

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

The Saints' Enduring Encouragement

2 Timothy 4:17-18 (600)

March 24, 2002

2 Timothy 4:17-18 ... *But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

In the disciplines of art and photography the background of a particular painting or picture is very important. In Iowa artist Grant Wood's famous 1930 painting, *American Gothic*, the austere looking farmer and his wife are the main subjects. The painting, however, takes its name from the Gothic Revival architecture of the white farmhouse behind them. This background element is key to rightly interpreting the message Wood is communicating in the painting.

To properly understand and fully appreciate these words of Paul we are wise to take a close look at the background. He had reached the point at which there were no external props and encouragements to support him. In terms of people, Paul had learned that even one's trusted associates may defect (**4:10, 16**). In terms of money, the man had none. In terms of a safety net, there was nothing between him and death. What did Paul know of insurance, welfare, Social Security, IRAs, investments, the county hospital, unemployment benefits, Mission Arlington, Christian lawyers to plead his case or watchdog groups to protest violations of his human rights? It is against this background of near absolute vulnerability that we must interpret **verses 17 and 18**.

Few of you have been as far out on the limb of vulnerability as this man. However, to varying degrees every child of God has known or will know the pain of loss, of being at the end of yourself, of feeling abandoned, of weakness and inadequacy. In those times you need encouragement. And you need that encouragement which is not rooted in your own ability to perform or in your own capacity to persevere. You need that encouragement which is outside of yourself. This is what I want to argue this morning : the person and promises of God Himself are the saints' only enduring encouragement. How is it that you, in the words of Isaiah the Prophet, can *gain new strength, mount up with wings as eagles, run and not get tired, walk and not become weary (40:31)*? The answer we get from this passage is that when all else fails the person and promises of God Himself alone sustain and give glad assurance to the soul. *"When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay"* (The Solid Rock, v3).

Yesterday morning I arrived at the office and, as semi-usual, checked my email. During the night I had received this note from Ed and Kelly Boehm. "We have sad news. On Tuesday, March 19, we found out that the 11-week old baby that Kelly was carrying had died ... no heartbeat. We were caught totally unaware since there had been no indication of a problem ... As with the miscarriage in August last year, we grieve the loss, perhaps more deeply with this one, since we allowed our hopes to grow. And yet, life goes on. So we cling to God's sovereignty and his tender mercy." The person and promises of God Himself are the saints' only enduring encouragement.

Now, what are these enduring encouragements which are yours because you are His? The first is the promise of God's sovereign presence. ***But the Lord stood with me (4:17)***. The verb *stood with* means to come to the aid of. So Paul, the prisoner, stood before the Roman judiciary with the eternal Judge of the universe at his side. Many believers entertain a woefully inadequate understanding of the presence of God reducing it to mere sentimentality, an emotional idea expressed in songs like *In the Garden*. "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses; and the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses. And he walks with me, and he talks with me."

Now God has, in fact, promised us His presence. "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (**Matt. 28:20**). "*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst*" (**Matt. 18:20**). "*The Spirit of truth ... abides with you, and will be in you*" (**John 14:17**). "***I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU***" (**Heb. 13:5**). But this divine presence is real and active. This was true in Paul's own experience. **Acts 23** records Paul's appearance before the Jewish Council. **Verse 10** points out, *the [Roman] commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them*. **Verse 11** goes on to say, *But on the night immediately following, the Lord [the risen Christ] **stood at his side** and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause in Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."* What is the tangible evidence that God really *stood with* him in the case mentioned in 2 Timothy 4?

This leads us to the second enduring encouragement – the reality of His sovereign power. **And strengthened me**. This does not refer to one's physical strength. **2 Corinthians 4:16**, *our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day*. This *outer man* is the body. The *inner man* consists of the mind, the will, the emotions which are vitalized by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. It is the *inner man* that is the object of this strengthening. **Ephesians 3:16**, *that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man*. Now what does this mean in practical terms? Let's examine a few verses.

Acts 9:22, *But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ*. Strength here refers to the moral and logical force of Paul's witness as well as the courage and boldness of his presentation. **Romans 4:20-21**, [speaking of Abraham and God's promise that he and Sarah would have a son in their old age] *yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith ... being fully assured that what [God] had promised, He was able also to perform*. Strength here refers to confidence in the Word of God. **Philippians 4:13**, *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*. Strength here refers to the capacity to endure in the path of righteousness. **1 Timothy 1:12**, *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service*. Strength here refers to moral and spiritual toughness.

The strengthening in view in **verse 17** is that empowering of mind, will, and emotions to boldly voice a potent and compelling witness for Jesus Christ. ***In order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear.*** So the first tangible, real evidence that God *stood with* Paul was this *strengthening* that he might bear a faithful and courageous public witness for Christ.

The second tangible evidence and third enduring encouragement is the security of God's sovereign protection. Paul ***was delivered out of the lion's mouth.*** Paul was actually spared from physical death until such time as God's purposes for him should be accomplished. This present deliverance bolstered his confidence in his future deliverance. ***The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed.*** We think of the Lord's Prayer here. *Deliver us from evil (Matthew 6:13).* There are both temporal and eternal dimensions to this petition. God delivers you from enticements and solicitations to sin (*Lead us not into temptation*) which can destroy in this life. God will also deliver you from the power of evil which can destroy finally and eternally. Indeed, ...

[He] will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. Here we have the fourth enduring encouragement – the assurance of God's sovereign preservation. One of my favorite hymns is that by John Newton, *Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder (Trinity Hymnal, 1990, #172)*. I love the last phrase of each of the first

four verses – “**he** has brought us nigh to God, **he** presents our souls to God, [**he**] soon will bring us home to God, and [**he**] has secured our way to God.”

Verse 18 is nothing less than the Biblical doctrine of the preservation of the saints. All who are chosen by God (**Col. 3:12**), redeemed by Christ (**Gal. 3:13**), and regenerated by the Holy Spirit (**Titus 3:5**) are eternally saved. You are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and therefore continue to persevere in faith. “What God has already accomplished in Christ, he will see through to final consummation; the salvation he has begun he will indeed complete” (Fee, p.298). What are some of the features of this great doctrine of comfort?

(1) Salvation is a work of God from start to finish. **Philippians 1:6**, *For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began** a good work in you **will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*** (2) God has given you eternal life. **John 10:28-29**, *“I give **eternal life** to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, **who has given them to Me**, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”* (3) Christ is your sanctification as surely as He is your justification. **1 Corinthians 1:30**, *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.* (4) God is able to keep you. **2 Timothy 1:12**, *I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that **He is able to guard** what I have entrusted to Him until that day.* (5) You are protected by the power of God. **1 Peter 1:5**, *who are **protected by the power of God***

*through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (6) The Spirit abides in and with you. **John 14:17**, “that is the Spirit of truth ... [who] abides with you, and will be in you.” (7) Christ Himself lives and prays for you. **Hebrews 7:25**, He is **able to save forever** those who draw near to God through Him, since **he always lives** to make intercession for them.*

Many gladly affirm the blessing of eternal security but angrily reject the theological basis for it. You see such preservation of the saints is necessarily tied to God’s gracious election of the saints. One day I had a man sit across from me at my desk and tell me that the doctrine of election would rob him of the assurance of his salvation. I had a young mother sit across from me at my desk and, with tears in her eyes, tell me that she could not accept the doctrine because she wanted her daughter to have the opportunity to accept Christ. Years ago we had an older couple visit the church for several months. They were encouraged by the worship, fellowship, and ministry of the Word. One Sunday in a Church Information class after I had explained that God elects to salvation and this is the unshakeable basis for the doctrine of eternal security, she said, “You believe **that**?” I responded, “Yes, we do” whereupon after that class she and her husband walked out never to return. But how does Paul respond to the idea that God sovereignly preserves the saints? He responds in worship. **To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Paul's life and doctrine were radically God-centered (theocentric). Let's examine one piece of evidence. Look back with me to **1 Timothy 1**. In **verse 11** the gospel is about *the blessed God*. In **verse 12**, his gratitude is to the Lord Jesus for giving him a ministry. In **verses 13 and 16** he confesses that his salvation is a function of the *mercy* of God. And then what happens in **verse 17**? He worships! *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.* For Paul everything centered on and around God. He sums up existence itself in **Romans 11:36**, *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*

But the church seems to be drifting from her fascination with the beauty of the person and purposes of God having been lured away by the siren of success. The irony is that communicating the beauty, perfection, excellence, and majesty of the person and purposes of God is the highest calling and privilege of the Church. **1 Peter 2:9**, *But you are A CHOSEN RACE, a royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

Based upon verses such as **1 Peter 2:9**, I would argue that when the church drifts away from God Himself as *her fundamental concern*, the message of the church is confused, her strength is diminished, her uniqueness is compromised, her beauty is marred, her integrity is suspect, her impact is weakened. At the

same time, the saints become more and more spiritually anemic in the face of a hostile world and in the face of frowning providences because the focus which alone fosters enduring encouragement is being at best neglected and at worst rejected. This is why we are committed to the main things. We are bound without apology to the centrality of the gospel, the absolute and objective truth of Scripture, and to the God-centeredness of all of life and faith because ... the person and promises of God Himself **ALONE** are the saints' **ONLY** enduring encouragement.

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The need for encouragement

You need that encouragement which is not rooted in your ability to _____ or in your own capacity to _____.

You need that encouragement which is _____ of yourself.

POINT :

the _____ and _____ of God Himself are the saints' only enduring encouragement.

The person and promises of God Himself alone _____ when all else fails and give glad _____ to the soul.

What are these *enduring encouragements* which are yours because you are His?

First ... the promise of His sovereign _____
But the Lord stood with me (4:17)

Second ... the reality of His sovereign _____
And strengthened me (4:17)

2 Cor. 4:17 ... The *inner man* consists of the mind, the will, the emotions which are *vitalized* by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

It is the *inner man* that is the object of this strengthening.

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In order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear.

Third ... the security of God's sovereign _____
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spared from physical death until such time as God's purposes for him should be accomplished

The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed (4:18)

delivered from the power of evil which can destroy finally and eternally

Fourth ... the assurance of God's sovereign _____
And will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom (4:18)

All who are **chosen** by God (**Col. 3:12**), **redeemed** by Christ (**Gal. 3:13**), and **regenerated** by the Holy Spirit (**Titus 3:5**) are eternally saved. You are **kept** in faith by the power of Almighty God and therefore continue to persevere in faith.

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To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (4:18)

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