

“Paul’s Last Words”

November 4, 2018

2 Timothy 4:6-8

I. Introduction

For Paul the end was very near and he knew it. His present imprisonment would be his final one; he would be released only through death. This was a difficult time for him, not because of his own physical situation, but because of the spiritual conditions of so many of the believers for whom he had poured out his heart and his life. He had special concern for Timothy, for the problems of false teaching and false living Timothy faced in the church at Ephesus and for the problems of timidity and apprehension Timothy faced in his own personal life. Again and again in his two letters to Timothy, Paul had challenged Timothy to have courage, endurance, and faithfulness, and to resist the attacks of evil and error with the power of God’s Word. Paul knew that he was about to move off the scene and Timothy would have to take his place.

Yet despite his deep concerns for the church and for Timothy, Paul’s final words demonstrate a calmness that comes only from confidence in the Lord—he had **“the peace of God, which transcends all understanding”** (Philippians 4:7). With that peace, he didn’t tremble at the prospect of death. In today’s Scripture, Paul looks at his life from three different directions. He begins in **verse 6** as he looks at the present and the close of his earthly life and ministry.

II. Paul’s Testimony

A. The Present: He is ready.

Paul had just written to Timothy in **2 Timothy 4:5**, **“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”** It was important for Timothy to carry out his ministry with steadfastness, because Paul’s ministry was about to end—**“For I am already being poured out.”** Paul was ready to depart this earth: **“For I am already being poured out**

like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.” Paul was passing the torch on to the next generation.

5 years earlier in [Philippians 2:17](#) Paul had written, “But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.” As he wrote in [Romans 12:1](#), Paul had offered himself to his Lord and Savior as “a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” while he was alive. Now Paul would complete that sacrifice as he laid his life down for his Lord. Caesar wasn’t going to kill him—Paul was giving his life as a sacrifice to Jesus Christ.

“Being poured out like a drink offering” is a figure taken from the Old Testament sacrificial system. In [Numbers 15:1-10](#), the people of Israel were commanded to first give a burnt offering, then a grain offering, and finally a drink offering. When the drink offering was poured onto the sacrifice, it would evaporate and disappear. Paul was pouring his life as a drink offering on the sacrifice of Christ. Paul’s life would soon disappear and all that would be seen would be Jesus Christ. In essence, Paul was saying, “*My life is a drink offering being poured out; Christ—not Paul—is the One who is to be exalted.*”

As a bond servant of Jesus Christ, Paul had always been ready to make the ultimate sacrifice. Now the possibility was about to become reality: “The time has come for my departure.” Paul was speaking of the final period of his life and ministry. He obviously expected—or hoped—to live a few more months before his departure, because later in [2 Timothy 4:13](#) he asked Timothy to “bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments” and in [verse 21](#) he added, “Do your best to get here before winter.” Paul hoped to see Timothy face-to-face one more time before he died.

In Greek, the word “*departure*” has a variety of meanings. It could be used for unyoking animals from a cart or a plow. Paul had been in hard service for many years. Now his Master would unyoke him and promote him to higher service. It meant to “*loose bonds or fetters.*” Death for Paul was liberation and a release. He was to exchange the confinement of a Roman prison for the glorious liberty of the

courts of heaven. It also meant “*to take down a tent.*” Now Paul was setting out on his last and greatest journey—he was taking the road that led to God. **Turn to 2 Corinthians 5:1-8.** Finally, “*departure*” meant to “*lift anchor and set sail.*” Paul looked on death as a release from the world—death was an opportunity to “set sail” into eternity. For Paul—for every Christian—death is exchanging the burden of earthly life for the eternal joy of heaven. Paul wrote in **Philippians 1:21**, “**For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**” **Turn to 1 Corinthians 15:53-55.** Paul was ready to go to his loving Lord and Savior.

B. The Past: He had been faithful.

In **verse 7** Paul looked back at the past; his life and ministry, “**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**” Looking back, Paul had no regrets or sense of unfulfillment—he had been faithful. Like a determined wrestler or boxer or soldier, he had fought the good fight. The words “*fought*” and “*fight*” are from the Greek word “*agon*” which leads to the English words agonize and agony. The fight or struggle is one that involves great effort and energy—whether physical or spiritual. As Paul reminded all Christians in **Ephesians 6:12**, we are in a struggle “**against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**” When an athlete can really say that he has done his best, then win or lose, there is a deep satisfaction in his heart. Paul had come to the end, and he knew that he has done his best—he had been faithful.

In **Acts 20:24** Paul said, “**I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.**” Like a good runner, Paul had finished his lifelong race victoriously. It is easy to begin but hard to finish. To be successful one must never give up—**turn to Philippians 3:13-14.** To use a running term, he had “*run through the tape,*” i.e., he didn’t let up when things got difficult or when the end was in sight—Paul had pressed on to the very end.

He had “**kept the faith.**” From the day Jesus Christ called him on the road to Damascus, Paul had never lost his trust in Jesus Christ. As he challenged Timothy in **2 Timothy 1:14**, Paul had guarded the

good deposit that was entrusted to him—he guarded it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lived in him. Regardless of the situation, in all his perils on land and on the sea, in freedom and in imprisonment, through thick and thin, he had kept the faith—he had proclaimed the Gospel; through his words and his actions he demonstrated that he was a child of God—a Christian. He walked the talk. Paul wasn't always popular, nor was he usually comfortable, but he remained faithful. That is what really counts.

C. The Future: He anticipated heavenly honor and reward.

Finally, Paul looked ahead to the future, “Now there 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 who have longed for his appearing.” A Greek or Roman athlete who was a winner was rewarded by the crowds and usually got a laurel wreath or a garland of oak leaves. However, Paul would not be given a fading crown of leaves; his crown would be a crown of righteousness that would never fade. A crown is a reward, and he would receive his heavenly reward. Paul anticipated heavenly honor and reward.

Jesus Christ is “the righteous Judge;” He always judges correctly. Paul’s judges in Rome were not righteous. If they were, they would have released him. Paul had been tried in courts in Rome and in various cities throughout the Roman Empire, yet now he faced his last Judge—his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because he served the Lord, he had not fear of the judgment of men or the judgment of God.

The crown of righteousness is God’s reward for a faithful and righteous life. Because Paul loved Jesus Christ’s appearing and looked for it, he lived righteously and served faithfully. This is why Paul used the return of Jesus Christ as the basis for his admonitions to Timothy in [2 Timothy 4:1](#): “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge.” In a similar way the return of our loving Lord and Savior should be our incentive for faithfulness and holiness as we look to the promise of His return.

III. Conclusion

Paul wasn't speaking from pride. As much as any saint who has ever lived, he knew that every good thing he had and did came by the grace of God. In [Colossians 1:29](#) he wrote, "To this end I labour, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me." In [Philippians 4:13](#) he wrote, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Paul wasn't taking credit for himself but was acknowledging that by the grace and the power of God, working through the faithfulness that the Lord requires, his life was coming to a victorious end. On the basis of the Lord's own promise, Paul expected one day soon to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant" ([Matthew 25:21](#)).

We aren't called to be apostles, but we have the same challenge that Paul gave Timothy: "But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you." As Paul wrote earlier in [1 Timothy 4:10](#), "This is why we work hard and struggle, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of believers." This isn't a wishful hope like "I hope it snows soon," this a sure expectation—there is no doubt that God is with those who make Him their Lord and Savior and there is no doubt that God will reward those who work hard and struggle to carry out their God given ministry.

In [Matthew 22:37](#) Jesus said that the Greatest Commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the reason we "work hard and struggle." Not because we are afraid of a vengeful God; not even that we are working hard for God's heavenly rewards—we are faithful in our daily lives—in the ministries God has given us because of the love we have for God. When you think of what God did for you in love—He sent His one and only Son to die on a cross for you—what is the reasonable response?

Let me put a different way—I assume that all of us here have been loved by someone else—a mother, father, a spouse or ... What is your response to the one who loves you? Don't you go out of your way to do nice things for them? God's love dwarves this "earthly" love, so what is the reasonable

response to God's love? This why Paul "fought the good fight and finished the race and kept the faith"—it's his response to God's love. This is why Paul lived righteously, served faithfully, and loved Christ's appearing—they are fruits of his love for God. If you want to live a life of feeling complete or satisfied, if you want to have an inner joy and peace, if you want to look forward to Christ's appearing and an eternity in heaven, then "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and watch what God will do in you and through you.