

I Have Kept The Faith

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[0 : 00] Timothy chapter 4. We can read again verse 6, 2nd Timothy chapter 4, reading at verse 6. But 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.

You may be familiar where Paul was writing this letter from, but if you're not, it just helps us to understand the emotion behind his words here, and just how powerful a letter it is as he writes to his one who was taking over from him, Timothy. He was really handing over the reins to him, hearing and encouraging him to keep the faith, to keep a firm hold of the word of God. But where was Paul when he was writing? He was in a prison cell, and he was just maybe perhaps days before the time of his departure, as he puts it here, when he was going to be executed and put to death.

So how would Timothy have felt hearing these words as Paul wrote to him, writing to him of his impending departure? I'm sure there would have been a mixed set of emotions for him. There would have been a fullness of sadness as he was hearing what was about to happen to Paul, but also a sense of thankfulness. Thankfulness for all that was being given over to him to be shared going forward with others. The gospel and all its truth and all its power in all its glory. And this setting of Paul's departure and the gospel going on is kind of a setting that we maybe feel that we're in just now as well. The last week has been a time of emotions that we've experienced, similar to maybe what Timothy has been feeling here. With the departure of Paul, there would have been a sense of a void, a great void being left. And for ourselves, in this last week, as we think of those who have been taken into glory, we know Professor McLeod was taken into glory on Sunday evening. Before that, on Friday,

Timothy Keller, an American preacher, evangelist, was taken into glory. And just, I think it was the day before that, another American, maybe less well-known, the name of Harry Reader, who was another faithful servant of the Lord, was taken into glory. He wrote a book called From Embers to a Flame, a book that encouraged the church to revitalize and to put its trust in the word and power of God. Three well-known men taken into glory. But others, maybe not as famous, even in these last few weeks, have been taken into glory as well. People who maybe we knew personally and meant much to us as individuals, men and women who encouraged us, who built us up in the faith, who prayed for us, who gave us wise teaching and counsel along the way. Anytime these people are taken from us, we feel a sense of a void in our midst.

[3 : 46] But we also should feel a sense of responsibility and a sense of thankfulness as well for all that they have left for us, for all they have given to us over many years of life, for the many ways that they've served their King and their Lord. And what do we think then of our own responsibility going forward?

Well, as Paul is writing to Timothy here, he's encouraging him to hold fast to the truth, to the word of God, to keep going in the strength of the Lord, fixing his eyes on the Lord Jesus.

And those who have departed from our midst in these recent times would be encouraging us in the same way, not to mourn as those who feel a sense of grief in it all, yes, but not to mourn without hope, and to look and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul here is coming to the end of his life, but he's looking back over it here and he's encouraging Timothy, encouraging him with wonderful words of encouragement, even as he speaks here of the time of his departure. You notice he doesn't say the time of his death, he says the time of his departure. And even in that, there is a sense of encouragement. There's encouragement for us, Timothy as a Christian then, and for ourselves as Christians today, that the Christian hope is firm even in death, that we are secure in Christ Jesus. Because even behind that word departure, there's so much meaning, it just paints such a vivid picture for us of what it is for the

Christian to depart from this world. The word departure, the word in the Greek behind its meaning is really four different pictures that you can look at in the sense of what it means. It means a loosening, the loosening, the loosening of a weight or a burden in many instances. For example, when a plough or a cart was taken off an animal, that was described as the loosening of it. So that's the word departure here.

And we think of the Christian. It's a loosening in terms of the labors and the toils of this life. The work being complete. The time of departure is the time of that loosening.

[6 : 34] It's also used in the sense of a prisoner being released, the loosening of the chains or the bonds that a prisoner has on. And again, you think of it in light of the Christian in this life, the time of their departure is the time of the loosening of the bonds of sin in this world and a corruptible body.

It was also a word that was used in the loosening of a soldier's tent, the ropes in a soldier's tent. The soldiers in those days would set up camp as they were going to battle. They could spend months and even years in these camps as the battles were going on. But when the time of their departure, when the time of their loosening would come, the battle was over. The victory was won. They were heading home. And again, it's such a vivid picture for the Christian there, the time of our departure, the time of my departure. As Paul is speaking about here, as the battle is over, the victory's won. It's time to go home. There's also another use it was used for was the mooring ropes of a ship. When they were loosened, when they were let go, it was time to cast off and to set sail. And again, you think of the Christian's experience in this world. And Psalm 107, maybe comes to mind in that when they get to the desired haven, when the storm is changed into a calm, even as Paul is speaking here of his departure, it's in this way, this loosening, this blessing that there is, that what faith in Christ means, it's not just the end, it's just the beginning. Departure to a better place, to glory, to be with the Lord.

And so as Paul is writing this letter to Timothy, yes, there's much emotion in it, much sadness and sorrow, but also much encouragement. And he's reminding Timothy here, as he's done himself in his life, the faith, the battle of faith is one that is always ongoing.

The Christian's life is always one of being a servant, right to the very end, to the very time of departure. And he says there, after the time of departure has come, he says, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, right up until that point. You see, for the Christian, there isn't an option of retirement. And taking it easy for a number of years before we depart, it's about this battle, this life that is always ongoing.

We are always to keep going, without until our last breath, looking to Jesus, because we all have something to offer. While we have breath, we have something to offer the Lord. We've heard that in the prayers already this evening. We think of people who we see as powerfully serving the church in great ways. But every Christian serves, in every ordinary way, in all that we do, through our prayers, through our service, through our hospitality, through our visits, through our calls, so many different ways, we all have a part to play. We are all encouraged to take on the reins as they're passed on to us from others, to keep the faith, to uphold the word of God and to pass it on ourselves to others. And so just for a few moments, I want to think of how Paul says here, I have kept the faith. One of the things he says there in verse 7, he speaks about fighting the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Just to think of what that word means here for Paul at the time of his departure. I have kept the faith. Well, we could say first of all, he means here that he has preserved the message. You see, as you read through these verses from verse 10 in chapter 3, down to this, the end of this section in chapter 4, the word of God is at the heart of all that he is speaking about. In verse 16 of chapter 3, it says, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, and so on, that they may be equipped for every good work. It's about keeping the word. And Paul is saying here, when he says, I have kept the faith, I have preserved the message, I have kept it for what it is, the word of God. He maintained it in its purity and in all its truth, and he was passing it on in that way. And we think of those who have gone on since then, who have kept the faith, who have guarded the word of God, who have kept it pure in its entirety, who have shared it in that way, who have not been afraid of the truth of God in the midst of an ever-changing world, but who have, in the midst of even pressures of false teachers, as Paul was under here, nothing new under the sun. We still see it in the church to this day, but to keep the faith, to guard the word of God, and to pass it on in that way. He speaks about it in chapter 2 of this letter earlier on in verse 2. He says, what you have heard from me, and in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also, share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ

Jesus. This is what is being passed on. This is what it is to keep the faith, to preserve the word of God, that the church has many roles in this world, so many important roles in this world, but one of its primary concerns is to guard the word of God, to keep the truth.

[13 : 32] Fort Knox in the United States of America is a place that's well known for containing and protecting much of the gold reserves of the United States. It's a place that's heavily guarded because it's so important, and that is the church's role when it comes to the word of God, to guard the truth because it's so precious. Refusing to alter it one little bit, but to stick to the word of God, which is more precious than gold, which is worth far more than any gold or silver in this world, while at the same time passing it on to those who come after us. To keep the faith then is to preserve the word, to keep it in all its purity. And we are so thankful to those who have taught and preached the word of God faith, who have shared it with so many around this world, who have kept the faith in this way. So that's what Paul is saying when he says, I have kept the faith. I have guarded the word of God.

The second thing he's saying here, when he's saying, I have kept the faith, is the sense of proclaiming the master. Preserving the word and yet proclaiming the master. It's the idea of kept the faith, not in keeping it to himself, but in sharing it with others. Throughout Paul's life, you see that, even as he's passing it on to Timothy here, it's so that the word of God will be proclaimed. For the word of God is, it is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching and for equipping for every good work.

It's not going to achieve that if it's kept to ourselves. It's got to go out. It's got to be shared with others. And so many people down through the generations have been blessed with gifts to proclaim the word of God, to teach generations of people. We think of the legacy of those we've mentioned already tonight, of the number of teachers and pastors around the world, of the number of Christians all over the world who have benefited from their teaching, from their guidance, down through the generations. And the word of God through that has spread, spread to all ends of the earth. Far and wide, the master is being proclaimed. And we thank God for that. One of the most precious jewels in the world is the hope diamond. It's said to be worth around 250 million dollars. And it's kept in a museum in Washington.

The hope diamond is kept behind glass that's several feet thick. You can go in and see it, but you'll never be able to touch it. You'll never be able to handle it. It's to be seen and not touched. But the gospel is so different. It's worth so much as we've already said, but it's not something that's to be kept in a museum. It's not something that's to be kept in a place where it's going to gather dust and where we can just look on it. It's to be given away. Unlike so many treasures, it's worth more, the more it's given away. And that's what Paul realized. And what every Christian and every servant of Christ should realize is this gospel is worth giving away. Paul's testimony of ministry can be found in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 5, where he says, but we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord. And that's a wonderful testimony of any Christian. We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord. And in the midst of all that was being taught and shared by many through generations and more recently as well, it was never about themselves.

[18 : 35] But about Christ Jesus, the Lord and him being known and shared. So that all that we've received, we are to share with others. And I encourage you as you receive to give away. To give away what you hear, what you receive from Christ and share it with others. Because it is something that is worth sharing.

If all we ever do is keep it under lock and key, gathering dust, then it's worthless. We're just a dry museum where the truth is stored to look at and not touch. That's not what we are about.

We are about the business of proclaiming the master, making Jesus known. When you think of the time of the Reformation, that's what it was all about. When the word was just for a select few and who you had to be taught to understand it. But the Reformation set the gospel free, set the word of God free so that all people could hear it and understand it. And that's the legacy that's been passed on to us and that we would pass on to others.

The legacy of Christ Jesus as Lord, the one who is able to save. So we are to proclaim our master, to make him known. I have kept the faith in that way, that Jesus is known. The third thing we see here in these words, I have kept the faith, is the assurance that Paul has in this. The assurance that the Lord is with him. Here is Paul in a prison cell. And many of his friends had deserted him at this time. They were afraid to go and see him for the fear of persecution themselves.

But Paul, he says, I have kept the faith. He knows who is with him. He is a man who has reached the end of his journey. His time of departure has come, but he has kept the faith.

[21 : 05] He has held on to the word of God and all its promises. It's not just something that he is holding in his hands. It's something that he is holding dear in his heart. But the Lord is with him.

And you look at Paul's life and testimony, and like many Christians since then and before then as well, it's the experience of all the ups and downs, the battles that have gone on, the struggles that he's had, the lonely valleys that he's gone through. When you read of Paul's testimony in different parts of scripture, he tells us that there's various struggles he's been through. How many times he's been in prison? How many times he was shipwrecked? How many times he was beaten for his faith? Yet despite all these times, and despite the very fact that here he is facing up to the time of his departure, what has held him and what is keeping him, it is relationship with the Lord. That the Lord is with him. He knows he is there. There may be nobody else around him, but the Lord is with him.

And as the Christian goes through life, as we go through life, we're going to face difficulties. We're going to face times of hurt. We face times when we'll be misunderstood, misrepresented. There'll be days when we feel like we're walking alone. But we have that promise that the Lord is with us, that we are never alone because he is with us. How would you assess the ministry of Paul? You know, if we were to look at the way we apply criteria today of success, you'd almost say that Paul's ministry was a failure. When you look at the churches that he'd started in Corinth, there was a church there squabbling and falling out with one another. When you look at Colossae, there was a church drifting back into the way of error. When you look at the church at Philippi, there you have ones who have contributed well. So there's a whole host of variety in the church that he's been involved in, from being successful in some eyes to falling away in others.

[23 : 38] But success isn't about us. Success is about what God is doing. And even despite the fact that there may be many who are falling away from the truth, there is still this hope that the Lord is building his church. Paul has been faithful. That's what he says here. I have fought the good fight.

I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. And so as Christians today as well, our success or failure is not what counts, but that we live for Christ. That's Paul's motto, as you see in Philippians, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

So in spite of all the challenges that he faced in life, despite all that he faces here at the time of his departure, his sense of loneliness and nobody around him, he has kept the faith. And in that, he knows the Lord is with him. The fourth and final thing we see here, though, is the mention of reward. reward. Henceforth, it says there in verse eight, 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. He has kept the faith. And what that means is that there is the crown of righteousness awaiting him. And as a great reminder for us as well, that this is for all Christians. Not only to me, he says, but to all who have loved his appearing, to all who love the Lord.

The idea here so often in Paul's writing is athletes running the race. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, he says. Now, the athletes will be running for the crown. Crowns that will be made up of leaves that will be placed on the heads of those who won the race.

[26 : 04] But Paul here is saying there's a different kind of crown. A crown that awaits the Christians. The crown of righteousness, the crown which the Lord will give to his own, to those who keep on, to those who fight the good fight, who finish the race, who keep the faith.

And as you think of the situation here, when those looking on him in prison, those Roman soldiers and those who have put him into prison, they'll be looking on him and thinking, this is the end for him.

This is the end. We'll execute him and that's it. But Paul knows differently. And that's what gives him this great hope. The time of his departure, the time of his loosening from this world, knowing he has kept the faith, he has this promise of a crown. And that's what we have learned from so many down through the generations. And we think of the teachings and the preachings we've been under, even in our own lifetime, from those who have now gone from us. The beauty of Christ, the wonder of the cross, what faith is all about, what death means, and what eternity has in store. The wonders of Christ that we've heard about down through the years, we would never lose our sense of awe of Christ.

Christ on the crown that he has prepared for those who love him. His reward has come. He's saying here, the reward of those who have gone now is for them the crown of righteousness.

And what keeps us going is to fix our eyes on Jesus, that we too may receive the crown of righteousness.

[28 : 08] C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, he says this, he's encouraging believers in how we often underestimate the full riches of God for his people. He says, if we consider the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.

Those who have now gone from us have reminded us so often that we're too easily pleased, but that there's a greater glory that we should strive for, the riches of Christ.

We have lost some whose greatest desire was to show and tell others of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. And the wonder of the cross, but how thankful we should be for what they've taught us and what they've left us to pass on to others. Much is written in these days about those who have gone to glory.

But that's not the words that they would rejoice in. The words that they would want to hear is, well done, good and faithful servant. The words of the Lord to those he receives into glory.

What do we want said of ourselves? What do we want to hear? Not what others have to say about us, but that we would be able to say as Paul, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

[30 : 08] I have kept the faith. That's what the word of God does for us. Encourages us to keep on looking to Jesus.

And what matters even more is that as we put our trust in him, the day will come when we will hear those words to, well done, good and faithful servant. We are encouraged to serve the Lord in whatever way we can.

In the little things and in the great things, it doesn't matter. The Lord has given us a responsibility and a duty to uphold the truth, to guard the truth and to share the truth. And we all have a part to play in that. So may we be a people who keep the faith. Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, we do rejoice in your gospel, for it is a gospel of hope and a gospel that's secure in Christ Jesus, our Lord. It reminds us that in this world we have but a time, a time that passes so quickly. It describes us like the mist that comes and goes or the flower that grows and then is gone.

But we thank you for the word of the Lord that stands forever. And help us, O Lord, to guard it and to have that hope in it, that hope that keeps us secure through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

[31 : 48] Help us that we would fight the good fight, that we would run the race, and above all that we would keep the faith. That we would be a people who are strengthened by you and encouraged through you and built up by you in the faith to keep us on. So Lord, be with us, continue to bless us and to comfort, to uphold us and to be near in all our days as we commit ourselves into your hands, asking all things for the forgiveness of our sins.

In Jesus' name, Amen.