**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message of 2 Timothy (15):**

**“Paul’s Final Testimony”**

**2 Timothy 4:6-8**

**July 30, 2023**

Charles Swindoll once made the following observation: “Sadly, in an alarming number of churches today, God’s people are being told what they *want* to hear, rather than what they *need* to hear. They are being fed warm milk, not solid food. A watered-down gospel may attract large crowds (for a while), but it has no eternal impact. I’ve not been able to find any place in the Scriptures where God expresses the least bit of concern for drawing numbers. Satisfying the various itching ears of our post-modern audiences is an exercise in futility” (Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit).

But as we saw in last week’s study, having “itching ears” is only a short step from “turning one’s ears” away from the truth. Once people have rejected the truth, they become the easy prey of every false teaching imaginable. It is a recognized fact that most founders of our modern-day cults were once members of Christian churches, as are most of their followers.

That’s the reason for Paul’s final charge to young Timothy. “. . . *preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage – with great patience and instruction*” (4:2). It’s also the reason why Paul reinforces that charge just a few verses later: “*But as for you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and fulfill your ministry*” (4:5).

The ultimate reason for this charge, however, is found in the verses before us today (vv. 6-8). Paul knew that the end was near. He was about to move off the scene and Timothy would have to take his place. Just as Joshua had followed Moses, and Solomon had followed David, and Elisha had followed Elijah, so now Timothy must follow Paul.

In verse 6, Paul uses two figures of speech to picture his impending death. In verse 7, he uses three additional images to summarize his life and ministry. In verse 8, he uses one final image to describe the reward he’s looking forward to receiving when he enters glory.

**A. Paul’s Impending Death (v. 6):** “*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time has come for my departure*.” Imagine how Timothy must have felt when he first read those words. Paul had accepted the inevitability of his death, and perhaps had already been martyred by the time this letter had arrived in Ephesus.

The first metaphor Paul uses for death is taken from the language of the Old Testament sacrificial system; “A drink offering of wine was poured out in the sanctuary as a sacrifice reflecting gratitude to God (Nu. 15:5, 7, 10; 28:7). Paul understood his imminent death as an offering to Christ. Christ had done so much that Paul owed his life to Him” (Spirit of The Reformation Study Bible). In effect he was saying, “Caesar is not going to take my life; rather, I’m pouring out my lifeblood in gratitude for all He’s done for me!”

The second metaphor comes from the world of sailing. By viewing his death as a departure, he sees himself as hoisting anchor from this world and setting sail into eternity. When viewed from this perspective, even the bad news Paul is sending can sound like good news! He was “being released” from his lengthy and faithful service for the Savior – not executed!

**B. Paul’s Past Ministry (v. 7):** “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*.” Here Paul is factually – not boastfully – looking back over his ministry of about thirty years and describing it by using three vivid figures of speech.

The first two of these images are athletic: **(a)** like a determined wrestler or boxer, Paul has “*fought the good fight*.” The word translated “the good fight” is the same word that the author of Hebrews uses when he exhorts us to run with endurance “the race” that is set before us (12:1). It refers to *any* contest involving exertion and endurance, whether a race or a fight; **(b)** like a long-distance runner, he has “*finished the race*.” Earlier, when speaking to the elders in the Ephesian church, Paul had declared his singular ambition to do this very thing. “*But I do not consider my life of any value nor as precious to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus . . .*” (Acts 20:24). Now he is able to say that he done this.

The last image is one of a steward; “*I have kept the faith*.” Within the context of this letter, “the faith” most likely refers to the content of the truth (the gospel message) which had been entrusted to Paul. If so, then Paul would be saying, “I have safely preserved, as a guardian or steward, the gospel treasure committed to my trust” (Stott). Over the course of his entire ministry, he had a proven track record of defending the truth against attacks from the Judaizers, pagan philosophers, and false teachers within the church.

What an amazing testimony of his life’s work, and to a lesser extent the labors of every gospel preacher and teacher. Paul’s concern was *not* that he had been successful (as the world views success); nor was his concern that he had been *popular*, or *comfortable*. His concern was that he had remained f*aithful*. That is what really mattered to him. He had been fighting a fight, running a race, and guarding a treasure. Each involved labor, sacrifice, and danger. In all three Paul had been faithful to the end. What an encouragement to young Timothy!

**C. Paul’s Future Reward (v. 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.*” This image of a crown, once again, comes from the world of athletics. A Greek or Roman athlete who had won a competition was rewarded with a laurel wreath or a garland of oak leaves placed upon his head. Paul, however, would not be given a fading crown of leaves. His reward would be a crown of righteousness that would *never* fade.

But what exactly does this mean? One interpretation views this as “the crown that is the *reward* for *righteousness*;” that is, a “victory crown” for Paul’s perseverance. If so, then this fits with what Paul has just said in verse 7 (He *has fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith*.)

More likely, however, Paul is referring to “the crown that *consists of righteousness*;” that is, the perfect righteousness (eternal life) that is given to all believers as the final phase of sanctification. This would be in keeping with what Paul has said earlier: “*Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation* (the crown which consists of perfect righteousness) *that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory*” (2:10).

In either case, Paul’s persevering faith would be rewarded only because of the grace that was working in his life: “*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that was with me*” (1 Cor. 15:10).

It’s important to note as well that Jesus Christ is the “righteous Judge,” who always judges correctly. “Paul’s judges in Rome were not righteous,” writes Warren Wiersbe; “If they were, they would have released him. How many times Paul had been tried in one court after another, yet now he faced his last Judge – his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When you are ready to face the Lord, you need not fear the judgment of men.”

One final thought. The Lord Jesus Christ will give the crown not only to Paul but to all who have loved His appearing, meaning, all true believers who set their heart on the return of Christ. Looking and hoping for Christ’s return is an essential element of persevering faith, as is taught throughout the New Testament (Cf. 1 John 2:28; Heb. 9:28).

Here, then, is Paul’s final testimony. His lifeblood is about to be poured out. His little boat is about to set sail. He has fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. He is eagerly awaiting his crown. What an encouragement to Timothy, and to everyone who knows Christ. The same reward awaits all who persevere faithfully to the end and long for His appearing. For only those who have entered by faith into the blessing of Christ’s first coming are eagerly awaiting His second! Until that time comes, we press on and preach the Word!