

## 2 TIMOTHY 1:15

### LION ATTACK

“You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.”<sup>1</sup>

Asics has produced an amusing ad. Two Xhosa men are walking and talking. “I’m no longer interested in Sandra Bullock,” says one. “It’s like in the old song,” he continues, “married women get sturdy legs.” It is at this point that they encounter a lion crouched behind a bush. The men freeze as the lion stands and begins to advance menacingly. The one who has been listening reaches into a bag and pulls out a pair of shoes. As he kneels to lace the shoes, the loquacious man whispers, “Do you think you’re faster than a lion?” The man responds, “No, but faster than you.” With that, he sprints off leaving the other man to face the advancing lion. In the final scene the two men sprint across the plains pursued by a hungry lion.

Legs turn to jelly, courage drains like water from a tub when Satan roars. At first wary, as the throaty cough grows louder the sheep simply cannot stand firm. Do you doubt that? Paul had heard the lion’s roar. If he had somehow missed the roar, desertion by “all who are in Asia” assuredly alerted him to this truth. Every preacher of the Gospel will come to a time when he stands alone because he sought to be faithful in declaring the message of life.

Peter would warn Christians, and especially would he warn elders of the congregations, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” [1 PETER 5:8]. This is not mere hyperbole—the wicked one destroys; he destroys churches, he destroys ministries, he destroys testimonies, he destroys Christians. Multitudes of believers in every era have fallen prey to the old dragon. Though Scripture convinces us that Christ saves the souls of those who believe in Him, the life and the influence of far too many saints have been destroyed when they were frightened by the lion’s attack.

The devil’s nature is to destroy those who are opposed to his own exaltation. Jesus warned of the devil’s character when he said to religious leaders, “[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” [JOHN 8:44]. Though a liar, the roar of the wicked one is nevertheless ferocious, intimidating the most fearless saint and deceiving yet others so that they panic and flee.

“All who are in Asia turned away from me,” writes Paul. Can anything be more discouraging, more distressing to those investing themselves in service to the saints than to be deserted? The Apostle’s statement is not some plaint based on his feelings—he was deserted by all. It is difficult to believe that the Apostle to the Gentiles would write such a dismal statement. We look at him as heroic, almost superhuman, a man who could not be stopped. Surely, all Christians loved him, appreciating his courage and boldness. Paul, the man who led the initial missionary teams as they penetrated the darkness of Roman night ensuring that light would spill across the landscape was at last deserted, left alone in a Roman prison cell awaiting execution. The man who had suffered so much to ensure that all would hear of the gift of life offered in the Beloved Son and that believers would have opportunity to grow unmolested in this holy Faith was shunned in his time of greatest need.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

No doubt multiple reasons could be advanced to account for why the Apostle was deserted. He was too demanding. He was not demanding enough. He wouldn't compromise. He made too many concessions. He was unreasonable. He was dogmatic. The accusations against the man of God were as varied as the people bringing those accusations—and they were likely contradictory. More to the point, there were likely as many reasons for deserting the Apostle as there were people deserting. Ultimately, the only reason that could be given for deserting the Apostle resided in the sinful nature of those deserting. Something like that is true of those deserting a preacher or deserting a congregation in this day. And yet, there is no doubt that the slanderer was behind the desertions. Paul was experiencing a lion attack.

As we examine the Apostle in his final days, I do want to think of why saints should ever be compelled to stand alone to face satanic attack. My primary purpose, however, is to encourage the people of God by reminding us that in truth we are never alone. No Christian will ever face lion attack alone. Ever and always the believer is sustained by unseen strength of God who is mighty. Nevertheless, there will come a day when each believer will imagine himself or herself alone as the lion attacks.

**LION ATTACK** — When Peter wrote, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” [**1 PETER 5:8**], he knew whereof he spoke. Before His Passion, Jesus foretold Peter's testing. The account is provided in Luke's Gospel. Jesus was preparing the disciples for what was soon to come. The disciples were jockeying for position in the Kingdom of God, arguing about who was most worthy to occupy the most prominent place. Jesus interrupted their discussion with the sobering assessment, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves” [**LUKE 22:25-27**].

Would you not agree that this is a stunning rebuke from the Master? Jesus just exposed the fatal flaw that contaminates all people—pride! And this flaw was exposed in the disciples. Walking with the Lord Jesus as He neared the Cross, these men were fighting for power over one another! We want “self” on the throne of life. We want to exalt “self.” Let me speak pointedly to this battle that continues to this day among the saints. The Wise Man warned:

“One's pride will bring him low,  
but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.”

[**PROVERBS 29:23**]

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace,  
but with the humble is wisdom.”

[**PROVERBS 11:2**]

Then, in one additional saying of the wise we read:

“Pride goes before destruction,  
and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

[**PROVERBS 16:18**]

Not only would pride be your jailer, it would be your executioner!

When fights occur in the church, when saints become disgruntled and quit in disgust, I can assure you that it is a virtual certainty that pride is at the root of the conflict. When couples fight, even coming to the point that they require counselling, it is a virtual certainty that pride lies at the root of the conflict. Josh Squires, Pastor of Counselling and Congregational Care for a South Carolina church, puts the issue in perspective with three questions:

- Whose sin are you focused upon?
- What is the focus of your joy, security and contentment?
- Who is the focus of your service?

Squires continues by giving the answers that he most commonly hears, (his observations are mirrored in what all pastors hear during interaction with aggrieved saints). “Whose sin is most odious to me in those moments? Whose sin needs to be brought into the light, repented of and ultimately mortified? Not mine, but everyone else’s.

“Where do I find my comfort, my joy, my peace, my security? Not in the glory of the gospel, but in some event, thing or person. If only I made more money, had more power, had a spouse, kids, house, dog, you name it. Anything but the joy of suffering for the gospel.

“Who should be served in all of this? Me. The world, my relationships and God himself exists to serve me.”<sup>2</sup>

Let me ask, and answer, those three questions Squires uses to gain a godly perspective.

***Whose sin should I be focused on?*** According to the Word, I should be focused on my sins!

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul has written, “If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” [ROMANS 8:13].

***Who is the focus of my joy, security and contentment?*** If I listen to the Word, Christ is to be my focus. Peter wrote to the saints of the Diaspora, and thus he wrote to all Christians, “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” [1 PETER 1:8, 9].

***Who should be the focus of my service?*** If I heed the teaching of the Word, others, and especially my fellow saints, are to be the focus of my service. Remember what Paul has written, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” [PHILIPPIANS 2:3, 4].

Armed with this insight, turn again to the interaction between the disciples and Jesus as He neared the Cross. They had brought upon themselves a gentle, loving rebuke because they were consumed by the desire for power over others—they were filled with pride. Because their aspirations were indistinguishable from the great men of the world, Jesus was compelled to expose them for who they were. In doing this, He revealed us to our own hearts.

If the damage resulting from such pride was confined to each one individually, it would be serious enough. However, the devil takes advantage of our sinful pride to attack and destroy. When the wicked one attacks the child of God, inevitably others are wounded. The work of Christ suffers and the advance of the Gospel is halted when we are seized by pride.

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<sup>2</sup> Josh Squires, “Pride is Your Greatest Problem,” Church Leaders, <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/259476-pride-greatest-problem.html/1>, accessed 8 August 2015

Jesus did continue by assuring the disciples that He would not forget their service to Him. Jesus said to these men, “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” [LUKE 22:28-30].

We who have been with Jesus will not be forgotten. Paul comforted the Thessalonian saints who were suffering so greatly when he wrote, “[Those who attack the believers] will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:9, 10].

Then, Jesus appended this sobering warning to Peter. “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” [LUKE 22:31, 32].

You will no doubt remember that Peter was tested severely. At the time, he perhaps thought that it was because he was cowardly, or because he was poorly equipped to stand alone, or even because others did not support him. However, his pride opened him to satanic attack. The lion roared and Peter fled. I suspect that any of us would have responded in the same way. Unless forced by events, few of us will actually stand firm in the day of testing.

The rest of the story concerning Peter and the lion’s roar is found near the end of this twenty-second chapter of Luke. “[The men sent by the council] seized [Jesus] and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, ‘This man also was with him.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ And a little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not.’ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly” [LUKE 22:54-62].

Thus, when Peter warns about the evil one’s desire to frighten the righteous, we know that he is writing from experience. Peter could have written from Scripture, but like us, he was able to speak from his own failure. Elijah, fresh off one of the great victories recorded in the Word of God, receives a threat from a bitter queen who sent a messenger to say, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of [the prophets of Baal] by this time tomorrow” [1 KINGS 19:2]. Self-preservation seized him and he fled. The Word says simply of Elijah, “Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life” [1 KINGS 19:3a].

There is something in the account of Peter’s failure that may be overlooked. That something is important for the purpose of the message. Peter had influence with the other disciples. We instinctively recognise that undefined quality that marks an individual as someone who will make a difference in the world. Almost unconsciously we heed what that individual says and watch how they respond. Consequently, when they fail, our own courage is often shaken. So it is that when Peter cowered before the little lass, his headlong dash from the threat shook the other disciples. Whatever courage they may have had was left behind as they sought to put distance between themselves and the danger of being counted with Jesus. Matthew observes after Jesus’ capture, “Then all the disciples left Him and fled” [MATTHEW 26:56].

After the Resurrection, the disciples had settled down somewhat. Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John together with two other disciples met. I suppose they were talking about what they might do. I believe Peter was of the opinion that his life as a disciple of the Saviour was finished. He had failed. He wasn't nearly as strong as he had imagined. His old occupation was always available. He still had his boat, and the nets were all mended and waiting for him. A man has to make a living. He was a fisherman; therefore, he would go fishing.

Suddenly, Peter said, "I am going fishing." The other six said, "We will go with you" [see JOHN 21:2, 3]. Peter, a man of action and with considerable influence over these other men, decided there was nothing left but to go back to what he knew. The others followed Peter in this new/old endeavour. However, Peter was forgetting the remainder of Jesus' words when He had foretold Peter's failure. "When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" [LUKE 22:31, 32]. Peter would be turned around. When that happened, he was to use his influence to strengthen his brothers. Peter's strength of character would become the means by which the other disciples would be steadied after they had been scattered.

If your life has not yet been disrupted by lion attack, hang on, it's coming. One day the lion will roar—you will hear the mighty, frightening cough. He may not have targeted you; he may be targeting someone else. Nevertheless, when you hear the roar or see fellow saints turn and flee you will feel fear and you will be tempted also to flee in panic. Your action at that time may well be induced by, or it may induce, other saints who are frightened and intimidated.

What has all this to do with the text today? Can there be any question but that Paul heard the lion roar. Imprisoned! Awaiting execution! Those who were in Asia were frightened when they witnessed what was happening. Once before the Apostle had been imprisoned and the results were quite different. Then, the Apostle could write, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" [PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14].

Now, Paul is held in gaol by Nero. The Emperor is unstable and known for taking out his wrath on the new sect known as "Christians." It would have been bruited about that Paul was facing death. The lion's loud roar was nearby; he was focused on destroying the Faith. No wonder those in the Province of Asia had abandoned the Apostle! To be near Paul was to expose oneself to death—beheading for Roman citizens and crucifixion for non-citizens.

**LEFT IN THE LURCH BY TIMID SAINTS** — It is a painful thing to watch those whom we love abandon us. From earliest days in the Faith, Saul of Tarsus—known to us as Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, discovered that he, as is true for all the professed saints of God, was a mere mortal in the final analysis. No man knows how he will respond to battle until he has been in battle. Those individuals with exaggerated opinions of their personal courage often discover they have lived a lie. Loud boasts about one's prowess or ostentatious bravado when asserting how one will respond in the hard place are seldom realised. When the lion roars, anticipate that you will be left in the lurch, compelled to stand alone.

Among Paul's greatest successes in the ministry was his service in the Province of Asia. When some among the Jews grew stubborn and attacked the Way, Paul began teaching daily in the hall of Tyrannus. He continued this ministry of teaching for two years with the result that "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" [see ACTS 19:1-10]. His was a glorious ministry while in the Capital of the Province of Asia.

In Ephesus, Paul had performed extraordinary miracles in the Name of Jesus. The sons of Sceva attempted to appropriate the Name of the Master to cast out a demon only to be set upon by the demonised man. When this event became known throughout the city, “Fear fell upon [the residents], and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily” [ACTS 19:17-20]. The ministry of the Apostle to the Gentiles became so great that ultimately the evil one stirred a riot in Ephesus compelling Paul to leave in order to ensure the safety of the saints [see ACTS 19:21-41]!

Among the churches of Asia, Paul’s name would have been well known. He was the instrument God had used to evangelise the province. John is enjoined by the Risen Christ to write the seven churches of Asia—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Undoubtedly Paul had visited, if not directly participated in the establishment of, each of these churches. Numerous saints from this province had accompanied the Apostle—Tychicus, Trophimus, Erastus and Epaenetus are specifically named at various times.

It became apparent that the saints in Asia were no longer willing even to acknowledge that they knew Paul. Two individuals of whom we know nothing other than their names—Phygelus and Hermogenes, are said to have deserted. Apparently Paul had anticipated that these two men would surely stand with him. These men were likely leaders, if not among the churches of Asia, then certainly within the Ephesian congregation. Whoever they were, they were known to Timothy. They had been given a great opportunity—to stand for righteousness and to stand against wickedness, and they had failed the test. Paul will shortly write in this letter to Timothy, “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me” [2 TIMOTHY 4:16].

Perhaps these men sought to injure Paul. During his first imprisonment in Rome some fellow Christians meant to do him harm. Paul writes of this attempt when writing the Philippian saints, “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment” [PHILIPPIANS 1:15-17]. It is possible that something similar was afoot in this instance.

Let me speak rather pointedly to this eventuality. When believers desert in time of need, they know that they will be held in low esteem by fellow believers. To deflect criticism, those who desert usually attempt to excuse their disgraceful behaviour by making accusations against faithful and upright servants of the Gospel. Treachery condemns an individual; thus, in order to cover their perfidy they often endeavour to tarnish the innocence of the faithful. What is of greater grief than mere desertion is that those who desert, having assailed the faithful servant of Christ, discover that they will soon find excuse to turn away from the Gospel.

God created us to *need* fellowship and to *require* the mutual service that is provided through serving together as a congregation. Those who turn away from the congregation in effect censure the Faith and call into question even the Master who redeems them. For if He is unable to make their life pleasant and comfortable according to their desires, they indicate that He is unworthy of their service. They perform a grave disservice to the Faith and to the faithful. However, I believe that Paul was deserted because these men were fearful of the cost that would be demanded for standing with the Apostle. Later, when writing of being deserted, Paul displays no animosity; he does not speak of judgement against the deserters. He prays for God’s mercy, “May it not be charged against them” [2 TIMOTHY 4:16b]!

It seems apparent to me that the Christians from the province of Asia were frightened—especially if they had recently been in Rome. The persecution under Nero had begun about three years earlier, and though that particular persecution did not extend beyond the immediate environs of Rome, the Jewish rebellion against Rome that would ultimately lead to Titus invading Palestine and the destruction of Jerusalem had begun about the time Paul was imprisoned. The Christians were known as a sect of the Jews by the populace. Thus, Christians, generally thought of as Jewish, were now viewed with suspicion throughout the Empire. In Rome itself, the Christians were targeted for persecution by Nero as a way to deflect suspicion concerning the conflagration that had recently burned so much of the city.

In light of the events swirling about this time in history, the Apostle had become a liability—especially to the Christians of Asia. Thus, in their fear, these saints shunned him. When Paul was haled before the Caesar, he stood alone. This could not end well for him. Though we note the sorrow with which Paul speaks of being abandoned by fellow Christians, there is neither a note of anger nor a plea of self-pity in what he has written to Timothy.

Permit me to speak pointedly to you as fellow believers. We each enter into the Faith with the baggage of the past—our lives are encrusted with barnacles of past choices that ensure our supposed sleek sloops cannot cut through the waves as nimbly as we once thought possible. Until the Spirit of God has completed His work, we each struggle with our sinful nature—the past plagues each Christian. Ramifications arising from misjudgements and unforced errors taint the life of each believer. Attitudes that were developed before we met Christ stain our lives indelibly and past flaws are exposed at the most inappropriate time—flaws that cling to us tenaciously. However much we may regret what we once did or deplore the thoughts we once entertained, our lives remain permanently contaminated by sin.

Even when the results of our ministries appear positive, we may injure fellow believers. To say that I had never wounded fellow saints would be a lie. It would be tragic enough if I alone injured others, however, I have also been seriously wounded by fellow believers; the same is true for you. Some wounds were deliberate, most were thoughtless. All the wounding given or received can be said to arise from pride that allowed the evil one opportunity and hindered the cause of Christ. Few of us can say that we are unscathed by the slings and arrows of other saints; few of us can say we have never been bruised by thoughtless words or deeds from other saints. Our wounds often resulted from timidity exposed by the lion's roar.

Early in my service before the Lord, I was mentored by an older man named Ben. Though he undoubtedly loved God, Ben was rough—frankly, he could be rude. He earned his living as a plumber and declared the Word of God on Sundays, preaching as opportunity was given, teaching Sunday School and Bible studies and visiting door-to-door throughout the Oak Cliff section of Dallas many evenings during the week. One thing that Ben iterated as we would speak was that the servant of God would ultimately stand alone. He humbly asserted that if the servant of God looked to people for support or for affirmation, he would be sorely disappointed. “Mike,” he said on multiple occasions, “even I will disappoint you. Look to God.”

If we seek affirmation and even support from fellow believers when we are in the hard place, we may be sorely disappointed. It is not that fellow believers intend to disappoint; but we are each but mortals. We must remember that we are but sheep; at any moment we may hear the lion's roar and we run involuntarily. Think back to Peter's education following the institution of the Lord's Table. Jesus spoke to the disciples; His words must have appeared insulting to those men. The Lord warned them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” [MATTHEW 26:31].

The Master's words no doubt stung these men. They had been with Him for three and one-half years. They had witnessed Him when He cleansed the Temple. They had heard Him when He rebuked Pharisees and insulted Sadducees. They had seen Him still storms with a word and stand resolute in the face of death. Throughout this time, though they had grown, they were nevertheless sheep. They had not been tested by the lion's roar.

Certainly Peter had a higher opinion of himself and his ability to stand than events warranted; nevertheless, he immediately responded to Jesus' prophecy concerning his conduct, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" [MATTHEW 26:33]. After this boisterous outburst, Jesus cautioned Peter, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times" [MATTHEW 26:34]. Perhaps wounded by Jesus' loving warning, Cephas responded, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you" [MATTHEW 26:35]. If you're inclined to imagine that Peter was just being Peter, filled with a sense of braggadocio, note that Peter was simply a tad quicker off the mark than were the others. Matthew concludes the pericope with a terse observation, "All the disciples said the same" [MATTHEW 26:35b].

I recall an incident that occurred while pastoring an ethnic congregation earlier in my service before the Lord in the city of Vancouver. A fellow pastor had risen up to oppose me. Having learned of my son's criminal conviction, the pastor had left a disparaging message on my office voice mail. Though willing to leave a caustic message in the privacy of voice mail, the man was unwilling to speak with me face-to-face. I suppose that he expected I would cease my service before the Lord. It was obvious that the man was more concerned about a supposed negative response from the ethnic community than he was for the advance of the Faith. Candidly, he had exalted culture above Christ.

Rather than quitting my charge, as he obviously hoped, I referred the matter to the church board. Before the board, my fellow elder denied that he had ever made the statement in question. Several seated there during that meeting had listened to the message he left. Yet, when I turned to my fellow believers, asking that they share what they had heard, each, in turn, hung his head and said they preferred not to speak.

I was stunned! I stood alone. Later, one of the men phoned to apologise; he pleaded, "Doctor Stark, you don't understand. He is an elder in our community and I couldn't cause him lose face."

I exclaimed, "But you had no difficulty in throwing me to the wolves!"

"But," he protested, "I knew you would take it and he wouldn't tolerate being embarrassed." Timid saints are often unable to stand with the truth. I was deeply wounded; the work of Christ in that place was hindered—to this day the work has never recovered.

Ultimately, denominational leaders were called to resolve the conflict between the pastors. Though they knew the situation, they recommended that I must leave in order to avoid offending the ethnic community. They chose to honour a lie rather than standing with the truth. The lion roared, and the sheep stampeded. Choices were made and believers chose to sacrifice a faithful servant in order to salve their own conscience.

Undoubtedly, many of you now listening have similar stories of a time when the lion roared and those whom you anticipated would stand firm deserted. You witnessed some whom you thought were stalwarts of the Faith cease to walk with the Saviour because they were timid; their weak consciences drove them to flee rather than standing with the Faith. The experience is far more common than we dare imagine. However, the Faith must not be defined by our failure. There is more to this story we must consider.

**ALONE AGAINST THE LION!** The Apostle penned some powerful words concerning the life of any who dares serve God. The passage to which I refer is found in Paul's second letter to the Christians in Corinth. In that letter he writes, "We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you" [2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-12].

I noted earlier that Paul would write, "At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them" [2 TIMOTHY 4:16]! Paul appeared to stand alone against the world; but he wasn't really alone. We need to see what Paul has written. "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" [2 TIMOTHY 4:17, 18].

The Lord stood with the Apostle. Therefore, Paul could assert with confidence that the Lord would rescue him from every evil deed, bringing him safely into God's heavenly kingdom. What was true for Paul has been true for me; God has rescued me from every evil deed. I have no doubt that He will continue to rescue me from every evil deed until it is time to enter into the heavenly kingdom. I am confident that He will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom.

What was true for the Apostle and what is proving true for me, is likewise true for you. God is at work in your life as you rest in Him. He has invested His very self in you; and He will bring you into His heavenly kingdom. Glory be to His eternal Name. Amen.

You see, there is a truth that we each need to seize, holding it dear—*the Christian is immortal until God calls that one home*. And when God does call His child home, the perfect work He has been performing will at last be complete. Is that not what we read in the Word? "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" [ROMANS 8:28-30].

God has begun a work in each believer that will be complete at the return of the Master. That work seems to be progressing imperceptibly slowly at times; but it is being accomplished, nevertheless. The work seems to be agonisingly incremental; but we can be assured that it is moving toward a grand conclusion. Roaring lion? Know that God is at work for good for those who are called according to His purpose. Desertion? Abandonment? Even in this God is at work conforming you to the image of His Son. Failure? Quailing in the face of the enemy? You may be confident that God is at work ensuring that you shall be glorified in His Son and that His Son shall be glorified among His saints.

Christ the Lord is coming to receive to Himself those who have believed in Him. Believers from this age who have looked to Jesus, trusting Him to deliver them from the power and the penalty of sin, are saved by His mercies. Thus redeemed, they are those in whom the Son of God shall be glorified at His return. When He comes again, Jesus our Lord will come in great power, "to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed" [see 2 THESSALONIANS 1:10].

For several years I was privileged to sit under the ministry of Dr. W. A. Criswell. Dr. Criswell often spoke to congregations around the globe, encouraging the faithful and building the churches. On one occasion he had returned from a trip behind the Iron Curtain to the old Soviet Union. He had received permission to address the only licenced Baptist church in the city of Leningrad. The conditions the officials had imposed on him were stringent, even oppressive; yet, he did have permission to bring a message to those dear saints, many of whom had suffered imprisonment, many of whom had been deprived of everything because of the Faith.

He was not permitted to announce his presence. He could not inform the congregation that he would be there for Sunday worship. He had supplied a text that he would deliver that day, and he would be accompanied at all times by an Intourist guide. Her presence was to ensure that he did not deviate from what he was permitted to say.

As the automobile transporting them to the meeting neared where the church was located, it stopped at the entrance of a dead end street. There was no street sign and no sign indicating that a church was anywhere nearby. As he and the Intourist guide got out of the car and began to walk down the block toward a nondescript building, Criswell saw a rather large group of people standing in the street, straining to see who was coming down the street. Somehow those dear saints had heard that a servant of Christ was coming from America, that he would be speaking to them, telling them of Christ and of His great salvation.

As Dr. Criswell and the guide walked, she spoke contemptuously of the Christians, denigrating the saints and ridiculing their belief. "Look at them. All of them drones. They are the scum of the earth. They do nothing for our glorious motherland, always taking and never contributing. Just look at them. They are useless, worthless, ignorant." As they walked, she poured out a steady stream of slanderous, malignant calumny about the believers.

As she continued her defamation of the Christians, Criswell turned to her and said, "Don't say that! Don't say that! These are my people! These are God's people! And though they are poor now, they shall be glorious when Jesus comes again. They are destined to reign with Him. They are redeemed and they shall rule with Him."

Jesus prayed for His people, asking the Father, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" [JOHN 17:20-24].

This is the promise our God has given His own, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" [HEBREWS 13:5]. This is my promise; this is our promise. What a promise is ours that is spoken through Isaiah:

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

[ISAIAH 42:2, 3a]

**2 TIMOTHY 1:15**  
**LION ATTACK**

Though the lion attacks, we are assured of victory, for God is with us. We may be frightened, but we shall ultimately succeed. Let the timid become bold in Christ. Let the disheartened be encouraged. Let each of us determine that we will serve Him and not grow discouraged. Amen.