

KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

ONLINE NOTICE BOARD - 33

IN Paul's final letter, his second letter to Timothy, written shortly before he was executed by order of the Roman Emperor Nero, Paul says something very striking. Paul, as a Roman citizen, had travelled to Rome after he had appealed to the Emperor. In Rome, while waiting his trial, Paul was under house arrest. He was able to receive visitors and through them to help build up the church in Rome, the church that was also strengthened by the presence and ministry of the Apostle Peter.

In this deeply personal and moving letter Paul tells us that at the first hearing of his case everyone 'abandoned' him (2 Timothy 4.16). The word he used means to be totally abandoned, completely forsaken. It is the very word used by Jesus in his cry of dereliction from the Cross.

But Paul had friends! So had Jesus! These friends were believers; some had been with Paul through his most difficult days. Where were they now? Now that he most needed them. Paul's words cannot help but remind us of the experience of our Lord in Gethsemane and in his trial before Pilate. But there is one great difference. Whereas our Lord, as he became sin for us, was forsaken even by his Father, Paul tells us that, although his friends forsook him, 'the Lord stood with me and strengthened me' (2 Timothy 4.17).

And that is our comfort too. Firstly, we all may face experiences in which none are able to share, not even those closest to us. They may not abandon us deliberately or because of unkindness but simply because they cannot experience what we are facing. Maybe this is what Paul is telling us. Or maybe his friends were not 'friends in need' and so not 'friends indeed'. But either way we, like Paul, will find that the Lord will stand with us, will walk with us, will carry us and strengthen us. That's his promise to us.

The second way this helps us is to remind us that when we are unable fully to meet the need and suffering of our friends, our prayers for them will accomplish more than we ever could. When our friends face these great and overwhelming experiences, what do we believe matters most: that we unaided are the only help they have, with all our inability and weakness and limitations, or that the Lord should stand by them, in his limitless love, his compassion and his ability to do far beyond what we can ask or think? When we pray for our friends we may rest assured, whatever the appearance may be, that the Lord will stand with them and strengthen them.

When it seems that 'there is nothing more to be done for him'... When we abandon our friend to God he continues to be supported by our love and the pain of being unable to help him accomplishes more than any self-confident action. (*Hans Urs von Balthasar*)