

07. 2 Timothy 4



2 Timothy 4:1

In the presence of God and of the Messiah Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you:

Paul's final exhortation to Timothy opens in an especially solemn way. Everything is placed in the perspective of the day of judgment, the day when Christ the king will reign supreme, when all that is evil will be destroyed and all that is good will be vindicated. One of the functions of the king was to judge, and so here we have one of the rare occasions when Paul speaks of Jesus as judge. Another is in his correspondence with the Corinthians: 'All of us must appear before the judgment seat of the Messiah, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil' (2 Corinthians 5:10).

2 Timothy 4:2

proclaim the message; be alert whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

These imperatives sum up the main content of his letter. Like Paul Timothy is to be a herald of the word (see 1:11). He is to be alert to grasp every opportunity to present the good news, even if people do not appear to be open to receive it. He is to point out where people are sinning and alert them to the fact that they must answer for their behaviour. Finally, he is to ‘encourage’ (παράκaleω). This verb includes a reference to Jesus to whose call Timothy is to give voice. Since he is an instrument of Jesus he must show the ‘utmost patience’ of Jesus (1 Timothy 1:16).

2 Timothy 4:3-5

For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Paul speaks again of resistance to the truth and exhorts Timothy to present the Christian message to the church faithfully.

The final four imperatives focus more on Timothy's dedication to his commission. He is to keep a clear head. His ministry will bring suffering to him. He must endure it. He must base all his teaching on the gospel and obediently and fully carry out the ministry given him by Christ, and thus be 'a good servant of the Messiah Jesus' (1 Timothy 4:6).

2 Timothy 4:6

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come.

Whatever the outcome of his present imprisonment, Paul is an old man now and knows that the end is approaching. He sees his life in sacrificial terms, for he has poured himself out, giving his all in the service of his Lord. As he wrote to the Philippians during his previous imprisonment: ‘I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith’ (Philippians 2:17). Now the cup is nearly empty. The ropes that tie him to this life are losing their grip. His longing ‘to depart and be with Christ’ (Philippians 1:23) is about to be fulfilled.

2 Timothy 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

In his First Letter to Timothy, he declared: ‘to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people’ (1 Timothy 4:10), and he urged Timothy: ‘Fight the good fight of the faith’ (1 Timothy 6:12). Now with profound humility and gratitude, he can say of himself: ‘**I have fought the good fight**’.

To the Philippians, he wrote: ‘It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain’ (Philippians 2:16). ‘Beloved, I do not consider that I have made the goal my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in the Messiah Jesus’ (Philippians 3:13-14).

Now he can say: ‘**I have finished the race.**’ He wrote to the Corinthians: ‘It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy’ (1 Corinthians 4:2). Looking back over thirty years of missionary endeavour, he can say: ‘**I have kept the faith**’. He has not betrayed the trust placed in him by Jesus. He has been faithful to his commission, and he has been faithful to his personal consecration to Jesus his Lord. His life is conformed to that of Jesus also in his dying which, like that of Jesus, is to be a self-giving sacrifice, offered in love for the world for whose salvation he has spent himself. He is suffering for the gospel (1:8; 2:9), and he is soon to offer his life in the same cause.

2 Timothy 4:8

From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Christ will appear at the parousia and, faithful to his word, will draw all who have longed for him into the fullness of divine communion. This is Paul's hope and trust.

2 Timothy 4:9-10

Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Demas was with Paul in Ephesus when Paul wrote to Philemon (verse 24) and to the community in Colossae (Colossians 4:14). He has deserted Paul and gone to Thessalonica. This is the only time we hear of Crescens. In Paul's letter to Titus he asked Titus to meet him in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), a coastal city in the Roman Province of Dalmatia (southern Illyricum). It would appear that he stayed on to carry on his missionary work there.

2 Timothy 4:11-12

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

Mark is somewhere where Timothy can pick him up on the journey to Rome which Paul urges him to take. The only one of Paul's close companions to be with him is Luke. The close contact between Paul and both Luke and Mark (see also Philemon 24 and Colossians 4:14) has interesting implications in regard to the relationship between the gospels of Mark and Luke, and also in regard to Paul's influence on the writing of the Gospels.

Tychicus was the carrier of both Colossians (4:7) and Ephesians (6:21). Paul planned on sending him to replace Titus in Crete (Titus 3:12). He is now on his way to Ephesus, perhaps to replace Timothy while Timothy joins Paul in Rome.

2 Timothy 4:13-15

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.

Alexander is probably the same man as was mentioned in Paul's first letter to Timothy (1:20). Was he responsible for turning Paul over to the authorities and having him back in prison on trial? Whatever harm he has caused, Paul is warning Timothy to be careful of him.

2 Timothy 4:16

At my first defence no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them!

The reference to a ‘**first defence**’ is probably to a preliminary investigation of the case brought against Paul. He was without support and obviously the case was not dismissed but put off for a later hearing which Paul is awaiting. Hence his being in prison. There is an interesting connection between Paul’s readiness to forgive and the attitude of Stephen at his martyrdom on the occasion of our first meeting of Saul: ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them’(Acts 7:60).

2 Timothy 4:17

But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

Years before, Paul had written: ‘It is no longer I who live. It is the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). His life was the life of Christ living in him; so too is his dying. As Jesus was betrayed, deserted, and left alone, so is Paul. As Jesus witnessed to the truth before a human tribunal, so does Paul. As Jesus entrusted himself to God, so does Paul. As Jesus pardoned those responsible, so does Paul.

2 Timothy 4:17-18

I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

There are a number of allusions to Psalm 22 in the account of the suffering and death of Jesus, and the Psalm can be read with profit as we contemplate Jesus on the cross. There is an allusion to it also in this passage ('Save me from the mouth of the lion!', Psalm 22:21), and we can draw profit from reading it prayerfully as we think of Paul languishing in prison. Jesus continues the mission given to him from the Father through Paul and Timothy and through those who will carry on after them: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Mat 28:18-20).

2 Timothy 4:19

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained in Corinth.

Prisca and her husband Aquila have been involved in ministry ever since Paul first met them about 25 years earlier in Corinth (Acts 18:2). They were among those expelled from Rome by decree of the emperor Claudius. They left Corinth with Paul and were with him in Ephesus when Paul wrote his first letter from there to Corinth (1Corinthians 16:19), but were back in Rome when he wrote to the community there in early 57AD. Now, perhaps ten years later they are back in the east.

Onesiphorus has already been mentioned in praise earlier in the letter (1:16-18). It is likely that the Erastus mentioned here is the Erastus who was the city treasurer in Corinth (Romans 16:23). It is perhaps he who, along with Timothy, is mentioned as one of the helpers whom Paul sent on from Ephesus to Macedonia (Acts 19:22).

2 Timothy 4:20-21

Trophimus I left ill in Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.

Trophimus was the Ephesian delegate responsible for the collection that Paul had organised for the poor in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). He was a Gentile and was the reason for the trouble Paul found himself in when he was in Jerusalem when the crowd wrongly ‘presumed that Paul had taken him into the temple’ (Acts 21:29).

Eubulus, Pudens and Claudia are not mentioned elsewhere. Tradition tells us that Linus was the first leader of the church in Rome after the death of Peter (see Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses*, III,3,3).

2 Timothy 4:22

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

It was because the Lord was with Paul that he could say ‘I have kept the faith’ (4:7). It is only through the Lord’s presence and life-giving Spirit that Timothy can continue the task of preaching the word and teaching with the persistent and unfailing love of Christ. And so it is that Paul concludes his final words to Timothy, with a prayer that the Lord be with him. The ‘your’ in ‘your spirit’ is in the singular. However, the ‘you’ in ‘Grace be with you’ is plural. Paul broadens out his greeting to include all those who are with Timothy, praying that he and the whole Christian community may experience the gracious gift of redemption, life and salvation that God wishes for all in Christ.

Paul's Death

Clement speaks of Paul's martyrdom in a letter written from Rome at the end of the first century: 'Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects. Thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience' (*1 Clement* 1.5).

The 'extreme limit of the west' has been interpreted as a reference to Spain. It is possible that Paul did fulfil his dream and that he headed to Spain upon his release from custody in Rome. This would have meant going into an area where hardly anyone spoke Greek, and where there were no synagogues.

Ignatius of Antioch in the opening years of the second century also speaks of Paul's martyrdom (*To the Ephesians*, 12), as does Tertullian in his *Prescriptions against Heresy*, 36.3).

‘In his *History of the Church* Eusebius writes of Paul's release from prison and of his martyrdom: ‘After defending himself, the Apostle was again sent on the ministry of preaching, and coming a second time to the same city [Rome] suffered martyrdom under Nero. During this imprisonment he wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy, indicating at the same time that his first defence had taken place and that his martyrdom was at hand’ (2.22)

Eusebius continues: 'It is recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day. It is confirmed likewise by Caius, a member of the Church, who arose under Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome. He, in a published disputation with Proclus, the leader of the Phrygian heresy, speaks as follows concerning the places where the sacred corpses of the aforesaid apostles are laid:

Caius states: 'I can show the trophies of the apostles. For if you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian way, you will find the trophies of those who laid the foundations of this church.'

Eusebius continues: ‘And that they both suffered martyrdom at the same time is stated by Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, in his epistle to the Romans, in the following words: ‘You have thus by such an admonition bound together the planting of Peter and of Paul at Rome and Corinth. For both of them planted and likewise taught us in our Corinth. And they taught together in like manner in Italy, and suffered martyrdom at the same time’ (*History of the Church*, 2.25.5).