

The Uncertain Is Certain

Hebrews 13:23-24

“Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.”

In these closing words of the Apostle Paul, we find some insight into our lives in general as Christians. Last words are important, and in this benediction, the Apostle gives us all some vital teaching about life.

I. Persecution in this life as a Christian with values should be expected.

“Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released.” The word *released* (ἀπολύεσθαι) is used in the New Testament primarily in cases of prisoners being set free (see Luke 23:16 and Acts 4:21). One strong reason to believe the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Hebrews is due to the fact he was imprisoned in Rome with others for preaching the gospel in spite of opposition (see Acts 28:14). Timothy has always been known as the student and companion of Paul. Both men suffered greatly.

A. Jesus tells us to expect suffering for doing *the right thing*.

“For it has been granted to you to not only believe in him, but also to suffer for him” (Phil. 1:29).

“No one should be disturbed by these afflictions; for they have been appointed” (I Thess. 3:3).

B. Suffering for doing the right thing (righteousness) is a blessing.

“All sin has at its root the suspicion that God is not good” — Oswald Chambers. When you believe that God gives us His wisdom and counsel in His Word for your good, then you will do what He says because He created you to function properly. The blueprint God made for you is best! “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness for *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:10). The greatest unhappiness is to live life without His reign in us.

C. Suffering as a consequence for sin will always bring a believer shame.

“If you are reviled for the name of Christ, *you are blessed* ... Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, *he is not to be ashamed*, but is to glorify God in this name [Christian]” (I Peter 4:12-16). “For it is far better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (I Peter 3:17). “The pursuit of purity is not about the suppression of lust, but about the reorientation of one's life to a larger goal” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). “Seek first the Kingdom of God,” Jesus said.

II. Plans in this life as a Christian will always be guided by Providence.

“If he (Timothy) comes soon, I will see you.” Timothy was separated from Paul. Either Paul was still in prison and Timothy released, or both were out of prison and Timothy was in another city. Regardless, both intended to come together to the place where the Hebrews were residing. There's no certainty. “You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then is gone. You ought say ‘If it is the Lord's will, we will live, do this or that’” (James 4:15).

III. People in this life who also love Jesus Christ are family, regardless of nationality.

“Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from (lit. natives of) Italy greet you (as well).” It is obvious that Paul was writing to a specific group of Hebrews that he intended to visit in person. He had become acquainted with Christians in Rome, and they offered their greetings with Paul. In this day of globalization and ultra-nationalism, we ought to be careful to remember that we are Kingdom citizens first, United States citizens second. It should be our intention and our goal to be acquainted with, supportive of, and moved by the needs of Christian brothers around the world. I can't think of a better text to study than this one during our November emphasis on missions.