

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 24 April 2014

No. T0934

Speaker: Mr. Paul Callicott

Last Words: The Last Words of Paul

To all those who are listening, I would like to say "Good Morning".

My subject for this morning is titled 'The last words of Paul' and is a consideration of some of the points contained within 2 Timothy 4. This is my first radio talk and my name is Paul. The title has the potential to be particularly meaningful. My performance over the next few minutes could mean that 'the last words of Paul' takes on a more wholly different meaning, on this programme at least!!

This talk is the last of a series of four talks concerning the last words of a particular Bible character. The previous three in the series were Moses, Joshua and David, all of whom are Old Testament characters. All three died during, just prior to or following times of great prosperity for the people of God. Each one came to a natural end to their long lives and had close friends and relatives around them. All three provide a mixture of blessings and warnings to those who were listening to their final words. This is in stark contrast to the Apostle Paul's last words. He found himself alone in prison, about to be executed and at the beginning of a great time of persecution for Christians in the world.

So, where do we find the last words of Paul? The Second Epistle to Timothy is widely held as the last New Testament writing of Paul. The epistle was written when Paul was once again in prison in Rome. He had been arrested again, having previously been released from imprisonment in Rome. During his first imprisonment, Paul had been hopeful of release. He had been under house arrest and was able to have a lot of interaction with people. The comfort that Paul enjoyed is made clear in Acts 28:30-31: *"He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."*

Philippians 1:24-26 also back up the thoughts of release which Paul had, but I will leave the verses for you to read yourselves. On this occasion, Paul did not hold such a hope as he states in 2 Timothy 4:6: *"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come."*

Paul's second arrest was part of the persecution of Christians initiated under the reign of Emperor Nero in AD 64. Paul was now alone in a prison cell, chained and abandoned by most of those who had previously been with him. His letter to Timothy showed his longing for the *"beloved son"*, as Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:2, and it asks for the opportunity to have one last visit to the beleaguered Apostle. However, the main thrust of the book is one of encouragement and the call to personal faithfulness despite many turning from the truths of the apostolic teaching and the principles of Christianity. The Church of God was suffering from many divisions internally and was undergoing a major attack outwardly. Paul, knowing that the end of his life was near, sought to encourage Timothy. He urged him to continue in all that he had learnt from the Apostle and had been given from God.

The last chapter of the second epistle to Timothy, 2 Timothy 4, is my main focus for our talk this morning. I won't be reading the whole chapter as that will take too long. Instead I will be picking out some of the key features of the chapter. I have split the chapter into four areas which I feel were the main points that Paul is trying to bring out as he draws his last epistle to a conclusion. These are:

1. The preaching of God's word (2 Timothy 4:1-5);
2. Paul's life and present condition (2 Timothy 4:6-16);
3. The faithfulness of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 4:17-18); and
4. Paul's final farewells (2 Timothy 4:19-22).

1. The preaching of God's word (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

The chapter begins with a command from Paul: *"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom: Preach the Word!"* (2 Timothy 4:1)

This is such a strong commandment that is given to the reader. It holds such responsibility and, sadly, this is a very necessary command. It is even more necessary today as it was when it was written over 2,000 years ago. The word of

God is more and more being rejected in the world and people are less and less exposed to the wonders of it. How much we need to have the word of God preached in all its ways by those who know its truth and power.

As we move further into the epistle, looking at 2 Timothy 4:1-5, it can be seen that there are some very important aspects of the preaching of the word of God that are brought out.

The Apostle reminds Timothy that there is no right or proper time for the Word of God to be spoken; it is always necessary. I have had to ensure that this talk was ready for a certain date in order for it to be made ready for broadcast. As usual, I have put it off as I seem to flourish in last minute work and thankfully my preparation has fallen within the deadline that I was set. However, there is no room for such delays in Paul's instruction as the need for the word of the Lord is the here and now of everyday life. Every aspect of our life is to be shaped by it and there is no decision that we can make that will not in some way be affected by it. Let us not "*put off*" the word of the Lord till tomorrow but embrace it and preach it today at every opportunity. When the word of God is needed it has to be spoken at that time; if we go away to prepare then it will be too late and the opportunity for the truth to be spoken will be missed.

We also learn that the preaching of the word is not just for soundbites and niceties. The word of God is sharper than a two edged sword (see Hebrews 4:12). It is able to convict people of their sin, the wrong in their lives and to bring people to a knowledge of their need for salvation. It brings wayward Christians back to a realisation of their need to follow on the straight path that God would have them follow. It reminds those who hear it of the truth of their nature and the reality of their position if they didn't have the Lord as their Saviour. The words used are "*convince, rebuke and exhort*" (2 Timothy 4:2). It is clear from this that the Apostle did not expect the things that Timothy was to preach would be universally accepted or popular. In fact, he goes on to say that people will soon not want to hear it at all and would look for people who would say the things that they wanted to hear. They would believe anything that sounded good and plausible, openly rejecting the truths of the Bible. How often we hear of this today. The word of God is regularly being dismissed for the feelings and emotions of today. Whole sections of the Bible are cast aside. It is dismissed because so many people believe that today's standards are more advanced, belief in the unjust thought that the Bible was written for another time, or the idea that we know better. But Timothy was not to be put off, and neither should we be put off, speaking the truths that are found in Word of God. Timothy was to fulfil his ministry despite the rejection of it.

This brings me to my last thought on this section, and perhaps the most important with regard to the preaching of the word. The thoughts in 2 Timothy 4:1 speak of why it is so important to correctly preach the Word. It is not for the sake of the Church or for any of the many writers over the ages and their reputations. It is for the sake of the Father and His Son the Lord Jesus. They are witnessing our response to the Word of God.

Each and every person who has ever lived and who will ever live will have to give an account before a righteous and holy God of their response to the word of God. Why is it so important to God we could ask? It is because it speaks of the Lord Jesus Himself. So many other scriptures tell us this, most notably in John 1:14, which says: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*"

The most important aspect of this is His saving work at Calvary. Calvary is the place where the perfect Man gave His life so that we might live and not face eternal punishment for our failures. He had done no wrong see Luke 23:4, 14, 41; John 18:38, 19:4, 6) He had done only that which was good. He had spoken the truth. Yet He had to die for us. He took our place and gave His life that we might live.

Were we worth it? The Bible tells us that we "*all have fallen short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). It says that there is "*none that is good, not one*" (Romans 3:10). We had a debt to pay and we could not meet it. Yet He died for us because He loves each one and we have to put our trust in Him, believing that He has paid our debt and given us everlasting life. That is why it is so important that we preach the word. It speaks of Him and His work. If anyone hasn't believed it then they are rejecting the Lord Jesus. If we dismiss sections of it as historical and not for today we cast doubt on His work. If we deny part of it as untrue or false we will cause the whole Gospel message of salvation to crumble. Why, because it is all pointing, every word, to Him who gave Himself for us. That is why it must be preached and that is why we all will give an account in a time to come as to our response to it.

2. Paul's life and present condition (2 Timothy 4:6-16)

If we move onto the next section, we can see that Paul goes on to talk of his own life of service for the Lord, declaring "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*" (2 Timothy 4:7).

Paul knew that his life was coming to an end. It was not going to be a glorious one that would be seen as brave and noble and something that others would aspire to. Paul died alone and seemingly in failure. There is no doubt that Paul

had led a life of suffering, persecution and rejection. There had been many triumphs. Paul had brought the Gospel into many different lands and had a profound effect on many people's lives. But he ends it alone in awful conditions and at the hand of an executioner no doubt. However, Paul declares that he has achieved all that he had to achieve and completed all that had been asked of him by God. He looks in triumph at his life coming to an end.

How could Paul have such a view at such an end? It was because of what he saw beyond the end of this life. He saw that in his death he would be delivered to the final triumphant finish where he would be given the crown of righteousness by his own Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 4:8). It is a great lesson for us to see the effects of a life that is looking to the rewards of eternal life with Christ rather than the legacy that has been left from this life. Paul here is prepared to suffer all that would be thrown at him for preaching the Gospel because he knew that that which was to come was far greater. Yet Paul reminds Timothy that this triumph and view is not just for Paul, the great Apostle, but for all who believe in Christ's work at Calvary. How much do we worry about what we accomplish in life, about what people think of us and if we shall be remembered. Yet for those who trust in Christ, we have a future that is far greater than anything we could suffer from, or enjoy in this world. Perhaps our work for Christ would be more profitable if we were concerned about being in His presence one day rather than be concerned about the impression we give to those whom we are presently with.

Paul then goes on to describe his present condition and the fact that he was virtually left alone now that he was in prison. 2 Timothy 4:9-16 provide a brief outline of what he had recently been going through. It is important that this aspect has been left to the latter part of his epistle.

Paul's primary aim was to encourage Timothy to continue on with the work for the Lord but he is still led of the Holy Spirit to disclose his current issues. Perhaps we can take a few lessons from this. Paul was informing Timothy of how he was getting on. He doesn't write to moan or to complain about how he was, but to state the facts of his present condition.

It is good to keep one another informed of how we are. Like Paul, we should not let it cloud our thoughts towards God but to see more clearly what He has done for us. It is also an important thing to point out that even those we look to for encouragement also need to be encouraged and can be suffering and struggling despite outward appearances. Paul obviously felt that it would be of benefit to himself and Timothy if he was to disclose his current condition.

3. The faithfulness of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 4:17-18)

Following this brief outline we move into our third section and it is as if Paul is suddenly arrested in his discourse and brought back into remembrance of the wonderful Saviour that he had. *"But the Lord stood with me"* declares the Apostle (2 Timothy 4:17). What a statement! It is almost as if Paul doesn't wish to leave any doubt. He does not want the reader to think for one moment that he did not feel that the Lord was with him. If there had been any deliverance, and success in his current predicament or any reason for the faith and surety that the Apostle had, it was all because he knew that the Lord was with him always.

What a message for all believers we gain in 2 Timothy 4:18 *"And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom."*

This to me is the full force of the epistle that Paul is writing. This assurance is not just for the Apostle but to all believers who would read these words. He knows he is about to die. He knows that Christians are about to undergo severe persecution. But he knows that the Lord will not and cannot fail in bringing every single believer home to glory, to His everlasting kingdom. It is not to achieve success in this world or to be accepted by all those around us and be universally popular. It is to bring each believer to a full enjoyment of heaven and be eternally in His presence, something far greater than anything that has ever been or ever will be achieved in this world (save the work of salvation itself).

This is why we are exhorted to *"Preach the word"* (2 Timothy 4:2), *"Run the race"* (2 Timothy 4:7) and *"Keep the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:7). It all should point to this wonderful truth that is expressed by Paul here in 2 Timothy 4:18. Well may the Apostle declare, *"To Him be the glory for ever and ever."*

4. Paul's final farewells (2 Timothy 4:19-22)

Paul closes the epistle with greetings to Timothy from various people and also some greetings for Timothy to pass on from Paul. Although the Apostle has declared himself alone there were still those that were close to him and that he had in his mind always. It is important that we have those that we know hold the same truths as us and that we can rely on. Paul does not forget them in times of difficulty. What a comfort we can be to one another and how we must ensure that we bear in mind the effect that we have on each other through our walk and behaviour in life.

I have come to the end of my thoughts on this chapter and I hope and trust that they have been of use.

I hope that if there are any who may be listening who have not trusted in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary they may see something of the wonder and completeness of His work. This salvation brings profound comfort and hope even in the most desperate circumstances.

May every believer be stirred up to follow the lessons and instructions of this chapter. Perhaps we can also look to emulate the Apostle in providing such encouragement even if we find ourselves with the prospect of giving our last words, as the Apostle was here.

I will finish by quoting the words that finish our chapter this morning: "*The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.*" (2 Timothy 4:22)

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.