the "kingdom" that Paul expects to be delivered into is not an ethereal kingdom some place spatially other than (i.e., "above") the present world; rather, it is the future kingdom that will be brought down from heaven to transform earth which, e.g., Rev 21–22 speaks of (the spatial depiction indicating the giftedness of the kingdom, the sovereign freedom of God in giving it, and human impotence to bring it about). The surprising "present Jerusalem"/"Jerusalem above" pairing and contrast in Gal 4:25–26 is instructive in this regard.

¹⁰ We know of Titus from several other letters of Paul. Crescens doesn't appear anywhere else in the pages of the NT.

¹¹ This is a task Tychicus is known for from other letters (see Eph 6:21; Col 4:7). Tychicus would likely also have been expected to take up pastoral duties in Ephesus in Timothy's absence, should Timothy be able to make it to Rome to see Paul one last time (see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 591).

¹² See Col 4:14; Philem 24.

¹³ Johnson, Timothy, 439.

¹⁴ The people of v. 21 also are likely fellow Christians with whom Paul had some contact; see *ibid.*, 442.

¹⁵ The command in v. 9 is actually *σπούδασον*, which underlines earnestness and intentionality (“make every effort”). There is likely haste implied in the command, but it comes to verbal expression in the adverb *ταχέως* (see Johnson, Timothy, 438).

¹⁶ In addition to Paul’s need for his cloak, there is also the matter of travel conditions. If Timothy doesn’t set out on his journey from Ephesus to Rome before winter, he likely will be delayed from making it until the following spring, because travel in the winter was treacherous. Paul doesn’t know whether he has that much time left. So he tells Timothy to hurry.

¹⁷ It possibly had to do with the swift nature of Paul’s arrest.

¹⁸ Note the gloss “a thick upper garment” provided in LSJ (under the alternative spelling *φαινόλης*).

¹⁹ Cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 588–89.

²⁰ His words and pleas to Timothy are vivid and heartfelt: “I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.” “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner.” “Guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace.” Paul says in 2 Cor 11:28 that he had daily pressure and anxiety upon him for the well-being of the churches of God that he ministered to, spending many sleepless and tear-filled nights pleading with the Lord for their good, lamenting over their sin, anxious for their well-being. Surely, his care and concern for Timothy was surely at least as intense. It is safe to assume that as Paul was waiting for his second trial in prison, he was spending many of his nights in tears, praying for Timothy’s good.

²¹ Apparently, Alexander had opposed Paul in some significant way in the past, but we have no way of knowing the details. For some reasonable speculations on the matter, see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 592–94. Johnson’s reserve is commendable: “In a case like this, we must simply confess our inability to sort out

the confused state of the evidence. Connections may be possible, but in the case of a common name such as Alexander (or Mark), it is a hazardous exercise” (Timothy, 448).

²² Johnson wields just such an observation in the service of a proposal for the Pauline authenticity of the letter (see Timothy, 450–51).

²³ It’s worth noting how remarkable it is (or at least, it seems remarkable to me) that the Bible gives us such a realistic, honest picture of human sadness and difficulty. What we get in Timothy, what we get in Revelation, what we get in the Gospels, what we get in the Psalms, and all over the place in Scripture is an unparalleled window onto actual human experience and heartache and despair. The Bible doesn’t distract us from the concrete hardships of life with a bunch of abstractions to think about; it gives us very material, earthy prison cells and trials before accusers and blood spilt and sweat on brows and thorns in hands and friends all leaving you and anxiety over children. The Bible doesn’t hide difficulty, or ignore it, or downplay it (“things could be a lot worse!”). The Bible readily admits that things are hard and bad. Things are not the way they’re supposed to be. The Bible knows and openly names our sorrows. Scripture looks badness and sadness and hardship and pain in the face, and doesn’t minimize it but orders it aright, sheds light on its meaning, in the truest of stories. And that, I think, is testimony to the Bible’s truthfulness.

²⁴ Sadly we don’t have time to explain this, but we could also note that Paul doesn’t just talk the talk, but apparently he also walked the walk. For he speaks of other Christians in Rome with whom he is presently in contact and fellowship of some sort in v. 21: “Eubulus sends greetings, as do and Pudens and Linus and Claudius and all the brothers.” In order for Paul to know that these Christians in Rome with him sent their greetings along to Timothy, Paul would have to be in some kind of contact and fellowship with them. But these were very likely among the Christians in Rome who just a short while prior did not come to Paul’s defense at his first hearing when he needed it. Paul not only speaks forgiving words about them in v. 16; evidently, he also extends mercy to them practically by seeking and welcoming their continued fellowship. The same point could be discerned by considering Paul’s relationship with Mark in v. 11.

²⁵ Another way in which Paul responds to his need, which is far different from how many people respond, is by humbling himself and honestly acknowledging his need to Timothy. He seeks Timothy’s help: Timothy, come quickly, and bring Mark; I need you both to join Luke in helping me persevere faithfully all the way to

the end. Paul humbles himself and asks for help. Many simply try to grin and bear it; the last thing many of us want is to admit to others that we're needy and are desperate for help.

²⁶ I read the "fulfillment" of the proclamation to "all the Gentiles" in this context as referring specifically to the testimony Paul gives before the Roman court in his trial. Paul speaks in hyperbole to indicate the socio-cultural-theological significance of his witness before Caesar (cf. Philip H. Towner, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 891–918, at 911). Witness in Rome and before Caesar takes on a "witness to all nations" significance at the end of Acts (note also Rom 1:14–15; Phil 1:12–18, 22), and also in the Gospels (there in the form of Jesus' trial before Pilate). We might also read these trials against the Isaianic backdrop of the eschatological trials before/ with the nations concerning the identity of the one true God appearing esp. in Isa 40–55.

²⁷ If we need persuasion on the point, we can look at the near context which presents the "Lord" as the the end-time judge (4:8), while also making it clear that "Christ Jesus" is the end-time judge (4:1). More broadly considered, Paul's typical usage of the title "Lord" throughout the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy indicates that for him the "Lord" is especially Jesus (see, e.g., 1 Tim 1:2, 12, 14; 6:3, 14–15; 2 Tim 1:2, 8).

²⁸ Paul is not only informing of his circumstances, but offering himself here at the end of 2 Tim as an example and encouragement for Timothy and for the church (cf. Johnson, *Timothy*, 446).

²⁹ Reading Luke-Acts as a single story helps us to recognize the immediate connection between resurrection and the giving of the Spirit (and note, in particular, Luke 24:46–49). The connection is made even more clearly in John's gospel (see John 20:22).

³⁰ The language of "reflection" is important. Christ is the decisive image; we are made into his image derivatively. In this light, the at-times proposed allusions to Ps 22 here at the end of 2 Tim are theologically intriguing. Paul's experience of abandonment yet being rescued "from the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim 4:16–17; cf. Ps 22:1, 21) has led a number of interpreters to suggest that Ps 22 has influenced Paul's self-portrayal (see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 587, for sources). Mounce doubts an intentional/meaningful allusion, or at least sees it as no more than possible, since "the Psalms are replete with affirmations of trust despite difficult circumstances ... , Paul never felt abandoned by God as did the psalmist, and the metaphor of being saved

from a lion is not that unusual" (ibid., 589). It may be true that Paul "never felt abandoned by God," but he clearly asserts that he was "forsaken" (ἐγκαταλείπω in 2 Tim 4:10, 16; cf. ἐγκαταλείπω in Ps 21:2 LXX; cf. Mark 15:34). The recurrence of the key Leitwort in both passages, together with the similarity of situation and the verbatim repetition of "from the mouth of the lion" (ἐκ στόματος λέοντος appearing only in 2 Tim 4:17 and Ps 21:22 LXX [also 1 Macc 2:60]; note also how both contexts use the language of being "saved" [see σῶζω in 2 Tim 4:18; Ps 21:22 LXX]) leads me to take seriously the possibility that Ps 22 has had an influence on Paul's experience/portrayal of his last days. The key issue seems to me to be Paul's confidence in his experience of forsakenness that it is not God who forsakes him; he does not take, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" upon his lips. If Ps 22 is in view in Paul's writing, then the question arises of how he can be so confident. And the proper answer is the cry in Mark 15:34. That is, because Christ first took ultimate forsakenness upon himself, Paul can be confident that his experience of abandonment is not a being forsaken by God. Thus, Paul is made to be like Christ (made to reflect the lamenting psalmist of Ps 22), but only in a reflective and derivative sense.

³¹ In general, I view my attempt here to unpack resurrection hope as an unpacking of a (the?) central theme and purposes of the letter of 2 Tim (see esp. the second point below). This first point is admittedly the most distant from the actual words of the letter, since the Spirit receives little overt attention in the letter (only one direct, undisputed mention in 1:14; but note θεόπνευστος in 3:16, and also 1:7, which Gordon Fee thinks refers to the Holy Spirit [see God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 785–89]). Despite the paucity of overt reference to the Spirit in this letter, I can say, first, that the presence and work of the Spirit is surely an unstated assumption throughout—e.g., if we will be raised with Christ in 2:11–12, then it is safe to assume it will be by the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead (note 1 Tim 3:16); if the ascended Lord "stood by" and was present with him in his first defense (4:17), it was by the power of the Spirit. Second, the one undisputed express mention of the Spirit sets the tone for the rest of the letter, appearing at its outset: "Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you." It is only by the Spirit that Timothy will heed Paul's call, fulfill his ministry, and fight the good fight. Thus, everything else Paul says in the letter by way of invitation, exhortation, and direction to Timothy assumes the presence and power of the Spirit.

³² This second way in which Christ's resurrection impacts us may be finely but importantly differentiated from the first point above. The first point had to do with an objective change in our "nature" that comes about by way of Christ's resurrection (i.e., the Spirit objectively given through Christ's resurrection changes us). This second point has to do with how we subjectively respond to the news of Christ's resurrection—that news gives us subjective hope, which is an engine of change in our lived lives. The first point had to do with a change in our constitution; this second point has to do with a new object of motivation. Again, the distinction is fine, but it is important. It is my attempt to hold together both divine sovereignty and human responsibility; or from a different angle, it is my attempt to prevent us falling off the horse on either side of passivity (which frequently works out as mere intellectual storing of data) or self-reliance. Still differently, it is my attempt to articulate my conviction that the sovereign God's sovereign work of change comes about in communicative ways (i.e., through his word of promise, which we lay hold of by faith).

³³ If v. 18 sounds to many ears as though Paul is hoping in an escape from his body and this earth, perhaps it's because our ears are not used to hearing and our lips are not used to speaking every day what our Lord Jesus himself told us to pray and hear daily: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Perhaps it is also because we have developed poor speech habits (speech habits that are insufficiently normed by Scripture), so that we have been trained (in many cases, through post-enlightenment hymnody) to speak of our ultimate destination almost exclusively as "heaven" and not as (or at least, not also as) "the new heavens and the new earth" or "the new creation" or "the New Jerusalem" or even "God's kingdom."

³⁴ Thus, at the end of Revelation, God's people are not whisked away into the air to "heaven," but the New Jerusalem is depicted as coming down to the earth so that heaven and earth might be one, so that the kingdom as it is being lived out now in heaven might be lived out in the same way on earth.

³⁵ As in 1 Tim, the crucial central hinge of 2 Tim appears in hymnic or creedal form (see 1 Tim 3:16). Standing at the structural and thematic center of both letters is the stuff of corporate confession. This is, I believe, of great significance exegetically, theologically, ecclesialogically, and liturgically. For a recent work arguing for the theological centrality of creedal statements in Scripture, see Mark J. Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions*, ASBT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017). Boda's focus is on the

creedal expressions appearing in the OT; the letters to Timothy suggest that NT creedal expressions may have a similar function and significance for exegesis and theology.

³⁶ The resurrection simply is the vindication of God's people, the end-time public proof that their present hope in Christ and in God's promise was rightly placed. On Christ's resurrection as his vindication, see 1 Tim 3:16, and also the brief comments of Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 26. For much more in-depth discussion of the biblical theological notion of resurrection as vindication (justification), see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 469–526.

³⁷ I think we can make the same point with respect to Alexander. In v. 14 of our passage, Paul can say of Alexander, his outright antagonist, "The Lord will repay him according to his deeds." It is Paul's hope in the resurrection that gives him such confidence and enables him to let go of the desire for immediate vindication. While his response to Alexander seems strikingly different from his response to those who abandoned him at his hearing in v. 16 (see, e.g., Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 593), I think both stem from the same hope and are consistent with a disposition toward mercy. It seems to me, importantly, that the expression in v. 16 arises with respect to those who are likely to be identified as brothers and sisters in Christ; while in v. 14 the expression arises with respect to one who likely was outside the church. Additionally, Paul gives no indication that he is unwilling to be merciful toward Alexander, but simply that he is confident that Alexander will be held accountable, a point which Paul can make with equal confidence concerning members of the church (see, e.g., Gal 6:7; cf. Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 5:10).

³⁸ In this light, 2 Tim parallels Heb 2:5–9: we do not presently see humankind reigning in glory as they were created to do, but we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor in the resurrection.

³⁹ Ada R. Habershon, "He Will Hold Me Fast," 1906.

⁴⁰ The only hesitation I have in speaking this way is that it can give the impression (muddled as we are nowadays in our thinking about Christ's presence and purpose in the world) that a "me and Jesus" spirituality is really, at the end of the day, the point of it all. When I say we are "wrapped in the Spirit of Christ's love," I mean what the Bible consistently means when it talks about where Christ is chiefly present to us by his Spirit: his people, the church, particularly as they are gathered for the Supper (see the following

statements). The God who speaks Scripture never presses upon us the binary of “either Jesus-or other people” (or more generally, “either Jesus-or creation,” which would be a contradiction of the Incarnation), but “either the way of Jesus-or our own self-determined way.” For all our talk that “Jesus is enough” (as I will say in just a moment) or “Jesus is our treasure” or “We desire nothing but him,” we must at the same time be able to render a truthful ecclesiology and a robust theology of creation.