

PAUL'S VALEDICTORY

II Timothy 4:1-8

This letter was written by a man who was about to die for Christ's sake. He was not under any delusion about his future, for he knew that he would soon be put to death, but there was no fear on his part. He did not have any regrets over having given himself to the work of the ministry. Paul was writing to one whom he loved, to one whom he had led to Christ years before, to one who had been associated with him in the Lord's work and who was then ministering where the Apostle had labored for some time.

This is Paul's last charge to the younger preacher, Timothy, and in it he laid upon him a most solemn obligation. The witnesses whom he called upon to observe this testimony gave it particular solemnity. They were God the Father, Who sent the Son to redeem sinners and Who is incomparably interested in the proclamation of the Gospel, and Christ the Son, Who not only died for sinners, but Who is the Judge of all. It is to God the Father and to the Anointed Saviour that Paul and Timothy will have to render an account. To Him every person must give an account some day. For the ministers of Christ that account will concern their faithfulness in performing this responsibility of proclaiming God's Word.

Christ will judge the living, that is, those who will still be living on earth when He returns, and the dead, that is, those who will have died before that time. Believers in Christ are to look forward to the appearing of their Lord. When they stand before the judgment seat of Christ, He is going to give rewards to those who have labored for Him down here, who have been ready to suffer with and for Him, and who have held the things of this world with a loose hand while fixing their affections on things above.

Timothy received the charge to "preach the word." He was not told to preach philosophy, politics or a system of morals, but to preach the Word. That takes in the entire Bible, for our commission is not only to preach the gospel which tells us how lost sinners may be saved, but we are to proclaim the whole truth of God which not only gives us the way of salvation, but also shows how we ought to live after we are saved. The servant of Christ who preaches the Word will never be at a loss for subjects, for he has the whole Bible from which to choose. Some ministers have never learned that it is their business to preach the Word, so they are always trying to think up topics which they hope will thrill and entertain the people. But the servant of God is not called to do such things. He is to seek to acquaint people with the mind of God, to preach the gospel to the unsaved, to show them their lost condition and then to set before them the remedy that God has provided. He is to open up God's Word to Christians, showing them how they may be kept from sin and enabled to live to the glory of God. He who does this may

never be highly esteemed or praised by many people, but he should not mind that, so long as he pleases the Lord. After all, that is what counts. It is simply his responsibility to proclaim as a herald the message which has been given to him by his Lord. He must announce it in its completeness, without alteration, addition or subtraction.

Paul challenged Timothy to be alert for opportunities to glorify God and to make Him known to others. The charge which Timothy received answered four questions:

1. Why should he preach?
It is the will of Christ.
2. What should he preach?
He should preach the Word of God.
3. When should he preach?
He should preach in season and out of season.
4. How should he preach?
 - (1) He should reprove.
Sin must be brought home to the sinner's consciousness in order that he may repent.
 - (2) He should rebuke.
Sin must not be toned down, but the sinner must be reprimanded sharply.
 - (3) He should exhort.
Hand in hand with pertinent rebuke there must be tender and fatherly admonition.

The reason why Timothy was charged to be diligent in the work of heralding the gospel was that the season was approaching when people would not endure sound doctrine. In every period of history there is a season during which men refuse to listen to sound doctrine. As history continues toward the consummation, this situation continues to grow worse. Men will not tolerate the truth which promotes spiritual health. Having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their fancies or perverted tastes. They are far more interested in something different and sensational than they are in truth. Sound doctrine will not satisfy their craving for novelty, or flatter their vanity, or condone their faults, so they will turn aside to preachers who will say things to them that will not trouble their consciences but will tickle their fancies. They want men who will say nice things to them so that they can go away feeling good. So Timothy was charged to suffer the ills which are the lot of believers in this unbelieving world, and to give himself completely to the great work to which God had called him.

One day I stood in the snow on top of a high peak in the Alps Mountains in Switzerland and looked first in one direction and then in the other. That scene was a vivid reminder of the two men who once stood on top of the Alps. One of them looked

toward Rome, and, raising his hat, exclaimed: "Glories of the past, I salute you!" The other lifted his hat, and looking toward Germany, exclaimed: "Glories of the future, I salute you!" Paul was both of these men in one. He stood on the Alpine peak of an experience here from which he could look back upon the glories of the past and forward into the glories of the future and salute both. From that vantage point he said, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." In that marvelously condensed and yet wonderfully luminous statement Paul summarized his life in its past experiences, present values and confident hopes.

It is interesting to note the splendid way in which Paul described his death. He spoke of it as an offering. "I am already being offered," indicating that his blood was about to be poured out as a libation. Paul was ready to yield up his life, for it belonged to Christ. Since Christ had saved him, Paul was glad to die for Him. The time of the separation of his spirit and body was at hand and he knew it. Paul spoke of death as "the time of my departure." The word which is translated "departure" means a loosing, and was used with reference to loosing the cables and lifting the anchor, when a vessel was about to leave a harbor and sail out into the open sea. Death was about to loose cable and lift anchor and let Paul sail out into the deep and broad waters of eternity, where he would be free from the narrow limitations of the body.

I. The Christian Life Is A Conflict.

"I have fought a good fight." With Paul it had been a struggle all the way. Every success and every achievement had cost him suffering. Factors in this conflict:

1. The conflict with self.

Paul had to fight with the powers of sin in his own carnal nature. How often he speaks of his struggles to keep in subjection to the Spirit his own fleshly tendencies to evil!

2. The conflict with the world.

As long as he was Saul the blasphemer and persecutor, the world caressed him; but when he became Paul the apostle, the world hated him. The more he loved, the more they hated.

3. The conflict with Satan.

After Paul was saved, Satan never let him alone. He tried in every way imaginable to get Paul to sin, but he never faltered in his warfare.

When Paul said, "I have fought a good fight," he was not boasting. He was merely testifying. He was not speaking of the quality of his fighting, but of the importance of the fight in which he was privileged to take part. He was not saying that he had been a good soldier, but that he had been privileged to participate in a good fight. As a warrior, he had fought and conquered.

II. The Christian Life Is A Race.

"I have finished my course." Paul knew that he was near the end of the journey. In penning this symbol, doubtless he was thinking of the great Olympian athletic contests in Greece, which were so popular in his day. As these men struggled to win an earthly crown, so Paul would struggle to win the heavenly crown. An athletic contest differs from a battle; the former is a contest between friends, and the latter is a fight between foes.

1. Only citizens could enroll for the contest. Unless one could prove that by birth he was a son of Greece, he could not compete for the laurel wreath. So, only those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit can compete for the rewards of the Christian race. The salvation of the soul is all of grace, but the rewards of service are all of merit.
2. Those who would win in the race had to strip off all superfluous garments.
3. The winner had to have staying qualities. It is not so difficult to start in a race as it is to keep on when others seem to be outrunning us. What the New Testament seeks to impress upon us is that in the heavenly race the reward is not for speed but for faithfulness. In the spiritual contest the reward is always for faithfulness.

Every runner must abide by the rules of the contest. He cannot run where and when he pleases. A course is laid out and God expects us to complete it. A day is coming for us who profess His name when we shall be ushered into God's presence. The only thing that will matter will be--- have we followed the gleam; have we kept faithfully to the course; have we really accomplished the will of God?

In the quiet of the dungeon, Paul looked back on the tumultuous years of his Christian career and rejoiced in the fact that he had finished his race with honor.

III. The Christian Life Is A Stewardship.

"I have kept the faith." Here a change is made from the figure of an athlete in the game to that of a faithful servant guarding his master's possessions. By "the faith"

is meant that body of truth that was committed to Paul by the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had guarded the faith against all comers. He realized that God had entrusted him with His Word. All along the way he had been loyal and true to the faith as he had learned it from Jesus Christ.

In relation to Christianity Paul thought of himself as a trustee or steward. He had kept the great doctrines of revelation as a sacred deposit committed to him as a trustee. He had been loyal to the person of Christ and faithful to the Word of God. What a joy to know that he had!

When Paul came to say farewell, he was cheered by the glorious prospect that awaited him. As he looked forward his eyes brightened, his bosom heaved, his heart expanded, his hope enlarged, earth receded, his surroundings were transformed; Caesar dropped out of sight, and Christ appeared; the executioner's axe was welcomed as the key which opened paradise; and Paul swept through the gates of a felon's death to wear the crown of eternal life and to hear the music of the Master's gracious greeting, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." As Paul looked beyond the grave, to him the immediate future after death was a period of blessedness indeed, but not yet entirely full. He thought of that day when Christ would put the crown of righteousness upon his brow, and upon all those who love His appearing.