

6. Paul's Last Words

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Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to the Scriptures and to God's Word and our reading for this morning, which you'll find in the New Testament in Paul's second letter to Timothy. If you have one of our church Bibles, it's page 996.

Second Timothy, and reading in the last chapter, chapter 4. So, 2 Timothy, chapter 4, then, at verse 1.

I charge you, says Paul, the apostle, to Timothy, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word.

Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure some teaching.

But having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions. And they'll turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. But as for you, always be sober-minded.

[1 : 18] Endure suffering. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry. 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. 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. Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Crescens has gone to Galatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me in my ministry.

Titicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I have left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all, the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm.

[2 : 27] The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. But beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. 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. And 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.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, in 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, and grace be with you all.

[3 : 39] Amen. May God bless to us this is word. Well, friends, let us turn again to 2 Timothy chapter 4, page 996.

And we have the last in this series of sermons from 2 Timothy. Now, this chapter 4 is certainly the last thing that Timothy, sorry, that Paul wrote.

At least the last thing he wrote, which has found its way into the New Testament. He may have written other things, but this is the last of his New Testament writings. And I think we could sum up the content of this fourth chapter by saying that in it, Paul gives us a clear and strong view of the great commitment of his life, which is his commitment to the gospel and to the broadcasting and preaching of the gospel as a lifelong task carried out regardless of any painful consequences, any kind of painful consequences that might come to Paul himself.

Now, for a little light on this, think of these words of Jesus. Whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

Now, surely 2 Timothy chapter 4 is a great illustration of that saying of Jesus. Because in this chapter, we have revealed Paul as a man who's prepared to lay down his life, to risk everything, to lose everything for the sake of Jesus and the gospel.

[5 : 19] Think of Paul's position. He's already in prison. He's already lost his freedom, his independence and his reputation. And he's now just about to lose his life. Paul is not a man who is toying with Christianity.

He's literally laying down his life as he writes. He knows that his life is about to be taken from him. Now, by comparison, think of the athletes who are performing at the Olympic Games.

Many of them, certainly the best of them, have poured their whole life and energy into their training for the past five or perhaps even ten years. They've been living, dreaming, eating, sleeping, cycling or swimming or whatever their discipline is.

Men like Sir Chris Hoy or Bradley Wiggins. I guess he'll soon be Sir Bradley. They have poured all their energy into cycling. They've denied themselves so much so that they can devote themselves to this one thing.

Now, this is what Paul is like in relation to the gospel. Paul has been willing for the last 30 years, ever since he met Christ on the road to Damascus, he's been willing to deny himself ease and comfort and the praise and approval of men.

[6 : 32] Paul has been willing to wear himself out and receive every kind of hostile brickbat in the service of the gospel. Here is a man whom Christ has gripped and taken hold of.

And Paul, of course, is our great example, the example to us of how to live the Christian life. He doesn't only teach us the gospel, he models the lifestyle of the gospel for us.

So let me encourage all of us now to read this final chapter of 2 Timothy as people who want to be like Paul, to follow his example as he follows the example of Christ.

We'll take the chapter in three sections. First of all, verses 1 to 5, which is about the great task of the Lord's people. And secondly, verses 6 to 8, which gives us a view of a man who is breasting the tape after what you might call the 10,000 meters race.

And thirdly, verses 9 to 22, which centers on Paul's willingness to fail to face trial and execution.

Now, we shan't be able to look at all the interesting details here.

[7 : 38] It's a chapter full of detail, but we'll try at least to get our hands on the main points. So first of all, verses 1 to 5, Paul writes of the great task of the Lord's people.

And there it is at the beginning of verse 2. Preach the word. Now, surely that is the most weighty commandment in this whole letter.

There are other weighty commandments that come earlier in the letter. For example, don't be ashamed of the gospel. Be prepared to suffer for the gospel. Guard the gospel. But this command here in chapter 4, verse 2, is the only one that has a backing like the backing of verse 1.

And surely verse 1 is one of the most remarkable things that Paul ever wrote. Let me read it. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word.

Now, that is some preface to a command, isn't it? I charge you. I command you. I lay upon you this great responsibility. And notice in whose presence Paul is speaking.

[8 : 47] He's not speaking in the presence of family or friends or the local church. He says, I'm speaking in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. God the Father and Christ are my witnesses, Timothy, to the charge that I am now laying upon your shoulders.

But that's not all. Look on in verse 1. Christ Jesus, King Jesus, says Paul, is the one appointed to judge the living and the dead. He is the one who will, at the end of time, like the great shepherd, separate the sheep from the goats.

He is the one appointed to distinguish the saved from the lost. He is the one who will make that great and irrevocable division. And I'm also charging you, Timothy, by his appearing.

That means, of course, his return, his second coming, which will soon take place when his kingdom and his kingly power will be revealed. It's because the great and dreadful day of judgment is pressing upon us, Timothy.

It's for that reason that you are to preach the word. Now, this is why we, too, are to keep preaching the gospel message today. We don't preach the gospel primarily because it makes people happy or

because it gives purpose to life to be Christians or because we begin to grow up into our true humanity when we become Christians, though all of those things are true.

[10:11] We're to preach the word today because of what Paul says in verse 1. It is the coming of the day of judgment that impels us to preach the gospel. It's the reality and power of God, the Father and the Son that presses us to keep on preaching the gospel.

This gospel, to refer back for a moment to chapter 1, is exactly the message that Paul has described in chapter 1, verse 8, as the testimony about our Lord.

In chapter 1, verse 13, as the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me. And in chapter 1, verse 14, as the good deposit. It's the message of Jesus about Jesus.

It's the good news of deliverance from the power of death and hell for all who repent and turn to Christ. So this is the message to come back to chapter 4, verse 2.

It's this that Timothy is to preach. And preaching the word is the great task of the Lord's people in every generation. Now, when Paul said, let's not be deceived by the word preach.

[11:16] When Paul says preach the word, he's not just thinking of formal preaching, not just thinking of what people do in pulpits on Sundays. That word translated preach really means herald.

Be heralds of the word. And that's something that all Christians can do to some extent. Even a Christian who's not too good with words can say, the Bible teaches that Jesus is the only savior. Now, if you say to a friend or a relative, the Bible teaches that Jesus is the only savior, you're preaching the word. You're acting as a herald who is not ashamed of the news that he's been given to announce.

All Christians can play a part in broadcasting this message about Jesus. Now, let's look a little further into verse 2. Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season.

In other words, when it is convenient for you, and even when it is extremely inconvenient for you, still share the gospel with others. So, for example, it might be half past 12 p.m. on a Sunday.

[12:20] And you're just about to leave church, having had a nice little chat with your friends. And you want to get home to your Sunday roast for which you are hungry. And somebody wanders in from the street and says to you, please, will you explain the gospel to me?

Do you say, go away? I'm on my way home. Thank you very much. And I'm hungry. No, says Paul. It's an inconvenient moment, perhaps. But sit down, friend, and do your work. Preach the word. And then still in verse 2. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. In other words, Timothy, press it home. Make people see their plight and their need.

You'll need patience, Timothy, because some people are very awkward and very provocative. But you must do it nonetheless. Now, why is Paul pressing Timothy to be so thorough and so committed to the work?

Well, he explains in verse 3 and 4. Here's the reason why Timothy has to keep at it. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching. But having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

[13:35] Now, you'll notice that Paul gives us two descriptions of the gospel here. One in verse 3 and one in verse 4. In verse 3, he calls it sound teaching.

The word sound really means healthy or health-giving. And then in verse 4, Paul calls the gospel the truth. So, and here is the sobering thing.

What will people often do in the time that is coming? What will they often do with sound teaching? Verse 3, they will not endure it. This gospel teaching, says somebody, is quite beyond my power to endure.

It is intolerable. I have itching ear syndrome. And the Bible gospel does not scratch where my ears itch. So, what does this person do in verse 3?

Well, he finds other teachers. He wants to be religious in some way, but he doesn't want the Bible gospel. And what does he do in verse 4? He turns away from listening to the truth.

[14:40] So, perhaps he comes to a gospel-preaching church and he sits through a service at a sermon. And then he says, I will not go to that church again. So, what drives this man who wants religion in some form, but not gospel?

Paul tells us in verse 3, it is his own passions. His own idiosyncratic, beloved, personal agenda. He doesn't want a teacher like Timothy who will present him with the glorious gospel of Jesus or with the ethical demands of Jesus. He wants teachers who will give him permission to indulge his

passions.

Some kind of unrestrained and self-gratifying lifestyle. Debauchery and dissipation, perhaps, dressed up in religious fancy dress. There has always been plenty of that kind of religion about. And this is why, according to verse 5, Timothy has to be sober-minded. In other words, steady. Steady. Not over-elated when the gospel work is going well.

[15 : 45] And not unduly depressed when the work receives setbacks. This is why, in verse 5, he is to endure suffering. Year after year of it, if necessary.

And why he is to go on evangelizing. Why he is to fulfill his ministry. In other words, to do it in a thoroughgoing 100% fashion. So, these first five verses are making the point very clearly that preaching the word is going to be difficult.

A church, and especially its leaders, are going to need plenty of good understanding if they are to grasp the gospel in some depth. And thus, to teach it clearly.

But much more than that. Much more than understanding. They are going to need a great level of moral courage and endurance if they are to keep on doing this work in a cultural atmosphere. Where many people's agenda is driven by their passions rather than by an interest in the truth. So, friends, I hope we feel the challenge of this paragraph.

[16 : 49] This is a tremendous little paragraph. May the Lord write it all over our hearts. This is Timothy's challenge. And it's the challenge to us to be a preach the word people.

We're not being asked to do something easy here. If this command in verse 2 was something easy, like do 10 minutes of aerobics every day, or eat five fruits per day, if it was some easy command, it would not need the backing of a charge made in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, would it?

It's not easy. But by the grace of God, it is not impossible. So, there's the first way in which Paul opens up to us a view of his heart and his commitment.

The great task of the Lord's people is to preach the word. Well, now, secondly, let's look at verses 6 to 8, where Paul shows himself as a man who is about to breast the tape after what you might call the 10,000 meters race.

Here is a picture of how to get to the end of the Christian life. Now, friends, let me look around. I see gray heads and I see brown.

[18 : 05] This is not just for the elderly. Even if you're 15 or 20, think ahead. Now, Paul doesn't just stick in this little paragraph, 6, 7, and 8, for the fun of it. I think there are two reasons why he includes these three verses.

The first is linked straight back to verse 5. In verse 5, he says, As for you, Timothy, you fulfill your ministry, because I've just about reached the end of mine.

So, Paul is passing the bat on to the next runner. The time of my departure has come, he says in verse 6. But the time of your departure, Timothy, has not yet come. So, brother, get on with the work.

So, that's the first reason. It's simply a question of chronology. The younger man must replace the older man. But the second reason for verses 6 to 8, and I think the more important, is surely that Paul wants Timothy to have the same attitude that he has about getting to the end of his life.

Look at verse 7, particularly. Paul wants Timothy to see his own life as a battle, as a good fight. A fight so good, so important, that it's worth getting knocked about in.

[19 : 14] He wants Timothy to think of his life as a race, which may be long and arduous, but it's a race that is worth finishing. And in the last phrase of verse 7, Paul wants Timothy to develop a determination to keep the faith.

In other words, to stick to the truth about Christ. Not to be like Hymenaeus and Philetus, back in chapter 2, verse 18, who have swerved from the truth. And let's think about these three phrases for a moment in verse 7.

I have fought the good fight, says Paul. Now let me ask brother or sister, has it yet sunk into your understanding that if you're going to be a faithful Christian, you mustn't shirk being a fighter?

Don't do this physically because you might injure the person next to you, but in your mind's eye, stick up your fists for a moment, okay? Jab, hook, uppercut.

Who's the enemy? Ultimately, of course, it's the devil, who is the father of lies. What we're doing is battling, fighting against Satan, his minions, and the lies that they propagate and circulate.

[20 : 25] The world is full of lies and deceptions, and the gospel of Christ, in the end, will show them up for what they really are. The battle really is about truth and error.

Let me give you a sample of the devil's armory. I'll give you four sentences, which we hear time and again. This is the devil's work. First, it's very humane to realize that all religions are really the same animal in a variety of skins.

Second, progressive and enlightened thinkers accept that marriage, in its traditional form, is an outdated institution.

Third, the preaching of judgment and hell is a barbaric relic of the Middle Ages. Fourth, the idea of a personal God has always been a figment of the imagination of rather pathetic people.

Now, when Christian people hear statements like that, what must the Christian do? He must look the speaker in the eye and say, No.

[21 : 37] No, my friend. The Bible takes a different view altogether. And then, just look back to the end of verse 2, The Christian, with great patience, tries to unpack the Bible's teaching.

Now, that's part of what Paul means by fighting the good fight, meeting the devil's lies with the Bible's truth, and trying very patiently to show people why the Bible is right and why the devil's speech is wrong.

But let's make no mistake, friends, we are in a battle with soldiers, as Paul has already told Timothy back in chapter 2, verse 3. Then Paul says, I have finished the race.

He moves the sporting metaphor from the boxing ring here to the athletics track. If the fight is about struggle and contention, the race is more about endurance.

If Paul is in for the 10,000 meters, by this stage, I guess he has run about 9,995. He's just about to breast the tape. He's running with endurance.

[22 : 43] And then look at the next phrase. I have kept the faith, which means I have held to the authentic gospel of Jesus. I've not dumbed it down or diluted it, even though I've often been under great pressure to do so.

Many of you know our good friend Dick Lucas, who was preaching in this very pulpit, I think, about six weeks ago. He's shortly to turn 87. Doesn't look it, but he is.

Well, a few years ago, I happened to be at a conference at which Dick was one of the speakers. I was one of the punters, but he was one of the speakers. And I remember hearing him being interviewed at this conference. And one of the questions he was asked was the question, Dick, what has caused you the most heartache over the years?

And he said something like this. The thing that has caused me the most pain is to see so many of my contemporaries turning away from the gospel because they have found it too costly to hold to it and to keep the faith.

In fact, hardly any of the men who started out in the Christian ministry with me in 1951 are still firm Bible-believing Christians. In other words, they didn't keep the faith.

[23 : 56] It's a very good thing for all of us to imagine ourselves in our final months and years as we approach the end of life.

Will we be able to take these words of Paul here in verse 7 and apply them to ourselves? Will we be able to say truly, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

I've kept the faith. It's a great aim for us to have. It is difficult. But by the grace of God, it's not impossible. Part of the secret of keeping on fighting and battling and running the race surely lies in verse 8.

Henceforth, says Paul, 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.

Now that is the great goal of the Christian life. It's possible to keep going as a Christian when we fix our eyes on that great final horizon. To use a very homely illustration, if you're climbing up Lough, not Lough Lomond, Ben Lomond, if you're climbing Ben Lomond on a typical west of Scotland day of pouring rain, such as we all know, one of the things that will keep you going up the slope until you reach the summit is the assurance of a hot bath and a large scale and satisfying tea at the end of the day.

[25 : 22] In other words, pain and discomfort now, but rest and peace and relaxation at the end. Let's look at the way Paul speaks about this in verse 8. He's actually still using the language of the athletic games.

Because the word for crown, the crown of righteousness, the actual Greek word is the word for garland, the garland of laurel leaves, which used to be placed on the head of the winner in the old Olympic games before medals came in.

So Paul is saying there is a garland, there's a prize waiting for me. It's laid up for me. That's a great verb. Laid up means it's definitely there.

The Lord is laying it up for me and it's waiting for my arrival. And it's a garland of righteousness. Righteousness. Now there's a poignancy about that word righteousness here. Just think of Paul's position in prison.

He's awaiting his final trial and he's fully expecting to be condemned. By Roman justice as unrighteous and worthy of execution as a criminal.

[26 : 26] Rome is about to say to Paul, unrighteous, condemned. But the Lord is about to say to Paul, righteous, vindicated. Many Christians like Paul have found themselves condemned by human courts of law because they have kept the faith.

And verse 8 will surely be a great encouragement to Christians today who are languishing in prison under persecuting regimes. Now somebody might ask, is Paul teaching some form of salvation by works here?

Is he saying that the Lord is going to recognize that Paul has earned his reward by fighting the good fight and keeping the faith? The answer is not at all. No.

Just look back to chapter 1, verse 9 for a moment. Chapter 1, verse 9. Salvation is a gift.

He gave it.

[28 : 03] He gave it. He gave it. He gave it. He gave it. He gave it. He gave it. But he's able to write with this lovely assurance in verse 8 because he knows that salvation is a gift of God's grace and not something earned by human works.

And you see there's something in verse 8 for you and me as well as for Paul. He says, this garland of righteousness will be not only awarded to me, but also to all who have loved Christ's appearing. And his appearing there means, just as it did in verse 1, his second coming. Christian people then are those who love the second coming of Christ. In other words, long for it and look forward to it. I think you can still get bifocal spectacles in the opticians, can't you? The sort of spectacles where you, the top part, you can see long distances.

And then there's a little nick, isn't there, halfway down. Then the lower part, you see what's going on around you. Now, Christians are really bifocal people. We have to get on with the stuff immediately around us, live our lives and earn our livings and so on.

[29 : 12] But also we have this long view. We're constantly scanning the horizon for the Lord's return. As he says in the penultimate verse of the Bible, the Lord says, surely I'm coming soon.

And the church replies, amen, come Lord Jesus. We want you to return, Lord, and to usher in your perfect kingdom of peace and joy and justice, where there is no longer place for pain and tears and death.

That's a great phrase, isn't it, at the end of verse 8, the way that Christians are described there. The Bible describes Christians in many different ways, but this is a rather unusual way.

Christians are those who love and long for the appearing of our Lord Jesus. And that's part of what will keep us going and help us to keep the faith. Well, we've seen so far the great task of the Lord's people, which is to preach the word.

And we've seen also the view of the man who is about to breast the tape. Now, thirdly, verses 9 to 22. We see Paul's willingness to face trial and execution, even if some of his Christian friends are not willing to stand with him.

[30 : 21] I'll come to that main point in just a moment. But let's notice how full these verses are of human interest. We see, for example, that Paul is probably writing in the late summer.

It might have been about the 29th of July in the year that he was writing. I say that because he asks Timothy in verse 13 to bring his cloak. Winter in a Roman prison would not be much fun.

And Paul was not young, probably 60 or 62 at this stage, and he had been much physically battered and beaten. He needed his cloak. And you see in verse 21, again, he tells Timothy to come if you possibly can before winter.

Timothy was probably living up in Ephesus. And to get to Rome, he would have had to sail partway across the northern Mediterranean. And weather conditions were such in those days that it was unsafe to sail much later than about the end of September.

So come quickly. We also get a strong sense here of Paul's many Christian friends and fellow workers. In fact, between verse 10 and verse 21, Paul mentions the names of 16 Christians. [31 : 28] Just count them up afterwards and you'll see how good at counting I am. 16 names of people whom Paul worked with and cared for. When we first read Paul's letters, we may think of him as the great heroic soloist, the pioneer missionary who takes on the evangelization of the world.

Now, he did take on the evangelization of the world, and he was certainly very much the team leader. But he was not alone, not by any means. He developed a great network of fellow evangelists and leaders, many of whom seem to have traveled around almost as much as he did. Teamwork is indispensable to gospel ministry. Jesus, of course, set the pattern for this as he trained up his apostles and many other disciples as a great network before sending them out to preach the gospel.

Well, now let's see if we can put our finger on the key note of these final verses. And that is Paul's sense of being alone and largely unsupported by his team when the going got really tough. Look at verse 10. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia. Titus to Dalmatia.

[32 : 46] Luke alone is with me. Now, Luke was one of Paul's very best friends. It was Luke who wrote the Acts of the Apostles. And as you know, the final two-thirds of the Acts of the Apostles are really a biography of Paul.

Paul describes Luke in Colossians as the beloved physician, the dear doctor. So Luke was with Paul, probably not in prison with Paul, but perhaps in lodgings nearby in Rome so that he could visit Paul perhaps daily and bring him food and a clean shirt and soap.

Then look on to verse 14. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself. Coppersmiths, silversmiths, and sculptors would often have been very hostile to Paul because they earned a great deal of money by making statues of idols and decorating pagan temples.

So whenever people were becoming Christians in large numbers and abandoning their idolatry, the coppersmiths would lose trade and income. Just notice at the end of verse 14 how Paul is not personally vindictive or vengeful.

He doesn't ask Timothy to send the heavy boys around and punch Alexander on the nose. Paul is perfectly happy to leave vengeance to the Lord. And there's a lesson, of course, for us there. But it's at verse 16 that we really begin to see into Paul's experience.

[34 : 10] 16. At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. Paul had many Christian friends, but when the chips were really down and he was taken to court for his preliminary trial, what he calls his first defense, no one went with him.

He stood there in the courtroom. He was facing the magistrates and the whole power of the Roman army and Roman justice. And he looked across the courtroom and he saw empty benches.

No one was there to support him. Were his Christian friends afraid that they too might be arrested and imprisoned? Probably. Were they ashamed to be publicly associated with a man who had such a bad reputation?

Perhaps. What do we learn from this? This is the kind of scenario that has repeated itself time and again in the course of the last 20 centuries.

The world is often indifferent to the gospel and simply brushes it aside. But sometimes the world becomes sharply and fiercely hostile to the gospel. Christians are taken to court.

[35 : 21] The gospel and its ethical implications are thought to be antagonistic towards the welfare of society. Christians are prosecuted, imprisoned, and in some places even put to death, as Paul was.

And it's when that kind of thing is going on that other Christians are tested and sifted. Will they be prepared to stand by those who are on trial?

If a good friend of yours or perhaps your pastor were to be put on trial because he insisted on fighting the good fight and keeping the faith, would you go to the courtroom with him and stand by him?

Or would you slip quietly away saying under your breath that discretion is the better part of valor? A couple of generations ago, this kind of thing could never have happened in this country.

But a great deal has changed in the last 50 years. At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them.

[36 : 25] Verse 17. But, and here's the wonderful consolation for the isolated Paul. The Lord stood by me. Others didn't, but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me.

Why? To what purpose? So that through me, the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

That's why. In other words, in that hostile courtroom, Paul told these Gentiles the message, the gospel, and he told it fully.

Thus demonstrating in his own life what he'd said back in verse 2, that the word must be preached when it's convenient and easy to do so, and when it is heart-wrenchingly inconvenient to do it.

And one reason why Paul is able to risk everything in the courtroom is that he knows, as verse 18 puts it, that the Lord will rescue him from every evil deed, such as his own execution, which is about to happen, and will bring him safely into his heavenly kingdom.

[37 : 31] Well, friends, isn't this a magnificent example for Timothy to follow, and for us to follow, too? There's no self-pity here. There's no wringing of hands. What Paul is concerned with is not that his life should be spared or extended, but that the gospel should be proclaimed fully to those who don't know it.

So let's take this final chapter of 2 Timothy away with us, as a window onto Paul's soul and onto Paul's real commitments. His example is for us to follow.

He says, follow me as I follow Christ. Preach the word, verses 1 to 5. Finish well. Breast the tape. Keep the faith, verses 6 to 8.

And then keep preaching the word, even if deserted by friends, even if it means death by execution. Because Paul knew, in the words of verse 18, that the Lord would rescue him from every evil deed and bring him safely into his heavenly kingdom.

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Let us pray. Amen. Dear God, our Father, you know the frailty of our hearts, and you know that there is much within us that would shrink from the kind of commitment to keeping the faith that Paul expressed.

[38 : 57] But we pray that you will help us and other churches that seek to stick to the gospel and to stand by the truth. Give us strength and bravery. Help us to fix our eyes on the great final horizon and the garland of righteousness, awarded not only to Paul, but to all who have loved the appearing of Christ.

Please, therefore, help us to stand firm. And may the truth be that from our church and many others, the word may be, the message may be proclaimed fully, so that all the Gentiles might hear it.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.