

## 2 Timothy 4:9-18

*“You gotta **Walk That Lonesome Valley**. You gotta walk it by **yourself**. Nobody here can walk it **for** you. You gotta walk it by **yourself**.”* These are the first words of an old American folksong. The **message** of the song is clear: There are some things in life that you just have to do for **yourself**. For example, nobody else can believe in Jesus **for** you. **You** have to be the one who believes. And when we **do** believe, there will be times in our life as **Christians** when we feel like we’re **all alone** - times of hardship, persecution, and abandonment. And no matter how **difficult** those times get, we just have to find a way to keep on **going**, to keep on **Walking That Lonesome Valley**. I think that phrase provides a suitable background for today’s sermon text. With some of his last recorded words, the Apostle Paul wrote about **Walking The Lonesome Valley**. And since today is Reformation Sunday, these are also good words to use in speaking about the **Reformation** in the **church** which was brought about by **Martin Luther** over 500 years ago. Luther himself knew more than a little about **Walking The Lonesome Valley**. And we who have **inherited** the great Gospel truths of the Reformation, still face **Walking That Lonesome Valley** too. When those times **come** - when we feel as though we’ve **entered** the lonesome valley - how are we going to keep on **walking**? Let’s take a look at today’s **text** for the answer.

The first eight verses of our text certainly give us a sense that the Apostle Paul was very **lonesome**, and he had plenty of good **reasons** to feel that way. Paul wrote the words of our text from a **prison cell** in Rome. And unlike his **first** imprisonment, which was more of a **house arrest**, **this** imprisonment was very **harsh**. It certainly seemed to Paul that this imprisonment was going to end in his **death**, and to the best of our knowledge, that’s precisely what happened. For that reason, Paul’s second letter to Timothy is often called his **Last Will and Testament**. The coming days would be very **difficult** for Paul, and to make matters even **worse**, he was being **abandoned** by his friends. In the first few verses of our text we find out that a man named **Demas** had deserted Paul because he loved the **world**. Some of his **other** friends, like **Crescens** and **Titus** were **also** gone - but more likely it was for the **good reason** of doing missionary work. Paul says that only **Luke** was still with him. To make his lonesomeness even **worse**, Paul says that at his first **defense**, **no one** spoke up on his behalf. There he was, facing the trial of his life and **no one** was willing to stand up for him. Paul was certainly **Walking The Lonesome Valley**.

But now, let’s move **away** from that lonely **prison** cell to a lonely **castle** in Germany, called the **Wartburg**. The year was 1521, and the man in the castle was

**Martin Luther.** Most of us know the story of Luther's life, so we're pretty familiar with his great stand for **God** and His **Word** at the Diet of **Worms**. This is where Luther came before the **Emperor** of the Holy Roman Empire, and **refused** to **take back** what he had written about the **errors** of the church of **Rome**, and about the **truth** of **God's Word**. As a **result**, the Emperor had issued an edict which basically said anyone who **executed** Luther would **not** be held **accountable**. He was declared to be an **outlaw**. It was on his way back from the Diet that a group of Luther's friends "**kidnapped**" him and took him to the Wartburg castle to **hide**. In the next year, Luther would **Walk The Lonesome Valley** in and around that castle. His **friends** were back in **Wittenberg** and **other** parts of Germany walking around **freely**, but **he** was resigned to many long and lonely days **fearing** for his **life**.

These are both very **dramatic** scenes - Paul in **prison** and Luther at the **Wartburg**. I'm not sure how well we can **relate** to **either** of these scenes. I don't think any of us have had to sit in a **prison** cell for the sake of the Gospel, nor have we ever had an **emperor** place an imperial **ban** on us. But, that **doesn't** mean that our lives are completely free of **hardship**. Being a Christian means living in a world that **opposes** us and our message. For that reason, sooner or later, everyone of us is going to have to **Walk That Lonesome Valley**. It might happen at our **workplace** when we feel like we're the only Christian there. Or it could be at the neighborhood **block** party, or as we're talking with **family** members or **friends** who don't believe the same things that **we** believe. Whenever we boldly proclaim God's Word like **Paul** did, or like **Luther** did, we will find **opposition**. The question is, how will we **respond**?

The temptation is to **give up** and turn our **back** on God and His Word, because that's the **easy** thing to do. That was the **unfortunate** path that was taken by **Demas** in our text - the one who loved this **world** more than God's **Word**. Think about what would have happened if the Apostle **Paul** had taken that path - if Paul had turned his **back** on God, and **rejected** His Word in those lonesome hours. Think about what **harm** that would have done to all the **preaching** and **teaching** which Paul had done in the **past**. And the same thing would have been true if **Martin Luther** had taken the **easy** way out, and had simply told the emperor that he **took back** all the things he had written. If Luther had **recanted**, the **Reformation** would have come to a grinding **halt**.

We **also** do great **damage** when we take the **easy** way out, instead of **standing up** for God's Word. We might gain or retain some **friends** and **popularity** in the **short** term, but we aren't doing **ourselves** or anyone **else** a bit of

good in the **long** run. We cause **damage** to our own faith, and we put our souls at risk when we **abandon** the truth of God's **Word**, instead of **standing up** and **fighting** for it. It might make life easier for us here and now, but it's definitely **not worth it** from an **eternal** perspective. When we see that our **salvation** is at stake, we realize that we can't **quit**. We have to **keep going**, no matter how **hard** it is. We need to **Walk That Lonesome Valley**. But how can we **do** that?

Paul knew the **answer**. When he was at his **most** lonesome - when he was standing before the **judge** and **no one** came to his defense, Paul knew that he was **not** completely alone. He wrote, "*But the **Lord** stood by me and **strengthened** me.*" Paul knew that the **Lord Jesus** was right there with him. He knew that he couldn't ask for **better** company. Jesus knew what it was like to **Walk The Lonesome Valley**. He walked it all the way to the **cross** and to his own **death**. His closest friends had **abandoned** him, yet Jesus **kept on going** until His mission was **complete**, and the world's salvation was **accomplished**. The message of Jesus and His untiring **love** is what gave Paul **strength** in those lonesome hours. It gave him the **courage** he needed to **speak up**, and accept whatever **consequences** would come his way. God's love in **Jesus** is the same thing that allowed **Martin Luther** to **keep on going**, even when his work seemed to be humanly **impossible**. Luther knew what the **Bible** said, and he stood on the **strength** of that Almighty **Word**, **not** on his **own** strength.

That's how **we** will be able to **Walk The Lonesome Valley**. The Lord Jesus is **with** us. When we **fall down**, when we **sin**, when we **turn away** from the **Lord** and His **Word**, God is still right there to **forgive** us - to pick us **up** and put us on the **right path** again. If we try to rely on our **own** strength, we aren't going to be **able** to keep on **walking**. But with the strength which **Jesus** provides in His Word and Sacrament, we **can** keep on walking. We **need** our Savior, and He will always **be there** for us, even if every **other** person in this world would **abandon** us. With **Jesus** by our side **simple, ordinary** people can accomplish **great** things.

Remember, with the power of **Jesus**, the Apostle **Paul** was able to boldly proclaim the message of salvation, so that **all the Gentiles** would be able hear it. With the power of **Jesus**, **Martin Luther** used those lonely days in the Wartburg castle to translate the entire New Testament into the German language, so that an **entire nation** would be able to **read** the Gospel message in their **own** language. And through the power of **Jesus**, we too can accomplish **great** things for our Lord. We can boldly **speak up** and **speak out** for our Savior, because we **know** that He will never **leave** us or **forsake** us.

Over the centuries, there were **thousands** of Christians who not only **understood** that, but who also **carried it out**. And in just 2 weeks, on **Saints Triumphant** Sunday, we'll be singing a **hymn** which **focuses** on them. It's called *For All The Saints*, but in **Latin** it's called *Sine Nomine* - which means "without a name." The words of this hymn were written for all the **unnamed saints** who have gone to heaven. In other words, they **weren't** the **famous** ones. They don't have their own **festival** days, and churches aren't **named** after them. Nevertheless, they are just as **important** as any of the **other** saints like Peter and Paul, or James and John. You all **know** some of those **unnamed** saints in heaven - people who lived their lives on this earth professing Jesus as their Savior in a **humble**, and **unassuming** way. They **Walked The Lonesome Valley** of this earth, and are now enjoying the mansions of heaven.

One day, **we'll** be there too. As we take encouragement from the Apostle Paul to keep on **walking** and **professing** our faith, as we look to the example of **Martin Luther** and so many **others** who have gone before us, **living** and even **dying** for their Savior, as we keep **walking** even when the valley is **lonesome**, our Savior will keep giving us the **strength** we need. In the words of our text, "*The Lord will **rescue** me from every evil work and will bring me **safely** into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the **glory** for ever and ever. Amen.*"