

2 Timothy 4:9-10

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- [0 : 0 0] As many of you know, we got back from a visit to Peru where we used to live about 10 days ago.
- And 10 days is quite a good time to recover and also in some measure to reflect on some of the experiences that we had visiting family and friends there in Peru and very particularly in Moyabamba where we lived and served for several years.
- And during the time that we were there, one of the questions that was asked of me by different folk was something along these lines. What changes do you see in Moyabamba?
- And it had been three years since our previous visit, so in three years there had been quite a lot of changes in the town. One thing that was quite an evident contrast with Europe, with the UK in these years of economic difficulties, perhaps Aberdeen in a little bit of a bubble, but we know that the times in terms of the economy have not been great these past few years, to put it mildly.
- And that's really quite a contrast with the whole of Latin America. I'm sure you've seen in the news that the growth rates there have remained very robust even in the midst of the crisis that has afflicted Europe and parts of Europe or all of Europe in some measure.
- [1 : 4 0] And that's certainly true of Peru and perhaps particularly true of that part of Peru where we used to live, where the growth rates have been even higher than in the country as a whole.
- And you see the effects of that. Increased commerce, people just seem to have more money at their disposal, a lot of construction and so on and so forth.
- So a lot of changes in that regard. But of course for us as a family, what was of particular interest was the health and progress and growth of the church, and very especially the congregation where we had been serving for ten years or so.
- And this is a good moment before I forget to extend to you the greetings of the Moyabamba Presbyterian congregation. They asked me to pass on their greetings, not only the church where I was the minister in the center of town, but also a new church plant that began just three or four years ago.
- I had the opportunity of preaching there also, and they also asked me to convey their greetings to you as a congregation. Well, that pleasant duty aside, what did we see in the church that struck us?
- [2 : 5 6] What changes? Was there growth? Was there decline? Were they good times? Were they difficult times? I think the overall picture is a healthy one. In the congregation where we served in Moyabamba, when we left, a Sunday morning congregation would have been something between four and five hundred people.
- And on the two Sunday mornings that we were able to worship there, I would guess there were about four hundred at the morning service, and you might say, well, that's a little bit less perhaps than before. But what you have to bear in mind is that in that period they've begun this new church, and many of the folk from the mother church moved to start the new congregation.

And I think I could safely say that the combined worshiping community between the two congregations would be greater than it was a few years ago, perhaps not dramatically, but nonetheless, less, and encouragingly greater.

That's a good thing. So the overall picture, I would say, is healthy. But, and there's always or often a but, one of the things that did strike me as I sat in worship, well, one morning it was sitting in worship, another time I was preaching, and I was looking around the congregation as one does, and I was encouraged by lots of new faces, but also was struck by lots of faces that seemed to be missing.

And, of course, if you're in a congregation, one or two services, you can't come to definitive conclusions about why any given individual isn't present. There could be so many reasons.

[4 : 26] But as you have the opportunity to converse with some folk, and even meet folk who you hadn't seen in church, but you meet them in town as you're going about your business and have a little chat with them, you would discover that a number of people, I wouldn't say a huge number, but a significant number of people were no longer there, no longer gathering to worship because they had drifted away from the things of God.

Their faith had, in some measure, grown cold. And it's sad to see that. It's sad to experience that. But it was sad for us to see folk who were no longer involved in the way that they had been in the past.

I say it's sad, and it is sad, but it's not surprising it has ever been so. As we go back to the pages of the New Testament, indeed throughout the Bible, but if we think especially of the church in the New Testament, we find a clear evidence of that being a feature of church life, of those who come to faith, who grow in the faith in a measure, and then who drift away, who fall away from the faith, or grow cold certainly in their faith.

And I want to spend a little time this evening considering the example of one believer who grew cold in his faith, and his name is Demas.

Now, we can learn from Demas in a number of different ways, and I trust in the small or the short time we spend thinking about him that we will learn from him.

[6 : 00] And the first thing we need to do is simply read the passages in Scripture that make reference to him. And that won't take very long because there are only three, and they're very short. So, let's just do that, and then we'll have the biblical material that speaks of this man, and from that we will seek to draw some lessons that I hope will be helpful for us.

So, first of all, if you turn to Paul's letter to the Colossians, Colossians chapter 4 and verse 14. This is the end of Paul's letter to the church in Colossae, and as was his custom, he ends his letter with greetings to those he is writing to.

And we read there in verse 14, our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. So, this is the first time we encounter this man, a very fleeting and passing reference to him, mentioned in the same breath as the much more famous Luke.

Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. And then we meet him again, or a reference is made to him again in Philemon. Colossians and Philemon are two very connected books.

They were written at the same time and sent by the same messenger, and so it's not surprising that there in Philemon there's also a fleeting reference to Demas.

[7 : 26] And again, it's not dissimilar to the one in Colossians. We can read from verse 23 of Philemon, a bit difficult to find because it's just one page, but just before Hebrews, Philemon, verse 23.

Again, the closing greetings of the letter. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

And the way in which Paul speaks of them as my fellow workers would suggest that at this point in his ministry, imprisoned in Rome, these are the group of men who particularly are supporting him in his ministry.

Perhaps there were others who supported him in one way or another, but these men in particular are described as my fellow workers. And then finally, we have reference made to Demas, and rather more somber reference to him in 2 Timothy.

In 2 Timothy and in chapter 4 and verse 10. 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10. And this is where we have more said about him.

[8 : 42] As I say, not so encouraging in terms of the content, but certainly instructive for us. And we'll read there from verse 9. Again, these are the closing remarks of Paul as he writes this second letter to Timothy.

And this is what he says, do your best to come to me quickly. He's asking this of Timothy, come to me quickly. And then he gives the reason why he's so concerned that Timothy would come to him quickly.

For Demas, and everything would suggest that this is the same Demas, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

And so here Paul, once again, makes reference to this man, but in this rather sad commentary on his actions, Demas, because he loved the world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

So that's the biblical material that we can draw on as we would paint a portrait of this man and learn from him and his experience. And what I want to do is just ask a few questions about Demas.

[9 : 52] And then as we answer the questions, build up this portrait and learn from him. We'll begin, I'll mention what the questions are. We're going to ask who he is, who is Demas, what happened to Demas.

That's particularly of interest to us. And when we're going to think about what happened to him, what we want to do is to think about the what, like what happened, but also to explore a little bit the why.

Why did he desert Paul? Think a little bit about the cost of his desertion. What was the cost of what he did as he left and abandoned Paul?

And then finally, think about what our response should be as we learn from him and from his example, not in a positive way, but in a negative way, or rather his negative example, what can it help us and teach us?

First of all, who was this man? Well, there's very little to say in answer to that question because we know so very little. His name, it would seem, is a shortened version of the name Demeter.

[10 : 58] I don't know how you pronounce it, Demeter, Demeter, a Greek goddess, the goddess of agriculture. Another form of the name more common today, not common here in Scotland, but in Greece, Demetrius, that really is a connected name.

Probably no great significance in the name. I don't think we could draw any conclusions from his name. It was his name. Maybe it was a name that his parents thought was nice. Maybe it was a family name.

We don't know. But that's what he was called. He was called Demas. But what we can say about him, what we do know about him, and we want to stress about him, are two important things. Even in the very little information we have, we can say two important things about this man Demas.

So, the first thing that we can say, I think with a great measure of confidence, is that he was a believer. He was a Christian. He was a disciple of Jesus Christ.

We don't know when or where he first heard the gospel, but it seems reasonable to imagine or presume that it may well have been under Paul's preaching, that he heard the good news concerning Jesus Christ and was converted.

[12 : 10] And it would appear, it would seem, that as a new believer he was enthusiastic in the faith. He was, and it became clear to the leaders of the church, to Paul and others, that he was gifted, and he was identified by Paul as a suitable helper for gospel ministry.

And as we've seen, Paul testifies to the fact that he became, this man Demas became part of this, we might almost call it, inner circle of gospel helpers for the apostle.

In the light of that, there seems to be no reason, certainly no sufficient evidence, to question the sincerity and genuineness of his faith. We know, of course, that it's possible that somebody could give every impression of a genuine conversion.

Somebody could even get involved in the life and ministry of the church and yet never have been truly converted. That is, of course, possible, but I don't think it would be fair or charitable to imagine that this is the case with Demas.

I think it's reasonable to conclude that he was indeed a believer. And men of the spiritual discernment of Paul, no doubt, were able to see the fruit that gave evidence that his was a true and a genuine faith.

[13 : 33] He was a man who, in the language that we were considering this morning, he was a man who came to Jesus and was received by Jesus.

So, he was a believer. But we can say more about him. He's also described by Paul there in Philemon as a fellow worker. That is, a fellow worker of the apostle, a fellow worker of Paul.

He's mentioned in the same breath as Luke. That in itself maybe gives him a certain status, if status is important in this matter of being a fellow worker in the gospel.

But certainly, he's mentioned in the same breath as Luke and is explicitly described, as I've just commented, as a fellow worker of Paul.

And as a fellow worker, I think it's reasonable to presume that he would have been somebody who had been identified by Paul, and not only by Paul, but confirmed by the church as suitable for and called to gospel ministry.

[14 : 42] He was in gospel ministry. He was a fellow worker of Paul. And for that to have come about, it would have been necessary for Paul, certainly, and others, to have identified him as somebody suitable for that work.

As a fellow worker, it seems reasonable to imagine that he was involved in preaching the gospel and instructing new believers. We can't know these things with complete certainty because we're simply not told.

But those seem reasonable suppositions. And as I've already suggested, Paul, as a man of deep spiritual discernment, would not have lightly taken on board someone without the requisite spiritual maturity and gifts.

His return to Thessalonica that Paul makes reference to there in 2 Timothy suggests, though it only suggests, that he might have been a native of the town. That was the view of one of the church fathers, which doesn't settle the case by any means, but Chrysostom, who was a church father who lived in the 4th century, identifies Demas as having been a native of Thessalonica.

That may be so. It may not be so. If it is so, then it also points to his commendable willingness to accompany Paul in his Roman imprisonment, far from home and from the comforts of home.

[16 : 08] Such was his level of commitment that he was willing to leave the comfort of home, if indeed that is what he did, to be with Paul and to help Paul and to be involved in furthering the cause of the gospel far from home.

So, from the little that we know, and it is very little, but from the little that we know, I think we can concur with one commentator who speaks of Demas as one who had shown a substantial commitment to the Lord's work.

Perhaps a more substantial commitment than many of us show to the Lord's work. Well, that's what we can say about Demas, given the little material that we have.

But moving on to the second question, really the one that is of greatest interest to us, what happened to him? What happened to Demas? And as I suggested I would do earlier, what I want to do is to answer this question in terms of what happened, but also why did it happen?

And what happened is simple enough. Paul tells us that Demas deserted him. There in 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10, Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

[17 : 22] And what can we draw from this language? Having suggested that we have every reason to believe that he was a genuine and true believer, what do we make of this reality that Paul describes for us, that this man reached a point when he decided to leave and to abandon Paul, to desert Paul?

Is Paul saying that Demas had abandoned the faith? Well, he doesn't say that, and given that he doesn't say that, I think such a conclusion would be uncharitable.

John Calvin makes reference to Demas, and he gives his thoughts, his opinion on this desertion of Demas.

And he concludes, and I think he fairly concludes, that we, and I quote, must not suppose that he altogether denied Christ.

Now, no doubt, his deserting Paul did involve, must have involved in some measure deserting the cause, but not necessarily abandoning the faith.

[18 : 32] This is not a good thing that he did, clearly, but it wouldn't be fair to equate it with abandoning the faith altogether. He may, we don't know, but he may even have continued to form part of the Fellowship of Believers in Thessalonica.

We know that there was a church there. Perhaps he did still attend church services and participate. We don't know. Perhaps he did, in some measure, maintain a Christian witness in his life and lifestyle and conversation.

He may have done. We don't know. But what we do know is that he deserted Paul, and in the absence of heartfelt repentance, and of course there may have been in due course heartfelt repentance, but in the absence of heartfelt repentance, he would have been of little usefulness in the work of the gospel, even if he had maintained a participation or involvement or connection with the gospel and with the church.

So he deserted Paul. But the next part of the question is, why did he do that? Why did he desert Paul? He seems to have begun so well. He seems to have been very gifted and committed, and yet he deserts Paul.

Why? Why did he do that? Well, the stated reason that Paul gives is clear enough. We read there for Demas, because he loved this world.

[19 : 56] Because he loved this world. And this explanation, though very brief, it does really get to the heart of all matters spiritual.

You see, in all matters spiritual, the key question is this. Who or what do you most love? And that is a crucial question for you this evening.

Who do you love most? Or what do you love most? And the answer to that question will give you a fairly clear indication of your spiritual condition.

And this is the problem with Demas. He loved this present world more than he loved Jesus. Or certainly he came to that point where he loved this present world more.

It would be unfair to conclude that he did not love the Lord at all, but his affections were now primarily directed elsewhere.

[20 : 57] He loved this present world. And there's a contrast that is possibly deliberate. We don't know for sure, but there's possibly a deliberate contrast that Paul makes in what he says at the end of verse 8 with his description of Demas.

Notice there in verse 8 of chapter 4, he declares himself in this way. Now that is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

And not only to me, but also to all, and in our version it says, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. That is for the appearing of Jesus Christ.

But what Paul literally says is, and also to all who love his appearing. To all who love his appearing. And then just immediately afterwards he speaks of Demas who love this present world.

So there's a contrast there. Whether it's intended or not, it's still a significant contrast. Those who love the Lord's appearing. Who long to see Jesus face to face.

[22 : 03] Whose love is directed to him. And Demas who love this present world. He had loved Jesus. Maybe in a measure he still did. But he loved this present world more.

And this is the problem. This is his big heart problem. Why had he come to love this present world more than the Lord and the Lord's service?

Well, we don't know. There may have been many factors that contributed to this. It couldn't have been easy being a fellow worker of Paul who found himself imprisoned.

It wouldn't have been easy. There was no doubt danger associated with being a fellow worker of Paul. Reproach and insult and troubles and worries and anxieties.

Very little in the way of material reward or comfort. Maybe in great enthusiasm he became part of that band of fellow workers of Paul. And then the months passed and things were very difficult.

[23 : 05] They were very tough. And Demas began to struggle. He became weary and discouraged. And in that condition, weary and discouraged, the present world seemed to become so much more attractive.

An easier life. Home comforts. Greater financial reward for his effort and his work. And again, if I can quote Colvin, who puts it really very quaintly as he paints this picture.

And it's only a suggested picture because we can't know for sure. But the way Colvin puts it, I think, is helpful. In speaking of what it was that explains why Demas loved this present world.

And he puts it this way. He merely preferred his private convenience to the life of Paul. To all that was involved in working with Paul.

He merely preferred his private convenience. And I think that's helpful because it helps us to realize that Demas, as far as we can tell, and I think we could put it more confidently than that, Demas was no monster.

[24 : 17] You know, Demas wasn't some horrendous apostate, you know, who abandoned the church and persecuted the believers. No, he was like so many of us.

I wonder if you can see something of yourself in Demas. How often do you, how often do I, prefer your private convenience to serving the Lord?

It's really put in very challenging terms. Do you prefer your private convenience? You see, opportunities to serve the Lord are there. Opportunities to use your gifts in His service.

But you prefer your private convenience. Maybe this was the problem with Demas. What was the cost of his desertion?

Let's move on. What was the cost? You see, Paul simply states that he deserted him. The manner he says it and the language he uses, it's very heartfelt. You can feel the pain, really.

[25 : 18] And really, that's what I'm going to. The cost of Demas deserting Paul, and the word that comes to my mind, that perhaps best describes the cost, is the word sadness.

Certainly, that's the word that comes to my mind. It was a sad turn of events for Demas himself. Was Demas happy in Thessalonica, having deserted Paul, having abandoned his calling to serve God in the manner that he had been called?

And back in Thessalonica, maybe more comfortable, maybe earning more money, less danger, less worries in many ways. But was he happy? Well, we can't ask him.

But what do you think? Was he happy? Was he fulfilled? Was he joyful? I can't imagine he was any of these things. It was sad that Demas did what he did.

It was sad also for Paul. Paul, it's very evident in the language he uses, is feeling increasingly alone and even abandoned. That's why he says to Timothy, come quickly.

[26 : 23] Come quickly. Demas has deserted me. Others have gone. The others, it would seem, for good reason. But nonetheless, it was sad for Paul that this man that he loved, that he had instructed, that he had helped, that he had prayed for, that he had given advice to, I'm sure, as maybe he struggled with these issues, but ultimately he deserts him.

It was sad for Paul. It was sad, no doubt, for the other fellow workers that are mentioned there in Philemon to see Demas deserting them. It may be a real danger that they might be tempted to go down that same route in the face of discouragement.

Discouragement has a very contagious quality to it. It spreads quickly. It spreads quickly. And there's the danger, of course, that that could have happened with Demas's abandoning his post and deserting Paul.

Before we think about our response, and I hope even as we've been thinking about Demas, there's been a sense in which we've been considering how we respond to him and to what happened to him.

There's just one other question I want to pose, and it's this, and we really are coming right to the end now. Was there any hope for Demas? You know, here's a man who had been given great opportunity to serve alongside this great apostle.

[27 : 43] It was a great privilege that God had given him, and yet he deserts Paul. Was there any hope for such a man? Is there any hope for somebody who does that kind of thing?

And the answer has got to be, of course, of course there was hope for Demas. The words of Jesus that we were considering this morning apply to Demas. Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

Jesus was committed to Demas, even if Demas was not at this point in his life committed to Jesus, as he ought to have been. But what about our response?

What can we learn from the life of Demas and his sad desertion? Well, let me suggest this. First of all, be warned. None of us are immune from doing what Demas did.

If we use the language that Calvin uses, we are all prone to prefer our private convenience and to leave aside gospel work in favor of our private convenience.

[28 : 45] And so we should take warning that we too could be like Demas. Maybe we too are like Demas. Be warned, but also be aware that it's possible to desert the cause while still remaining in the faith.

It's contradictory. It makes no sense, but it is a reality. We can in many ways desert the cause, not make use of the gifts that we've been given, not obey God in serving Him as we ought, and yet still be within the faith.

We need to be aware of that. Not imagine that just because we're here and we participate and we're members of a church, that means that all is well. So be aware of that. Perhaps most importantly, guard your heart.

Cultivate your love for Jesus. The great problem that Demas had was a problem of the heart. His heart had been drawn away from Jesus to this present world.

He didn't love Jesus enough. And that is why this present world seems so attractive to Him. And so we must guard our heart because that can easily happen to us also.

[30 : 00] One further thing I would say, and that is be concerned. What I've said so far concerns us individually in our own Christian walk. But this one, this final lesson, I suppose, is one that I would share with you with the intention of encouraging you to think not only of yourself but of others.

Be concerned for those who are going down the route that Demas travel or those who have already gone down that route. And as opportunity affords, indeed, as you actively seek opportunity, look to counsel and to encourage such that there is hope for them, that they can come back, that they don't need to remain a far off.

They don't need to remain inactive and unengaged in the work of the gospel. They can return. For Demas, there was that opportunity.

Perhaps he did. Perhaps the months passed or the years passed and he was brought to repentance and no doubt he lamented the time that had been lost. But the point is that we can help others to return.

And I want to close by suggesting what would be a useful or who would be a useful counselor for Demas. And for those of us who are in some measure like Demas. And we've sung, and this is the reason we've sung the testimony of Asaph there in Psalm 73.

[31 : 26] And we're going to close by singing the final verses. But before we do, let's just look at that psalm. We've read it. We've sung most of it. But let's just close before we sing the final part and read some of the verses in the psalm and see how Asaph serves as a counselor to the likes of Demas from his own experience and as he shares his own testimony.

And we'll just read from the Sing Psalms version that we've sung from and that we'll sing from again. Notice the testimony that Asaph shares there in Psalm 73.

In verse 2, As for me, my steps were slipping and my foothold was unsure. For the arrogant I envied as I saw them live secure. What's the problem with Asaph? He's beginning to love this present world.

He's envying the prosperous and the arrogant. He's a believer. But he looks at the arrogant. He looks at those who know nothing of God and take no care for God and they seem to be doing so well.

And he's envious of them. He's beginning to love this present world more than he loves the Lord. Verses 4 and 5. They are not beset by struggles.

[32 : 38] They are healthy, fit, and strong, undisturbed by such diseases as to human life belong. He looks on and he says, well, their life, it looks so good. It's so much better than mine.

My life is so difficult. So many struggles. I wish I was like them. And then he goes on. We jump through to verse 13. Have I kept my heart for nothing?

Washed my hands in innocence? All day long your plagues are on me daily. Are my pains intense? As he thinks of all the effort that he had put in, all the sacrifices he had made, and it's for nothing.

Or so it appears. And he's so close to saying, well, let's just throw in the towel. Let's just abandon all the effort that is involved in serving God.

There seems to be so little reward. But for Asaph, and thank God, there is a turning point. In verses 16 and 17 we read, when I tried to understand this, it was all too hard for me.

[33 : 40] And then comes the crucial turning point. Till I came into God's temple. Till I came into God's temple. Till I sought the Lord again.

Till I sought to reignite my love for the Lord and commune with Him. Till then all appeared a waste of time.

But then things began to change. And how things change. We read from verse 23, yet, O Lord, you hold my right hand. With you I will always go.

To your glory you will bring me. With your counsel as my guide, I have none but you in heaven. All on earth I lay aside. No longer in love with this world. In verses 3 and 4 he was envying the arrogant and all their riches.

And now he says, there's nothing in this world that compares to you. Flesh and heart may fail, but ever God my portion will abide. And verse 28, as for me, it is a blessing to be near the sovereign Lord.

[34 : 46] I have made my God my refuge. All your deeds I will record. Would it not have been the case that if Demas had read that psalm and read it under the direction and the help of the Holy Spirit, he could have seen himself and said, there is hope.

I can return. I can return. And once again, know that sweet communion that I once knew with my Lord. And of course, that is true for us also. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you for the honest portrayal that we have of your people, their successes, and their many failures.

And we thank you that we can indeed relate so well to those who are presented to us because we are like them. We also are weak and frail and vulnerable.

We are sinners who fall short in so many ways. But we thank you that even as we do, while we do not justify our shortcomings, but even when we do fall short, there is always hope.

[35 : 52] For though we are not committed to you as we ought to be, your commitment to us is one that never wavers. And we pray that you would help us, even this evening, to ponder on and to think about this man Demas and what we can learn from him, that we would be warned, that we would be aware, that we would be careful, that we would guard our heart, that we would be concerned for others.

Help us in all of these things, we pray. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's sing the final verses of that psalm that we briefly, well, that we read in its entirety earlier on and just a moment ago we're looking through.

Psalms 73 and verses 24 to 28. And we'll sing these verses to the tune Regent Square.

Psalms 73 on page 96, verses 24 to the end. To your glory you will bring me with your counsel as my guide. I have none but you in heaven. All on earth I lay aside.

Let's stand to sing. Flesh and heart may flow.

[37 : 33] But ever God my portion will abide. Those far off you, you will perish.

You give them their due reward. As for me it is a blessing to be near the sovereign Lord.

I have made my God my refuge. All your deeds I will recall.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always.

Amen. Amen.