

Paul in Rome - The End of a Great Man

FDR....IKE...JFK....Most of us know who these men are and we are appreciative of their leadership in times when America desperately needed great leadership. We study American History in school to learn of great things accomplished by great people. We are simply put, interested in greatness.

So, when God places his stamp of greatness upon a man, our interest in that man is heightened. I believe such a man is the Apostle Paul. I've been fascinated by Paul most of my life. A study of Paul's last days is a very interesting study. Paul gives us a glimpse of these last days in his life in 2 Timothy 4. Here we are told of his last days in prison in Rome. His last words are addressed to Timothy, his son in the gospel. It will do our souls good to study this lesson.

Paul has encouraged Timothy in the first letter by giving him guidelines to help organize churches and himself. Here, Paul gives Timothy a serious charge. In verse 1 he says that Christ will judge the living and the dead, and that this judgment will come when He appears. This does not sound like Paul thought that Jesus was coming back to this earth to reign here for a thousand years or so. No, Jesus is coming to judge us all. Paul's charge to Timothy, and to all other gospel preachers is this: ***"Preach the word."*** A gospel preacher has no choice in this matter. He must be fully encompassed by the gospel of Christ. He must preach the gospel of Jesus no matter what comes in this life. He must ***"be instant in season, out of season."*** He must preach when there is an opportunity; and if there is no opportunity, he must make one. He must ***"reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."*** He must reprove kindly and rebuke sharply. And the warm exhortations that a true preacher of the gospel can give! And we must not forget to be long-suffering and kind.

Paul talks about a time coming when folks would not endure sound doctrine. We do not need to be told that the time has arrived and has been here for 2000 years. ***"After their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears."***

There have always been men ready to preach **what folks want preached!** *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame. They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity. And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.”* Hos. 4:6-9.

Paul tells Timothy in this farewell chapter to endure afflictions. And we know how Paul had been afflicted! He had been in stripes above measure, often in prison, three times he had been beaten with rods, stoned once, in perils of waters, robbers, by his own countrymen, by the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, among false brethren; often had he been weary and in pain; he knew hunger, and thirst, and cold, and nakedness; he knew what it meant to have the care of the churches to burden his soul. (2 Cor. 11:23-33.)

Paul is not trying to frighten the young preacher, he wants Timothy to know what is in store for a faithful gospel preacher. There are no "soft" places in the army of the Lord. Jesus said: *“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.”* (Matt.8:20.) Being a preacher means hardships, privation, and toil. It is no easy ride. Paul said it this way in verses 6-7, *“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.”* Servant of God. well done! Paul had been a good soldier. For a third of a century he had obeyed his Captain implicitly. That Captain has never lost a battle, and, thanks be to God, He never will. He does not even lose a soldier. Every soldier will come to a victorious end if he remains true to his marching orders.

Paul tells Timothy that he had finished his course. Paul had come to the end of his earthly race and through it all, he had kept the faith. Because of his faithful following there is a reward ahead of him.

As Paul stands on the edge of the grave and the brink of eternity, what can he see by the eye of faith? How does it look from that vantage point? In verse 8 Paul gives us a glimpse of what awaits us. ***“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.”***

➤ **After the cross, the crown!**

➤ **After death, life!**

Here is an old man, in prison, knowing his days are short. In his last days he longs to see Timothy. ***“Do your best to come to me soon.”*** Paul is simply saying, Timothy, I want to see you. I want to talk with you. I want your comfort and encouragement. ***“For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.”*** Paul laments that he has lost a fellow laborer back to the world. Demas was in love with the world. We cannot love the world and the Lord at the same time. We must forsake the one or the other. Brethren do not try to love the world and the Lord at the same time, it will not work.

Paul goes on to tell Timothy that other faithful workers had gone to other places. ***“Only Luke is with me.”*** It seems that the beloved physician stayed with the old soldier of the cross until the very last. It is gratifying that Luke was with Paul to comfort and help. ***“Get Mark and bring him with you: for he is very useful to me for ministry.”*** What a fine spirit! There was a time when Paul thought Mark was not as profitable for the ministry as he ought to have been, but that time has passed. Paul had rebuked him sharply. He would not take him with him on a missionary journey. But Mark is now back in the good graces of Paul. Bring him with you, Timothy. I want to see him. He will do me good, and he is a profitable servant. ***“When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.”*** This is just pitiful! The world's greatest preacher is in jail. He feels the need of a coat that he had left at Troas. Maybe the jail was damp and cold. He thought of the cloak he had left with Carpus. Timothy, bring it.

I want my books, and especially the papers. Perhaps they were papers that Paul had written himself. He wanted to peruse them once more before he crossed over to the grave.

"Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message." Paul did not get "soft" at the last. Here was a dangerous man. Paul warned Timothy against him. He had withstood Paul's words, and he would withstand Timothy's. He might even take undue advantage of a younger preacher. No, there was no hatred in Paul's heart; Paul was perfectly willing to let the Lord do the rewarding, but he felt a responsibility to warn against false teachers. And so, should we!

"At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it. So, I was rescued from the lion's mouth."

Many of our brethren in the first century were thrown to the lions, especially in Rome. However, Paul escaped this dreadful fate. I have often wondered if the Emperor had a notion to throw Paul to the Lions just to be able to brag about it. But there is no historical record of this ever being a part of his plan as he persecuted Christians.

As Paul closes this letter to Timothy, we know where Paul's thoughts are for himself and for those saints that he loved. I'm certain that these closing statements tell us that Paul was looking to the eternal kingdom.

"The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Paul then asks Timothy to greet some of his dear friends for him. ***"Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you."***