

Letters From My Father
Week 32 (Conclusion)
2 Timothy 4:6-22
“Before Winter”

Introduction

Come now you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring — what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes.
James 4:13-14

As we come to the close of Paul's final correspondence with Timothy, it is with a mixture of sadness and rejoicing, as we read the great apostle's last known words on this earth. There is sadness, because of the cruel and inhumane treatment that he was forced to endure under the evil Nero. And there is rejoicing, for we know as Paul knew that his heavenly reward was very great indeed. It could be argued that no one ever served Christ as faithfully as this beloved apostle who gave us so much of our doctrine in his writings to the various churches and their pastors.

Thank God for using this man in such a way, so that we would be blessed with the richness of his writings. For it proved to be true that God had a grand plan for this once rebellious Pharisee, who had considered Christ his mortal enemy until that fateful day on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9**). Even the most faithful of Christians were terrified of him. Ananias was afraid to even meet with Paul after his conversion, so terrible was his reputation of persecuting the church.

But The Lord said to him, “Go, for this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to the Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for my Name.”
Acts 9:15-16

And suffer he did. We can read the long list of punishments that Paul endured for the sake of spreading the gospel in **2 Corinthians 11:14-33**. But despite his many hardship, the faithful apostle remained undaunted until the very end, even preaching out his last days in Mamertine Prison as he awaited the executioner's axe. What faithfulness this man exemplified until the very end.

As a pastor, I of course have read through the pastoral letters of Timothy and Titus many times, for in them are specific teachings with regards to how the church of Christ should function. These letters are filled with instructions, such as the qualifications of pastors and deacons, the God-ordained roles for men and women in the church, as well as, practical admonitions for the holiness and faithfulness that are required of God's elect.

But I must say, recently as I have re-read these sacred texts, I was struck by two simple words that come near the end of Paul's final letter: “*before winter*”. Paul pleaded with Timothy to come and see him before winter (**vs. 21**). Perhaps it is due to my own advancing age, that I have paid more attention to these words, that heretofore have gone largely unnoticed by me. But I have certainly paid more heed to them in recent days. For you see, life is indeed short, and we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (all Believers that is) to give an account for what we have done in the short amount of time we have been given. And I want to be counted among those who ran a good race and finished well, so that I will not find myself ashamed on that day.

But like it or not, winter... is coming. And it will arrive faster than any of us expect. The time to serve, the time to be faithful with all that we have is now, my friends, for we know not the hour of our departure. As Paul awaited his final appointment with death, he could look back upon his life without regret, for he knew full well that he had given his all for the cause of Christ. I have met so many in my life, who speak of a time when they would be able to serve with more fervor, but sadly many of those good intentions go unfulfilled. And winter often comes before we are ready for its chill.

So, as we come to the conclusion of Paul's two final letters to Timothy, his "*son in the faith*", I would like for us to consider what we should be doing today, rather than the putting off for tomorrow. For winter is coming. We have called this series, "*Letters From My Father*" for a reason. Paul's motive for writing was to give fatherly advice to the closest thing he would ever have to a son in this life. And he desperately wanted Timothy to take up the torch to continue in Paul's legacy of faith. At this moment in time, Paul's race was nearly run, and his own "winter" was fast approaching.

In the same way, I would like to use Paul's words and his example to encourage all of us to consider our own approaching "*winter*", as it were, when we will have no more opportunities to serve the cause of Christ in this world. So what must we do... before winter? I would like to share three things that I believe are important objectives, duties if you will, that all of us should consider before our final "*winter*" is upon us and it is too late. Before winter, we must endeavor to *Fight The Good Fight*, *Find It In Our Hearts to Forgive*, and *Find The Time for Kindness*. Please allow me to explain.

Fight The Good Fight (vs. 6-8)

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing. **2 Timothy 4:6-8**

Throughout these letters to Timothy, Paul uses the pronoun you, over and over again as he pours instruction and encouragement into young Timothy. But here at the end of this letter, Paul's use of pronouns becomes personal as he shifts the topic to himself. He tells Timothy, "**Fulfill your ministry... For I am already being poured out as a drink offering**" (vs.5b-6a). Simply put, Paul is passing the baton here, for he knows that his time is at an end, and Timothy's is just beginning.

Being a Jewish teacher, Paul knew full well the emphasis he was placing on *The Old Testament* sacrifices in regards to his own ministry. In Mosaic law, the people were required to offer a sacrificial animal, such as a lamb, followed by a grain offering, and then finally a cup of red wine was poured out at the base of the altar as a drink offering. These offerings not only symbolize Christ's sacrifice upon the cross, but they also were offered to God in recognition that all the good things that we have are gifts from above.

The drink offering was the final acknowledgement that God is the giver of all good things. It is the last and final sacrifice a person would make in the order of the sacrificial requirements. Red wine symbolizes the blood of Christ poured out for us at Calvary. So Paul was, in essence, saying that his own blood was about to be offered to God as his last and final sacrifice. Paul would give his very life's-blood as one last offering to the God Who had loved him and had shown him endless mercy and grace. To Paul, it was an honor to die for the One Who had died to save him.

The word that he used for "departure" (*analysis* pronounced an-al'-oo-sis in the Greek) is a term that carries the meaning of pulling up tent stakes from the ground and breaking camp. Paul, a tentmaker by trade, was letting Timothy know that the time had come for him to leave this world and journey to the next. He was "pulling up stakes" as it were and heading for his everlasting home.

Even as Paul was awaiting this departure, he could look back upon his life and say without reservation "*I have fought the good fight.*" There was nothing that this faithful apostle had held back in his service of The LORD. If ever there was a man who was completely devoted to Christ in all things, it was Paul. And now at the very end of all things, he was left with no regrets, no remorse for things left undone. He knew full well that Christ had gotten from him the very best he had to give! Can you imagine how comforting it must have been to him in his final moments, knowing that he had served with distinction?

In my profession, I have had the opportunity to spend time with many who are in the final stages of their lives. Many express regret for the things they should have said and done, as well as, for the things they should *not* have said or done. Imagine being able to say with confidence, "I may not be

perfect, but I have given Christ the very best I had to give.” That is something that we must strive to to *before winter*, my friends. We must offer ourselves as **“living sacrifices, holy and acceptable, for this is our reasonable service” (Romans 12:1)**. For by so doing, we can be assured to receive the same reward as Paul himself.

There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which The LORD, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, BUT TO ALL THOSE who have loved His appearing. **vs. 8** (emphasis added)

The “crown” of which Paul speaks is *stephanos* in the Greek. It was the type of crown given to an athlete who competed according to the rules and emerged victoriously. Those who serve Christ faithfully with all they have shall be awarded such victor’s crowns, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And the book of *Revelation* tells us that we will take those crowns and lay them at the feet of Jesus, for He alone is worthy (**Revelation 4:10**). Imagine what it will be like when Christ awards you with a crown of righteousness, which is a reference to our being not only clothed in His righteousness, but also that we are remade in His glorious image free from all sin! What a glorious day that will be. And what an honor to be able to lay that crown at His feet and say, “I served You LORD with all that I had, because I love you above all else!”

When your life draws to its close, will you be able to say with confidence, “I have fought the good fight”? Are you serving Christ with everything that you have? If you wish to be counted worthy upon that day, I strongly suggest you make those preparations now. And make them... before winter. For you do not know how much time you have left to give your all for Christ.

Find It In Your Heart To Forgive (vs. 9-18)

Make every effort to come to me soon, because Demas has deserted me, since he loved this present world and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak I left in Troas with Carpus, as well as the scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did great harm to me. The Lord will repay him according to his works. Watch out for him yourself because he strongly opposed our words.

At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that I might fully preach the word and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

2 Timothy 4:9-18

Paul had not only had his fair share of persecutions and trials, in this life, but he was also abandoned by many of his trusted friends, when he most needed them. We know very little of many of the names Paul mentions in his final correspondence, save that a great many of them had proved to be a source of disappointment for the apostle. Demas had abandoned Paul in order to pursue worldly riches and comforts, as Paul was left languishing in a Roman dungeon. In the end, he had very few loyal friends who were willing to risk their own lives to give him comfort and aid. Others he had sent to various cities to minister to the respective churches there.

Luke the ever faithful physician remained at Paul's side. Obviously in Paul's extreme condition, it was most helpful to have a doctor to see to his needs. Roman prisons offered very little in the manner of food or necessities, but the guards could be bribed in order to allow outsiders to bring the prisoners aid and comfort.

Apparently, Tychichus, Paul's faithful assistant, was sent to Ephesus, possibly even as a bearer of this letter, to minister there in Timothy's stead so that Paul's son in the faith could travel to see his mentor one last time. But other than those faithful few, Paul found himself completely isolated.

What strikes me most about all who had disappointed Paul, was that he had no ill will toward them, save Alexander the metal worker, who had vigorously opposed Paul in order to hinder the gospel. Paul warned Timothy to beware of him. But to all the others Paul held no grudge. In fact, he prayed that their unfaithfulness would not be charged to their account. In short, Paul forgave those who had transgressed against him. This is another thing that we must all do... before winter comes. For you see, to allow bitterness to rule the day in our lives is to be consumed by it from the inside out. There will be many in this world who let us down. But Christ is sufficient. He is the friend that stays closer than a brother. He is enough.

So we must find it in our hearts to forgive those who trespass against us. *They may not deserve such forgiveness, but in fact, neither do we deserve the forgiveness that Christ has shown to us!* So forgive. Jesus did, and He is sufficient to make up for all that we have lost. One of my favorite verses in Scripture is found in the book of *Joel*. And it speaks of the great loss God's people have suffered due to a plague of locust. God sent the plague of locust so that His chosen people would return to Him. God admonished His people to return to Him and promised them:

I will repay you for the years that the swarming locusts ate, the young locust, the destroying locust, and the devouring locust — my great army that I sent against you. You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied. ***Joel 2:25-26a***

Paul forgave those who had wronged him, for he realized that Christ is sufficient, and to hold onto grudges when you have Christ is a waste of time and energy. For you see, no matter what hurt you have suffered at the hands of others, God... can make it up to you. He is always enough. So forgive. Forgive as you have been forgiven. Do not withhold your forgiveness, even from those who do not deserve it. Forgive before winter comes, and it is too late.

Find The Time For Kindness (vs. 19-22)

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus has remained at Corinth; I left Trophimus sick at Miletus. Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, as do Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all. ***Timothy 4:19-22***

As I have grown older, one thing I have learned: It doesn't cost anything to be kind. In the final months of his life, Paul's thoughts were on those who mattered most to him; Timothy, Luke, along with Priscilla (spelled in this text *Prisca*) and Aquila (**Romans 6:13**), the fellow tentmakers who had been so vital to Paul's ministry. Imagine how blessed they all were to know that he was thinking of them in his final moments.

Paul had even mentioned John Mark (**vs. 11**), the young man whom had deserted him so many years ago, causing a rift between Paul and his partner Bananas (**Acts 15:36**). Paul, in his last days, requested that Timothy bring John Mark to see him, even saying that the young missionary was "useful to me I ministry." Yet another soul that Paul had forgiven and sought out for restoration. The old apostle had turned his thoughts to those he cherished as he faced his own pending execution. And he sent greetings to them all, one final time.

All of us have those people that we hold dear to us. To have family and friends is to be blessed indeed by God. And so many times, we neglect to tell them just how much they mean to us. I once heard an old preacher say, "*The time to send our loved ones flowers is not after they have passed away, but while they are still alive and can appreciate their sweet fragrance.*" This is a true axiom indeed. We need to find the time to show our love and our kindness to those we care about, while they are still with us. How precious is a word of encouragement, when we most need to hear it! So find the time for kindness... before winter.

So there you have it. Our life is but a vapor; here today and gone tomorrow. We must spend our brief time upon this earth wisely, while leaves are green and life is abundant. For we never know when winter will come. Or as the great apostle himself had written to his beloved church at Ephesus:

Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk — not as unwise people but as wise — making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ***Ephesians 5:15-16***

And with this my best attempt at dispensing fatherly advice from The Scriptures today, I leave you with Paul's final words that he penned so many years ago:

The LORD be with your spirit. Grace be with you all. ***2 Timothy 4:22***

And let all of God's people say... TRUTH!!!