

Paul's Last Letter

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in 2 Timothy and chapter 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved child, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a man that dwelled first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now I am sure dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you, through the laying on of my hands.

For God gave us a spirit, not of fear, but of power and of love and self-control. Now, as we know, this is coming to the end of Paul's letters.

He's written a lot of letters, and this is a very personal letter to Timothy. We find that before this, the letters have been to particular churches, like the church in Rome and in Ephesus and in Colossae and Ephesus.

[1 : 29] But now we come to these final pastoral epistles, letters to Timothy and to Titus. And Paul is on death row.

We know that. We often talked about that. And he's living in a time of real persecution. And it's really a call, if you were to sum it up, a call to perseverance in the faith, particularly in times of persecution.

And we are living more and more, I suppose, in days where it's becoming harder and harder for the Christian. Even as you look back over your own lifetime, you see that there are things that we had total freedom in that we no longer have.

And there's a very subtle movement going on where the freedom that we completely enjoyed is being strangled bit by bit.

There's a kind of a suffocating atmosphere. And it's quite, sometimes it's every so often you stop and you look around and you think, my word, it's becoming increasingly harder for the Christian in this life, in this world, in this particular nation that we're in.

[2 : 42] But we mustn't despair because God is in control of everything. And Paul was living at a time where it was far harder to be a Christian than it is for the likes of you and me here today.

And so he's encouraging Timothy in the faith, in the face of persecution, in the face of all these things. And that's one of the wonderful things about Paul because here's a man who has suffered like few have for his faith.

And yet he's really encouraging Timothy. And he's saying, look, this is the only way to go. It's the only life there is. What an honor it is to be called by God to serve him.

Basically, that's what Paul is saying. It's a most wonderful privilege to serve the Lord. Yes, I'm in prison. Yes, I'm going to lose my life. But in the great sphere, in the great counting everything, it's nothing.

The great thing, the great honor, the great privilege is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Paul is writing to this young man, Timothy. And Timothy, as we know, was a man who, it would appear from the letters, was timid by nature and somebody who didn't keep well.

[4 : 00] And Paul was seeing in Timothy a great future. Because he believed that Timothy was a man that the Lord was going to use. And straight away, we see the great difference between the world's estimation and the church's estimation.

Or if we should say of God's estimation. Because it's possible that even sometimes the church may be dismissive of somebody. If Timothy was to present himself and say, well, you know, I feel that I'm somebody that here I am.

I feel very inadequate and don't feel up to this work. And I don't keep well at all. And people might be wondering, is this the kind of passion? The world would certainly say, oh, no.

We need somebody who is good health and somebody who is dynamic. Somebody who is forward-looking. Somebody who is self-reliant. Somebody who is going to push on. But Paul saw in Timothy that he was a man that God was able to use.

And that's the important thing. That somebody that God will use. And God uses us in lots of different ways. Sometimes publicly and sometimes privately.

[5 : 09] But God is going to use his people. And the thing is that we are available to be used by the Lord. And often we might not even realize. The great thing is that we have to say to the Lord.

Lord, use me wherever I am. Whatever I do. Just use me. And it's on the great day we will discover just how much the Lord acknowledges what we do.

Because as we know, even the giving of a cup of water in his name. Anything that's done by faith will carry its own reward. And the Lord is taking note of all these things.

So here is Paul. And as we've said it often before. There is no sign of self-pity. It would be very easy for the Apostle Paul to say.

Look, I was way back. I was heading out into a distinguished career. I had sat at the feet of Gamaliel.

[6 : 04] Who was the great mind. The great teacher in the Jewish religion. And Paul was somebody who had learnt there. He had been at the...

It was like being in the Oxford. Or the Cambridge. It's if he had been there at the very highest in the land. And he had a career mapped out. He was somebody of great potential.

And he had all the right degrees and qualifications in the Jewish faith and the Jewish religion. But that all changed. He could have been a somebody.

As far as his world was concerned. But Paul was... He became... As far as the world was concerned in some ways a nobody. In order that Christ would become somebody through his life and through his teaching.

And so Paul is here in prison. And as I say, from a human point of view. It would be very easy to become full of self-pity. And self-pity is very much something that we're prone to in life.

[7 : 06] The poor me syndrome. And don't get me wrong. Because there's no doubt that there are times when we feel overwhelmed. And there are times when it's tough.

And it's very easy to begin to wallow in self-pity. But if there was anybody who could have wallowed in self-pity. Surely it was the Apostle Paul. Because he had served the Lord in the most zealous way possible.

He had given his life. He had been stoned. He had been shipwrecked. He had been imprisoned often. He had been beaten up so often. Just for serving the Lord. And here he is.

He's waiting for the executioner to come. So it would be very easy to say to the Lord. Lord, look at all I've done for you. I have been as obedient. I have gone where you wanted me to go.

I have done what you wanted me to do. I didn't do what you didn't want me to do. And this is it. This is what's happening. But we don't find any of that. Because Paul believed completely that God was in control.

[8 : 12] And we need to have that faith. It's only faith that can do that. Particularly when things are against you. And the chips are down. And life is maybe even sort of dissolving to a certain extent in front of your eyes.

Everything that you'd hoped and planned. And it's just not happening. It's very easy to think of it. Is the Lord in this? Yes, he is. But we need the faith to believe that.

If you don't have faith, we cannot see it. We cannot say, oh. You know, it's one thing to say, oh, I think the Lord's in this. It's another thing altogether to say, I don't know what's happening. But I know.

See, the apostle. See how assured the apostle was in life. But I, verse 12. There was this absolute assurance in the Lord that Timothy had.

Assured of his own salvation. Assured of what had been entrusted to him. He had this assurance. And that so helps when we meet the knocks and the troubles in life.

[9 : 30] That we have this faith, this assurance in the Lord. Otherwise, we're going to sink. So it's so important that we're focused upon the Lord.

And so Paul is at pains to make Timothy realize the greatness of the work that he has been called to. And again, Paul underlines the fact that he himself is an apostle.

It was one of the problems Paul had as he went around preaching in different places and bringing the word. Because a lot of people weren't accepting his apostleship.

And Paul was having to try and prove his apostleship over and over again. And one of the reasons was that an apostle had to be a witness of the risen Lord Jesus.

And that's why the apostle said that he was an apostle out of time. In other words, the Lord Jesus had revealed himself. The risen Christ had revealed himself after his resurrection.

[10 : 34] On the road to Damascus, Paul was given a clear vision of the risen Jesus. Something he never forgot for his entire life.

And that is why he could be an apostle. Because he was given to see. He was given a sight of the risen Jesus. And not only that, but an apostle had to be commissioned.

Had to be specifically commissioned by the Lord Jesus. And an apostle wasn't somebody who was commissioned by other apostles. But specifically commissioned by Jesus Christ.

And that again is what Paul experienced. In Acts 26 he tells us, Paul says at that time, I have appeared to you, this is what the Lord said, I have appeared to you for this purpose.

To appoint you to serve me and to bear witness to the things which you have seen. And to those things which I will appear to you.

[11 : 37] Delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles to whom I send you. So here are the words of Christ. Appearing to Paul, to Saul and commissioning Saul.

Paul. And so that's why Paul is reminding Timothy that he is an apostle. So there were these two things. Where his apostleship began and its purpose.

And you see that his apostleship began by the will of God. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God. And very often you find that he begins his letters in the same way.

I am an apostle by the will of God. So Paul is saying here, it wasn't the church who called me one day and said, You know, Paul, I think, or we think it would be a great idea if you would become an apostle.

We're going to set you aside to work for the Lord. It hadn't come that way. It was by the will of God. But God had sovereignly, he had called and he began with the will of God and the call of God.

[12 : 49] And it's the same, we could say, with regard to the ministry. That the ministry, the entering into the ministry begins with a call within a person's own experience.

The church will ratify that. And again, there are some people who believe that they have been called and maybe the church haven't ratified.

There are some people that the church think ought to be in the ministry. And yet the individual says, well, I don't feel called. So sometimes there are tensions along the way in these sort of things.

But it has to begin, I believe, with an inward call. Because that's how it began, and it has always been in this way. And it's the same to a certain extent even with regard to our own salvation.

It begins with a call. There are two calls in the gospel. There is what we term the general call of the gospel. And there is the inward call of the gospel. Now, today, as we sit here, every single one of us is, and wherever the gospel is preached, we're under the general call of the gospel.

[13 : 59] In other words, we hear the word of God. And in that word, as it is proclaimed, people are invited. People are called to accept the Lord Jesus Christ.

That goes out the great invitation. Jesus said, come unto me. Often he referred in that way, spoken that way. Come unto me. Come unto me. Come unto me.

There's the invitation. The invitation goes out. This is what we term the general call of the gospel. It's an outward call of the gospel. But through that outward call of the gospel, through the outward word, also comes the inward word, where the Holy Spirit applies that word with power, effectively, effectually.

It applies it in such a way that you come to receive, you come to believe in Jesus. There is a change takes place.

And again, it's by the will of God. And we have to accept that. There are some people who will say, oh no, it is by the will of God.

[15 : 13] And that's why it's so important. Because people, a lot of people have this. And we've said it often enough before. A lot of people will try and hide under this.

And say, well the reason that I am not a Christian, or I am not in a personal relationship with the Lord, is because the work begins with God.

And if the work begins with God, then he will save me. If he's not going to save me, then there's nothing I can do. Well, that's not what the Bible says. The Bible says, make your calling and your election sure.

There's a responsibility put upon ourselves. We are called, this is a command, you leave that part to God. That's his part, is to save you. Our part, we're told in the scripture, is to seek, is to search, is to call, is to pray, is to plead.

All these things. And we're told that the one that seeks will find. The one who knocks, the door will be opened. The one who asks will receive.

[16 : 22] Doesn't say that you'll receive immediately. But the soul that truly seeks will find. And the Lord will say, well, my part is the saving.

You can't save yourself. Your part is the seeking. The Lord says, my part is the saving. And that is how we are to go. We are to go to him.

Because if we try, and I know I've been there trying to reach this point of salvation ourselves, we can't.

We cannot try and make ourselves believe. I used to try and do that. Trying to say, right, trying to jump this gap from where I was into salvation. And I couldn't do it.

And I was trying to say, right, I believe. It didn't work. Until I came to the point where I says, Lord, I'm finished. You have to save me.

[17 : 15] I cannot. And it's only when we reach that point of absolute need, where we're cast upon the Lord, is where he is then the one who will save us.

And as many people will know, the experience, the outworking of it can be so gradual. Some people, it's like Saul of Tarshish. They know, they can pinpoint, they can tell just when that experience happened.

There are other people who will never be able to tell. For them, it's just like the dawning of the day. And you cannot, one moment it's dark. And then there's that slow, gradual, where the light is gradually coming in and in and in.

And then everything is clear. So it is very often with regard to the way God works. The seed has been planted. But the outworking of that, the growing of that seed, sometimes is so slow within our own experience.

But anyway, time's moving on. The apostle highlights the purpose of his apostleship. According to the promise of life, by the will of God, according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus.

[18 : 36] That's why we share the gospel. That's why we preach the gospel. Because of the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus. Isn't this a wonderful thing?

Because, you see, it's a promise. God has made a promise. And the promise is that whosoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ will not perish.

God has done the work in sending his son. Jesus has done the work by dying on the cross. And we're now told, whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

It's a most wonderful thing to be able to tell people. Here is a person. Somebody who will never, ever, ever let you go.

Somebody who will be with you through thick and thin, through day and night, through life and death. Somebody who is real. Somebody who is powerful.

[19 : 32] And, you know, sometimes people can feel ashamed about the gospel. It's one of the things that the apostle was saying, look, I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Again, he mentions it here. Which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed. A lot of people are ashamed.

They talk of the shame of the cross. But you know, the wonderful thing is Jesus is not somebody that we ought to be ashamed of. The gospel is not something we should be ashamed of.

It's a good news of salvation to sinners. And it's life. This is the great thing. It's a promise of life. Right from the very beginning it was life.

The tree of life that was in the midst of the garden. There was a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There was a tree of life. And it is the promise of life that the Lord is giving. And we run right

through the Bible.

[20 : 33] It's life, life, life. Right to revelation. And there we find that the tree of life. We find it there that we eat of the tree of life. And we drink of the water of life. Both freely.

And this is what the Lord gives us. It's life. Life all the time. And then Paul prays for grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

You know we couldn't pray for greater. As somebody said grace for the worthless. Mercy, grace, mercy and peace.

Grace for the worthless. Mercy for the helpless. And peace for the restless. And that's so true. Because you know we are worthless before God.

As we are in and of ourselves. You go through the Bible. And it will show how unworthy we really are. But the Lord comes in his grace.

[21 : 34] And he says, I'm going to give you myself grace. We are helpless because we cannot do it ourselves. So he comes in his mercy towards us.

And we are restless. Because that's the nature of sin. We're on the run from God. There is no rest. There is no peace to the wicked.

The Bible tells us. But there is peace in Jesus Christ. So that's why Paul was always saying grace, mercy and peace. Grace for the worthless. Mercy for the helpless.

And peace for the restless. And then Paul says, I thank God whom I serve. As did my ancestors with a clear conscience. As I remember you constantly in my prayers day and night.

Isn't that wonderful? You know when Timothy would have got that letter. I could imagine opening that letter and seeing these words. I remember you constantly in my prayers day and night.

[22 : 33] I don't know what condition or what experience Timothy was going through when he got that letter. But whatever it was. It would have been just the most wonderful balm to his soul.

The apostle is praying for me. Day and night. And you know my friends. It's the most wonderful thing. To be prayed for.

When you are in the center of people's prayers. It is one of the most humbling things. To know that people are praying for you. And when people are praying for you.

You know it. You're conscious of the Lord's people praying for you. You know it's happening. And it is a humbling.

A truly humbling experience. And it's also a wonderful thing. To be praying for someone. It is a privilege to be praying for someone.

[23 : 33] And it works both ways. And so the apostle is praying for Timothy night and day. And Paul is remembering Timothy's tears. As I remember you.

I long to see you that I may be filled with joy. As I remember you tears. And there was this wonderful bond. Between Timothy and. You know there are wonderful bonds in the gospel. You and I know that. People that maybe you didn't ever knew before. But you know. And you come. And particularly. Particularly people that you have. A bond in the gospel. Whether it's somebody who has.

Encouraged you in the faith. Somebody you know that has been praying for you. I think I said this before. What I remember. It's just like what Paul was saying. When I was a student.

And I was preaching in this particular place. And I was feeling just. Just. So. So. Unworthy. So. Helpless.

[24 : 31] And this old elder came in. To see me. I was sitting in the vestry. And he spoke to me. And he said. You know. He said. I will pray for you. Every single day.

For as long as I live. I think I probably felt. A wee bit like. Timothy did at that moment. It was just. You're a man. I didn't know. But the way he said it.

I knew. That he was going to do just that. And these sort of things. We can't put a price. On. The like of that. Where the Lord's people. Are remembering.

And so there was this. There was this bond. And bonds grow in the gospel. Not just. Where somebody might come to faith. Through another person. But all the little bits. The strengthening. The encouragements. The words here and there. And the fellowship that we enjoy. All these things. Create wonderful bonds. And then again. Paul highlights.

[25 : 25] In verse 5. The wonderful privilege. That Timothy had. He highlights his upbringing. And you know. The upbringing is so important. Because. He says. I'm reminded.

Of your sincere faith. Faith. A faith that dwelled. First in your grandmother. And in your mother. You know. What a. What a privilege. What a privilege.

To grow up. Where you have. In a Christian home. Even if it's just one person. Within that home. That is a Christian. It's the most wonderful thing. I've said this often enough.

In the. In the last few years. Of her life. My granny lived with us. When we were in Calanish. She was very. Very bad. With. Rheumatism. And arthritis. And she was very disabled.

She couldn't sleep properly. Her room was across from mine. And she used to. She was one of those. Who often used to pray audibly. And I would wake in the night. And I would hear her praying. And praying. And praying for me.

[26 : 21] And you know. It was a wonderful thing. To have a granny like that. Who was praying. And I remember the day she died. I was away. And it's the first thing. Yes. I was sorry my granny died. But you know this.

I wasn't a Christian at the time. The first thing that hit me. Whoa. Granny's prayers are stopped. Because. I was almost relying on them. To a certain extent. But it's one of the most wonderful. Privileges. And that's what the privilege. That Timothy had. He had a grandmother. And a mother. Who had. Faith. In. In. In the Lord Jesus Christ.

And. He was saying. He goes on to say this. And I am sure. Dwells in you. For this reason. I remind you. To fan. The flame.

The gift of God. Which is in you. Through the laying on of my hands. For God. Gave us a spirit. Not of fear. But of power. And love. And self-control. Just in a minute.

[27 : 17] Time is going. The Lord doesn't give us. A spirit of fear. If we have fear. In our heart. It's not the Lord. Who gives us that fear. Yes. If we're out.

Let me say. If. We're out. Of Christ. I believe the Holy Spirit. Will convict us. And in that conviction. There will be.

A convincing. Of our sin. There is a fear. I remember it well. Often used to waken at night. Through the night. And still remember the fear.

If I die. I'm going to hell. I remember that fear. Fear. And it's an awful fear. I believe that. That is a fear.

That comes from the Holy Spirit. But when we come to faith. In Jesus Christ. The Lord is never the author. Of fear. That doesn't mean. That we will never have fear. In our heart. And there are lots of things.

[28 : 12] That can make us afraid. The disciples experience fear. Lots of Christians. Have experienced fear. Fear. The psalmist said. What time I am afraid. He talks about fear.

It's part and partial. Of living in a sinful world. But the Lord is not the author of fear. And yet there is another type of fear. That the Christian has.

Not the slavish fear. But the fear of reverence. The fear of. Just bowing down. Of respect. A fear of awe.

In the presence of God. That's a totally different type of fear. And that's a fear the Christian has. But we're told. That God has given us a spirit. Not of fear. But of power.

And. We know that this. This power that comes of God. Is the power that first enabled us to believe. That's what the apostle said in Romans. I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

[29 : 08] Of Christ. Because it is the power of God. The dynamite of God. That blows apart. All the resistance. That's already there within our heart. Bang. Pulls apart. And in comes.

This new life. And so there is this power within us. And it's a power. That enables us.

To live the Christian life. Because without this power we couldn't. It's a power that enables us. To fight temptation. It's not a power of ourselves.

It's his power working within us. That's why the apostle said. I can do all things through Christ. To strengthen me. Paul doesn't say. I can do all things. There was somebody.

Once reading the Bible. And that's the way it worked. The first part. At the bottom of the page. Was Paul says. I can do all things. And the man was saying. Oh Paul. You've lost yourself here. Turned over.

[30 : 03] Oh that's better. He said. Through Christ. To strengthen me. This was the first time. The man had read. He had become a Christian. Had read through the Bible. And he had never seen this before. And he thought. When Paul said that.

That Paul had taken leave of his senses. Paul. I can do all things. I'm saying. You can't Paul. Ah. But I can do all things. Through Christ. And that's. The strength that we have. Where we're given courage. To face things. That normally we couldn't. Where we're given. That grace. To bear things. That normally we couldn't. All these things. That God gives us. This power. To live for him. In his world. Because it's difficult. There are enemies all around us. And the biggest enemy. I know of. Is the enemy within me. I often say to the Lord. Lord save me for myself. Just so aware of the corruption. That is within me. [31 : 00] Save me for myself. So there are enemies all around. But the Lord gives us the power. And that's the amazing thing. At the end of the day. Every believer. Can say. Kept. How are we kept? We are kept by the power of God. That's what it says. We are kept by the power of God. And to salvation. Ready to be revealed. At the last time. And we see there's power. Not the spirit of fear. But of power. And of love. Love. And this love. Is a love that is seeking. To honour and to serve the Lord. A love. That seeks. The glory of God. Within our lives. It's a love that isn't ambitious. It's a love that wants. Really the best. For the cause of the Lord. Because this is what happens. When you become a Christian. You love God's people. You love God's day. You love God's word. [31 : 58] You love God's cause. You love all these things. That are his. Love. Is a great mark. Of God's people. The Lord said. That. That. That it would be the. The way that his people would know. That they would be known. By this love. This love that you have. For one another. This is what the Lord. Wants. This is. I believe it's one of the greatest. Desires. That the Lord has. As his people go through this world. Is that they display. A love. For one another. Love covers. A multitude of sins. Love. Love. Love. The best. For everybody else. That's how love works. Love. Love. Seeks. Not its own. Love. Keeps. No record. Of wrongs. Love. Is patient. Love. [32 : 56] Is kind. But all these things. You go to. Galatians. And look at the definition. Of love. And that's how our lives. Should be. And that's. The great testimony. Of. The believer. And I believe that. The church. Of Jesus Christ. Would have a far. Greater. Impact. In the world. If it displayed. The united love. That it. That it should display. Love. And self-control. We must have a balanced mind. And. I think one of the reasons. Paul is mentioning this. Is. This self-control. This balanced mind. Is. You're living in difficult days. Timothy. You're living in. Unreasonable days. And it's very easy. To lose control. When the pressure is on. That's. That's the hardest time. You know. When everything is going smooth. And your life. In these times. [33 : 51] Where. It's just. You're almost in a kind of free flow. It's very easy to. To feel that you're in control. And feel balanced. In everything. The pressure. There's no pressure. See when the pressure is on. And it's coming. You feel the heat of the pressure. It's very easy. To be irrational. To say the wrong things. And to do the wrong things. And to react in the wrong way. All pressure causes us often. To react in different ways. And that's why it's important. That the Christian. Exercises that self-control. It's not easy. Again. It's from the power. The power. We need the power. God's power. To enable us. To live in this way. So the great question. That we have to ask ourselves. This day is. Do we know. This power. Do we know. This love. Within our lives. If so. Let us. Seek that the Lord. Let us. The Lord will continue. [34 : 48] To fill our lives with it. If not. As I said earlier on. Go to the Lord. And ask him today. Lord. Come into my heart. Into my life. You know. You need the Lord Jesus. Jesus. And only he. Is able to do. He's. As I said. Our doing. Our part. Is to seek. His part. Is a saving. And he will. If you seek him. Let us pray. Lord. Our God. We. We pray that. You will indeed. Bless us.

Bless us richly. And we give thanks. That we can ask for that. Because. We are told. In your word. That you are a God. Who pours out.

That you open your hand. Liberally. And. We wouldn't ask for these things. We wouldn't dare to ask for them. Were it not for the fact. That your word. Reveals these things to us.

[35 : 44] And so we pray. That you will bless us. With every blessing. Spiritual and temporal. And all whom we love. Our families. And our friends. Oh Lord.

Will you prosper us. In every single way. And that we will be able to say. This is a doing of the Lord. And wonderful in our eyes. Take away from us our sin.

Take us home safely. We pray. In Jesus name. We ask all. Amen. We're going to conclude. Singing in Psalm 31.

The 31st Psalm. And the last two verses of the Psalm. Psalm 31. Notice. The following verses of the Jasmine.

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[37 : 14] Psalm 31 and the last two verses of the psalm.

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