

Encouragement to Continue

Part 1

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[00:00:01] I was rather surprised to find that I was billed to deliver a lecture to you here tonight, because what I feel like saying to you is remote from being lecturing you, and I would like to try to reflect in my manner with you here tonight the spirit that pervades this letter to Timothy, this last letter of all that we have in our New Testament that Paul wrote. And if one thing is apparent more than another, it's quite obvious that Paul is not lecturing Timothy when he writes this letter to him.

And indeed, it would be fair to say that it wouldn't be right for me to start lecturing you when I look around. It's about one face in twenty that I recognize. The vast majority of you are unknown quantities as far as I'm concerned, [00:01:04] and it's very likely, I'm sure, it's probable that the quality of your Christian lives might very well put me to shame in some senses, and therefore it doesn't do for me to be cracking any whips or grinding any axes here tonight.

What I would like to do is to reflect the spirit of this letter, and it certainly is not a lecture.

I suppose it might be spoken of as a word of exhortation to Timothy and a word of encouragement to Timothy as well.

A writer for the Hebrews, you will remember, when he comes near the end and speaks to his readers once again, he says, Suffer the word of exhortation.

And I think that's a fairly apt description not only of the letter to the Hebrews [00:02:01] but also of the second letter to Timothy.

Timothy needed exhorting in some senses. He needed encouraging in other senses. He needed to gather up a new heart in pursuing his life for Christ.

It had been a faithful life up to date. It had been through many a deep experience with the Lord Jesus Christ and along with the Apostle Paul on many an occasion. And he had been running the course, so to speak, over many years, it must have been, though he was still a youngish man when he received this letter. But he needed to gather up a new heart and new strength to continue because, in fact, there were many things that worked against faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ, many things that would deter him, and he needed to be encouraged to face.

[00:03:04] He needed to be told that there was a trust resting upon his shoulders, so to speak, that it

was up to him to fulfill.

He needed to be given strength to face the rigors and the tests and the difficulties and perhaps even the disappointments that those that were true to the Lord Jesus Christ were having to face in those days when this letter was written. Timothy found many things that were a bit of a challenge to his continuance and to his persistence in the Christian life.

And when we say Timothy was in that situation, I don't think it is wrong for us to say that if the challenges were around and if the tests were around and if Timothy needed to be told to continue to be a faithful person, [00:04:02] we in our day are not facing less difficulties or more disappointments than Timothy had to face in his day.

These things are all around with us still. The outlook as far as Timothy and Paul were concerned, the propagation of the Christian truth and the preaching of the Christian message out and around as Paul had taken it and Timothy had gone with him on many of those missions, it was taking a turn which was a disappointing turn. The outlook was not the brightest and there were defections on quite a broad scale.

The first chapter of this epistle, he says, all those in Asia have turned away from me.

There was a broad departure from adherence to the Christian truth in those days. Things that were a great disappointment to the Apostle Paul, [00:05:03] things that were a sadness to Timothy, to these two devoted persons that were concerned about the interests of the Lord Jesus Christ in those days. The outlook was not the brightest. The defections were there and they were on a broad scale. They were pretty massive really and they were not only happening in general in many areas but they were happening at close quarters too, something that seems to hurt the Apostle Paul rather a lot when he writes these closing words that deemeth that this latest stage has forsaken him and hath departed.

Within the broad view, so to speak, there was a lot of declension, a lot of giving up Christian faith and Christian truth. People departing from those wonderful things that Paul had taught them, those wonderful truths that Paul had ministered to them. [00:06:02] People that were letting these things slide and moving away from loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's the situation that is around still today.

The tendency for many is to give up and it's not too difficult to see these kind of things happening. And our tendency too is not necessarily to continue in loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to be told, as Timothy needed to be told, that we have to gather new hearts, so to speak, and stir up the gift of God that is in us. Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.

God has not given us a spirit of fear but of a sound mind and of a strong character to live for him.

He has infused that spirit. He has supplied that spirit indwelling us and we need to make use of it. We need to stir up the gift of God that has been bestowed upon us.

[00:07:05] Timothy needed to be told that and we need to be told this. We need to be encouraged. We need to be exhorted along the kind of lines that this epistle does exhort.

One of the things that strikes me very particularly about this last chapter of this epistle, and

remember these are the very last words written by the Apostle Paul, he's anxious that Timothy should come soon. Twice in this chapter he says, do thy diligence to come.

Come before winter, he says, almost the last of those verses. Come quickly because there's a chance that I might not see you if you don't get along pretty quick. And in the opening chapter he says, I greatly desire to see you.

I'm mindful of your tears. I remember you as you were when I left you, when last I saw you, [00:08:03] and I would like just during these last days to have one more glimpse of you, Timothy. I suppose one of the things that pervades this chapter is that tenderness and that strong link, that strong human tie which is existing between these two individuals who are so devoted to the Lord.

And that impending parting was deeply felt, Paul felt it and Timothy certainly felt it. It was going to be a great loss to Timothy to have no longer the Apostle Paul to lean on and to consult and to communicate with and to have fellowship with in the work and the things of the Lord Jesus Christ. The tests were heavy as far as Timothy was concerned and Paul knows that very well.

What sympathy he has for Timothy in his situation. [00:09:01] What tenderness comes through in these final words to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith.

And yet over and above the sad side of this situation, over and above the poignancy, so to speak, of these words, there is a triumph that rings through and overtops all the sadness.

A sense of triumph and a sense of Christian fortitude is really the dominant note in this chapter.

The things that they were having to face were severe but there was in Christ a strength to overcome everything that they might have to meet, everything that they might have to go through with. Christian fortitude is the dominant note in this chapter and if one thing is plain rather than another, Paul has no regrets, Paul has no doubts about the value of the life that they have been pursuing. [00:10:05] That life that was coming so nearly to the end now as far as Paul was concerned. He has no regrets, he has no doubts about having been on the valuable line as far as the Lord Jesus Christ is concerned. He had lived his life totally and fully for the Lord. He'd lived out what he enjoins on Timothy.

His life had been lived to the full for the Lord and he has nothing but recommendation for Timothy to follow in the same sort of line as he is glad to be able to say that he had been able to follow. Looking down the chapter then, let me pick out a few things just to make a few comments about.

It would be easy to harp back to some of these earlier chapters but I think I must avoid doing that perhaps except to say that he encourages him to be brave and to be full of courage in the face of his present situation [00:11:07] and it seems to me he does that pretty clearly in the first chapter. What is more, he tells him that something rests on his shoulders. Hold fast the form of sound words, he says, which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

He tells Timothy in more than one place and he also says this in the first epistle as well that something is committed to you, Timothy. Something rests on your shoulders and I wonder whether all of us here tonight, we have younger people as well as older people, are we aware that we're not only recipients of great blessings and wonderful things that have come through in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ but that we have something to be true to, something to carry for the Lord. And this

isn't only something that older people have to carry but it's something that younger people as well, [00:12:05] Timothy as I've said was not all that old yet, he was still on the youngest side anyway and on his shoulders there rested something that had been committed to him to be true to and to represent and to reflect here in this world so long as he was here.

And this is something that I think we have to say sometimes that not only are we receivers of the Christian truth but we are those that are supposed to be responsible to it.

We have to carry it, we have to be true to it.

To some extent it rests on our shoulders as successors of those that have gone before us to stand for the same truths as those that have preceded us and to honour the Lord Jesus Christ first and foremost in all our demeanour, in all our ways, in all our conduct. Stand by the truth of God.

[00:13:03] There'll be plenty that will relax and plenty that will give it up, plenty that will shelve it and pass away out of sight. But we, Timothy in the first place, have to treat ourselves as those that are in the line of succession so to speak as having received something very wonderful, needing to carry it, needing to be true to it, needing to represent it, needing to be a good example of the kind of thing that others can take notice of as well.

Beginning of that second chapter he says that which has been committed to you, the things which you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. Have we ever thought about ourselves not only as receivers of great light and truth from the scriptures but as those that are required to be true to what we have received and to be influencing other people [00:14:03] that are taking notice of what we are, but be very sure that people are taking notice of what we are and if we are untrue to the Lord that has a bad influence and if we are faithful to the Lord that has a helpful influence amongst those that witness our behaviour. Perhaps we do not think sufficiently how much it does depend on our good example and our good influence that others might take notice and be persuaded to follow in the same kind of lines. Paul had a great influence as far as Timothy was concerned. Timothy was to be a right influence as far as those that watched him were concerned. We do occupy the place both as receivers of Christian truth and as those that have to stand for it and those that have to be true to it in our day. [00:15:01] This was true in Timothy's day and this is still true today. Finally, of course, in this last chapter, having pressed many things on him of this kind, he has one last final charge to put on Timothy's shoulders.

I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word. And one of the things about the way in which Paul presses this is the way in which he treats this as something terribly important, something very vital. With all solemnity and with all firmness and with all dignity, he emphasizes that this is a vital thing that Timothy must be charged with and feel the charge of having it on his own shoulders.

He presses on him these words that call to mind the day of judgment, [00:16:05] the day when the quick and the dead will be judged. That's a prospect that has solemn overtones as well as joyous overtones for the Christian and our lives are going to be reviewed, as I suppose you will know, in that day when Christ appears and our faithfulness to him is something that is going to be looked at. We will not, if we belong to him, lose anything that's vital, but we might lose his approbation, we might lose the reward that would be there for those that remain firm and remain true to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul doesn't hesitate to underline this with all the strength and the importance that he can lay upon it, he presses it with great firmness, great dignity, [00:17:01] and how important the word of God is and how necessary it is to not only repeat it, not only assert it, so to speak, but to be true to it in manner as well as speaking it out, so to speak.

One thing that strikes me about these verses, I suppose you will notice it too, is that Timothy's manner of preaching hasn't to be overbearing and it hasn't to be so insistent that it has the wrong spirit about it.

He has to be insistent, he has to seize opportunities, he has to be alive, he has to be alert. He doesn't have to be sluggish, he doesn't have to hide his light under a bed or under a bushel. He has to be on the alert all the time, seizing opportunities of propagating the word of God, but he must do it in a way that isn't heavy-handed. [00:18:01] He must do it in a way that is true to the spirit of the word of God. Do it, he says, with all longsuffering and doctrine, and Timothy's spirit, Timothy's manner must be consistent with the message that he is underlining and the message that he is passing on. He is told to herald it out, it isn't enough to guard the word of God, it must be propagated, there must be some positive heralding of the word of God, according to these verses. It isn't just holding it, holding the truth of it privately to ourselves, but it's passing it on, it's pushing it out, so to speak, but it must be done in a delicate way, it must be done in the right spirit, with all longsuffering and doctrine. Seize opportunities to press the word of God, but do it in the right way, with all longsuffering.

[00:19:02] I suppose you will notice that he is told to reprove, to rebuke, to exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine, and these very words are much the same words as are said, are used about scripture itself in verse 16 of the previous chapter. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, and Timothy is essentially being told to be a person who is reflecting the very characteristics of the word of God itself.

And, you know, this is important.

To channel Christian teaching to others, one must be well under its effects oneself, not enough to preach the word of God without being under the power of it oneself. And Timothy is being told to reflect the very word of God that he's preaching in the very manner in which he preaches it in these words.

[00:20:07] He's to insist on it, and it's more important to insist on it in view of the fact that many people are choosing other things. As these next verses say, the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears. And this is true to life in the 20th century, isn't it, that people will go for what they like more than what is true. They'll turn their ears to the fables all right, the empty things, the lightweight things, the things that suit them. But whether they're true or not is another matter. These are days, as you know as well as I do, when people have their preferences and the demand creates the supply, so to speak.

There'll always be speakers that will produce the kind of thing that will suit the audience, [00:21:04] but that isn't what has to be done. It has to be the word of God, and it has to be pressed, and it has to be what is the truth of God concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, concerning all that has been brought to light by the coming and by the death, by the resurrection, by the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. All that has come in in a wonderful way in the New Testament days, those are the things to press, those are the things to underline to other people. These are the things that must be proclaimed.

These are the things that must be propagated. It's not what people choose to listen to, but it's what will do them good and what will be a great help to them that must be pressed. Timothy mustn't be diverted into any of these unhelpful lines. Be plenty people of that kind. A waning of desire for the truth of God is mentioned in this verse. Preference for lightweight subject matter. [00:22:01] Is this something that characterizes us in some sort of way? Do we like the entertaining speakers? Do we like the people that tickle our fancy, so to speak, and say the pleasant things? Or do we like those that proclaim the wonderful truth that surrounds the glorious person of the Lord Jesus Christ and all that he has brought to life? Which of these things do we like to listen to? Which of these things are we pressing ourselves? Timothy has to preach the word, for the time will come when lots of people are listening to other things. He's told to have these basic qualities, and it seems to me very striking in this verse 5, the very last words that Paul has to say in a way of exhortation to Timothy are that he must have these basic qualities. He must be watchful.

He must be vigilant. He must be sober-minded about all the things that he's observing. He must have the proper judgments guided by the word of God [00:23:05] as to the trends that are all around him. He must endure afflictions.

He must be a hardy person. He must be a robust person.

It's not the soft life for Christians. It's the life that is a demanding life in one sense, and yet it is the life which is the valuable life, the worthwhile life to pursue, as I said before.

He's to be robust.

He's to do the work of an evangelist, and now you know I like to underline the word work in that little phrase. Working at evangelism is what has to be done.

This isn't the first time in this epistle that Timothy has been told to be a worker. He's been told to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. [00:24:01] He's been told to strive for the masteries.

He's been told to be like a husbandman, laboring, and it's a long, arduous business, farm laboring.

But, of course, it brings its reward, it brings its returns, it brings its fruit. If we're prepared to work our things in the Christian area, this is the valuable life. Those that idle, you know, don't get much profit out of living, but those that work for the Lord find that this is the rewarding life. Those that are prepared to put a bit of effort into trueness to the Lord Jesus Christ, Timothy's been told to be like that. Make full proof of thy ministry. I suppose what that really says is that he's to use to the full, or fill up to the full, as I suppose the original probably says, fill up to the full that capacity that God has given you for his service. [00:25:03] Fill it up, the measure of your capacity for serving the Lord.

He's not asked to be a more able person than he is. He's asked to be the person that he is able to be as God has provided that ability.

And is that not a message perhaps for all of us here tonight, that insofar as we have been given a gift from God, all of us have been, we need to be using it.

It isn't sufficient to be gifted. It's necessary to use that gift that has been given us and to fill it up to the

full. Use it to the full, and Timothy had used it over the years, needs still to be told to carry on in that same sort of way. Well, all these exhortations to Timothy, which also come through as very much needed exhortations to ourselves, as I'm sure you must agree, they have a very strong backing in these next verses, [00:26:03] because one thing about Paul is that if he presses something on somebody else, you can be pretty sure he doesn't do that unless he is a good example of it himself.

And the one thing that is very evident here is that Paul isn't asking Timothy to be anything that he hadn't been himself. These things are pressed, strongly backed by not only Paul's words, but by his example.

And he goes on to say, For now I am ready to be offered.

The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.

And he's just been telling Timothy to fill up his measure to the full. And I believe that he is saying that Paul himself, he himself, his measure is now filled up and it's being poured out.

[00:27:02] Now, he had come to the end of that life of devotion and service for the Lord, and he's able to review it and look back, not in any self-commending way, but with integrity he's able to say that he has pursued the Christian life to the full. Now his life is being poured out.

What wonderful words these are, that life which had been filled with devotion to Christ was now being poured out and looking back over the life of the Apostle Paul, as we have it recorded in the Holy Scriptures, how he spent himself to the full.

He spent himself.

He didn't conserve himself in any sense. He spent himself spreading the faith, treasuring it, living it right to the end. And he's able to say these words without any boasting, because they are true, that he had lived that life from the day that the glory shone into his heart, [00:28:05] the light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, shone down into his heart, and that commanding glory that penetrated into his dark heart changed his course.

And what a course it was from that moment onwards to this very moment that we are reading about here tonight. He had kept the faith.

He had pursued it.

And he's able to say that in a way that isn't boasting, which has its influence on Timothy too. He's about to go.

Timothy's going to face something that he'd never faced before. Life without the Apostle Paul was going to be a pretty major problem for Timothy to face.

But with the Apostle Paul, in particular with the grace that descends from the heavenly Christ, the grace that is in Christ Jesus, there is strength for a lonely life and for a testing life. [00:29:01] Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, Paul had said at the beginning of the second chapter. That's

where the strength for a life like this comes from, comes from the ascended Christ, with part from that grace, part from that glory that surrounds the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no strength for these things. But with it, Timothy can pursue this course and continue as the Apostle Paul had continued.

Paul isn't only talking, looking back over all the past course that he had covered, but he's also able to speak about a very recent occasion. He's just been telling him to preach the word and to be instant, in season and out of season. And he has words about what happened when he faced that Roman audience only recently, when he was on trial, I suppose on trial for his life. But my first answer, nobody, no man stood with me, but all men pursued me. [00:30:02] I pray God that it may not be led to their charge. He had stood alone.

He's asking Timothy to be prepared to stand alone, if needs be, though he never suggests to him that he'll be entirely alone in quite this way. He'll be without Paul all right in a very few weeks or months, perhaps it would be. But the Lord stood by the Apostle Paul when he stood alone.

May the Lord stood with me and strengthen me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. You know, it's a slightly moot point whether that was an in-season occasion or whether it was an out-of-season occasion. One might have said it was a difficult occasion. It certainly was, with all the musts there of Roman folk, nobody to support him, even the loyal people that deserted him. I suppose the risks and the dangers were such that even the loyal people were not around [00:31:03] when Paul stood alone.

And there he was, and he was loyal to his Lord, and the preaching was fully delivered to that vast audience. And it was a difficult moment.

It was an out-of-season moment in one sense, and yet Paul treated it as an in-season moment, an opportunity to fully preach the gospel, preach the word he said to Timothy, and certainly is a good example of seizing every opportunity to do that. And that had been happening only recently. There he was on trial for his life, and the sentence, I suppose, was deferred for a while.

The outcome was not known, but the outcome looked as though it would be pretty hard for the Apostle Paul. The verdict was awaited, but he knew very well that it was likely to be against him. And in face of the fact that the capital sentence was about to be delivered upon him, [00:32:06] he's not greatly daunted. He's not over-sorrowful about it.

He has a resilience that will face the darkest things in life, in one sense. Death, martyrdom, is only a few weeks away, perhaps a few months. He doesn't know. Part of the trouble is that he's in suspense at this moment, but he's not daunted.

And even martyrdom doesn't make the Apostle Paul want to change his attitude.

His sights are set on the day of Christ's glory, and he's able to look over the immediate future, if that is a short-term thing, but beyond. Henceforth, he says, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, not to me only, but unto all them also that love is appearing.

[00:33:06] His sights were set not on the immediate future, not on the short-term future, but on that

ultimate day, the day of Christ's glory, the day when the righteous judge will mete out the right rewards for those that have been faithful to him. It's remarkable, however, Caesar's verdict and the Roman verdict against the Apostle Paul take second place to Christ's verdict as far as his life is concerned.

Perhaps this particular court was going to condemn him. It was likely that it was. But I suppose he's looking to a higher court where all the false verdicts are reversed and where the Lord, who makes the righteous decisions about people, will certainly accord that need of approval to a life such as the Apostle Paul had lived, [00:34:03] not only to him, but also to all those that love is appearing. Do we look beyond the problems, and do we look to the day of Christ, and do we see there cause for stimulus and cause for cheer, cause for triumph in our lives?

Because there's plenty cause for triumph if we look off to Christ, and even the dark things and even the trials, even the problems of faithfulness to Christ pale into small significance as compared with that bright day, the great day of Christ's glory.

These last messages, and I must stop in five minutes' time, these last messages have their words to us as well. Finish us off with greetings. Greetings from Paul to two faithful individuals that he'd seen many a time, Aquila and Priscilla. Greetings from local people in Rome to Timothy, where he is.

[00:35:03] Greetings to and fro between individuals, various individuals. And then there are a few requests that Paul has to put to Timothy, and then there are a few comments about individuals, persons, and movements going on around Paul there in the Roman prison.

His needs, this connects with what Laurie was talking about this afternoon, it seems to me, that rich man, plenty in his barns, and yet he wanted to pull down the barns and build greater to bestow his fruits. What does Paul need when he's in the Roman dungeon? The strict nature of that confinement must have been pretty testing, mustn't it? What do his needs amount to at that particular moment?

Well, he wants a heavy coat. He'd left it, and he could do with it when the winter comes, if ever the winter reaches him. He needs a cloak. [00:36:01] And he says, bring that cloak. And he says, bring also the books and the parchments. These are two things, only two things that Paul needed there in the Roman prison. That would meet his needs. I suppose it was a pretty rough place of confinement. Don't suppose it had any central heating there. Don't suppose there was room for a very great deal of comfort or anything like that. But that would suffice, just the coat to alleviate the cold just a little bit, and the books and the parchments. Interesting to me to say that Paul, with only a few weeks ahead, the remainder of his life, wants some books to be reading, wants some parchments. There might have been scriptures, I don't know. Perhaps there were blank parchments. Perhaps he wanted to do some writing. I don't know. But he wasn't proposing to give up.

In those last few weeks, he wasn't going to idle those remaining weeks. His mind was alert, and his mind wanted to be occupied. And we retire too early, it seems to me, sometimes. [00:37:03] We need to be busy in the things of the Lord. Paul was a hardy person. His faith was a hardy faith, and he was hardy, and he was active to the end.

No complaints, I suppose it was a pretty rough place, as I've said already. You know, it was bad enough when he was in prison in Rome, when he wrote those earlier letters. But he was talking about being released then, when he wrote to the saints at Philippi. He says, I hope to be coming. Not quite

sure which way it's going to go, but I don't think he was in quite such rigorous surroundings as he was at this stage. Hope of release had gone, and that death that was ahead was just about inevitable, as far as he could see.

And yet there's not a breath of complaint in this letter, any more than there is a breath of complaint in the Philippian letter. Uncomplaining, true to the Lord, true requirements, hardy and active to the end.

[00:38:04] This is the kind of person that the Apostle Paul was.

I suppose he felt the lack of fellowship when he begins to speak about the persons that had been around, but not very many of them, really. There are a few that had lately been with him that had gone off, most of them on legitimate and unspecified missions. It doesn't say where these individuals had gone. Only Luke is with me.

I suppose that bears testimony to the solitary place where Paul was, the lack of fellowship that he noticed, how used he had been to Christian fellowship, and how restricted he was in that sense at this stage. Only Luke is with me.

And yet, Luke, the beloved physician, was there. And you know, it's remarkable to say that Luke was faithful to the end. I'm not saying that these others were not faithful, that Luke was there. [00:39:03] He was a self-effacing person, Luke. He was loyal to the very end.

And you can be sure that Paul valued his company and needed his company. All the more because these others had departed.

These words speak about Paul's solitary situation and how much he missed fellowship in those last days of his. And he urges Timothy to come. He just wants to see him for that one last time, if it's at all possible. We have no knowledge as to whether Timothy got there in time or not, but certainly the pressure is on Timothy to come, post-haste, so that he might just see him fist to fist once more. This mixture of the Lord's concerns dominating everything, and yet this human touch that is there in this chapter, something that's very striking, and it stirs our souls when we read about it.

And what a triumph it is that people that are true to the Lord Jesus Christ [00:40:04] can be in this kind of spirit at the close of their days, urging a similar spirit onto those that it is their responsibility to help and urge forward. And if we've gained from these verses that kind of encouragement, this is what I'm after, hoping will happen here tonight.

You'll notice that there's one man that disappoints Paul more than these others, Demas. He says, you come quickly because Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.

I suppose he wanted to share that blow with his loyal Timothy, if it was at all possible.

It's a sad situation that, you know, when you think about Demas, you read about him in Colossians, he was a fellow labourer with the Apostle Paul, read about him in the Epistle to the Philemon, you find that he was a fellow labourer with the Apostle Paul. [00:41:04] He was a fellow labourer, one of the bunch, so to speak, who were working together in the Lord's concern, and yet at the last, near the end, he forsook the Apostle Paul, loved this present world. And yet there's a lighter side to the picture as well, because he says, you bring Mark with you, because he's useful to me, he can perform a

service at this stage. Bring Mark, for he, I can't find the verse at the moment, take Mark, verse 11, bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

You know, if you go back into the story of Mark, you'll find that when they were setting out, or when they were partway on the way on the first missionary journey, Mark had gone with them up to a certain point, and then it says he departed, he went not with them to the work, it says Mark took a turn and reversed the direction in which he was going, [00:42:03] and it hurt the Apostle Paul that too, insomuch that he wouldn't look at Mark for a while later. But you know, there came a time when Mark turned round and came into the Lord's interests and the Lord's concerns again, and that very verse that mentions Demas in Philemon, it includes Mark as well.

Mark was a fellow labourer with the Apostle Paul. After having defected, after having turned round, gone the other way for a time, there came a time when he reversed his course and came closer to the true path again. It's a sad thing when people are shelving off, disappearing from the Christian testimony, especially as they get towards the end. But it's a marvellous thing when people return and having defected, return and repent and are true to the Lord Jesus Christ from that moment onwards. [00:43:04] This is how I want to finish here tonight, I think. The contrast between Demas and Mark makes me ask the question, are we getting closer to the Lord? Are we getting truer to him as the days go by? There might have been failures in the past, but what's our position now? Are we coming closer to the Lord Jesus Christ, more able, more willing to be in the current that pleases him, like Mark was?

Are we on our way in or are we on our way out, like Demas was, from this path of loyalty to the law?

That's a challenge to us, and I hope we will accept the challenge, find ourselves receiving this instruction, encouraged to go on for the Lord Jesus Christ until that day comes when we will see him.