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Last Words

Scripture text: 2 Timothy 4

LAST WORDS

A great person's last words are significant. **They are a window that helps us to look into his heart, or a measure that helps us evaluate his life.** In this chapter, we have Paul's last words to Timothy and to the church.

It is interesting that Paul expressed no regrets as he came to the end. He even forgave those who made his situation difficult (2 Tim. 4:16). More than seventeen people are referred to in this chapter, which shows that Paul was a friend-maker as well as a soul winner. Though his own days were numbered, Paul thought of others.

The apostle gave three final admonitions to Timothy, and he backed each of them up with a reason.

Preach the Word! (2 Tim. 4:1–4)

“I charge thee” should read “I solemnly witness.” This was a serious moment, and Paul wanted Timothy to sense the importance of it. It was serious, not only because Paul was facing death, but even more because both Paul and Timothy **would be judged one day when Jesus Christ appeared**. It would do us all good to occasionally reflect on the fact that **one day we will face God and our works will be judged**.

For one thing, **this realization would encourage us to do our work carefully and faithfully.** It would also **deliver us from the fear of man; for, after all, our final Judge is God.** Finally, the realization that God will one day judge our works **encourages us to keep going even when we face difficulties. We are serving Him, not ourselves.**

“Preach the Word!” is the main responsibility that Paul shared in this section. Everything else he said is related to this. The word “preach” means **“to preach like a herald.”** In Paul’s day, a ruler had a special herald who made announcements to the people.

He was commissioned by the ruler to make his announcements in a loud, clear voice so everyone could hear. He was not an ambassador with the privilege of negotiating; **he was a messenger with a proclamation to be heard and heeded.** Not to heed the ruler's messenger was serious; to abuse the messenger was even worse.

Timothy was to herald God's Word with the authority of heaven behind him. The Word of God is what both sinners and saints need. It is a pity that many churches have substituted other things for the preaching of the Word, things that may be good in their place, but that are bad when they replace the proclamation of the Word.

In my own pastoral ministry, I have seen what the preaching of the Word can do in churches and in individual lives; and I affirm that *nothing can take its place.*

Timothy should be diligent and alert to use every opportunity to preach the Word, when it is favorable and even when it is not favorable. ***It is easy to make excuses when we ought to be making opportunities.***

Paul himself always found an opportunity to share the Word, whether it was in the temple courts, on a stormy sea, or even in prison. Ecc. 11:4 He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. ***Stop making excuses and get to work!***

Preaching must be marked by three elements: conviction, warning, and appeal (“**reprove, rebuke, exhort**”). To quote an old rule of preachers, “He should afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.” **If there is conviction but no remedy, we add to people’s burdens. And if we encourage those who ought to be rebuked, we are assisting them to sin.** Biblical preaching must be balanced.

God’s speaker must be patient as he preaches the Word. He will not always see immediate results. **He must be patient with those who oppose his preaching.**

Above all else, he must preach doctrine. He must not simply tell Bible stories, relate interesting illustrations, or read a verse and then forget it. **True preaching is the explanation and application of Bible doctrine.** Anything else is just religious speechmaking.

Paul gave the responsibility—“**preach the Word**” (2 Tim. 4:2)—and he also gave the reason (2 Tim. 4:3–4). The time would come (and it has been here for a long time!) when most people would not want the “**healthy doctrine**” of the **Word of God**. They would have carnal desires for religious novelties.

Because of their “itching ears” they would accumulate teachers who would satisfy their cravings for things that disagree with God’s truths.

The fact that a preacher has a large congregation is not always a sign that he is preaching the truth. In fact, it may be evidence that he is tickling people’s “itching ears” and *giving them what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear.*

It is but a short step from “itching ears” to turning one’s ears away from the truth. Once people have rejected the truth, they turn to fables (myths). It is not likely that man-made fables will convict them of sin or make them want to repent!

The result is a congregation of comfortable, professing Christians, listening to a comfortable, religious talk that contains no Bible doctrine. **These people become the prey of every false cult because their lives lack a foundation in the Word of God.** It is a recognized fact that most cultists were formerly members of churches.

Note the emphasis on Scripture: **“Preach the Word ... with ... doctrine ... They will not endure sound doctrine ... they shall turn away their ears from the truth”** (2 Tim. 4:2–4). This emphasis on sound (healthy) doctrine runs through all three of Paul’s Pastoral Epistles, and this emphasis is surely needed today.

Fulfill Your Ministry (2 Tim. 4:5–8)

“Make full proof of thy ministry” means “fulfill whatever God wants you to do.” Timothy’s ministry would not be exactly like Paul’s, but it would be important to the cause of Christ. **No God-directed ministry is small or unimportant.** In this final chapter, Paul named some co-laborers about whom we know nothing; yet they too had a ministry to fulfill. A young preacher once complained to Charles Spurgeon, the **famous British preacher of the 1800s,** **that he did not have as big a church as he deserved.**

“How many do you preach to?” Spurgeon asked.
“Oh, about 100,” the man replied.
Solemnly Spurgeon said, **“That will be enough to give account for on the day of judgment.”**

We do not measure the fulfillment of a ministry only on the basis of statistics or on what people see. We realize that faithfulness is important and that God sees the heart. This was why Timothy had to be “sober in all things” (2 Tim. 4:5, nasb) and carry on his ministry with seriousness of purpose. (We have met this word “sober” many times in these letters.)

Timothy was not only a preacher; he was also a soldier (2 Tim. 2:3–4) who would have to “endure afflictions” (2 Tim. 4:5).

He had seen Paul go through sufferings on more than one occasion (2 Cor. 6:1–10; 2 Tim. 3:10–12).

Most of Timothy’s sufferings would come from the “religious crowd” that did not want to hear the truth. It was the “religious crowd” that crucified Christ and that persecuted Paul and had him arrested.

“Do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5) would remind Timothy that all of his ministry must have soul-winning at its heart. **This does not mean that every sermon should be a “sawdust trail, hellfire-and-brimstone” message, because the saints need feeding as well.**

But it does mean that a preacher, no matter what he is preaching, **should keep the lost souls in mind.** This burden **for the lost should characterize a pastor’s private ministry as well.** (See Acts 20:17–21 for a description of a balanced ministry.)

Act 20:17-21 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: "**You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

God has given special men to the church as evangelists (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11); but **this does not absolve a pastor from his soul-winning responsibility.**

Ephesians 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

Not every preacher has the same gifts, but every preacher can share the same burden and proclaim the same saving message. A friend of mine went to hear a famous preacher, and I asked him how the message was. He replied, **“There wasn’t enough Gospel in it to save a flea!”**

2 Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and **the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.** Henceforth there is laid up 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 loved his appearing.

Paul gave the reason behind the responsibility: **He was about to move off the scene and Timothy would have to take his place.** In this beautiful paragraph of personal testimony, you find Paul looking in three different directions.

He looked around (v. 6). Paul realized that his time was short. He was on trial in Rome and had been through the first hearing (2 Tim. 4:17). But Paul knew that the end was near. However, **he did not tremble at the prospect of death!** The two words “offered” and “departure” (2 Tim. 4:6) **tell us of his faith and confidence.** “Offered” means “poured out on the altar as a drink-offering.” He used the same picture in Philippians 2:7–8. In effect Paul was saying, **“Caesar is not going to kill me. I am going to give my life as a sacrifice to Jesus Christ.** I have been a living sacrifice, serving Him since the day I was saved. **Now I will complete that sacrifice by laying down my life for Him.”**

Philippians 2:3-8 Do nothing from rivalry 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.** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**

The word departure (2 Tim. 4:6) is a beautiful word that has many meanings. It means **“to hoist anchor and set sail.”**

Paul looked on death as a release from the world, an opportunity to **“set sail” into eternity**. The word also means **“to take down a tent.”** This parallels 2 Corinthians 5:1–8, where Paul compared the death of believers to the taking down of a tent (tabernacle), **in order to receive a permanent, glorified body** (“house not made with hands”—a glorified body, not a “mansion” in heaven).

Departure also has the meaning of “**loosing a prisoner.**”

Paul was facing release, not execution!

“The unyoking of an ox” is another meaning of this word. Paul had been in hard service for many years.

Now his Master **would unyoke him and promote him to higher service.**

Paul looked back (v. 7). He summed up his life and ministry. Two of the images here are athletic: like a determined wrestler or boxer, **he had fought a good fight**; and, like a runner, **he had finished his lifelong race victoriously. He had kept the rules and deserved a prize** (see Acts 20:24; Phil. 3:13–14). The third image is that of a steward who had faithfully guarded his boss' deposit: **"I have kept the faith"** (2 Tim. 4:7). Paul used this image often in his pastoral letters. It is reassuring to be able to look back and have no regrets. Paul was not always popular, nor was he usually comfortable; but **he remained faithful. That is what really counted.**

Paul looked ahead (v. 8). 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. The word for “crown” is stephanos—the victor’s crown; we get our name Stephen from this word. (The kingly crown is diadema, from which we get “diadem.”) **However, Paul would not be given a fading crown of leaves; his would be a crown of righteousness that would never fade.**

Jesus Christ is the “righteous Judge” who always judges correctly.

Paul's judges in Rome were not righteous. If they were, they would have released him. How many times Paul had been tried in one court after another, yet now he faced his last Judge—his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **When you are ready to face the Lord, you need not fear the judgment of men.**

The crown of righteousness is God's reward for a faithful and righteous life; and our incentive for faithfulness and holiness is the promise of the Lord's appearing.

Because Paul loved His appearing and looked for it, he lived righteously and served faithfully. This is why Paul used the return of Jesus Christ as a basis for his admonitions in this chapter (**2 Tim. 4:1** *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:*).

We are not called to be apostles; **yet we can win the same crown that Paul won.** If we love Christ's appearing, **live in obedience to His will, and do the work He has called us to do, we will be crowned.**