

SOME PERSONAL MATTERS
(Continued)

II Timothy 4:9-18

Paul had three friends upon whom he could count. The first of these was Jesus Christ, that One who would be the Friend of every man, the Friend who laid down His life for us all. The second was the physician. This friend Paul handed down to immortality with that imperishable encomium, "Luke, the beloved physician." He said, "Only Luke is with me." The third was the young man whose name was Timothy, whom Paul affectionately called, "My son in the faith." Paul and Timothy each had in the other a friend who was born for adversity.

Paul's last letter was to this dearest of his friends, Timothy, whom he had left in charge of the church at far-off Ephesus. He tells Timothy that he wants him to come and be with him at Rome. Anticipating a visit from him, Paul took the opportunity of reminding Timothy of certain personal needs. Some particular articles, dear to him, were at the house of Paul's friend, Carpus, at Troas. The name Carpus means fruit. He was one of the many fruits of Paul's ministry. Do you have any fruits of your service for God? Paul asked for:

1. Something to warm his body - "the cloak."

The cloak was a circular garment, sleeveless, with a hole in the middle for slipping it over the head. It was made of black goat's hair. Tents were made of the same material. Since Paul was a tentmaker, it is possible that he made this cloak for himself. At any rate, it had been a useful and comfortable garment on his travels. He knew that if he could only get it that it would alleviate some of the discomfort of his damp, dark, dismal and dreadfully cold cell. If you are surprised that the Bible should mention such an ordinary thing as the need of a cloak, you should remember that God has room in His heart for every detail of human life.

Doubtless the cloak was one that he had used many times. It may have been soaked often with the water torrents of Pamphylia, and whitened with the dust of the long Roman roads, and stained with the brine of shipwreck, when, on the rocky cliffs of Malta, the Euroclydon was driving the waters into foam; he may have slept in its warm shelter on the uplands under the canopy of the stars; it may have covered his trembling limbs, bruised with the brutal rods of the lictors, as he lay that night in the dungeon at Philippi; and now the old man sits shivering in the gloomy prison and, thinking of the old cloak, asks Timothy to bring it to him.

Worn with service, wearied with travel, emaciated with disease, perhaps tortured with rheumatism, confined in that damp prison, Paul wanted his cloak. The snows and sleets of Italy, as well as the wintry winds, would bring shivering chills. He wanted to be prepared for just such weather as was sure to come. He knew that he had a duty toward his body. He knew that this Heavenly Father did not want him to be exposed to greater risks or perils than were absolutely necessary. Paul was no monkish ascetic. He kept under his body, but he did not neglect to take care of his health. He understood full well that God would not have him incapacitated for further service on account of failure to take care of his physical health. So, he requested Timothy to bring his coat with him when he came.

2. Something to occupy his mind - "the books."

Perhaps the idea of getting the books was to be able to read through them and then to bequeath them to Luke when he died.

Who is this man for whom books were so necessary? He was a man of the schools. Paul was born and reared at Tarsus, a university center. From Tarsus he went to Jerusalem, where he sat at the feet of Gamaliel. He had the very best training that the schools of that day could give him, but in spite of his excellent training he still found that he needed his books.

Paul not only had the best that the schools could give him, but he was further educated by travel and by association with people. His feet had trod many of the Roman roads. He had visited almost every capital of the Roman world. But, in spite of the fact that he had the best culture that the best schools could give, that he had the very best that could come from travel, yet, he simply could not get along without his books.

Paul had wide experience in the work of the ministry. He had been a preacher of the gospel for more than a quarter of a century. During that time he had preached to all sorts and conditions of men. He had prepared and delivered numerous sermons. He had written books that will live as long as literature lasts, but he did not feel that he could rest upon his laurels. He must keep reading. He must keep preparing new sermons. After more than twenty-five diligent, earnest and fruitful years, he still could not get along without his books. He still had a strong desire for more and greater knowledge. He never would have made such an ignorant statement as the person who said, "A minister should never read or quote any book but the Bible." Paul was a persistent reader and a thorough scholar. He knew that learning need not hinder usefulness, but that ignorance would frustrate much good. Even an apostle of our Lord must read. Paul had written the major portion of the New Testament, but still he needed and wanted books.

Paul was a man of vast intellectual ability and of marked originality. No man of his day had a keener intellect. He was a daring thinker. But in spite of his vast ability and marked originality, he felt that he simply could not get along without his books. Even though he was brilliant and gifted he needed his books.

Of all the legacies that have come down to us from the past, by far the most valuable is that of books. Marvelous, indeed, is that power by which the master minds of all ages have made for themselves a place in the heart and life of the generations which have followed them.

We ought to read good books. They will never leave us nor forsake us. We ought to read for the sheer joy of it; for the delight that it brings us "to lose ourselves in other men's minds." We should read for information. Bacon said, "Reading makes a full man." Then, we ought to read for inspiration. The books of inspiration are more lasting than the books of information.

By means of good books we enter into the presence and society of those whose company is most worthy of being sought after, and they, in turn, may bring us into contact with others, greater even than themselves. Books provide companionship with the best and the greatest. Thoughts which have brought incalculable benefit to the world have, through the medium of books, been passed down the centuries, and men, long since dead, speak to their fellow men forever. Many a person has dated a new era in his life from the perusal of a good book.

3. Something to feed his soul - "the parchments."

Perhaps these have reference to parts of the Scriptures. If so, that was why Paul wanted them especially. It was possible that he had been arrested at Troas and refused permission to call at his lodging place to collect his belongings - cloak, books and parchments.

One who had greatly withstood Paul either at his trial or in his preaching was Alexander the coppersmith. Paul urged Timothy to be on guard constantly against this wicked man. Three things about him are mentioned here:

1. His position in the matter.

"Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil."

2. His peril for believers.

"Of whom do thou also beware; for he greatly withstood our words."

3. His punishment by God.

"The Lord will render to him according to his works." This is merely a statement of a fact. The Lord will repay him in accordance with his deeds. It is not wrong to trust in God's final victory over the forces of evil.

Paul, being in a reminiscent mood, as one is prone to be when he reaches the end of his life here on earth and has an opportunity to look back, vividly recalled his previous public trial. Professional pleaders refused to take his case. All the witnesses, who should have been there to testify in his favor, absented themselves. Naturally, Paul felt their defection very keenly. In the hour of his greatest need, Paul found himself unbefriended, deserted, and with nobody to sympathize with him, to sustain him or to comfort him. Yet, he was not alone. By his side, unseen by the throng of curious spectators and unperceived by his malignant foes, there stood One as real to Paul as his very self. He said, "The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." His unfailing presence and His upholding power were at Paul's disposal, even though all others had failed him.

In contrast to the insufficiency of human aid, the Lord took His stand beside Paul and infused him with power. The purpose of this divine enabling was that the proclamation of the gospel might be made to this Roman audience. The Lord delivered him from being executed that day. How often his Lord had proved to be a great Deliverer! Truly He provides protection and deliverance for His own. Nothing can permanently injure one who belongs to Christ; death itself will deliver him from suffering and bring him into eternal bliss.

Conclusion. II Timothy 4:19-22.

As this letter comes to a close, Paul asks Timothy to give Priscilla and Aquila his kind remembrance and affectionate greetings. Lest Timothy might wonder why Erastus and Trophimus were not with Paul at that time, the Apostle informed him that the former was at Corinth and the latter was at Miletus. Again Paul urged Timothy to do his best to come to him before winter. Under the restrictions of the primitive navigation of those days, there was no sailing in the winter. So, if Timothy did not come before winter, in all probability his arrival would be too late to see Paul.

For Timothy, Paul invoked the blessings of his ever-present Lord, and prayed that divine grace might be granted to sustain all true believers. This grace supported Paul when he was led forth to die, and it surely will suffice for all who trust Christ as their Saviour and serve Him as their Lord.