

Paul's Last Words 2 Timothy 4:1-18

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon on 2 Timothy 4:1-18 emphasizes the urgency of preaching the Word and living a life of faithfulness in anticipation of eternal rewards.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:1

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Eternal Reward"

Description

J.R. Miller reflects on Paul's final words in 2 Timothy, emphasizing the seriousness of life as we stand before God, our ultimate Judge. He urges Timothy to preach the Word with fervor and patience, reminding him that the time will come when people will turn away from sound doctrine. Paul's own reflections on his impending martyrdom highlight his view of life as a fight, a race, and a trust, culminating in the hope of receiving a crown of righteousness. Miller encourages believers to live with the awareness of eternity, striving for faithfulness in their calling. Ultimately, he reassures that even in failure by worldly standards, faithfulness to God leads to eternal reward.

Transcript

It is the year A.D. 64, and the great apostle is lying in a damp Roman prison cell waiting for his final trial. Two charges are filed against him; one, taking part in the burning of Rome, July 19, A.D. 64; the other, treason, in attempting to change the established customs of society and weaken imperial authority. All his friends, except Luke, have forsaken him; he is becoming nerved for martyrdom; before his fate is sealed--he writes a final farewell word to Timothy. He began, "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!" 2 Timothy 4:1

Life is very serious. We are always standing before God who is our Judge. Our commonest days--are judgment days. We should learn to do everything 'in the presence of God'. This makes every word and act serious. If only we were more conscious of God and of eternity--we would live better!

"Preach the Word." Timothy was not making the most of himself. He seems to have been indolent--he was not preaching with the burning ardor which should characterize a minister of Christ. Paul wished to stir him up to do better work. He charges him to preach the Word, not only in season--at the stated times of public service--but out of season, wherever and whenever he had opportunity. Many of us are not making the most of our life. We are not doing our best in our efforts to help save the world. From this Roman prison comes the call to everyone to arouse his best energies in behalf of the kingdom of Christ.

"Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience." The minister is to watch the souls entrusted to his care--as a shepherd watches his sheep. Perhaps a word at the right time may prevent their wandering altogether away. Yet no duty of friendship is so difficult--as that of reproof or rebuke. Too often the word of admonition is sharp, bitter, and censorious. Paul wisely adds that we need to have all patience in our exhorting or rebuking of others. Words of reproof should always be spoken in love and patience.

Not always do people receive graciously the simple truths of God's Word. "For the time will come when men 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!" Plain, old fashioned teaching is not brilliant enough to please them. The old, old story lacks interest, and they want something new. The fault is with the hearers, not with the teachers. "Take heed how you hear," is one of the Master's wise exhortations. Of course, one should teach well. There is no excuse for being boring or dull in presenting the truths of Christianity. Paul urges Timothy to do his part with earnestness for the very reason that the people would be apt to turn away to fables, instead of listening to the old gospel.

The words of exhortation are emphasized by Paul's closing message about himself. They were his parting thoughts. Before he had spoken of Timothy--now he spoke of himself, "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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." 2 Timothy 4:6-8

"I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure." It is interesting to study Paul's view of death as we have a glimpse of it here. He thinks of it in two ways. He was about to die as a martyr, and this made his death an offering to God. His life would be poured out on the altar as a sacrifice.

Then he also thinks of it also as a departure, not the end of life--but a going away to another country. The body is only a temporary home, where the man stays for a while. At death he leaves it and goes on to his permanent abiding place. For the Christian dying is not the end--it is only a departure from the frail tabernacle--to the eternal house, from the body of weakness and mortality, to be at home with Christ. If we would think more of death in this Christian way, it would lose its terrors for us, and would come to appear as it is--but a momentary phase of life; an emerging from frailty, weakness and sin--into strength, perfectness and holiness.

"I have fought the good fight." Here we have Paul's retrospect. He saw his life under three different forms. It was a fight. He was not a quarrelsome man, and yet his life had been a fight from beginning to end. It was strife against sinfulness within him--and evil outside him. Life is not easy for anyone who tries to live worthily. We are always in the enemy's country until we pass over to glory. We can never lay off our armor, nor sheath our sword, nor cease to fight while we remain here in this sinful world. But we need not fail, for the Captain of our salvation is strong. He has met and conquered every enemy and will help us to be victorious, more than conquerors, if only we keep close to him and as he fights for us.

Paul thinks of his life also, as a race: "I have finished the race." Yonder is the goal, with the judge waiting to crown the successful competitor. Along the course are the witnesses, watching the contest, cheering their favorites. Paul had now run the race almost to the end. Just before him was the goal, and he saw the crown shining, ready to be put upon his brow. The racer strains every muscle, and puts all his strength into

the race. So had Paul lived. We must do our very best always--if we would win in life's race.

Then life is also a trust, something given to keep and guard and use, and bring home at last unimpaired. "I have kept the faith." Everyone's life is a trust--something he has to answer for. Whatever God gives us--is a trust. The parable of the talents illustrates this. People should think of life and its privileges, as not their own--they receive all they have and are from God, not to be spent on their own pleasure--but for the blessing of others and then to be accounted for--not the bare talents merely as first received--but the talents increased by use. The story of the man with the one talent is forever a warning to all who do not make the most of their gifts and opportunities.

"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." It was only a wreath of laurel that the ancient racer who first touched the goal received--but it is a crown of fadeless glory which every Christian racer will receive.

There is something to live for--besides the pleasure of success in this world. Those who live the life of faith will receive the crown of glory! One may even fail in this world's struggles, not making a success of his life, as men estimate life, and yet be wonderfully successful in the true sense, gaining eternal reward. If we live well in this present world--if we lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven!

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