

THE TRIUMPHANT TESTIMONY OF PAUL

2 TIMOTHY 04:06–08

Introduction: Paul Awaiting Death

Paul is sitting in the drab dungeon of a Roman prison. He is facing the capital charge of insurrection against the Roman government. He has had his preliminary hearing before Nero; therefore, he is soon to stand before Nero in his final trial and hear the fateful verdict: “Execution.” How soon? We do not know, but these verses indicate very soon. Paul knew that the end of his life upon earth was immediately at hand. This is the reason he had just passed the banner of the gospel over to Timothy — the reason he had just given Timothy the most awesome charge that can be given to a man: the awesome charge to preach the Word of God and to minister to a world that is lost and dying — a world that is reeling under the weight of so many desperate needs. Timothy must go forth and preach the gospel with all the might and commitment of his being. Note how Paul encourages Timothy even in discussing his own coming death. He wants Timothy to look ahead to the end of his own life and to be able to bear the same testimony. What a challenge to us all: Paul’s triumphant testimony.

- I. His death (v. 6).
- II. His testimony (v. 7).
- III. His reward: the crown of righteousness (v. 8).

I. 2 Timothy 04:06 *Death: A Sacrifice Offered to God*

Paul’s confrontation with death.

1. Paul says that his life is being offered and sacrificed to God in one last act — the act of death. What a view of death! Seeing death as an offering and sacrifice being presented to God. The Greek word for offering or sacrifice (spendomai) is striking: it refers to the drink offering that was presented to God. When a person wanted to make a sacrifice to God, he often took a cup of wine or oil and poured it out as an offering and sacrifice to God. The drink offering symbolized the Lord Jesus pouring out His soul — dying — for us.

Paul is saying, “I am pouring out my soul through death for the Lord Jesus Christ. The life and blood of my body is being sacrificed for the preaching of God’s Word. I am laying down my life as an offering to Christ Jesus my Lord — laying it down in the supreme act of sacrifice. I am dying for Him.”

The great Biblical writer William Barclay describes the scene with words that should challenge us all:

“Paul did not think of himself as going to be executed; he thought of himself as going to offer his life to God. His life was not being taken from him; he was laying it down. Ever since his conversion Paul had offered to God — his money, his scholarship, his

strength, his time, the vigour of his body, the acuteness of his mind, the devotion of his passionate heart. Only life itself was left to offer, and gladly Paul was going to lay life down.” (The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, p. 240).

2. Paul says that the time for his departure from this world has come. The word “departure” (analuo) is striking in its meaning. (The following meanings are taken from W.E. Vine. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.)
 - a. To depart is the picture of a ship hoisting the anchor and loosening the mooring ropes and departing one country for another country. Paul had been anchored and tied to this world, but the anchor and ropes of this world were now being loosed, and Paul was about to set sail for the greatest of all ports — heaven itself.
 - b. To depart is the picture of “breaking up an encampment” (W.E. Vine). Paul had been camping in this world. If any man has ever known what it is like to be unsettled and moving about from place to place, it was Paul. And unfortunately it was often not by choice. Many times the opposition to the gospel had been so violent, he had been forced to break camp and move on, sometimes fleeing for his life. But now, Paul was to break camp and depart for the last time, and what a departure it was to be. He would never again have to move. He was departing this world for his permanent residence: heaven itself.
 - c. To depart is the picture of the unyoking of an animal from the burden of the cart, plough or millstone which it had been pulling to grind the grain. Paul was to be released from the yoke and burden of labour and toil in this life. He was being released and set free to depart for the pastures and still waters and rest of heaven and eternity.

Mathew Henry says:

“Observe...with what pleasure he [Paul] speaks of dying. He calls it his departure: though it is probable that he foresaw he must die a violent bloody death, yet he calls it his departure, or his release. Death to a good man is his release from the imprisonment of this world and his departure to the enjoyments of another world; he does not cease to be, but is only removed from one world to another.” (Mathew Henry’s Commentary, Vol. 5, p. 849).

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Rom 14:8 *If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

Phil 1:21-23 *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*

Heb 11:13 *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.*

Rev 14:13 *Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour; for their deeds will follow them."*

Psa 23:4 *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Psa 116:15 *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

Prov 14:32 *When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge.*

II. 2 Timothy 04:07 *Paul, Life and Death*

Paul's glorious testimony. The way Paul describes his life is also full of meaning. He quickly glances back over his life and uses three pictures to describe it, the pictures of a soldier, an athlete, and a steward or manager.

1. Paul says that he had lived life just like a faithful soldier: "I have fought the good fight." Paul had responded to the call of the Lord Jesus Christ...
 - He had volunteered to serve Christ.
 - He had separated himself from this world, sacrificing all that he was and had to be a soldier for Christ — a soldier totally committed to the mission of Christ.
 - He had suffered through the threats, scrapes and wars launched by the enemies of Christ.
 - He had fought the "good" (kalos) fight: the fight that was worthy, honourable, noble and commendable.
 - He had done his time, stuck to the mission of Christ to the very end.

Therefore, Paul could victoriously declare, "I have fought the good fight." He was being released from his service as a soldier for the King, released to go home to live at peace in the kingdom of his Lord forever and ever.

Eph 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

1 Tim 1:18 *Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight.*

1 Tim 6:12 *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

2 Tim 2:4 *No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer.*

Heb 10:32 *Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.*

2. Paul says that he had run and finished the race of his life; he had completed the course of life just like the athlete runs and finishes the course of his race. This is powerful, for it means that Paul disciplined and controlled his life to the utmost — just like the Olympian athlete.

⇒ He controlled what he ate and drank and what he did with his body and mind.

⇒ He focused upon the course of life, how he ran it. He could not run the risk of being distracted by the things of the world and of the flesh, (sinful nature) lest he become disqualified from running the race.

1 Cor 9:23-27 *I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

Gal 5:7 *You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?*

Phil 3:14 *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

2 Tim 4:7 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

Heb 12:1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

3. Paul says that he had kept the faith. He had looked after the faith just like a good steward looks after the estate of his master. The Lord had *entrusted* the faith to Paul, and he had kept the faith. He had proven faithful: he had faithfully managed the faith for his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. The idea is that of a trust, of a management contract between Christ and Paul. Paul is saying that he had kept the terms of the contract; he had managed and looked after the trust faithfully and well. Think about this for a moment — all the sufferings that Paul went through — the terrible trials — the times that he could have...
 - dumped the trust of the faith or laid it aside and ignored it. But he never did. He had been chosen by the Lord and Master of life to manage the trust of God, even

the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul took the trust and managed it through all — both good and bad times. He never forsook the faith. And because he had been faithful, it was time for him to bear the fruit of his labour. He was now to reap the benefits of the faith; he was to be given all the rights and privileges of the Lord's estate — to live and enjoy its pleasures for evermore.

Luke 19:13, 17 *“So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’ ‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’”*

1 Cor 4:2 *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*

1 Tim 6:20 *Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge.*

1 Pet 4:10 *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

III. 2 Timothy 04:08 Reward: Crown of Righteousness

Paul's unbelievable reward: The crown of righteousness. Imagine! There is a crown of righteousness — a crown that a person can receive, a crown that will make him acceptable to God. No person can ever be accepted by God unless he is crowned with righteousness — completely covered with righteousness and made perfect. Why? Because God is perfect and only perfection can live in the presence of God. Therefore, the only way a person can ever become acceptable to God is by receiving the crown of righteousness from God. Paul was to receive the crown of righteousness because he had given his life...

- to be a soldier for Christ and His warfare.
- to be an athlete for Christ and His race (life).
- to be a steward or manager for Christ and His faith.

Think about it: Paul was to be given the crown of righteousness that makes a person perfect before God — righteous and perfect so that he can live before God forever and ever. What a contrast with the fading and deteriorating crowns and trophies given by this world. Note two points.

1. The crown of righteousness will be given by the Lord, the righteous Judge. He is the righteous and perfect judge, the only judge who knows the truth about all men. He knows the heart of every man, and He has seen every man every day and hour of his life. In fact, the Lord has seen every act and heard every word every person has ever done or spoken. He knows all. The Lord knew all about Paul...
 - that he had been a good soldier for Christ.
 - that he had been a good athlete for Christ.
 - that he had been a good steward (manager) for Christ.

The Lord is righteous and just; therefore, Paul knew that the Lord would give him the crown of righteousness in that glorious day of redemption.

2. The crown of righteousness will be given to all who love and look for the Lord's appearing. This is a striking truth. Who is it that loves the Lord's *appearing*? The person who loves the Lord Himself. Who is it that loves the Lord? The person who truly believes in the Lord and the glorious salvation He has provided. Who is a true believer? The person who has committed his life...
 - to be a soldier for Christ and His mission.
 - to be an athlete for Christ and His course (race and life).
 - to be a steward or manager for Christ and His faith.

This is the person who loves and looks for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is the person who shall receive the crown of righteousness. As the Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest says:

“To those who have considered precious His appearing and therefore have loved it, and...are still holding that attitude in their hearts, to these the Lord Jesus will also give the victor's garland [crown] of righteousness” (The Pastoral Epistles, Vol. 2, p. 163).

The effective preacher Oliver Greene says:

“No man knows the day or the hour when Jesus will come; we do not know the day or the hour when we will be called to meet the Lord in death. If this should be the day of the Lord's return, or if this should be the day death comes for me, could I testify as Paul did in the face of death? Have I really fought a good fight? Have I kept the faith? Have I been a good minister, true to the Word and to those to whom I preached? Will I have a crown to cast at the feet of Jesus when we crown Him Lord of all?” (The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to Timothy and Titus. p. 371f).

Thought 1. What an indictment against false profession. It is not what we profess about Christ; it is what we do for Christ.

1 Cor 9:25 *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

2 Tim 4:8 *Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.*

James 1:12 *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

1 Pet 5:4 *And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

Rev 3:11 *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

Rev 4:10 *The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:*

Mat 10:42 *“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”*

Mat 25:23 *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”*

Eph 6:8 *Because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. ■*