

Final Words and Finishing Well

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[0 : 0 0] Well, how about I just quickly pray for us, and then we'll get underway. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that it continues to teach us about who you are, and what you've done for us.

And we ask this morning that you might give us minds to understand it, and hearts to live in light of it. We ask it for your glory. Amen. Well, I thought I'd start this morning with some famous last words.

First, Lord Palmerston, a minister in the British government, on his deathbed, said this to his doctor, die, my dear doctor, why, that's the last thing I shall do.

Apparently he had a very dry sense of humour. On the next slide, John Sedgwick, General of the Union Army, his last words were, they couldn't hit an elephant at this distance, and he was shot by the Confederates.

Of course, there are more moving examples of famous large words, like that of 82-year-old Hugh Latimer, who with his fellow Bishop Nicholas Ridley, after who Ridley College is named, they were burnt at the stake for Christ.

[1 : 0 5] And as they stood back to back, about to be burnt, Latimer said to Ridley, be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle in England, as I trust by God's grace shall never be put out.

And their example was not put out, but it encouraged others to stand up for Jesus and the authority of Scripture. They were great last words, weren't they?

And as we come to chapter 4 this morning, we have 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 this morning on point 1, but let me first briefly recap.

You'll remember that Paul is in prison in Rome, and he is close to death. If you have your inserts there from the Holman, have a look there at verse number 6.

Paul writes, For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close, he says. Paul knows his time for his death is close.

[2 : 1 1] He doesn't know exactly when he will die, though. It could be days or even months. For example, in verse 21, he asks for a cloak since winter is coming, which indicates that he may still be alive in the coming weeks or even months.

You see, he doesn't know exactly when he will die, but he does know it's not far away. His departure is close, he says. He also knows the gospel is under fire from certain false teachers at Ephesus, as we've seen, where Timothy is the senior pastor of the church.

And so, as we've seen, Paul writes this letter to Timothy to encourage him to guard the gospel. From chapter 1, we saw that this means that Timothy is not to be ashamed of the gospel, but to be willing to suffer for it.

And then from chapter 2, we saw that Timothy is to persevere in the gospel and even pass it down to future generations so that the gospel is guarded throughout time. And then last week, we saw from chapter 3 that to guard the gospel, Timothy must live like Paul in these last days and live in the word.

And today, we'll see from chapter 4 that to guard the gospel, Timothy must firstly proclaim it, which brings us to point 1, verse 1. Paul writes, Now, Timothy is to proclaim the message, or literally the word.

[3 : 46] That is, Timothy is to proclaim the gospel about Jesus and its implications for how we live. He is to proclaim it from the Old Testament scriptures that he has and from what he's being taught by Paul.

And do you notice the importance of this command? And not only is it one of Paul's last commands to Timothy, but Paul also uses the phrase, I solemnly charge you. But even more than that, he charges Timothy before God and Christ Jesus.

It's as though Paul brings in the big guns, so to speak, to kind of add weight to his charge to Timothy. It's as though he says, In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, the King and Judge, proclaim his gospel.

You see the weight with which Paul makes this last command? It's a sense of seriousness and urgency, isn't there? And I wonder whether this is because Paul knows that salvation is at stake.

For he speaks about Christ's return when he will judge the living and the dead and establish his kingdom. And only those who hear the gospel message about Jesus and believe in him will be safe from judgment and enjoy the kingdom fully.

[4 : 57] And so preach the gospel, he says to Timothy, so that people will hear and be saved. You see, when Jesus returns and there is judgment day, the things of this world, what the world says is important, it's not going to matter that much.

You know, where we live, what job we do, where we send our children to school. I mean, they're important decisions. We had to decide where to send our children to school when we moved to Melbourne. They're important decisions, don't get me wrong.

But on that last day, they're not going to matter a whole lot, are they? What will matter is if we and others know Jesus, if we believe in him. And so if you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus, you don't know if you'll be safe on that final day, then please talk to me or someone else here so that we can share with you the message about Jesus, which saves and ensures a place in heaven for you.

But also notice that this message, Timothy is to proclaim, is not a message. Rather, he's to proclaim the message. That is, Timothy is to not preach any old word or gospel, but he is to preach the gospel that was handed down to him.

On the 14th of November 2008, Prince Charles turned 60 years old. And questions were again raised about whether he will ever be king since the queen is doing so well, not to mention William and Kate are now being groomed.

[6 : 18] But if he does become king, instead of being known as defender of the faith, Charles wants to be known as defender of faith.

That is, all faiths. You know, instead of being defending the Christian faith that was handed down from Jesus to the apostles like Paul, that the faith that Ridley and Latimer died for, Charles wants to defend all faiths.

You see, the word the makes a huge amount of difference, doesn't it? But what Timothy was to proclaim was the gospel message that he was entrusted with. For this is the message that saves.

And he's to proclaim it persistently. See verse 2 again? He says, Proclaim the message. Persist in it, whether convenient or not. Rebuke, correct and encourage with great patience and teaching, he says.

Timothy is to persist in proclaiming this message. Other translations which you may be familiar with actually read, Be prepared or be ready in season or out of season.

[7 : 20] In fact, the old King James Version says he is to be instant in season or out of season. You know, in the world of instant entertainment and instant coffee, Timothy was to be an instant preacher, if you like.

But it's more than that. He's more than just to be ready to preach in an instant. He was to actively persist in preaching it. He was to persist in proclaiming the gospel and the teachings that came with it, whether it was convenient or not.

Whether false teachers were opposing him or not. He's to persist in it, says Paul. For others will not teach this gospel.

See verse 3? It says, Now I'm not sure if you've noticed, particularly teenagers in society today, they often get bored very quickly of things.

Kids often get bored very quickly. You buy a present for them one Christmas and the next present, it's in the garbage or something like that. They need the latest thing, the next new thing on the market. And it seems something like that was happening at Timothy's church.

[8 : 40] It seems as though people were bored of the message. They wanted to graduate onto something else, something new. But friends, we're never to graduate from the gospel.

And we're never to go beyond it, to add to it or subtract from it. We're never to tire from hearing the gospel, but rather grow deeper in our understanding of it and living in light of it.

For it is the message that saves, you see. And so likewise, Timothy is not to graduate from the truth of the gospel, but verse 5, Now the word serious in verse 5 seems to suggest that Timothy can ever smile or laugh.

That's not quite the case. The original word also means self-controlled, which is a better translation here. For Timothy needs self-control if he is to be patient, verse 2. If he is to endure hardship, verse 5.

He needs self-control if he is to instruct his opponents with gentleness, without getting sucked into his arguments, as we saw at the end of chapter 2. And so with self-control, Timothy is to keep doing the work of an evangelist and fulfill his ministry by faithfully persisting in proclaiming the word.

[10 : 00] For others will not faithfully proclaim it, you see. And soon, Paul just won't be able to. See verse 6? He says, For or because I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me in the future the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day.

And not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing. You see, Timothy is to persist in proclaiming the gospel. Not only because false teachers won't do it, but also because soon Paul won't be able to do it.

It's as though Paul is handing over the baton here to Timothy. It's as though he's saying, You keep going, Timothy. I'm not going to be around much longer. It's over to you.

So you persist in proclaiming the word. Now, as I've mentioned before, not all of us are pastors of churches. And none of us here are pastors of a church with false teachers, I'm glad to say.

[11 : 06] But the Bible does talk about a way in which all of us are to proclaim the word. For example, in Colossians 3, which comes up on the screen, Paul writes, You see, even though we are not all teachers as Timothy was, there is a sense in which we are all to teach one another, speak 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 morning tea. As we talk about what encouraged us or what challenged us from the Bible this morning.

We can do it at our Bible study groups as we contribute to group discussions. We can do it one-to-one as we share with each other our favourite Bible verse or what we've been learning in our quiet times.

Or bringing the Bible to bear on a particular social issue. In these ways, we can teach one another. We can proclaim the word, the message to each other. And so here's a bit of a challenge for you.

Why not this morning tea this morning, after church this morning, why not after you talk about the weekend, ask someone, now what's your favourite verse? Or what have you learnt from the Bible in the last month or so?

[12 : 17] I know it's intimidating. But why not do that? So that we can keep proclaiming the word to each other. Encourage each other to keep going. But it's not just to each other we're to proclaim the word.

We can also do it to non-Christians. And again, we need to be clear, we're not Timothy who is to actively persist in preaching it as an evangelist, pastor kind of person. However, we're to be ready and prepared to take the opportunities that come our way.

Whether it's in season or out of season, whether it's convenient or not. I know a man called Phil. Phil had just finished a big conference for work over in the UK. And he boarded a plane back to Australia.

And he was exhausted from his week-long conference. And so he's very much looking forward to a quiet flight home. And just as his head hit the back of his headrest, a person came up to him, sat down next to him and said, gee, God better give us a safe flight home if he exists.

Now, here was a golden opportunity for Phil to proclaim the word, to say something about God to this person. But Phil confessed that his first thought was, oh Lord, couldn't you have given me someone quiet?

[13 : 30] But he remembered this very verse, proclaim the word when it's convenient or not, in season, out of season. So he took the opportunity. That's what it might look like for us.

I mean, it doesn't, it may not be on a plane, but you get the idea, don't you? We're to be ready to make the most of every opportunity. And as the Apostle Peter says, always be prepared to give an answer for the hope we have.

In fact, I've been so encouraged by a couple of people who were here at this service this morning. One person has been saying, oh, Andrew, I've been trying to make sure I get Jesus into the conversations at work. I'm going, good on you, that's terrific.

Another person took an opportunity to talk to his bus driver about Jesus. Taking those opportunities to proclaim the word. It's great. Well, this is Paul's last big instruction to Timothy, to proclaim the word to both Christian and non-Christian.

But Paul goes on to give some other small instructions in verse 9 and following. For example, he says, come and visit. He also says to Timothy, bring Mark, bring my cloak and my parchments and so on.

[14 : 31] Now, in the Bibles, people have inserted little headings. They're not on your inserts, but they're on your pew Bibles. And the little heading often says, personal remarks. Because the people who make up these headings don't quite know what to do with these last few verses.

But I want to suggest that they're much more than just personal remarks. For when we look at these last words of Paul, I think we see what it means to finish well. Which brings us to our final point, point 2.

Paul has already spoken about finishing the race and receiving the crown in verses 7 to 8. And then he says in verses 9 and 10, Make every effort to come to me soon. For Demas has deserted me because he loved this present world and has gone to Thessalonica.

Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me, he says. Now, here we see that to finish well firstly means not being distracted.

You see, what happened to Demas in verse 10? He abandoned Paul, didn't he? He presumably abandoned the gospel as well. Why? Well, it says because he loved this present world too much.

[15 : 37] He got distracted, you see, and fell in love with this life rather than living for the next. In 1904, the Olympic Games were held at St. Louis in the US and as usual there was a marathon event.

One of the runners was a Cuban mailman called Felix and he was coming first for that first 18 miles. But then he got distracted. He was running past some fields, you see, and in the fields were some apple trees.

True story. And so he stopped running, jumped the fence, and went and ate some apples. Green apples, they were. Now, as it turned out, some of the apples were a little rotten and so as he started to run the race again, the apples actually had a kind of laxative effect on him.

And so he had to keep stopping to go to the toilet and he didn't win the race. True story. You see, to finish well means not being distracted by the things around us. You're not falling in love with the world to the point where it takes us away from the race and away from Jesus.

In fact, if we get too distracted, if we are like Demas who falls in love with this present world rather than living for the world to come, then we won't even finish the race at all. We'll miss out on the crown of righteousness that awaits us.

[16 : 46] So don't be distracted, says Paul. That's what it means to finish well. But the flip side to not being distracted is to keep serving, keep running. Keep serving Jesus to the very end. And it's the other thing it means to finish well.

You see, Paul doesn't just cruise over the line in retirement mode, does he? He keeps his foot on the accelerator. Look at what he writes in verses 11 to 15. He says, only Luke is with me.

And then he says, bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry. I have sent Tychius to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak I left in trowers with Carpus, as well as the scrolls, especially the parchments.

Alexander the coppersmith did great harm to me. The Lord will repay him according to his works. Watch out for him yourself, because he strongly opposed our words. Now, you see what Paul is doing?

It's as though he's marshalling the troops. You know, bring Mark with you, Timothy. Bring the parchments and scrolls and so on. See, why does Paul send Tychius to Ephesus? Why does he ask for his books and parchments?

[17 : 47] Why does he ask for Mark, who is helpful to Paul in his ministry? What ministry? He's in prison, isn't he? And it's not the comfortable minimum security house arrest that he was under before.

No, no. This prison was a filthy, disgusting cell dug underground. It would have been damp, and it would have been cold, and it would have stunk, because there were no special prison toilets, and it would have made the old Melbourne jail look like the Hilton, by comparison.

But Paul thinks it's his ministry headquarters. Tychius, you go to Ephesus and encourage the saints there. Timothy, bring Mark to me. Kingdom parchments and the scrolls is what we've got work to do.

Let's keep running. See, Paul hasn't given up. He hasn't finished running the race. He wants to keep serving Jesus to the end, and this is what it means to finish well. In fact, if you go back to verse 7 for a moment, you can actually translate the original language as this.

I am fighting the good fight. I am running the race. I am keeping the faith. In other words, Paul is still actively serving Jesus.

[18 : 53] He hasn't hung up his gloves yet, so to speak. He's not cruising over the line. He's serving Jesus to the very end, even though he's in a prison cell on death row. He will keep serving Jesus in whatever way he can.

That's what it means to finish well. One of the first funerals I ever conducted was for a man called Bob Lormer. He died of a heart attack, and the morning he suffered his heart attack, he was actually off to lead a Bible study group.

See, here is a man that knew what it was to finish well, to keep running the race, serving Jesus to the very end. Bob, you see, finished well, just like Paul was doing.

Of course, it's not easy to do this, and so it's worth asking, what motivated or enabled Paul to keep running like this? What was it that made him keep going on, even after everyone deserted him at his initial trial?

Well, it was by remembering who was with him and what awaited him. Have a look at verse 16 to 18. He says, At my first defence, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me.

[20 : 00] May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me so that the proclamation might be fully made through me and all the Gentiles might hear.

So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. You see in verse 17, who was with Paul? The Lord. Jesus was with Paul. You see, Paul knew Jesus was with him every step of the way.

It's how he begins his chapter. He charges Timothy before God or 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 Christ, his Lord. And Paul saw this in action when Jesus rescued him from being thrown to the lions. In the Roman legal system, you're allowed to make an initial defense.

[20 : 55] And if your initial defense wasn't any good, then off the lions with you straight away. But it seems Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, had given Paul the words to say so that Paul was saved and the gospel heard by all the people there.

Of course, Paul knew this reprieve wouldn't be for long. And at this time, you see, the Roman emperor was probably Nero and Nero delighted in killing Christians. Now, verse 18, of course, though, does sound like Jesus will rescue Paul, but I don't think it's talking about rescuing him from his impending death and prison.

Rather, I suspect it's talking about Jesus will rescue him from every evil temptation to give up and instead keep him strong and bring him safely into his heavenly home.

You see, Paul is able to run the race because he knows who is with him. He knows Jesus is with him and by the Holy Spirit, Jesus enables Paul to keep going, strengthens Paul to the very end.

That's why at the end of verse 18, Paul doesn't say, all glory to me who's run the race. No, no. He says, all glory be to him, to the Lord Jesus forever and ever.

[22 : 07] For it's Jesus who's with him, enabling him to keep running the race. And lastly, Paul also knows what awaits him. Verse 18 says that Jesus will bring him safely into his heavenly kingdom.

That's where Paul is headed. Paul is ever aware, you see, that Jesus will return and will establish his kingdom and bring him safely home. In fact, he mentions Jesus' returning kingdom in verse 1 and verse 8 and he mentions the heavenly home in verse 8 and here again in verse 18.

And the point is, Paul is certain, you see, Jesus will return and his heavenly home is secure. And this glorious future motivates Paul to keep going.

It impacts how he lives, you see, by serving Jesus to the very end. It shapes how he uses his time even in these last few days or weeks of his life.

I know of a lady called Barbara who's been told that she doesn't have long to live. Her daughter comes to our church actually and I was speaking to her daughter one day and she was saying that her mum Barbara, even though she's been told this, she doesn't want to sit around and mope.

[23 : 15] No. In her condition, she can manage one visit a day and so she does one visit a day. She visits a parishioner from her church to encourage them or she might visit a non-Christian neighbour or friend and prays that she might have an opportunity to talk to Jesus with them.

Here is a lady who knows what it means to finish well. How can she do this? Well, I take it because she knows who is with her and what awaits her. She knows Jesus is with her to strengthen her and she knows she has heaven waiting for her.

You see, Paul describes the Christian life as a race to keep running, a fight to keep fighting, which means it requires effort, doesn't it? You know that if you have been a Christian for any amount of time. And so, we are to remember what awaits us, that it will be worth it, that it might motivate us to keep going.

And we are to remember that we don't run alone. Jesus is with us to graciously enable us to keep running. That's why I love the way that Paul finishes his letter in that very last verse, verse 22.

He says, The Lord be with your spirit and grace be with you. May the Lord and his enabling grace be with us all so that our last words might be, I have run the race, I have fought the fight, I have kept the faith.

[24 : 35] Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the gospel of Jesus. We thank you that it is incredibly good news that it tells of your son who gave his life for us, that we might be forgiven and given the hope of eternity with you.

Father, we pray that you would help us to follow the examples of people in history and in your word. Father, we thank you for these examples, the example of Paul. Help us, Father, we pray to do what we can to proclaim the word and to finish well.

Enable us to do this by your spirit. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.