

Under Order and Unfinished

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our reading for this morning. And Josh is finishing a series in 2 Timothy.! So we're in 2 Timothy chapter 4 this morning.

! Page 996 if you have one of the visitor Bibles. That's 2 Timothy.

And we're reading chapter 4. So beginning there, 2 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 1.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is the judge of the living and the dead, and his appearing at 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 sound teaching.

[1 : 08] 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.

As for you, always be sober-minded. 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 the present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Cretans 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 for ministry.

[2 : 21] Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas. Also the books. And above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm.

The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself. For he has strongly opposed our message. At my first offence, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them. For 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.

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 at Miletus.

[3 : 26] 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. Well, amen. May the Lord bless his word to us this morning. Well, good morning.

Do you open once again? It's 2 Timothy chapter 4. The horizon of eternity cannot be wrenched apart from normal gospel work.

With all that stands in the way of gospel work, the desertion, the detention, the deceivers, the duffing up, and even the death that so often meets those who give themselves wholeheartedly to serving God, there is no perspective more necessary than the perspective of eternity.

That is true for the gospel servant. Eternity gives the hope that all that befalls us will one day be put right and be shown to have been worth it.

[4 : 43] But the context of eternity is vital not only for helping us keep going, it's also vital for the ministry itself. What we do here, as we gather, as we sit under preaching, as we benefit from word

ministry, all of it is given its full significance by the reality of the last day.

Paul had that very firmly in view. Chapter 1, verse 12, he says, Paul can press on because of the great day that is coming and because he's confident in what God will do on that day and until that day.

And he has the same horizon in view here in chapter 4, verse 8. He looks forward to what the Lord will award to me on that day. And so as we come now to the central command of this whole letter, a command that may sound obvious to anyone familiar with church, and yet it is in fact Paul's final written charge as beloved lieutenant, we need to see that it is framed by eternity, by eternal realities.

Paul's last word, in essence, is simple, preach the word. But as he gives that charge to Timothy, he shrouds it in eternity so that we see eternity not only as the reward amidst the cost of gospel work, but as the reason for gospel work.

We saw last time that many imposters will arise, not only in the world, but in the church. And in the face of that, God's word must be held fast, no matter the cost.

[6 : 36] Because it is the word that makes people wise for salvation. And the word that equips God's servants for every good work. All because it is the breathed out word of God himself.

And so Paul's final word to the church is this. Preach the word. That's what we see first in verses 1 to 5. Preach the word in view of the end.

Preach the word in view of the end. Time and history are heading towards a day when Jesus will judge the world and establish his kingdom. That is why the Bible cannot ever be shut and the pulpit empty.

This whole letter has been building to this point. Paul has shown Timothy the cost of normal gospel work, the character it requires, the dangers that threaten it, and the divine nature of the gospel itself.

And it all leads now to one simple charge for Timothy and thus for the church in the post-apostolic age. Verse 2. Preach the word.

[7 : 42] Preach it. Timothy is not to invent a message and prove on it or replace it. There is a word to preach, the apostolic gospel, which still stands in the post-apostolic age because it is the God-breathed word of God.

And in light of all that's wrong in this world, in the face of all the challenges of ministry, and in light of where everything is headed, nothing else will do.

Verse 2. Preach the word and notice. Preach it continually and consistently, in season and out of season, whether welcomed or resisted, whether fashionable or not, the word is to be preached.

And notice how that preaching works. Paul says, reprove, rebuke, and exhort. Two of those words are corrective, aren't they? Because the reality is, in normal gospel work, people wander.

People drift. People fall in love with the world. People accumulate for themselves, teach to suit their own desires. All things that we see in this letter. All things that we see in this life.

[8 : 52] And so faithful preaching will at times need to be confronting. Not to gratuitously provoke, but because that is the means of graciously pastoring.

Of those words that Paul uses, notice reprove and rebuke. They're negative words, aren't they? But they're restorative words. The reality is that our default way in life, our natural direction of travel, is not along straight paths.

Our hearts are naturally crooked. And so what God's word will need to do is correct us and turn us back. To act like the bumpers at a bowling alley. As we incline towards the gutter naturally, God's word will need to keep pushing us back onto straight paths.

And even the positive word there, exhort, carries urgency. It means to urge, implore, comfort, and courage. And so Paul says, this is what the task is.

And all of it is to be done with complete patience and teaching. That is the minister's tool, the church's tool. Not gimmicks, not coercion, but patient, clear instruction, seeking to turn people onto straight paths.

[10 : 08] To urge them towards what matters and counts. Teaching that brings understanding. And actually that reality, the patient teaching, helps us understand that phrase that we see elsewhere in Scripture, able to teach.

That's not merely a skill, a gift. It's a deeply moral quality. In 1 Timothy chapter 3, we read that overseers, that is ministers, must be above reproach.

And among the traits that we see there is that one, able to teach. But here, Paul shows us what that includes. The patience to keep teaching, correcting, urging, and explaining, even when it's resisted or misunderstood.

And so the charge is clear. Preach the word persistently, preach it pointedly, and preach it patiently. But as Paul charges Timothy to do this, he also tells in verse 5 to be super-minded about it.

That is, to be self-controlled and to endure suffering. That's what will be required to keep to this task. We've seen what that suffering will look like.

[11 : 21] And we've seen the pressure that might drive us to lose control. But Paul never summons us to this task, asking us to do it out of some sort of dear self-reliance.

You see, throughout the letter, he's made clear where the strength comes from to be able to do this. 2-1. It's from the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Chapter 1, verse 14, the Holy Spirit who dwells within us enables us to.

Chapter 1, verse 7, that's the same Spirit who gives power, love, and self-control. And so the super-mind that Paul commands comes from the very self-control that God's Spirit gives his people. And the endurance Paul seeks is the very endurance God's power supplies. And so he's making clear to Timothy it's possible, viable, for the church to keep going with this charge.

It's viable, but it is also vital. And that leaves the question then with something that seems rather obvious to us. Preach the word.

[12 : 26] Why is this Paul's final word? Why does he need to say this? Why this above all else? Well, he gives us two reasons in these verses. First, preach the word because of what is coming.

Verse 1. Before Paul gives the charge, he lifts Timothy's vision. Whatever our role in gospel work, we must not ever overlook whose work it is and who it is that it serves.

Verse 1. Paul's solemn charge comes in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. You see, when people like Fagellus and Hermogenes are ashamed of the gospel and turn away from Paul, they're not merely rejecting a man, are they?

They're rejecting God's appointed servants and God's word. And the reality is that to be ashamed of God's word and God's gospel is in the end to be ashamed of God himself.

Remember the soldier back in chapter 2, verse 4, who longs to please the one who enlisted him. Or 2.15, Timothy was to present himself to God as one approved with no need to be ashamed.

[13 : 45] Or the false teachers in chapter 3, they're not merely distorting a message. 3, they're opposing the truth and thus opposing God. And because ministry is personal in this way, because our task comes to us from God himself, it's possible not only to be ashamed of God and his appointed means, but it is also then possible to please him.

Normal gospel work is genuine service rendered unto God to the one who sees all, who knows all. But verse 1 also reminds us what is at stake.

Paul charges Timothy in the presence of Christ Jesus, notice, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom. Preach the word because of what this world is all about and because of where everything is heading.

Paul's saying judgment day is coming. Christ's kingdom will be established in full. Preaching is not simply something we do because it fits our order of service.

It's not a box to tick. Preaching is at the heart of all the church does because eternity is at stake. As Peter says in Acts, Jesus is the one appointed by God to judge the living and the dead and he's the one through whom everyone who believes receives forgiveness of sins.

[15 : 16] There is a day fixed when every person who has ever believed, sorry, there's a day fixed when every person who has ever lived will be raised and judged by Christ.

Some to salvation, some to wrath. On the day Christ judges the world, the passing remedies, the trifling concerns of this world, of this age, they will matter not a jot.

What will matter on that day is what has been done with the word of the gospel. Where the gospel is heard and believed, it makes people wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Where preaching is silenced, skewed, or scorned, judgment awaits. Jesus is coming back. He will return in glory and he will establish his kingdom.

And that day will divide humanity forevermore. And so there's nothing more urgent in this world than reckoning with that reality.

[16 : 30] With heaven and hell on the horizon, Paul says, preach the word, preach because people's lives, because people's eternities depend upon it. Now in our church, clarity about the

centrality of preaching is not muddled.

It's hard to miss that preaching here is at the heart of our ministry, deliberately so. But whilst that is the case, it is worth each of us asking ourselves a couple of questions.

First, what would it say about us if we can sit under preaching week by week and remain basically untouched, unengaged, unchanged?

Well, it would say that whatever we might profess, heaven and hell, judgment and God's kingdom are not vivid to us.

where we grasp the significance of eternity, that will drive us and shape us toward being prepared week after week to be confronted by God's word, to let it dwell richly in our hearts.

[17 : 46] It will drive us to be prepared to hear it and heed it. Secondly, it's worth us asking, if judgment is real and God's kingdom is coming, can we easily be content that the people around us remain strangers to Christ and ignorant of the gospel?

Can we when week after week, morning and evening, right here, there is opportunity for people to come under the sound of gospel preaching, preaching that can rescue them, that can change their eternities?

Look again at verse 5, right at the heart of the charge, Paul says to Timothy, do the work of an evangelist.

That word evangelist is often narrowed to outreach as though it simply means evangelizing non-Christians, but biblically it means heralding the good news of the victory of God's king and kingdom.

Isaiah and Nahum speak of the messenger running on the mountains with good news. His beautiful feet because he's bringing good news.

[19 : 02] Because he's coming to declare that the king has won. Peace is proclaimed and that is something which always and only comes through enemies being defeated.

That is the gospel. It is more than just a personal message of salvation. It is the public announcement that Jesus is the victorious king.

The gospel is shaped by eternity. It's shaped by verse 1 the judge, the king by his appearing and his kingdom.

And so the task of the church is to declare the victory of Jesus. The undeniable, unstoppable, certain victory of Jesus. that he is the triumphant king who has defeated all his enemies and that the fruit of his victory will one day cover the whole earth.

And so until he comes, there is opportunity to share in that victory. Even now, he offers peace terms. That's what's held out in the gospel.

[20 : 13] Peace terms. But the day is coming when he will appear and his kingdom will divide humanity.

Those who share in his victory, those who take hold of the wonderful offer of peace and those who suffer defeat. And so Paul says, preach the word in view of the end.

And Paul's second reason is just a searching. He says, preach the word because of what people are like. Verses three and four, preach the word because of what people are like.

There is always a war raging against the word. Verse three, the time is coming and I take it, Paul means the time has now come because of all that he said when people will not endure sound teaching but instead with itching ears will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.

Notice Paul does not say preaching will disappear. He says people will prefer a certain kind of preaching. Preaching that flatters, that entertains, that reassures.

[21 : 27] Preaching that leaves them untouched. Ears will still be listening but not listening to the truth. Verse four, they'll turn aside to myths.

That is why preaching the apostolic gospel persistently, pointedly, and patiently is soon necessary because it's common, natural even, people to prefer something else.

Sinful humanity has a remarkable ability to dress up falsehood as spirituality, to give the appearance of godliness to what lacks its power. That's what we saw last week.

And Paul is saying that these last days will always be marked by a desire to neuter the pulpit, to have preaching that comforts but never confronts.

we don't usually say, do we, that we want a powerless ministry. Please give me a powerless ministry. Of course we don't. But instead we say, just don't make it too disruptive.

[22 : 32] Don't bring the Bible too far into my home, my career, too far into my relationships. don't bring it into my hopes.

And most certainly do not bring it into my politics. It's preaching that occupies Sunday but never governs Monday.

Religion that comforts but never challenges. there will always be a war against the Bible remaining open and being declared with power.

But here is Paul's message to a world that is moving towards eternity, a world that is governed by God, and a world that will be judged by Jesus. Nothing is better with a closed Bible.

Nothing's better with a closed Bible. Well, secondly, Paul also says, preach the word until the end, verses 6 to 8. Preach the word until the end.

[23 : 36] Paul's life and death illustrate what it means to fulfill one's ministry. A life poured out in sacrifice, clinging to God's promises and crowned at Christ's appearing.

Verse 5 ended with the command fulfill your ministry. And verses 6 to 8 illustrate what that looks like. And they tell us why Timothy and the church must do it.

We've seen all along that verse 6 is crucial to this letter. Paul is about to die, his death is imminent. And so in the post-apostolic age, it's vital that Timothy and the church fulfill the ministry that has been passed on to them.

That's the line of apostolic succession that we saw in chapter 2 verse 2. The passing on of the gospel to faithful men who pass it on to others also and so on. Such a ministry can never be neglected in the church.

Maybe that's a word to someone this morning. We must not think that gospel work is somebody else's responsibility. Well, leave it to them. The question is always, what does it look like for me to do the gospel work that God has given me with all that I am?

[24 : 52] Well, Paul now shows us what it looked like for him. for him fulfilling his ministry looked like death. But his death means three things. Firstly, verse 6, Paul's death is the completion of a life of sacrifice.

Paul refers to his death in verse 6 as being poured out as a drink offering. That image shows us that his impending death is not some sudden sacrifice that he's only now about to make.

In the Old Testament, the drink offering was usually not offered on its own, but rather it was poured out alongside the main sacrifice as its kind of concluding accompaniment.

The drink offering was the final act of outpouring that completed what had already been laid on the altar. And so when Paul uses that language here, he's saying that his dying is not separate from the rest of his ministry, but rather his death will be the completion of a life already marked by sacrifice in the service of God.

Through all the fighting of the good fight that he's done, through all the desertion, the duffing up, the detention, his death is the final pouring out of a life already given in sacrifice to the Lord.

[26 : 18] Paul was expecting execution, he was imprisoned and waiting for it, but his death is not going to be some sort of drastic gear change that comes out of the blue, it is simply the concluding sacrifice that completes the offering that his whole life has been.

That's what it looks like to fulfill one's ministry, not a grand flourish at the end, but a whole life of costly faithfulness of normal gospel work, a whole life given in service.

Paul's death was but the last act in a long liturgy of sacrifice. It's a powerful image, isn't it? Who knows whether any of us may one day find ourselves in a place where faithfulness to Jesus leads directly to death.

without being trite, if that is our future, we'd be in very good company. But whether that lies before us or not, surely what is true for all of us is this.

This life is to be poured out as a sacrifice of praise to God. Listen to William Stale on this. He writes, Israel's sheep were reared, fed, tended, retrieved, healed, and restored for sacrifice on the altar of God.

[27 : 46] This end of all pastoral work must never be forgotten that its ultimate aim is to lead God's people to offer themselves up to him in total devotion of worship and service.

It's striking, isn't it? The work of a pastor is in one sense to fatten the sheep for sacrifice. And the language that accompanies those Old Testament offerings, including the drink offering, is that they are a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

Lives given in the service of Jesus, bearing the cost of doing so, that is a pleasing aroma to the Lord. It's a very steadying reassurance for us, isn't it?

When costs do come our way, when we bear them, God smells the sweet aroma of our offering. Paul's death is a completion of a life of sacrifice, but Paul's death is also a departure, not destruction, verse 6.

Death is the last piece of a lifelong sacrifice, but also for Paul, it's the beginning of a new journey. Notice the language Paul uses, the time of my departure has come.

[29 : 05] The word departure literally carries the idea of loosing marines. It's a picture of a ship about to set sail. What does it look like to complete one's ministry?

It's to live a life without fearing death, for we see death in right perspective. We knew the truth about it. Paul wants Timothy, wants the church and us to be clear.

We can keep preaching the words, we can keep giving ourselves to normal gospel work until the end. We can commit ourselves to that task as a church family because the end is not the end.

Back in chapter 1, Paul spoke of the promise of life, chapter 1, verse 1. And then in chapter 1, verse 10, he unpacked it. It's the life and immortality brought to light through the gospel because Jesus has abolished death.

death. So when death comes, it's not destruction, it's departure. It's a step on an onward journey. Death is the gateway to actually tasting all that has been promised.

[30 : 16] And that's what we see then in verses 7 to 8. Paul's death, thirdly, is the gateway to the promised reward. Paul returns to the imagery here from chapter 2 of the soldier and the athlete.

He says, verse 7, I've fought the good fight. That is from chapter 2, verse 3, he's shared in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. And 2, verse 4, he's remained single-minded, intent on pleasing the one who enlisted him.

And he says, verse 7, I've finished the race. That is chapter 2, verse 5, he's competed according to the rules. He's finished the race through the disciplined training required to get to the end.

Paul has kept the faith. And so he's about to taste the full delight of the one who enlisted him. He's soon to be in the presence of his master to hear those words, well done, well done, good and faithful servant.

And he's soon to receive the athlete's crown. That's the image Paul picks up in verse 8. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown. But notice what kind of crown it is.

[31 : 28] It's the crown of righteousness. Righteousness, that was the fruit to be pursued instead of youthful passions in chapter 2, verse 22. Righteousness, the fruit the scriptures train us towards in chapter 3, verse 16.

But now for Paul it's no longer simply pursued or longed for. It'll be consummated. His reward is to take hold of all that he longed for in his life and what all of his trials had been shaping him towards. Our lives here and now are a preparation for what is to come. Jesus in the parable of the ten miners tells of servants who are entrusted with the king's resources.

And they're called to trade with him faithfully until he returns. And their faithfulness is shown not by burying the resource, but it's shown by fruitful service.

And when the king comes, the reward is not idleness. It's not put your feet up. The reward is greater service still. It's authority, responsibility, a share in his rule.

[32 : 43] Ten cities for the one who made ten miners. And the point is that service in Christ's kingdom now is training his people for the fuller enjoyment of Christ's kingdom to come.

So too here, the crown is not an arbitrary prize tacked on at the end, but the crown is the fitting consummation of a life that grace has been shaping through Paul's endurance, through his sacrifice, through his ministry of the word.

The Bible presents a real continuity between what grace is shaping in us now, and what will be brought to fullness in the age to come.

What we are in this life will not suddenly disappear in the life to come, but rather there's a connection between them. And so if our lives now are marked by a ministry that produces the fruit of righteousness, and we let all of the trials and the costs shape us through grace, then what we will find is that all those things are brought into full bloom in the world to come, only untarnished, crowned.

And notice that is not just the case for Paul. Verse 8 makes that gloriously clear. He says it's for all who have loved his appearance, all who long for Christ's kingdom to come, all who give themselves

in service to him nigh, all who pursue righteousness instead of youthful passions.

[34 : 24] There will be a glorious crowning of all that this life by grace has been used for. And so Paul says, fulfill your ministry, preach the word until the end.

God. And then finally, verses 9 to 22, Paul makes clear that preaching the word is people work. Preaching the word is people work. Normal gospel work is intrinsically people oriented. The highs, the lows, and the purpose of ministry all center around people.

It can be tempting in a letter like this to skip over the final section. The parts our Bible so creatively label final instructions or personal greetings.

But here in these verses, Paul is rooting everything he has said throughout the whole letter in the reality that ministry always involves people. These verses are littered with names.

[35 : 28] Indeed, 2 Timothy is unusually crowded with them. For such a short letter, it's striking how many people Paul mentions. 29 in total, 30 if we include Jesus.

Only Romans has more. And they are all concentrated in Romans in the final chapter. Whereas here, throughout 2 Timothy, names appear in every chapter.

Paul builds his argument the whole way through, through people. And that is not an accident. It's reinforcing that normal gospel work is never abstract. its delights and its discouragements, its pressures and its comforts, its faithfulness and its failure.

They're all worked out in the context of real people. And Paul finishes then with three encouragements amidst all these relationships and all the costs of ministry.

Verses 9 to 13, he shows that there's restoration amid desertion. There can be restoration amid desertion. These verses 9 to 13 are bookended by Paul urging Timothy to come to him.

[36 : 36] Back in 1 Timothy, he'd actually said to Timothy to remain in Ephesus, but now with Paul's death near and so many having deserted him, it's more important than ever that Timothy be publicly seen to stand with Paul and therefore the apostolic gospel.

And so Paul says verse 9, do your best to come to me soon. And then he lands that appeal in the painful realities of ministry. Come to me soon, why? Verse 10, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.

That is one of the grim realities of gospel work. You can train people, invest in them, labor alongside them, count them as fellow workers. Demas was one of those.

Demas is mentioned in Colossians and Philemon as exactly that. And yet we can see them fall away. And notice the nature of his desertion for Demas.

Verse 10, his love is misplaced. Rather than taking hold of the spirit-given power and love, Paul has spoken of throughout this letter. No, instead, Demas is captivated by this present world.

[37 : 53] He's in love with it. these things are painful, discouraging, galling, even. And Demas is just reflective of a wider reality.

We saw in chapter one, all Asia have deserted Paul. But notice Paul's tune towards Demas is not quite the same as his tune towards Alexander later in verse 14.

And I think that matters because Paul has the strongest grasp of grace. And so he has the strongest grasp of the possibility of restoration.

He's already said in chapter 2 verses 20 and 21 that a vessel that was once dishonorable may yet be cleansed and become useful to the master. Well, in these verses, we see various gospel workers, other apostolic delegates like Timothy, they're being moved around in the ordinary course of Paul's ministry.

At least one of them is a deserter and at least one of them has stayed the course with Paul. We see discouragement and delight. But notice the name that stands out.

[39 : 03] It's Mark, verse 11. Get Mark and bring him with you. Why? For he is very useful to me for ministry. This is the Mark who once caused a parting of the ways between Paul and Barnabas.

Why? Because Mark had previously departed and withdrawn from their ministry. So Paul didn't want to bring him with him. And yet here he is, restored, welcomed, very useful.

And amongst all these discouragements, and amongst all these people, there's a beautiful reminder, there will be deserters, yes. Many even. all in Asia deserted Paul.

There will be disappointments, but there is also such a thing as restoration. It's possible that a cleansing can happen to make the dishonorable useful for the master's work.

Restoration amid desertion. But then verses 14 to 18, another encouragement. Paul shows us there's rescue amid danger. verses 14 to 18 show how closely Paul's ministry overlaps with the

pattern of Jesus himself.

[40 : 19] In these verses there are lots of strong allusions to Psalm 22, the psalm we began our service with, the psalm that Jesus takes on his lips at the cross. And notice the other similarities between Jesus and Paul.

At Jesus' trial his disciples all fled, but here verse 16 look at Paul. At my first offense, no one came to stand by me.

Just the same. Jesus prayed for those who crucified him. Father, forgive them. They knew not what they do. What does Paul say? Of those who deserted him, may it not be charged against them. And Alexander the coppersmith appears almost Judas like, a man who has done great harm. who has strongly opposed the apostolic message and one who seems bound up with Paul's present suffering and peril.

He's likely been involved in Paul's imprisonment. Paul is showing that his ministry follows the pattern of Christ. He faces abandonment, hostility, danger, and death, just as Jesus did.

[41 : 29] And that is the shape of ministry. Anyone who takes seriously the call to serve God by serving his gospel will have to die many deaths. Perhaps for some literal death, but certainly the repeated dying to self, dying to worldly ambition, dying to self-preservation, dying to self-promotion.

Normal gospel work means dying many a death. But look at where Paul's confidence lies in the midst of those deaths. First, verse 14, the Lord will repay.

Paul does not need to settle accounts for himself. He entrusts justice to God. And we can do the same. God cares about justice more than we do.

And the victorious king will defeat every enemy. God will repay. Second, the Lord will reinforce. Verse 17, he stood by me, he strengthened me.

Even when everyone else deserts, the Lord does not. Like in chapter 2, 19, we read that he knows those who are his. The Lord knows.

[42 : 40] And he stands by his servants and strengthens them. That means that when we do face danger or hostility or deep discouragement, we do not need to wonder whether this will finally be the wave that sweeps us away.

We do not need to worry whether in ourselves we will be enough. in ourselves we won't be. But the Lord stands by and the Lord strengthens.

He brings reinforcement. And then third, the Lord will rescue verses 17 and 18, even from the lion's mouth. Paul trusts the one who will rescue him from every evil deed and bring him safe, safe into his heavenly kingdom.

the righteous judge will do that. And so amidst the dangers and discouragements of normal gospel work, amidst the deaths that need to be died, much of it coming to his people, much of it coming to us through people, the reassurance is also intensely personal, isn't it?

Notice how Paul frees every single one of those. Verse 14, the Lord will repay. Verse 17, the Lord stood by me and strengthened me.

[43 : 59] Verse 18, the Lord will rescue me. Paul reassures us that the Lord is personally invested in his servants. And then finally, verses 19 to 21, Paul also shows us that there's refreshment amid discouragement.

Notice all the greetings here. Amidst all the discouragement and opposition Timothy is facing, amidst all the desertion that Paul's experienced, here's a real source of refreshment.

They are not alone. The Bible assures us that the gates of hell will never prevail against Christ's church, and that means that there will always be genuine co-laborers, fellow servants, brothers and sisters with whom we are bound together in the gospel.

People like verse 19, Prisca and Aquila, and the household of precious Onesiphorus. Verse 20, the Erastuses and Truphemuses of the world.

Verse 21, Eubulus and Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers. These greetings at the end are not incidental. Here is Paul giving further encouragement.

[45 : 19] He is showing Timothy that ministry is not isolated even when it feels lonely. There are others who love him, others who stand with Paul, others who share in the work.

And so with all that said, Paul closes with verse 22. Verse 22, as you press on with normal gospel work, the Lord be with your spirit, granting you his power to press on with normal gospel work and with the end in view.

And so he says, grace be with you all. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us.

Grant us your grace that we might not only know but also feel the weight of eternity. So much distracts us and dulls us to the unseen realities of heaven and hell. So help us, we pray, fix in our minds and our hearts the weight and wonder of the day when Jesus will appear again.

[46 : 37] And until that day, teach us to long for it and to love it. And so may these things serve to fuel our shared ministry here as we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.