

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

---

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 7 July 2002

**No.** T0221

**Speaker:** Mr. Peter Ollerhead

---

## A Look at 2 Timothy: 2 Timothy 4:1-22 - Paul's Last Words

### Last words

Amongst my collection of books, I have one entitled "*Last Words of Five Hundred Remarkable People*". I sometimes give a talk based upon this book to such organisations as the Women's Institute or the Town's Women's Guild. I must admit I am very selective in my references but it does make a humorous talk, at least judged by the audience reaction. If I can quote one example, you might get a flavour of what I mean. On page 50 there are some words of a man who was so remarkable that everybody I ask has never heard of him! Just before he died he is supposed to have said, "I need no more medicine. I am well." If anybody needed a second opinion, it was that man!

In the opening talk of this series on 2 Timothy, it was pointed out that it contains the last words, as far as we are aware, of the Apostle Paul. They are, consequently, of far greater import than the silly quote with which I began this talk. For some people, a person's last words are of great significance. Personally I do not think that Paul's last words are of greater significance than his other writings; I am convinced that all of his words are extremely important to us regardless, of when or where they were written.

### Preach the Word

2 Timothy 3, that was the subject of last week's talk, ended with instructions regarding the scriptures and the man of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). 2 Timothy 4 begins with a solemn charge for Timothy to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-2). How significant this is for us today when so many will not listen to sound doctrine. Do we then preach something in line with the fashion of the age that might appeal to the ears of the listeners? The answer, "**NO!**" comes ringing down the years from the pen of the Apostle Paul. As a minister of the word, he was to correct, rebuke and encourage his fellow Christians. As was made clear in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Scripture has the ability to do just this when applied in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is probably the major theme of the Pastoral Epistles. Timothy was at Ephesus when Paul wrote his first letter to him, 1 Timothy. He was probably still there when he received the letter we are discussing this morning. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:3, "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." We, at *Truth for Today*, believe that we must not preach or teach anything other than sound doctrine.

### Paul's requests

In the face of indifference and opposition, Timothy was to fulfil a four-fold request:

1. Keep his head in all situations
2. Endure hardship
3. Do the work of an evangelist
4. Discharge all the duties of his ministry

#### 1. Keep his head in all situations

Firstly, he was to keep his head in all situations. He must not lose his self-control.

#### 2. Endure hardship

Secondly, he must endure hardship. In our age of wall to wall carpets and comfort where we hardly have to move a muscle to change channels on our TV sets, the idea of bearing hardship is not very palatable. We are often not very keen on engaging in Christian activity if it impinges upon our comfort.

#### 3. Do the work of an evangelist

Thirdly, he is to do the work of an evangelist. An evangelist is a person who seeks to bring people to Jesus. When I worked in an engineering workshop in the fifties, there was a man who had worked in the same shop as I did. One of my fellow workers once referred to him in a sneering way as a "Come to Jesus" preacher. Personally I think that was a wonderful testimony to the man's preaching for there is no better message. Paul certainly urged Timothy to do that kind of outreach preaching. He was to work in that hinterland between belief and unbelief, to seek to bring unbelievers into the glorious liberty of God's rich forgiveness in Christ.

#### 4. Discharge all the duties of his ministry

Lastly, he was to discharge all the duties of his ministry. He had not to fall short on any aspect of his ministry to the Christians at Ephesus.

#### Ready to be offered

2 Timothy 4:6-8 form, for me, some of the most stirring words in the whole of scripture. A man about to be executed wrote them. He had one friend with him and much of his work in the province of Asia seemed to be ruined. I quote them from the Authorised Version. "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" (2 Timothy 4:6-8) The note of triumph and victory in these words is truly amazing. I should, therefore, like to examine the passage more closely to grasp just what Paul was saying.

In 2 Timothy 4:6, where he writes, "For I am now ready to be offered," is similar to a thought he has in Philippians 2:17, "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." Notice that there, Paul uses the word "if". There is doubt in his mind whether that imprisonment will end with his death. In our quoted passage there is no doubt for he states quite definitely and defiantly that he is ready to be offered. This word "offered" speaks of the drink offering from Numbers 28:1-31 when wine would be poured on to the lamb of sacrifice. Another picture of this drink offering is in Genesis 35:1-15 when Jacob returns to Bethel. He poured out a drink offering upon the pillar he had erected there as a way of thanking God for His faithfulness in bringing him back to his father's house (Genesis 35:14). This is how Paul viewed his imminent death.

When he writes, "...the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Timothy 4:6) he has the thought of a boat waiting to be cast off from its mooring. The cargo is loaded along with all the passengers and all that remains is for it to gently leave the harbour for its destination across the sea. For Paul, death was but a journey from one shore to another. In his mind the time for that journey had arrived. What a magnificent grasp of the reality of heaven this great Christian and honoured servant of Christ had!

2 Timothy 4:7 was the inspiration for that well known hymn "*Fight the Good Fight*" (JSB Monsell), for that is what he had done. Ever since his conversion to Christ on the Damascus road many years before (Acts 9:1-19), he had endeavoured to battle for the truth as it is in Christ. In Ephesians 6:12 he wrote, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

His personal fight was nearing its end and, despite his desperate circumstances, he rested in the confidence of the victory of his Lord over death. We saw that in 2 Timothy 1, but I would remind you of it again. In 2 Timothy 1:10 he wrote of the appearing of the Saviour Jesus Christ, "...who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:" It is also worth reminding ourselves that Paul urged Timothy to be a good soldier for Jesus Christ in 2 Timothy 2:3-4. He wanted the battle to be continued in his absence.

The next metaphor we get in 2 Timothy 4:7 is that of finishing his course. Here we have the figure of the stadium with the athlete approaching the winning post. I think the thought of "his course" could mean his earthly pilgrimage. In the light of Acts 20:24, I think it could also apply to his ministry. In that verse Paul wrote, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God", (Acts 20:24). Paul was now aware that that ministry was finished.

The last triumphant declaration of 2 Timothy 4:7 is that he had kept the faith. Against all the opposition brought against him and the other Apostles from the chief enemy of Christ and His Gospel, Paul had been faithful to the end. It also means much more than this. That holy, precious truth concerning Christ and His church had been kept undefiled. Paul had carried through the task that was committed to him. It is worth noting, however, that he wanted Timothy to guard the faith and to pass it, in his turn, to others who would do the same (see 1 Timothy 6:20, 2 Timothy 2:2).

### **A crown of righteousness**

In 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul moves on to the next stage of his life in Christ. This is not being morbid, but rather a glorious confidence in his Lord. I must quote this verse in full. "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 that love his appearing."

Note the adjective that Paul uses to describe the Lord. He is the righteous Judge in distinction to the unrighteous judge at Paul's recent tribunal where he been had sentenced to death. So confident was he that he could anticipate the crown he would gain, the crown that possibly is the reward for all who long for the glorious appearing of Christ.

### **Practical requests**

Paul now moves on to some practical requests. Though he is aware that the end is near, he does not know when that hour will strike. We have already seen in 2 Timothy 1:4 that Paul longed to see Timothy. There is a note of urgency in the entreaty to Timothy to travel to see him as quickly as possible (2 Timothy 4:9). There is also a note of sadness in the remarks he makes about his friend and fellow Christian, Demas, who had left Paul in prison (2 Timothy 4:10). Notice the reason why Demas has forsaken Paul. It is because he loved this present world. He had neither the vision nor the grasp that Paul had for that world where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Demas had not set his heart on things above (see Colossians 3:2). He was too concerned with the things of sight and sound. How easy it is in our world that is so full of materialism, to be like Demas and love this present age to the detriment of our Christian testimony.

Two of Paul's other companions had gone on what were probably missionary journeys. Whatever the reasons, Paul waved goodbye to his two colleagues and turned to his good friend, Luke, who stayed with him (2 Timothy 4:11). It is quite probable that Luke is the one who actually did the writing 2 Timothy. Paul often used a companion to act as a secretary, finishing off the letter with a final greeting in his own script. Luke, being a doctor, would be valuable to the Apostle, aged before his time with many journeys and hardships through being in the service of Christ. Luke obviously felt a tremendous personal loyalty to Paul.

There is also a request for Timothy to bring Mark with him when he came (2 Timothy 4:11). This man was the cause of the quarrel between Paul and Barnabas that led to the break-up in the missionary partnership (see Acts 15:36-40). Now Mark receives the commendation that he will be useful to the Apostle (2 Timothy 4:11). Colossians 4:10-11 tells us that the quarrel had been settled, for there we can read that Mark was with Paul. How good to see harmony restored between brothers in Christian service.

In 2 Timothy 4:13, there is a command to Timothy to bring Paul's cloak and his scrolls. At the end of his life, all this man possessed could be compressed into a shopping bag. To many modern eyes he would be judged a failure. To be successful in our world usually means we have power, influence and wealth. Here is the man who influenced western civilisation perhaps more than any other person, yet he died virtually penniless. Paul's many talents could have earned him a comfortable living in the Roman dominated world of the first century. Instead, he devoted himself to the cause of a crucified Galilean whom he believed was the Son of God, eternally alive.

2 Timothy 4:14-15 bring before us the name of an enemy of Paul. This was Alexander, a coppersmith or metalworker. This is possibly the same Alexander that was mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20. I say possibly because Alexander was a common name and we can't assume they were the same man. He is mentioned there in conjunction with Hymenaeus with the comment they had made ship-wreck of their faith. The cause of the dispute is explained in the phrase "he hath greatly withstood our words" (2 Timothy 4:15). The New International Version renders this as, "strongly opposed our message". The warning, therefore, was because Alexander opposed the message of Christianity, at least as Paul preached it. If he is the companion of Hymenaeus, then he was teaching heresy, as Paul made clear in 2 Timothy 2:17-19.

### **Paul's trial**

The Apostle now moves on to an account of his trial. This is in 2 Timothy 4:16-18 where he writes, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

It is obvious from this that Paul was expecting a second trial or hearing. It is possible that this first hearing went better than he expected. It certainly gave him an opportunity to preach the gospel at the centre of the Roman world. What is also true is that he had to do it by himself.

If a general and violent persecution was in progress, then that would be sufficient reason for his lonely stance. In 2 Timothy 1:16-18, Onesiphorus is commended for seeking out Paul despite the fact that Paul was in prison. Standing with him, however, before the Imperial Tribunal required extraordinary courage and Paul didn't blame anyone for not doing so; instead he prayed for their forgiveness.

Within the verses we have just read is a further thought that had wonderful implications for Paul. Though he was conscious that he had been forsaken of men, he was very much aware that the Lord stood with him (2 Timothy 4:17-18). He was proving the promise that the Lord gave to His disciples and which is recorded for us in the last words of Matthew's Gospel: "and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

These same words must give us confidence too, to face any situation in the will of God. He will be with us as He was with Paul.

It is possible to misread this promise and imagine that the leading of the Lord will be away from trouble and danger into perfect safety. We can see from the experience of Paul that this was not so. Though he was delivered from the lion's mouth on that occasion, we have seen that he is aware that he will soon be put to death. This is a truth that the Hebrews 11 brings before us. In this letter, the writer lists a group of men and women who through faith had great and visible victories. In Hebrews 11:32-33 it says, "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions..."

And so he went on until in Hebrews 11:36-37 he brings out another aspect of standing for the faith: "...And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented..."

During his time as a Christian, Paul was exposed to much of this type of experience. We, too, must not imagine that being a Christian will always lead to victory as the world understands victory. Sometimes, standing for the truth of Christ can bring suffering. It did for Paul but in it all he had the presence of his Lord with him.

### **Doxology**

We must now move quickly on to 2 Timothy 4:19-22. Before we do, we must notice the way that Paul breaks into a doxology when he thinks of the ultimate victory. He rests in the confidence that the Lord will bring him safely to the heavenly kingdom. This causes a hymn of praise to break out. We have quoted it once but it is well worth quoting again: "To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:18)

I am sure that those of us who believe in the eternal majesty of the risen and ascended Son of God, and who know something of the immensity of what He did upon the cross, can also say "Amen and Amen".

### **Personal greetings**

The letter closes with some personal greetings to those whose friendship Paul valued 2 Timothy 4:19-22. The first two mentioned are Priscilla and Aquila (2 Timothy 4:19) who flitted in and out of Paul's life as he moved around Europe (Acts 18:2, 18, 26, Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19). He first met them at Corinth (Acts 18:2), indeed he lodged with them there (Acts 18:3). They seemed to have been close companions in the work of the Gospel. Onesiphorus we have mentioned already as the one who sought him out on a visit to Rome (2 Timothy 4:19). Trophimus is mentioned in Acts 20:4 as a travelling companion of Paul, on his last journey to Jerusalem. Erastus mentioned here could possibly be the city treasurer, Erastus of Corinth, mentioned in Romans 16:33. What is certain is that all of these names belong to that group of selfless individuals who, often at great personal cost, assisted Paul to plant the Gospel across the Roman world.

The penultimate verse of Paul's letter reveals a touch that would have hurried Timothy along the way (2 Timothy 4:21). Winter was approaching and Paul would be feeling the bone biting chill of his prison cell. He needed both the warmth of his cloak and the encouragement of Timothy's personal presence. What an honour was Timothy's, to be part of the last request of this aged Apostle. We do not know whether Timothy ever reached Rome before Paul was executed but it is recorded here that Paul, in the closing days of his life, wanted Timothy to be with him.

Part of the final benediction is for his young friend (2 Timothy 4:22). Could there be a better prayer for him than for the Lord Jesus Christ to be with his spirit? Nothing more intimate or closer could be asked for. The final prayer is for grace to be with all associated with Timothy (2 Timothy 4:22). It is Paul's distinctive way of signing off but it is not less precious that the rich forgiving power of grace should be with them all. There is nothing greater or more powerful in this world than the grace that was manifested by the Lord Jesus. We have not, nor will we ever, move into a time when anything will be

more effective or desirable than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul learned that first on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-19) and he never ceased to be moved into praise whenever he thought about it.

And so Paul expressed his final thoughts to Luke, if he was the one who did the actual writing. One can imagine Paul taking a final glance at his letter before arranging for its dispatch to Ephesus, to his friend and companion in the work. 2 Timothy reaches us today. It comes down the years with all the freshness and power with which it left the hand of the great servant of the Lord. We leave him in his prison cell, a prisoner of the Emperor Nero. It seemed then, with Nero at the height of his power and Paul his prisoner, that he, Nero, was the successful one, especially when his acolytes pronounced him divine. The day would come however, as FF Bruce remarked, when a man would call his dog Nero and his son Paul. Paul did not seek the judgment of history but rather the commendation of his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. May we all seek to follow the same Master today and every day!

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.