

Final Words

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[0 : 00] So these, particularly if you've studied at Ridley, and the last words of 82-year-old Hugh Latimer to Bishop Nicholas Ridley. They were burnt at the stake for Christ, and as they stood there, tied back to back, about to be burnt, Latimer said to Ridley this, I think it's on the slide, Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man.

We shall this day light such a candle in England that I trust by God's grace shall never be put out. And their example was not put out.

Instead, it did encourage others to stand up for Jesus and to submit to Scripture above the authority of the church. They were indeed great last words. As we come to chapter 4 of 2 Timothy, tonight we come to Paul's last recorded words before his death.

And as we look at his final words, we'll see two big points. We'll spend most of our time on point one. But before we get there, let me just briefly recap, in case you've been away. You'll remember that Paul is in prison, and he's in Rome, and he's close to death.

So if you've got your Bibles there, have a look at verse 6. He says, For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.

[1 : 18] You see, he's about to die. He doesn't know exactly when he will die. It could be days or even a few months. For example, in verse 21, he asks for a cloak since winter is approaching, which indicates he still may be alive in a little while's time.

But he does know his death is imminent. His departure is close. And so Paul gives his last words to Timothy, particularly because he also knows that the gospel is under fire at Ephesus, where he's left Timothy.

The gospel is under fire because of false teachers who have risen up in the ranks there. And so he writes to Timothy this last recorded letter that we have of Paul to encourage Timothy to guard this gospel in the face of false teachers.

And we saw from chapter 1 that guarding the gospel means that Timothy is not to be ashamed of the gospel, but be willing to suffer for it. And then from chapter 2, we saw that Timothy is to persevere in following Christ and be a useful instrument for Christ, you might remember.

And trusting the gospel, trusting the gospel will not fade away, but will be guarded down through the generations. And then last week, we saw from chapter 3 that to guard the gospel, Timothy must live like Paul in these last days, you remember.

[2 : 38] And he is to live in the word so that he might be thoroughly equipped for every good work. And so guard the gospel. And tonight we'll see from chapter 4 that to guard the gospel, Timothy must preach it.

So point 1, verse 1, he says, In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I, Paul, give you, Timothy, this charge. Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. It's very clear, isn't it?

Timothy is to preach the word. That is, Timothy is to proclaim the gospel message about Jesus and its implications for how we live. He is to proclaim it from the Old Testament scriptures and from what he has learnt from Paul.

But do notice, it's not a word he is to preach. It's the word. That is, Timothy is not to preach any old word or any old gospel, but he is to preach the true gospel.

[3 : 42] The one that was handed down to him. Now, I'm assuming you've all heard the exciting news of last Saturday, I think it was, with Princess Charlotte's birth. Was that last Saturday?

Yep, last Saturday. It's on the slide. England's gone pink. It was very funny, very amusing. But Prince Charles... Oh, sorry. I'm not a romantic. It was very cute.

It was lovely. But even with the birth of Princess Charlotte, Prince Charles is still next in line for the throne.

And here he is there. And back in 2008, he said that if he does become king, instead of being known as defender of the faith, the Christian faith, which is every king has been known as all the way down or through the centuries, he wants to be known as defender of faith.

What's the difference? What's the difference? Well, instead of defending the Christian faith that was passed down from Jesus to the apostles like Paul, the faith of Latimer and Ridley that they died for, Charles wants to defend any faith.

[4 : 49] All faiths, all faiths, not the faith. You see, the word the makes all the difference. And Paul commands Timothy to preach the word, not any old word, but the gospel word that was entrusted to Timothy.

And notice how serious Paul is about this. Not only is this one of Paul's last commands to Timothy, but he says again, verse 1, he says, In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead.

And in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge. Paul kind of brings out the big guns, doesn't he? I charge you in God's presence, not just God's presence, but Jesus' presence.

And not just Jesus, but Jesus the king and the judge who will return. He's very serious about this charge to Timothy. Why? Because Paul knows that Jesus will return, that Jesus will judge all people, hold all people to account for what we have done, which is not good news for us.

But the gospel brings good news because it tells us that Jesus died to pay for our sins and rise again as king. So that if we believe in him, we can receive forgiveness.

[6 : 10] We can be saved from judgment. And so this gospel message must be proclaimed so that people can be saved.

And it must be proclaimed persistently. See verse 2 again? He says, Timothy is to be ready to preach at any moment.

In fact, the old King James says he is to be instant in preaching the word. You know, in a world of instant things like instant entertainment, instant coffee, Timothy is to be an instant preacher.

But the word for be ready here can actually mean be at one's task, which I think is really what Paul's idea is here. So not just sit back and be prepared, but rather actively be doing it persistently.

Be at the task. Keep doing it in season and out of season when it's convenient for him and his hearers or whether it's inconvenient for him. Either way is to keep at the task of preaching the word.

[7 : 21] But he is to do it with great patience and careful instruction because most people don't really want to hear it. For most people, the timing is always inconvenient.

And for most people, the only thing they want to hear is what suits them. See verses 3 and 4 there? Timothy is to persist in preaching with great patience because, verse 3, for the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.

Instead, to suit their own desires. They will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. I remember some years ago, on the next slide, this book came out.

Does anyone remember this? The Da Vinci Code? It sold well over 80 million copies, was translated into 44 languages, and caused a massive stir within the religious community.

[8 : 29] Now, why was it so popular? Well, because it basically said mainstream Christianity was wrong. It meant people didn't have to listen to us anymore.

They found something else. It said Jesus married Mary Magdalene and the church has been lying for 2,000 years. And I was surprised at first at how many people took all this in, how many people bought it without even checking the real facts.

But you see, it suited what their itching ears wanted to hear. Or take Joseph Smith, who founded Mormonism, who wanted more than one wife, so he introduced the practice of polygamy in 1830s. You know, lots of wives to suit his own desires. You see, because humanity has a sinful nature at its core, then we resist truth.

We don't want to be told that we are sinners, that some of our desires are wrong, that we are guilty and must look to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. I mean, no one likes being told they're wrong, do they?

[9 : 33] No one likes being dependent on someone else for help. We don't like that. So instead, people gather around themselves and listen to false teachers or even novelists who will tell them what their itching ears long to hear to suit their own desires.

And so because people are gathering false teachers for themselves to preach a false word that suits them, Timothy is to do the opposite. He is to persist in preaching the true word, regardless of whether it suits him or his hearers' desires, regardless of whether it's convenient or inconvenient. He is to preach the word because the false teachers won't preach the true word and because poor soon won't be able to preach the true word. Look at verse 5. But you, Timothy, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry, because, well, I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time for my departure is near.

Do you see the two reasons there? Timothy is to persist in proclaiming the true gospel, firstly because false teachers won't, and secondly because poor won't be able to very soon. And Paul wants to see the gospel guarded so that more people, those who do listen, can be saved. Now, as I've said before, we're not all pastors of a church, and none of us here are pastors of a church with false teachers.

[11 : 11] I don't think so, anyway. So how does Paul's charge to Timothy to persistently preach the word apply to us? How are we to persistently?

What's it look like for us? Well, I think there's two main ways. First, all Christians are to preach the word to one another. So I think I might have shown you this verse before on the next slide. It says, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. You see, even though we're not all teachers as Timothy was, there is a sense in which we are to teach one another, speaking the truth in love to one another. It doesn't have to be something new. It can be something the other person already knows. And we can do this over supper or during the week, sharing something we found encouraging from our own Bible reading. If someone's struggling, reminding them of God's promise in his word, that's a way of teaching one another, reminding each other.

We are to persistently preach the word in this way, even if it's inconvenient for us, and sometimes even if it's inconvenient for the other person.

[12 : 22] The second way we are to persistently preach the word is by persistently taking opportunities that come our way to share the gospel with non-Christians.

And so again, on the next slide, verse from Colossians, it says, Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Notice here, though, that preaching the word results from our actions. The way you act towards outsiders provides an opportunity for them to question you, and then you answer them.

It could be as simple as handing them an invite to our apologetics series, and then them saying, What's this all about? Well, then you give them an answer. That's gracious and appropriate.

It could be acting towards outsiders in love, helping them, and from your action comes a conversation in which you can point them to Jesus. And again, we're to take these opportunities in season and out of season, whether it's convenient for us or not.

[13 : 31] I know a man called Phil, who he just finished a long conference in the UK, and he boarded a plane for Australia. He was exhausted and looking forward to a quiet flight home.

And just as his head came to rest on the headrest behind him, down sat a person next to him. And the person next to him said, Oh, gee, God better give us a safe flight if he exists.

And at that point, he was a golden opportunity to say something about God, to proclaim the word in some small way. But Phil confessed. His first thought was, Oh, Lord, couldn't you have given me a quiet one?

But then he remembered this very passage, proclaim the word in season, out of season, when it's convenient or not. And so he took the opportunity.

And that's what it might look like for us, though not necessarily on a plane. But you get the idea.

We're to persistently make the most of every opportunity. And if we miss an opportunity, you know, sometimes I realize, Oh, I could have said that.

[14 : 30] And the moment's gone. Don't worry. Just pray that God would help you get the next opportunity. Well, this is Paul's big last instruction to Timothy to proclaim the word to both Christians

and non-Christians.

But Paul goes on to give some other small instructions in verses nine and following. For example, he says, Come and visit, bring Mark, get my cloak, and so on.

And in our English Bibles, if you've got your Bibles there, there's a heading that says Personal Remarks. Because the people who make up these headings don't really know what to do with all these lists of instructions.

You've got to remember that the headings are not part of the original Bible. They've been inserted by whoever does the NIV Bibles here. But I want to suggest that these verses are much more than just personal remarks.

For when we look at these verses, these last words of Paul, I think we see what it means to finish well, which is our second point. Paul has already spoken about finishing the race in verses seven and eight, and we'll come back to those.

[15 : 36] But have a look at verse nine and ten to start with. He says, Do your best, Timothy, to come to me quickly. For Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

Christens has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me, he says. Here we say, to start with, that finishing well means not getting distracted.

You see, what happened to Demas according to verse 10? Well, it says that he deserted Paul. Why? Because he loved this present world too much.

He got distracted and fell in love with this world rather than living for the world to come. In 1904, the Olympic Games were held at St. Louis, St. Louis, sorry, in the U.S.

and as usual, there was a marathon event and one of the runners was a Cuban mailman, believe it or not, called Felix, who was coming first for 18 miles.

[16 : 41] But then, he was distracted by, this is a true story, some apple trees in the field he was running next to. And so he stopped running, climbed over the fence, ate some apples, green apples they were, in the middle of an Olympic marathon event he did this, where he was coming first and then kept running.

The only problem was that some of the apples he had eaten were a bit rotten. And so, as he started running the race, the apples had a kind of laxative effect on him.

It's a true story. Such that he had to keep stopping to go to the toilet. You see, to finish well, which he didn't, means not getting distracted by the things around us, not falling in love with the world to the point where he takes you away from the race, away from Jesus.

In fact, if we get too distracted, if we are like Demas, who fell in love with this present world rather than the Lord Jesus, then we won't even finish the race. We'll miss out on the crown of righteousness that awaits.

And so, to finish well firstly means not being distracted. But secondly, and on the flip side, it means keeping focused, doesn't it, on Jesus to the end. That's the other thing it means to finish well.

[18 : 03] You see, Paul doesn't just want to cruise over the line in retirement mode. He actually keeps his foot on the accelerator, fixed on Christ and serving him.

And look at what he writes in the rest of verse 11 to 15. He says, Look, Luke is with me, so get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

I sent Tychicus to Ephesus and when you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas and my scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander, the metal worker, did me a great deal of harm.

The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him because he strongly opposed our message. You see, what Paul is doing here is much more than just personal remarks.

He's actually marshalling the troops. See, why does Paul send Tychicus to Ephesus? And why does he ask for his books and parchments? And why does he ask Mark who is helpful to Paul in his ministry?

[19 : 02] I mean, what ministry? He's in prison, isn't he? And it's not the comfortable minimum security house arrest he was under before. No, no, this prison was a filthy, disgusting cell dug underground.

It was damp, cold, and it would have stunk. It would have made the old Melbourne jail look like the Hilton. But here is Paul and he thinks it's his ministry headquarters.

Can you hear him? Oh, Tychicus, could you go to Ephesus and help the church out there? Oh, Timothy, bring my scrolls. We've got some work to do. Don't forget the parchments. This to work. I'll bring Mark because he can help me in my work.

Watch out for Alexander but keep going. You see, Paul is not dead yet. He knows he'll die soon but he doesn't slow down, does he? For as long as he has breath, for as long as he is able, he will keep serving his Lord Jesus till the very end.

And that's what it means to finish well. In fact, if you go back to verse 7 for a moment that we skipped before, you can translate the original text of verse 7 like this.

[20 : 13] He says, you can say, I am fighting the good fight. I am running the race. I am keeping the faith. Paul, in other words, is still active in serving Jesus.

He hasn't hung up the gloves yet. He's not going to cruise over the line even though he's in a cell on death row. He will keep serving Jesus in whatever way he can to the end.

Of course, it's not easy to do this and so it's worth asking what motivated and enabled Paul to keep running the race like this. What was it that made him keep going even after everyone else deserted him initially anyway?

Well, it was by remembering who was with him and what awaited him. Who was with him and what awaited him. Have a look at verse 16. He says, at my first defence no one came to my support. But everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

[21 : 16] And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

In verse 17, who is with him? Yeah, it's not rhetorical. I'm just making sure you're still with me. Who was with him? The Lord. Yeah, Jesus. The Lord Jesus was with him.

So Paul knew that. Paul knew Jesus was with him every step of the way. It's how he starts the chapter, remember? Verse 1, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus. You see, Paul may be in prison but he's not alone.

He's in the presence of God and his Lord Jesus. It's like David in Psalm 27. He's confident that the Lord is with him to help him. And Paul saw this in action when Jesus rescued him from being thrown to the lions.

You see, in the Roman legal system you were allowed to make your defence, your initial defence at an initial trial and if your defence wasn't convincing then you wouldn't go on to a second of hearing.

[22 : 18] You'd just go straight to the lions and shoot up. But it seems Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, had given Paul the words to say so that Paul was saved at his initial hearing. The gospel was guarded, more than that, was heard by all the Gentiles, he says.

Of course, Paul knew that this reprieve wouldn't be for long. At that time, you see, the Roman emperor was Nero. Nero was a lunatic. He was delighted in killing Christians.

And verse 18, of course, sounds like that Jesus will rescue Paul from every earthly trial. But I don't think he's talking about being rescued from those sorts of earthly trials, prison or death.

I suspect he's talking about being rescued from every evil temptation to give up. And instead, Jesus will keep him strong to the end.

See, Paul was able to run the race because he knows who is with him. He knows Jesus is with him to help him to keep going, to help him to keep guarding the gospel with the help of the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 25] Chapter 1, verse 14. So that's why he says at the end of verse 18, all glory be to Jesus because he's the one who is helping me, enabling me to keep running the race.

But Paul also knows what awaits him at the end of his race. So come back with me to verse 8. He says, 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. Or verse 18, he will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. You see, Paul knows what awaits him at the end of his race, doesn't he? It's the victor's crown, the crown of righteousness as sharing Christ's heavenly kingdom and his glorious future impacts how he lives in the present.

It motivates him to keep serving Jesus in whatever way he can. It shapes how he uses his time, even his last few days or weeks. And it motivates him to keep proclaiming the word and to finish well.

One of the first funerals I ever conducted was for a man called Bob Lormer. He died of a heart attack at the age of 92.

[24 : 44] And the morning he suffered his heart attack, the morning that he had his heart attack, he was actually off to run a Bible study group at his retirement village. It's incredible.

Now, not all of us will be well enough to do that at that age. In fact, not all of us will live to that age. But here was Bob running the race for as long as he was able, to the very end, doing what he could to serve the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. Why? Well, because he knew that the Lord Jesus had died for him, was with him, and would one day bring him into glory and to his heavenly kingdom.

May we continue to run the race serving the Lord Jesus in whatever way we can, remembering he is the one who died for us, is with us, and will bring us into his heavenly kingdom.

May we be able to say, like Bob and like Paul, I have run the race, I have fought the fight, I have kept the faith.

[25 : 50] Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the example of the apostle Paul. We thank you for his last recorded words in the letter of 2 Timothy.

And father, we pray that you would help us to take opportunities that come our way to preach your word, your gospel, to one another, to those around us.

And father, help us to serve you in whatever way we can, knowing that you are always with us, and that you not only died for us, but that you will also bring us into your heavenly kingdom.

Help us to finish well, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[27 : 01] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.