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The Lord Stood with Me

"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." — 2 Timothy 4:17

Summary:

When every human supporter had deserted Paul, the Lord remained with him and supplied the courage, composure, and the words he needed. Christ's presence proved more than sufficient, turning a dangerous trial into an opportunity for the Gospel to reach Rome and beyond. Paul's narrow escape also showed that the sufferings of God's servants remain under divine providence. Enemies may threaten, but God restrains them, displays his power in extremity, and teaches his people never to despair.

Outline:

1. **Christ stands with his deserted servants**
   - The Lord's spiritual presence supplied what absent friends could not give.
2. **The Lord strengthens for faithful witness**
   - Paul received courage, self-possession, and freedom of thought and expression.
3. **Trials can advance the Gospel**
   - Paul's defence allowed the message of Christ to spread through Rome and its provinces.
4. **Deliverance remains under providence**
   - Paul's narrow escape showed that enemies cannot exceed the limits God appoints.
5. **God teaches his people not to despair**
   - He often permits extremity before displaying his power and glory in deliverance.

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Text

To the loss of his friends, he contrasts the Saviour's grace: "But the Lord stood by me." The Lord was not visible to the assembly, nor did Paul see him with his physical eyes. His presence was real, but spiritual. He was with his servant not merely as a witness, but as a helper—he "strengthened me." He steadied Paul's courage and gave him composure, as well as freedom of thought and expression. Paul had every reason to expect this, in light of the Lord's own promise: *"And you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour"* (Matthew 10:18-19).

See how he differs from others! They abandon us in times of distress, but he is always present to help in trouble. When human support fails, he is sure to extend his own arm and say, "Trust, and be not afraid." He was with Joseph when he was sold into Egypt, with Jeremiah in the dungeon, with the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, and with Paul when everyone abandoned him before Nero! And what a substitute he was for Paul's friends! They would have been nothing without him, but he was everything without them. If we walk with him through the valley of the shadow of death, we need fear no evil.

He is all in all. Why did this happen? "*So that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.*" During this trial, he could proclaim it widely and effectively. His message would spread through the palace, the city, and beyond. Since Rome was the world's metropolis, his listeners would share it throughout the provinces.

Though his servants may suffer as evildoers, even in bonds, God's word remains unbound. Nothing can restrain it—not the sea's flow or the sun's rise. Even efforts to harm it have advanced its progress; persecution has furthered the Gospel. What was the outcome? "And I was delivered from the mouth of the lion." Does he mean the enemy of souls?

He is called a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, and hoped to make Paul deny the Saviour's name. Or does this refer to Nero? Scripture often compares wicked men, especially tyrants, to beasts of prey. No worse monster could disgrace the imperial throne: Nero killed his tutor, watched his mother be disembowelled, and entertained himself at supper with Christians burning at the corners of his pleasure-grounds.

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Yet this hardly accords with Paul's writing style or the respect he officially owed his sovereign. The phrase instead suggests a narrow escape from grave danger. Thus David said, "Save me from the lion's mouth." Paul's situation seemed desperate; he was considered as good as dead. Yet the emperor and senate took no action against him. After a hearing, he was returned to prison.

The sufferings of God's servants depend not on human passions but on God's providence. Their enemies are restrained, and God is above their pride. By his power, he restrains or diverts them when he does not govern them by grace. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will." He may let his people face great danger, then deliver them to display his power and glory and teach them not to despair. Therefore, seed of Jacob, hope and wait for him. He can always deliver those who serve him—from the lion's paw and even its mouth.

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, Morning and Evening Exercises (February 2, Morning), first published in 1854.