

Discover Unshakable Peace With These 3 God-Truths

Imagine you're on death row. Your only crime is preaching the gospel. Your execution looms over you like an ominous cloud. You are confined to a dingy, dark, dank dungeon. To make matters worse, there is no plumbing in your cell, no toothpaste, no deodorant, no air conditioning, no wi-fi. You can only bathe occasionally. You look bad, you feel bad, you smell bad. How can you have peace in this miserable situation? Oh, and by the way, you can request three things. What would you ask for?

That is the grim context of the apostle Paul's last recorded words in 2 Timothy 4. "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come" (2 Tim. 4:6). By "departure" he means his execution. Paul already had one hearing before Nero, "At my first defense no one stood with me, but everyone forsook me. May it not be charged against them" (2 Tim. 4:16). Apparently, he wasn't even afforded a defense attorney. At his second hearing, he was condemned to death by beheading. Since Paul never mentioned the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) in his writings, scholars believe he was executed prior to that event.

The context reveals eight of Paul's co-workers are absent: 1. Demas backslid and deserted him (v. 10). 2. Crescens left for Galatia (v. 10). 3. Titus went to Dalmatia (v. 10). 4. Tychicus was sent to Ephesus (v. 12). 5. Erastus stayed behind in Corinth (v. 20). 6. Trophimus was left sick in Miletum (v. 20). 7. and 8. Aquila and Priscilla ministered elsewhere (v. 19). (When I read this list, I'm grateful my parents simply named me Ben.) Paul indicated, "Only Luke is with me" (v. 11). Luke was the "beloved physician" (Col. 4:14) who accompanied Paul and recorded his missionary journeys in the book of Acts and wrote the gospel named after him. He was not a cellmate

but a frequent visitor who treated Paul's ailments with whatever medicine was available. Paul was lonely, isolated and uncertain of the future, yet he found peace in three very certain things:

1. **The Presence of God:** "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (2 Tim. 4:17). Lacking human companionship, Paul found peace in divine fellowship. "Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of God no matter what the conflict." When Gideon built his altar, he called it Jehovah Shalom, which means "the Lord my peace" (Judg. 6:24). Notice it wasn't a peaceful time but a time of war. The Midianites invaded and oppressed Israel, but Gideon prophesied that God would bring peace even when there was turmoil. The Holy Spirit is our constant companion who walks with us through every fiery trial. Paul knew there is no substitute for God's presence and, when God is with you, you can have peace in any situation.
2. **The Providence of God:** "And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. The Lord will deliver me from every evil work: (2 Tim. 4:17-18). We assume Paul used "lion" here figuratively either of Nero or Satan, but he may have meant literally. During Nero's reign of terror, Christians were often thrown to wild beasts in arenas for sport. Yet Paul never called himself Nero's or Rome's prisoner. He referred to himself as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ." God controlled his fate, not Nero. Providence is the continual care God exercises over His creation, and He alone has the final verdict in the affairs of mankind. Often God's hand of providence prevents bad things from happening to us. Occasionally, He lifts the hedge and permits things we don't understand to test our faith and help us grow. Either way, He is sovereignly in control and is working all things together for our good. Notice the word "provide" is hidden in the word "providence." Breaking down the

word “provision,” the prefix “pro” means “before,” while the root word “vision” means “to see.” Together they form “to see before.” Jehovah Jireh sees our need before we’re even aware of it and is already in our future making a way. Remember, God put the ram on Mount Moriah before Abraham arrived and realized he needed a substitute for Isaac. That wasn’t a coincidence; that was providence!

3. **The Preservation of God:** “The Lord ... will preserve me for His heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18a). The Greek word *sozo* is translated “preserve” here but is usually translated “save.” Wait a minute. Paul had been saved about 30 years at this point. Why would he say God was going to “save” him knowing he’d be martyred soon? He understood God would complete the process of salvation. Salvation is past, present and future. We were saved from the penalty of sin—justification, we are being saved from the power of sin—sanctification, and we will be saved from the presence of sin—glorification. Paul believed God would finish what He started in him—“I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). It’s good to know there is both saving and keeping power in the blood of Jesus (Jude 1:24).

So, what did Paul ask Timothy for on death row?

1. Clothes to warm his body (a physical need—vs. 13a). He asked Timothy to come ASAP and bring his coat before winter (vv. 9, 21). Why? It gets cold in prison and shipping routes shut down due to rough seas. God promised to meet our physical needs (Phil. 4:19).
2. Scrolls to warm his mind (a spiritual need—vs. 13b). Prison is boring and monotonous. Paul, ever the scholar, wanted inspirational material to read to feed his mind and quench his spiritual thirst.

3. Friends to warm his heart (an emotional need—vs. 9, 11). He asked Timothy, his spiritual son and protégé, to come and bring Mark with him. Though Mark quit on him on his first missionary journey, Paul now sensed maturity in him—"He is profitable to me for the ministry" (v. 11b). (Incidentally, Mark later wrote the Gospel of Saint Mark.) Paul longed for human companionship. We are relational beings which God hardwired to need fellowship. None of us is a lone ranger. We all need friends to lean on and learn from.

When turmoil invades your tranquil life, remember God gave Paul supernatural peace in prison. If Paul had peace on death row, we can have peace anytime, anywhere and in any situation. May the perfect peace that passes all understanding prevail in your life (Isa. 26:3, Phil. 4:7). {eoa}

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