

Stand By Me

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2 Timothy 4:16-18, 22 (ESV)

“At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen....The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Introduction:

Given the title of today’s sermon, first, let’s listen to the song “Stand By Me” (words projected on screen). As I was studying this passage, I could not help thinking about the phrase, “stand by me” since it was right in today’s passage. There is a comparison and contrast between verses 16 and 17, “no one came to stand by me...but the Lord stood by me.” There is such a deep truth and a deep contrast between these 2 phrases. This is Paul’s final testimony in 2 Timothy, in the final book he wrote before his death. He is giving final assurances to Timothy. He is charging Timothy with the Gospel torch. “Timothy, you have to carry the Gospel torch in your generation. Keep on preaching the Word, train leaders, conduct the church well and continue on with the Gospel to the world even after I die” , These are tremendous, precious testimonies of Paul. We will summarize his testimonies in 7 words to summarize Paul’s final testimony so we can learn some lessons: people, presence, power, purpose, peoples, perseverance and praise.

I. People - “No one came to stand by me” [16]

There is already emotion with this statement. We’ve all had such experiences. What kind of experience have you had with this phrase? We all have some sort of testimony about a situation in which there is no one to stand by us. This could be in Christian life, in Christian ministry. Relationships are hard. Friendships and ministries can let you down and never care for you again. But good friends and Christian life and ministry can let you down and still remain as friends.

A. At my first defense

When Paul needed them the most, they were not there. This was his preliminary hearing probably before his execution, there was not one to stand by him. So it was a tense time during Nero’s persecution of Christians – to testify in court on Paul’s behalf would have been extremely dangerous if not deadly. So we don’t really know what reasons all of his friends, even Luke, had for not being there. Some were probably legitimate reasons, (such as obeying Paul’s charge to deliver a letter to the Ephesians or some other missionary task) but I’m sure there were some illegitimate reasons (fear for their lives) for not being there for Paul. We don’t know the reasons, but no one was there. As Christians we need to always prepare ourselves to die well, in our hearts. Am I committed enough, do I love the Lord enough? Is His presence enough, so that if that situation comes I will not deny the name of Christ and can die for Christ?

B. No one came to stand by me but all deserted me

But he says “at my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.” When Paul needed his friends the most, they were not there. Again the reasons why all deserted him might have been selfish or might have been legitimate. One thing you have to understand in Christian life and in ministry, you cannot fully trust in people all the time. The Bible does not say “trust people” but the Bible does say “love people” and that is what we need to do. Just know that God is the only One you can rely on and sometimes He uses people so that we can rely on Him through them, but not all the time. There were times when Paul relied on God through people. But, in this occasion “all deserted [him].”

C. May it not be charged against them

1 Corinthians 13:5 –

But Paul did not take it personally in bitterness – he said “may it not be charged against them”. So don’t take it personally, don’t be bitter. The word charged means to count or to calculate. May it not be counted or calculated against them. We do that all the time don’t we? Once might be okay but after second or 3rd time, we count it against them. We calculate. The word count is used in 1 Cor 13:5 as it talks about love – “it does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable, it is not resentful” the word resentful has similar meaning – don’t count evil. When we count evils against us, we become resentful. NIV says – love does not count the record of wrongs. Don’t calculate. Don’t think and remember the wrongs against you. When people hurt others, we might need to correct them, for the sake of others. But when they hurt us, our prayer needs to be “may it not be charged against them.” Sometimes people say to me, “you disappointed me, you were there for me” because I am their pastor. Some of you may say to your spouse, “if he loved me he could not have said that to me or done that to me”. Or you may say about your children “if they really respected me, if they loved me or cared for me they would not have....” We can say all kinds of things as we “count” things against other people.

But we have to learn to not count these things against them. It is possible to love somebody deeply and yet we deeply let them down. We do the same thing. We hurt other people. But we are also hurt by others, but think of it like this – It is possible to be deeply hurt by someone because we are deeply selfish. Sometimes deeply loving them means to deeply expect from them and deeply demanding from them. So instead of being quickly hurt, we must learn to quickly forgive. Rather than deeply expecting

and demanding from others, we must learn to deeply love. Don't be quick to be hurt, but be quick to forgive. Don't expect and demand, but learn to deeply love. Learn to say, "may it not be charged against them". Paul in v 21, even though they were not there – Luke, Eubulus, Pudens Linus and Claudia – they did not show up to the trial, but Paul sends greetings to them through Timothy. Christ did the same thing, some of the disciples didn't only not show up to his trial, some denied Him or cursed Him. Jesus not only forgives them, but He uses them and restores them to change the world. The ones that hurt Him can still be used to change the world. That is the essence of justification. He does not count the record of wrongs against them. To picture Christ we also need to not count the record of wrongs against people.

II. Presence - "The Lord stood by me" [17]

This was the key, the foundation and the reason why he was able to do the first part even though no one came to stand by him. He was able to still love and forgive them and continue his relationship with them. He did not count the offenses against them., "because the Lord stood by [him]." Paul is not saying this as a lament to earn sympathy, but as a testimony to strengthen Timothy. No one came, but the Lord came to stand by me. "Timmy, the Lord is all you need." The Lord stood by Paul when others didn't. I believe Paul is intentionally making this comparison and contrast between the Lord and others. No one stood by me, but the Lord stood by me.

My question and my challenge to you and to me and to all of us is would this be enough for us in this situation. "Lord, as long as you are with me." May this be our prayer, that we don't need anyone or anything as long as the Lord is with us. Presence of Jesus was the foundation of all of Paul's relationships. Even in the absence of friends. So I thought about Paul's philosophy of friendship, friendship with Jesus compared to his friendship with others, as follows – (John 15) when Christ died, so we become his friends, he did not nullify our friendship with believers. In fact, He created it. So there is something we need to understand about our relationships with others with respect to our relationship with Christ. Jesus always intended that our friendship with Him would be the heartbeat (the foundation) of our relationships with others. His presence would be the central joy of Christian friendships. Any joy in others has to be because He is present in them. If there is any presence in them, we can enjoy Him in them. You know there is much to dislike in some people there is much to dislike in you by others. There is much to dislike in some people, but learn to enjoy HIM in them. Learn to see Jesus in them. See the potential they have to glorify Jesus, to praise Him and worship Him. Jesus never intended that the enjoyment of His presence would replace the enjoyment of Christian friends. But through Christian friends, we can enjoy His presence. That is why we enjoy each other's presence in the Church because Christ is in each and every one of us. We also all have different aspects of Jesus Christ in us, which we share when we sing and worship together.

Therefore true biblical friendship should help one another befriend Christ deeper and vice versa. Our friendship with Jesus can help others' friendships with Jesus. Help them to deepen their relationships with Jesus Christ. Some of you say, "what about unbelievers who do not have Christ in them?" Well, then enjoy Christ in you that loves and cares for them. Even if there is no one around us, we can enjoy His presence. We also can love less likable people around us. Jesus is our only totally reliable and flawless friend. But we have flaws, so we can BE a friend to others, not demand others to be a friend to us.

III. Power - "Strengthened me" [17]

The Lord stood by me, and "the Lord strengthened me." Notice that the Lord is the subject. He is the one that is giving us power. The power of God is available. He is pouring His power into us. We can always ask for more power and more strength because He is limitlessly going to provide for us. But notice that this is so personal. He strengthened *me, moi*. You have to believe that he strengthens *me, ME*. Whatever I need to do in Christian life is by His strength in us. What does it mean that He "stood by me," stood by Paul. By this time though Jesus has a physical body, though His Spirit, He is present everywhere. Jesus is omnipresent, so He is with us all though His Holy Spirit. As Jesus is omnipresent – it is the *personal presence* of Christ that is "*with me*". Some of you might leave the church without experiencing a personal presence with Jesus because your heart is not right. You need to experience Christ, spiritually, that He is standing by me, TODAY and every moment of our lives. Christ was in Paul and Paul was in Christ. Paul's highest pleasure was Christ. For Paul being aware of Christ's presence was probably as natural as breathing. Faith is a condition of the heart because we already have the capability in our hearts to believe. So, is your heart in the condition of faith? Or do you look at circumstances and worry because your heart is not in the condition of faith? Or do you look at Jesus and have faith because your heart is in the condition of faith?

Romans 4:20 – "No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God" "he strengthened me" Abraham, he couldn't give birth to Isaac. Was the condition of his heart that of faith or not? Did he think, "I'm old. I'm incapable"? No. According to Romans 4:20, though he considered himself like one who is dead... "no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God" because Abraham embraced the Word of God. He trusted in His promises – that his progeny would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, the sands on the seashore - the promise of God's redemptive history through Abraham's seed, Isaac. Abraham grew strong as he embraced God's Word. The condition of his heart was moving and active and alive in faith. And then it says "he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God". We also must trust in his Word. Ask and He will strengthen us. As long as our hearts are in the condition of faith, we will experience Him standing beside us. Then we'll have the ability to keep on serving the Lord and continuing in redemptive history, to be faithful in his calling. It not just about feeling good, but it's about continuing with His purpose, for His glory.

2 Timothy 2:1 – "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus"

Paul is speaking to Timothy, “be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus”. Then he talks about how Timothy has to disciple and strengthen the leaders. We can always experience His presence, Him standing by us, if our hearts are in the condition of faith and if we are in the Word and in prayer. I remember when I was a youth pastor about 30yrs ago. Just graduated from college, just got married, a church needed a youth pastor. So we drove to the east coast. This was my first time in youth ministry, we had no idea what we were doing. There were some difficulties in ministry, and it was very discouraging, especially as a young youth pastor. So one night I was just praying, praising, picked up the guitar, singing this song, “Blessed Be the Lord... the God of mercy, the God who saves. I shall not fear the dark of night nor the arrows that flies by day.” I was singling this song about 50 times. I don’t know why I was singing this song at the time. Then about the 39th time, I was singing at the top of my lungs. Then the song strengthened me. Because it was from Psalms 91, so the song became reality for me as I was singing it and meditating on it. Whether you’re singing or saying or meditating, get into the Word and it will strengthen you and you will experience the Lord standing by you.

IV. Purpose - “So that through me the message might be fully proclaimed” [17]

A. Through me

So that *through me* – through me, Paul is saying “I am His ordained instrument”. He is sovereign. It does not mean he cannot do it without me. He just wants to do it through me, through his people. Paul is saying, “I have been elected. He wants to do it through me, but I’m not the only person He wants to use. He wants to use His people. But I am His instrument. I belong to Him.” I believe that is what Paul is saying.

B. The message

I believe Paul is saying, “the message is not about me, the message is about Jesus.” So we must not give mixed messages. You know when it comes to issues between guys and girls, some people think, “does he like me or not? He is giving me mixed messages – I like you, I don’t like you”. Same thing with ministry, don’t give mixed messages – “praise me, praise Jesus, praise me, praise Jesus.” No. Only one message - *Jesus* is to be praised. This should be the only message we’re giving, so the message might be fully proclaimed.

C. Fully proclaimed

Fully proclaimed literally means completed, fulfilled. The content as we preach ought to be fully proclaimed. Paul constantly preached the message, to Roman rulers – to Felix in Acts 24, and to Agrippa in Acts 26. It’s incredible! When he preaches to Agrippa, in vs 28-29 – And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian?” (29) And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am – except for these chains.” Paul was awesome as he preached with Christ was standing by him. Christ was standing beside him in his heart, empowering him to do it.

V. Peoples - “All the Gentiles” [17]

Groups of peoples. Ethnos – groups of peoples, specific groups of people such as missionaries, those of specific language or culture that need to preach the Gospel. The command of the Scripture is to go through all the difference language groups and preach the Gospel. I believe that is what Paul is thinking. That all the gentiles might hear the Gospel, the whole world. So the message might be fully proclaimed – Paul is thinking deep. “that all the gentiles might hear it” – Paul is thinking wide. Paul was thinking deep and wide. He wants all ethnic groups to know all of Scripture. Even Jesus said not only baptize them, but teach them to obey all that I have commanded you. He did not say that all Gentiles might become Christian, but that all Gentiles might HEAR the Gospel. Our job is to simply proclaim the Gospel. Conversion is GOD’s business!! ☺ We just need to relate with people, reach out to them, pray and proclaim the Gospel. God will convert people. Salvation belongs to the Lord. God will do the rest. Therefore, there is no glory for people in ministry, God did the work. Alternatively, no discouragement, it is all God’s work. Continuously pray that God would do the work. Deep and wide.

How Paul sees people is different from how we see people sometimes. In 2 Timothy, he is thinking about people who hurt him, but he is also thinking about people he needs to minister to. How do you see people? Do you see people as ones who are hurting me? Or do you see people as ones who are hurting? They need to be healed by the message of Jesus Christ. Do you see people you need to hurt, or people who need to hear Him. We need to have transformation in our thinking process in how we see people. Think about the heart’s direction of Paul towards people. They left him, but he thought, “I will go to them” so that the Message might be proclaimed and the Gentiles might hear. The direction is that he is going to people rather than worrying about those that leave him. Are people objects to use or objects to serve? We need to have transformation, radical paradigm shifting in our view of other people. Paul until the end, thought about how he needs to serve and minister to others, even though people were leaving him. He remembered his original calling and he embraced his calling until the end. Remember...

Acts 9:15

“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel’” Paul’s call was to go to the Gentiles...and kings and children of Israel. There was a man named Charles McCoy, a Baptist pastor., a single man, who retired at age 72yo. Had a doctorate. About the time he was retiring, a missionary from India invited him to India to preach. So Dr. McCoy had not traveled much even in the States, let alone overseas. But was told in India, because of his age, he would have more

influence. Still he gave God a lot of excuses in his prayers. He also didn't have money. However, as he prayed, God convicted him to sell his car and go. People in his church thought he was crazy. Chairman of the church asked, what if you die there? Dr. McCoy said, well it's just as close to heaven from there as it is here. On his way there, he lost everything, all his belongings including his wallet and passport. His missionary friend who invited him was not even there. He didn't know anyone. But, God opened doors for him. Gave him the opportunity to preach the Gospel to influential people, including those in the government and the military. He started a Chinese church in Calcutta. His ministry lasted 16 more years until he was 88yo. Dr. Charles McCoy was faithful until the end. May we also be faithful until the end of our lives.

VI. Perseverance - "The Lord will rescue me" [17-18]

There will be hardships and difficulties, but there will be protection. The Lord will rescue me. Paul faced incredible hardships in his life. V17 – I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

A. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth [17]

He was thinking about physical death, while preaching in court his head was in the proverbial "lion's mouth." The court's "jaws" could easily have snapped shut. Instead the courts held that there needed to be a subsequent hearing. The court's hearing was postponed, so he was saved, at least temporarily. Maybe Paul's thinking about Daniel in the lion's den when God shut the mouth of the lions. Or maybe he's thinking about Psalm 22:21 – save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!. He knew that God had rescued him, at least temporarily.

B. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed [18]

We can mistakenly think that the Lord will rescue us from death, but we know Paul is not thinking about physical death. "The Lord *will* rescue me from every evil deed." He has certainty about his future, this was based on past faithfulness of God. Future certainty was based on past faithfulness of God. I believe he is thinking like a missionary once said, "I am invincible until God's will is fulfilled in my life." So from what evil must the Lord rescue Paul?

C. Bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom [18]

You know Paul is not thinking of death from this phrase. He says in verse 6 that he fully expects to die in the near future. What then will the Lord rescue him from? What can threaten his entrance into heaven? Paul is thinking about spiritual danger, not physical danger. The Lord will help him to keep his faith, to be faithful to his calling. These things are more important than physical safety. That is what Satan will do.

Bring him safely into his heavenly kingdom. Literally it means "He will save me into His Heavenly Kingdom." "Safely" – think of all the problems and persecution he had and his persecutions. Soon, he will likely be beheaded. So when he uses the word "safely", I chuckle. Paul is not at all concerned about his physical safety or physical hardships or difficulties. He is only concerned about his spiritual safety instead. Our expectation is that God will rescue us from physical pain or difficulties. Paul is concerned about being rescued from losing the Truth, not being faithful to his calling, not keeping his faith. That was the purpose of his life and his mindset, "as long as I am faithful to the Lord, fulfill the purpose to which the Lord has called me, keep the Truth and proclaim the Gospel, nothing else is a danger." Only danger is that he would lose his heart for God, that he would not love Christ.

So, what is safety to you? What is danger to you? What are you afraid of in this world? What are you living for? We need to have a paradigm shift in what we are afraid of in this world.

VII. Praise - "To Him be the glory" [18, 22]

A. What? - Doxa

The word glory means doxa. Doxa literally means opinion. Opinion means the highest opinion. When we praise, we give highest opinion of Christ – we glorify him, we worship him. To Him be the praise and honor forever into eternity. To him be the praise forever and ever and ever. This explains why he wants to proclaim the Gospel deeply into people. The more deeply the Word goes into them, the more our hearts change and love Christ more to give Him higher praise and worship. Depth of ministry is needed, so the heart will praise Him more. We only think widely – the lost are dying and need to be saved. However, the Biblical intention of salvation in the world is not just salvation, which is only the beginning, but the praise, worship and glory of God is the main purpose. The more deeply the Word goes into people's hearts, the more deeply their hearts are transformed, which when creates more praise, more glory to God. That is why we do ministry – even though people are already saved, more glory, praise and honor and worship to God.

B. How?

2 Timothy 4:22

“The Lord be with your spirit, singular you. Grace be with you.” The Lord be with your spirit, singular you. Paul is talking to Timothy. Grace be with you all (plural), the Church of Jesus Christ. If God’s grace comes to us, then we can be faithful until the last day. Deeply and widely into ministry and missions in the world.

Define Grace – we tend to think of positive things, forgiveness. There is also difficult grace and sometimes harsh grace. As a father I don’t like it when my children goes through difficult times. It pains me. But, as much as it hurts me, God loves so much more than I love my children. When you go through pain, it hurts Him more than it hurts you. So if you have going through hardships in your life, it is likely because it is good for you. That is the only reason. So often we misunderstand God when He allows hardships in our lives. We think of it as punishment. We think God is like us, as if God gets bitter at us. He hurts when we sin, so we think He needs to retaliate or punish us. The Bible says He disciplines so we would not sin and so we would not do it again and so harm ourselves and harm others. Like a kid that puts a venomous snake in his pants, when we sin, we put a venomous snake in our hearts.

His reason for pain is never to punish us, but is Always for his future plan to flourish us. So at times He gives us temporary painful grace to lead us to eternal flourish and glory. If God gives His grace to us, He will get His glory through us. Understand, we need to run to Him first. Then, keep on running the race as beloved children of God. He will continue to stand by us. He will strengthen us.

As I think about my life, I realize, wow – the Lord was always there. I lived in Korea for 12 years. I have been going to church since I was 8yo, because someone told me to go to church because they give you donuts. The first time I walked into church, I could sense that there was some kind of being there. Even though no one made me, I walked to church every week, by myself in Korea. I realize now that during those days, the Lord stood by me. Then, when I was 12 years old, I moved to America. For 6 years, until I came to the U of I, I was a latchkey kid. My parents were immigrant parents. Though they were college graduates, they had to work in factory because they did not know the language. So they were not home when I came home from school. So, after school I would watch TV and eat canned spaghetti every day for 6 years while home alone. I was very lonely. But when I look back at those years, I received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior when I was 12 years old, I see that the Lord stood by me during those days.

Then, when I was 18 years old, I went to the greatest university in the world, U of I (UIUC). I was at this university for 5 years. I was so immature and worldly, but God lead me to the gospel band, Alpha Omega. The Lord lead me to my calling in full time ministry and to my wife, Gee during my sophomore year in college. After graduation, I learned how to do ministry because we didn’t have a college pastor, so I was kind of acting like a pastor as I was counseling people. As I look back I realize that the Lord stood by me during those days. So right after graduation, Gee and I were 22yo. We got married, then I was in seminary for 3yrs and I was dying. I had never had to study so much while doing ministry. During those times, there were not many that could speak English to the second generation, so I was asked to preach a lot. I barely survived. Nevertheless, I managed to graduate seminary, was a Youth pastor. Now, looking back I realize the Lord was standing by me during those days.

When I was 26yo, the Lord called me to come back to Champaign Urbana, that was about 24 years ago. The Lord convicted me to start this church. I said no, because I didn’t know what I was doing and knew nothing about starting a church. I prayed and fought God for a whole year. When you fight God and pray, you lose. God won. So, 1990, the Lord convicted me to start CFC. Time has wings. After birth of a church and the birth of 5 children, I look back and see that God stood by me. As I will try to be faithful to my family and to CFC and to this generation and the generations to come. Looking at God’s track record, I believe the Lord WILL stand by me. I pray that you will keep that in your heart and be faithful until the end.