

## Safely to His Heavenly Kingdom

‡ Deserted (vv.9-16)

‡ Strengthened (vv.16-17)

‡ Rescued (v.18)

In the Name of Jesus our Lord and Savior, dear fellow heirs of the Lutheran Reformation:

Ever hear the expression, “Hindsight is 20/20”? In many ways it’s not true. Looking back on your life, “Should-a...Would-a...Could-a...” might feel like you’d-a done better. But we often make the same mistakes. Likewise, hindsight says the US and Allies won WWII. But only those living at the time know the fear of civilization hanging in the balance. Only God knew how it would all turn out. You might think the Reformation had Luther confidently preaching to smiling faces. But history shows how vehemently Luther was opposed by government and church officials loyal to the Pope in Rome. Our text is from the last of thirteen God-inspired letters by the Lord’s Apostle Paul. Do you picture Paul writing at his desk in a comfortable office with his favorite pen? Mail the letter and off it goes? Not quite. Here is a miracle for a believer in confident hope that God will bring us **Safely to His Heavenly Kingdom**.

‡ Deserted (vv.9-16)

Paul’s “office” may not even have been a lonely prison cell. Piecing together the Biblical record, it’s clear this was Paul’s second and final imprisonment in Rome. According to Christian tradition Paul spent his final days in the Mamertine Prison before being martyred by the cruel Emperor Nero. If that’s true, he was lowered into a cistern which must have smelled like an outhouse. At the very least Paul’s prison was a dungeon, way below the seediest motel you can imagine.

Yet Paul has no complaints about his living conditions. His heart is aching for his spiritual son. He writes to young Pastor Timothy, *“Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.”* Demas had been a faithful worker, but worldly love drove him to desert Paul. Faithful coworkers like Crescens and Titus were away working. Doctor Luke accompanied Paul on missionary journeys in Acts and stayed during Paul’s last imprisonment. Mark who deserted on the First Missionary Journey, was at the center of a rift between Paul and Barnabas on the Second. But the Lord had matured Mark to where Paul wanted his help. Tychicus probably carried this letter back to Ephesus to replace Timothy. If he could come quick before winter, Paul needed the warmth of his cloak against the cold stone walls and the wind which always seemed to get inside old buildings.

Paul warns Timothy about Alexander a metalworker. But again, no bitterness. The Lord would deal with him for strongly opposing God’s message through Paul. Leave vengeance to God.

Christians everywhere suffer loneliness and pain. You bear the cross of Christ. Martin Luther after publishing his German Bible was condemned again by Roman Catholic officials. Then they republished Luther’s German Bible under their own name and called it great! Luther commented, *“I am satisfied and glad that my work (as St. Paul also boasts [Phil. 1:18]) must be furthered even by enemies;*

and that Luther's book, without Luther's name but under that of his enemies, must be read. How could I avenge myself better?"<sup>1</sup> Paul and Luther rejoiced when God's Word spread.

### † Strengthened (vv.16-17)

Our Lord Jesus says not to fret at persecution and prison under the cross. Jesus kept His Word for Paul in spite of standing alone: ***"At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them."*** What love would flow through marriage and family if all of us learned to pray for each other this way: "Lord, forgive \_\_\_\_ for this sin." How could Paul be so generous and kind when friends and family failed? Paul did not rely on people. He had real hope and help: ***"But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth."***

Your chances of dying are absolutely ZERO until the Lord's time comes to call you home. Many a soldier has fought fearlessly because nothing can touch you unless God lets it pass through His loving hands. You too have been **Strengthened** by Christ Jesus again and again. He took away your guilt by dying and insured your eternity by rising again. Now Jesus sends His Holy Spirit so that every time you read or remember your Bible or hear a Bible class or sermon, our loving Lord gives strength to your soul.

So it was for Martin Luther at the Imperial Diet at Worms (1521). Posters all over the city pictured a goose because that's the meaning of John Huss who was burned at the stake a century earlier. Rome wanted this young monk stopped. The Spanish guards of Emperor Charles V hissed "Burn him! Burn him!" as Luther entered the council room. No discussion was allowed about the pile of Luther's books on the table. He had to admit they were his. But he begged for time to pray about his answer to Rome's demand that he recant. After a night on his knees Luther stood before papal legates and government power to answer, **Strengthened** by our Savior: *"Since your majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen."*<sup>2</sup>

### † Rescued (v.18)

What separates Rome from the Bible to this day? This is not complicated. It comes down to this: The Bible says we are saved by Christ alone: ***"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*** (Acts 4:12 NIV84) Rome says you need the merits of the Church and saints over and above Christ. Holy Scripture says we are saved by Christ alone not by tradition or councils or theologians. Salvation is given by grace alone and accepted by faith alone as a gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8-10) Paul, Luther and simple hearted believers all the way back to Adam and Eve are **Rescued** by the sufferings and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul hoped in Christ as he and wrote last letter for young Pastor Timothy and us: ***"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom."*** We too will be **Rescued** for eternal joy.

Such is the strength of our Reformation faith when we feel alone or deserted. We confess our sins and give God all the credit for taking them away and giving us in Christ the holiness He demands. **Rescued** for time and eternity we rejoice to praise God. Luther concluded some sermons: "If we try to say everything, you will get nothing." With Paul we say: ***"To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."***

<sup>1</sup> "On Translating: An Open Letter." LW, 35, 184f.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1501-1600/martin-luthers-most-noble-words-11629925.html>

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