

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Introduction

Last time we looked at the first two reasons why there is urgency to preach the Word, namely, because of Christ's Return, and because of widespread departure from the truth in the current situation. The third reason Paul sets out before Timothy is because of his impending death. Very soon now Paul was expecting to be executed. The aged warrior was about to lay down his arms that Timothy might take them up. Timothy must continue and complete his own ministry, because Paul's was about to close. As Joshua followed Moses, Solomon followed David, Elisha followed Elijah, so must Timothy follow Paul.

Paul takes three looks: (1) downward to the grave, (2) backward over his life, and (3) forward to the great day of reckoning.

Paul's look downward to the grave

Paul does so calmly and without fear. He provides two striking pictures of what death means for the Christian. **I am already being poured out like a drink offering** (2 Timothy 4:6). He sees life like the outpouring of the drink offering, like the libation of wine poured out besides the altar as the final act of the sacrificial ceremony when an animal was sacrificed (Numbers 15:1-10). Death was the final act of sacrifice to God. No one took his life, but he gave it.

Ever since his conversion he had given everything to God – himself, his strength, time, money, talents, mental powers. Now he had only one thing left to offer – his very life, which he would now do in his death. This is the supreme gift.

*“Till death thine endless mercies seal
And make the sacrifice complete.”*

God had fixed the time of his departure, and now it was that time. **The time has come for my departure** (2 Timothy 4:6). He uses the word ἀναλυσίς, which means “loosening”, the breaking up of something into its main parts. This gives us many pictures we could consider. Like unyoking an animal from the shafts of the cart, so death was like laying down a burden, and resting from toil. Like the loosening of fetters, death brought liberation and release from the Roman prison to freedom in the courts of heaven. Like loosening the ropes on a tent, Paul was striking camp, setting out on his last and greatest journey, which would lead to the very presence of God. Like loosening the moorings on a ship, Paul's “boat” was leaving the shore, sailing across the waters of death to arrive in the haven of eternity. He would soon arrive in the fair havens of peace, in a better country, where Christ is, who had gone before him.

Thus we have two picture of death – a sacrifice brought to completion, and putting out to sea to arrive at another shore, Immanuel's land. Paul was setting out to be with Christ, to be at home with the Lord.

*“O, think to step onshore, and that shore heaven,
To take hold of a hand, and that hand God’s hand,
To breathe a new air and feel it celestial air,
To feel invigorated and know it immortality,
To wake up and find it glory.”*

This is the glorious prospect for the Christian. In death, he is entering a place of rest and joy, the end of sorrow and pain, and reunion with those who went before us in Christ. There is no need to fear. Christ went that way. The journey has been undertaken by thousands before us. With Christ on board our vessel we shall certainly reach the desired harbour.

Are you ready to go now? Are your affairs in order? Is there no loose end to tie up? Are there no duties left undone? Are you right with the Lord and with others? Do you live loosely to this world? Is your treasure in heaven?

Paul’s look backward over his life

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). These words have been written on the grave and coffin of many great Christian men, e.g. C.H.Spurgeon.

The underlying picture in this verse is of a wrestling match or boxing bout. Much of Paul’s life was an uphill struggle against Satan, principalities and powers. He had struggled against many enemies challenging the purity and peace of the church. In Galatians we see him struggling against Judaism, in Thessalonians against fanaticism, and a whole series of problems in Corinthians, and in Ephesians and Colossians against Gnosticism. He knew fightings within and fears without. But he concluded that he had fought a good fight. To unbelievers, Paul’s life would be foolish, insane, sheer madness. To Paul it was a grand and noble fight.

As a race, it had certainly been an obstacle course, but Paul had stayed the course and got to the end without falling over. Paul told the elders in Ephesus, **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** (Acts 20:24). Now on the verge of death he was able to say his ambition was fulfilled. It is much harder to finish something than it is to begin something – but Paul had done it.

In keeping faith with his Master, he had remained true to the promises he had made at the beginning. Through thick and thin, amid the ups and downs, freedom and prison, and now in the hour of death, he had never lost confidence or his commitment to the Lord. He had also guarded the deposit of the Gospel that had been revealed to him. As a good steward, he had preserved the Gospel treasure entrusted to him. He had been a good soldier, and good athlete, and a good steward.

How gratifying to be able to look back over life and be able to say the same as Paul. So many men fall at the last lap, and spoil a noble life by some folly. Even Christians have done it – though they have not lost their salvation. They have held on to office

too long, made a silly decision, been off guard in a certain matter, spoken too much on one occasion.

Compare the two Saul's in the Bible. King Saul of the Old Testament concluded at the end of his life, "I have played the fool". But Saul the Apostle, "I have kept the faith." Both men were called and anointed with the Holy Spirit, servants of God, life full of responsibility at an important time. But at the end, one had been a fool, and the other had been faithful to the end. Which one describes us?

Paul's look forward to the great Day of Christ's appearing

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). This was the next step. A crown of righteousness would be received at the winning post at the last day. Victors in Greek games were given garlands of leaves. It was the greatest honour ever bestowed on an athlete. But the garland did not last long – it soon withered and shrivelled. Paul was looking forward to a crown that would never spoil or fade.

Crown of righteousness is a reference to justification, or more likely, to vindication by the Lord. The human judge, Emperor Nero, was going to condemn Paul to death soon. But soon after, there would be a magnificent reversal of that verdict – by the righteous judge. Paul would be declared innocent.

At the Second Coming the world's verdicts will be reversed. The unbeliever ought to dread that day, for he is unready, and it can only end in shame for him. But the believer, who has been justified, can look forward to that day. His heart is set on it, and he can face it boldly and confidently. This is the privilege of everyone who loves Christ's appearance.

Over and above the gift of salvation, there are the rewards for faithful service. Five crowns are mentioned in the New Testament: a crown for self mastery (1 Corinthians 9:25), for suffering (Revelation 2:10), for winning others (1 Thessalonians 2:19), for shepherding the flock (1 Peter 5:4) and finally for faithfulness (2 Timothy 4:8).

Conclusion

Paul the aged was about to make his final sacrifice and set sail to another shore. But though at the end of life he was able to look back with satisfaction, by the grace of God. He had fought a good fight, kept the faith and finished the course. His future was a glorious prospect. All wrongs were going to be righted. The final vindication of his life and service would be by the one whose verdict really matters – the righteous judge.

How do we look at our lives? If we knew this was our last day on earth, how would we feel? How do we view the prospect of the future?

This subject underlines the fact that the only thing that matters in life, the only thing of consequence in the long run, is belonging to the Lord. All else is empty, meaningless and inconsequential.

*“Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion’s children know.”*

This should spur God’s people on. We are so apt to get sidetracked, and lose our priorities in this hostile world. There is such assurance to be found here. We can know calm security and confidence because of our relationship with the Lord. **I know that my redeemer lives** (Job 19:26). **I will fear no evil** (Psalm 23:4). **I know whom I have believed** (2 Timothy 1:12). **We know we have passed from death to life** (1 John 3:14).

God wants us to have this assurance. If you are filled with anxiety, ask Him for this assurance. He will give you great peace and comfort. Then you can face adversity, troubles, sickness and trial with great confidence and quietness. You can feel something solid beneath your feet. With this assurance, your prayer life is strengthened and your obedience is quickened. It makes you a decided Christian.

“It is well with my soul, it is well!”