

A MAN WHO COULDN'T TAKE IT

"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." II Timothy 4:10.

There are few things more awful than the punishment that is meted out to deserters in the army in time of war. Nothing, even in a battle, is so blood-chilling and horrible. It is an act that strikes into the heart of the bravest soldiers and sends a shudder through everyone who has ever witnessed it. It is cool, premeditated and terrible. The deserter is led forth before his regiment. The story of his disgraceful act is recited in the hearing of his comrades. Then his arms are bound, and his eyes are bandaged. A file of his comrades take aim at his fluttering heart. Then there comes the command, followed by the ringing volley and the deserter drops dead.

Why is the deserter's doom made so awful? Simply because the crime is so great and the consequences of the crime so fatal to the interests of an army and of the cause for which an army fights. An army must destroy desertion, or desertion would destroy the army. It is the treachery that makes the deserter's crime so black. It is because of the danger which the deserter brings to his comrades, and because of the demoralizing effect which he has on the army, that his crime is punished so signally. History has put the brand of infamy on more than one deserter of his country, or of a sacred cause. Benedict Arnold stands forth prominently in American history, marked indelibly as a deserter and his memory shot through with the volley of a nation's abhorrence. Judas Iscariot was a deserter. In the hour of His great need our Lord was deserted and sold and left to His fate by Judas. Then, here in our text we read of another deserter whose name was Demas.

This text contains an epitaph which preaches its own sermon. The meaning of it is so apparent and so piercing that nobody can miss it, and it warns us all to be on our guard against the seductive influence of the world in which we live, a world which is the natural enemy of Christ.

When Paul wrote to the Colossians his closing salutation read, "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you" (Colossians 4:14). Note, however, that this reference to Demas is devoid of commendation. Paul merely mentioned his name and that was all. To some people that would not be strange, but it is significant in the case of Paul. Being a devoted Christian he was endowed with the grace of appreciation. When he mentioned a fellow Christian, he usually said something pleasant and complimentary about him, and expressed grateful appreciation for him. That was a mark of a generous spirit and of a good habit. But, in this case, Paul said nothing about Demas.

In closing his letter to Philemon Paul wrote, "There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers" (Philemon 1:23-24).

These verses indicate that Demas was once quite active in the work of the Lord with Paul, and also that he had been closely associated with other great Christian characters. Few men have enjoyed such advantages as were granted to Demas. He was the friend and associate of the greatest Christian of his day. He was Paul's cherished companion, and often heard him preach. Quite frequently he was under the spell of his radiant personality.

When Paul wrote our text he was in circumstances of trial and loneliness. He was in the Mamertine prison in Rome, and the end of his course was in sight. He knew full well that his only escape from captivity was by the gate of martyrdom, but his own fate did not cause him great concern. His keenest suffering came from the defection of his friends, those whom he loved abundantly but who had themselves repaid his love with cold disloyalty. Conspicuous among them was Demas, of whom we know but little except in the matter of his desertion.

Think of the lonely Christian here, worn and weary with the work of the years, condemned to death, each day listening for the tramp of the soldiers coming to lead him away to his execution. If there was ever a time when he needed friends, it was then. It was just then that Demas deserted Paul. It must have been with a sorrow that wet his face with tears that the Apostle wrote, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." This sad statement tells us three things:

I. What Demas Did.

Sinning against great light and great love Demas forsook Paul, who had regarded him with warm affection and had awarded him the honor due to a fellowlaborer in the Lord. Demas had stood high in Paul's esteem. This tragedy is deepened by the reflection that, in all likelihood, he owed practically everything to Paul. Doubtless the Apostle had led him to Christ, although we know not where nor how. His heart was touched, his mind was fascinated and he was drawn to Paul and his Christ with real enthusiasm. Naturally his departure brought great distress to Paul. That is true because Demas had been his friend, because he forsook him at a critical time in his personal history -- when he was already disheartened by other deserters and was soon to face death, and because there was a special need for such as Demas to stand for the gospel of Christ in the city which was the heart of paganism, and to show courage and constancy in persecution.

II. Why Demas Did It.

There was some reason for it. Did his health fail him? Did his spirit break down? Did he go elsewhere to labor for the Lord? Every person who has ever brought disgrace on his Christian profession, or has fallen away from his church standing, had some secret cause of his fall. Demas deserted under the temptation of some besetting sin. Some underlying cause turned him away. Some specific sin chilled his heart and caused him to beat a retreat.

If we could read the record of all open deserters and discover their specific sins, we would doubtless find reasons like these: "Deserted because of moral cowardice," or "Deserted through neglect of prayer," or "Deserted through the influence of bad associates," or "Deserted through love of the world."

Demas deserted Paul because of his love for the world. I do not mean that he was immoral or vicious, but he was worldly. He just loved the world more than he loved the Lord. God's Word admonishes us to live separate from the world. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." This religion won't save you, but it is the kind that every saved person ought to have. The child of God is required to keep himself "unspotted from the world."

Moreover, Demas could not see far enough ahead. He refused to look ahead to an old age crowned with honor, with peace in his heart, and a longing to be with Christ, all of which is far better than pleasure, profits or earthly fame.

Demas couldn't take it. He couldn't take the discipline necessary to be a Christian. No doubt he had lazy dreams of spiritual conquest, but was unwilling to pay the price. When he came up against the stern difficulties he retreated from them.

Paderewski started playing the piano at three years of age and began composing at seven. He developed rather slowly, but he was determined to become master in the empire of music. He studied and practiced through the years until he gained world renown and became the highest paid instrumental artist in history. In his advanced years he practiced three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. The great artist reached his success and maintained it by paying the price in discipline and determination.

We cannot grow great lives without making great sacrifices. It is not what we take up in life that counts so much; it is what we give up. Athletes know this.

Three things are noteworthy about this statement, "having loved this present world."

1. The alluring force -- "this present age."
How did it allure Demas?

(1) By its nearness.

Demas was in magnificent and imperial Rome, where he saw the voluptuousness of its life, the ease and the laughter and the merriment of its wealth. That was to him the "present age." Frequently Paul had spoken of an appearing glory presently, but here was glory

close at hand. Paul had been leading Demas along a way of present renunciation and service toward a glory not yet revealed, but all about him were the things that were immediate and near. Demas was conscious of the contrast between the seen and the unseen, the tangible and the intangible, the sensual and the spiritual. The thing that appealed to him was the fact that the "present age" was something of which he could be sure.

(2) By its method.

Everything which Demas saw in his travels was contrary to the teaching of Paul. The Apostle had been teaching that self-sacrifice was of the very essence of life, or that men must be crucified in order to live. In Rome Demas saw men mastered, not by self-sacrifice, but by self-gratification. Paul had been teaching that the noblest law of life was that of service, but Demas saw men in Rome seeking not to serve each other, but how far they could make other men serve them. Not being sure of the reality of the unseen, but feeling the lure of the seen, the method of his age appealed to him.

(3) By its gifts.

The present offered him wealth, pleasure and liberty, and he was enticed greatly by these things.

2. The assenting will -- "having loved."

The Greek word for love here is the highest word it is possible to use -- agapao. This word signifies a deliberate volitional action; love illuminated by judgment and decided by will. The world did not do Demas any real harm until he loved it. Neither will it do you any harm as long as you keep it out of your heart and do not love it. But, when love of the world eats into the heart, it consumes the spirituality of the soul and destroys loyalty to Christ.

3. The active separation -- "Demas hath forsaken me."

This verse implies that if one loves this present age he will cease to love God. Love of the world and love for Christ will not dwell in the same heart. God's Word says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him." Because Demas loved the world he lost the companionship of Paul. The companionship of a great man or woman is the richest earthly gift a person can receive. On account of his love for the world Demas lost the fellowship of Christ.

III. Where Demas Went.

"And is departed unto Thessalonica." When you mention the name of that great and powerful city of the ancient Empire, you think of one in which the time-spirit was incarnate.

Thessalonica was at once luxury-loving, pleasure-seeking and idol-worshipping. Demas went to that wicked city, but he did not get that for which he went. No man ever does. Selfishness, love of pleasure, questionable companionships and neglect of his spiritual life led Demas there.

This text is a warning to all of us. It instructs us to beware of over-confidence. It urges all to guard against a presumptuous confidence. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." I Corinthians 12:10. It instructs us to guard against a decay in our spiritual affections. It informs us that if we have deserted the Lord, the door of mercy is not yet closed against us. As long as one remains in the body God says, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely." Do not follow the example of Demas. If the world has begun to assume controlling power over your life, blinding your vision, sapping your strength, quenching your enthusiasm, and chilling your heart, then --

"Come to His feet and lay open your story
Of sorrow and suffering, of sin and of shame;
For the pardon of sin is the crown of His glory,
And the joy of the Lord to be true to His name."