

(Keswick) 1959, Ministry From 2 Timothy - Part 5

by Paul S. Rees

This sermon emphasizes the importance of making a triumph out of the finish, as seen in Paul's life and ministry, and encourages listeners to maintain an urgency that is undiminished and a loyalty that is undaunted in their own ministry and witnessing.

Duration: 40:36

Topics: "Keswick Convention"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the life of the apostle Paul and his transformation after encountering Jesus on the Damascus road. Paul went from being a rebellious Jew to a devoted disciple and passionate preacher of the gospel. He declares that he has finished the race and kept the faith, looking forward to receiving the crown of righteousness from the Lord. The speaker then discusses three main points: the summing up of Paul's life, the remarkable way he describes death as finishing up, and the concept of laying up treasures in heaven. The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a faithful and purposeful life in Christ.

Transcript

I'm sure you've all greatly enjoyed the ministry messages of Dr. Paul Rees each afternoon. We present him this afternoon in the concluding message in this series on 2nd Timothy. He will, of course, be present tomorrow afternoon for the subject after Keswick Watt, but this will bring to an end this series.

We're glad indeed for this rich ministry. Dr. Paul Rees. Those of you who have been following along with us during the week at this four o'clock hour will know that we have been not attempting any exhaustive exposition of the second letter that Paul wrote to Timothy, but rather picking out and following a bit certain trailways of truth through this very wonderful little document that Paul was inspired to write to his young ministerial friend, Timothy.

On the first afternoon, Monday afternoon, in chapter one, we talked together about making a dying fire live again. And on the following two afternoons, in chapter two, we thought about making Jesus Christ the center of everything. And yesterday afternoon, focusing our attention upon chapter three, our theme was making sacred scripture what God intends it to be.

And now we come, in this concluding study this afternoon, with our attention focused upon chapter four, to consider the theme making a triumph out of the finish. Making a triumph out of the finish. In the portion of this final chapter of 2nd Timothy that has been read to us, there are two figures that appear vividly before us.

The first is the figure of the young church leader, Timothy, to whom this entire letter is addressed. Now there you see him, after the manner in which we looked at him the very first afternoon, the young leader of the church in Ephesus. He is passing through a very critical period in his life.

And Paul knows it, and Paul has anxiety about it. Paul does not express any fear that Timothy will betray the faith. He's very sound in doctrine.

If Paul has any fears that Timothy is going to fall into some gross sin, something that will reflect seriously upon his moral character, there is no indication of that. Paul's fear is that Timothy will have a faint heart, that he will lose his nerve, that the fire of the passion of his conviction and his courage is at that very moment burning low. Now there's the first figure.

The second figure is that of Paul himself. And he's in prison. And out of his imprisonment, and all of this loving concern that fills his heart as he thinks tenderly about his young friend, this junior minister, Paul writes.

And he shares with Timothy the great solicitude that he has for him. The prayer that's in his heart, in his behalf. And now coming to the end of this message, he says, Timothy, I have a last word for you about myself.

I want you to know how I'm facing the end. With you, life is before you. Your ministry is ahead of you, largely at least.

You're at liberty. Yours is a magnificent opportunity. As for me, my days are nearing their end.

It's been a great life. I don't want anybody to feel sorry for me. There isn't a touch of self-pity about what Paul says.

He simply says, I want you to know how I'm coming to the finish. And that we shall see in just a moment. Now, so far as the first figure is concerned, I think we may gather up what Paul says to Timothy under two heads.

First of all, take as suggestive, if you will, as symbolic, this word in the second verse, which we have in the revised standard version, be urgent. And then Paul adds, in season and out of season. Now let me state the thought in this way.

He is saying, my dear young Timothy, I want you to maintain an urgency that is undiminished. Samuel Chadwick, a great preacher and teacher and trainer of preachers in England, a generation ago, and the author of a number of very excellent books, by the way, that I wish all of you would read, such as *The Path of Prayer* and *The Way to Pentecost*. Samuel Chadwick, talking to a group of ministers one day, said, my brethren, preaching must never be a mere profession.

It must always be a passion. And he was right. And that's exactly the way St. Paul wanted young Timothy to feel as a churchman and as a minister.

Timothy, you are not to be merely the follower of a profession. You are to be one who exhibits a passion, be urgent, in season and out of season. Thomas Carlyle once described one of his contemporaries as a man who was filled with bankrupt enthusiasms.

What a phrase. Bankrupt enthusiasms. Once the fire was there, but it's gone out.

You've got nothing but the shell, the shell of certain ideas, the shell of certain ideals, the shell of certain objectives, but no real fire. And Paul says to Timothy, I want you to maintain, dear man, in the power and the energy of the Holy Spirit an urgency that is undiminished as the days go by. Be urgent when you convince people of the truth.

Be urgent when you rebuke them. Be urgent when you exhort them. Be urgent when you exercise long-suffering in their behalf.

Let there be in all of this, not that which is mechanical and perfunctory, but that which is hot and passionate. It's a great word for us ministers and Sunday school teachers and leaders of. The second thing that we may gather up here as we look at Timothy and think of him as receiving this letter from Paul, is indicated in the fifth verse.

As for you, always be steady. Endure suffering. Do the work of an evangelist.

Fulfill. And it's a very strong word in the Greek. Complete to the uttermost you are ministering.

Now if we stated the first thought by saying, let there be an urgency that is undiminished. Let us state the second thought by saying, let there be a loyalty that is undaunted. I like these words, always be steady.

We talked a moment ago about fire, about passion, about ardor. And sometimes you meet people who've got it. But alas, they've only got it for a day or so.

They blow hot one day and they blow cold the next. And to guard against that peril, Paul says, Timothy, I want your heart to be hot and I want your convictions to flame, but let it not be an intermittent thing, a spasmodic thing. Let there be a loyalty about you, a steadfastness about you that will glorify the Christ who steadfastly set his faith to go to Jerusalem.

Now that brings us to the other figure. And here is where we spend the remainder of our time. Please God.

Let us look now at Paul as having said these final words to his beloved young friend yonder in Ephesus. He then says in effect, Timothy, I know you will want to know how it's going with me. I know that you will want to know how I'm faring here at the end.

And I'm now prepared to tell you. Thus we hear him say, For I am already on the point of being sacrificed. 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, shall give to me of that day. And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. I hope that those words have not grown so familiar to you.

That your soul does not thrill beyond all words at a dying testimony, a dying valedictory, let us say, as magnificent as this is. Now let's take it apart just a little bit. I want to discuss it with you under three heads.

First of all, the summing up, where Paul reviews life as he had lived it as a redeemed man in Christ Jesus. Secondly, the finishing up, the remarkable way that he has of describing death. And thirdly, the laying up.

There he has laid up for me the crown of righteousness. Now take the summing up. How does a man like Paul look back upon these years that have passed since that memorable day on the Damascus road when he was captured by Jesus Christ and his life was so utterly transformed that he was no longer the fiercely rebellious little Jew but was the transformed and ardent disciple of Jesus of Nazareth and the flaming crusader for that gospel which at first he opposed so bitterly.

How does he sum it all up? Well, I want you to notice the three things that he says now in verse 7. I have fought a good fight, or as the Revised has it, the good fight. Which leads one to say that for Paul as a redeemed man, life had been a battle and he had won it through Christ the Lord. Life had been a battle and he had won it.

How often Paul showed his fondness for military figures and military analogies in his description of the Christian life and Christian service. We have had several instances of it right here in the Timothy correspondence. Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Fight the good fight of faith. Strong, militant figures you see. Descriptive of this strenuous aspect of the life that is hid with Christ in God.

Sometimes Paul found it necessary to do battle at the level of his own personal life. You remember his very intimately personal word in the ninth chapter of the first letter that he wrote to the Corinthians when he said, So fight I, I keep under my body, and subdue it. Lest by any means after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Now I want to point out to you, please, I want to point out to you that is not the word of a defeated man. That is not the word of an inwardly divided man. Some people come to Casi convention.

They come as Christians, but they are living divided lives. They are divided within. There is not a total surrender and a total commitment and a total reliance upon the indwelling Lord who is recognized not simply as Savior but as sovereign within.

But this word of Paul's, So fight I, I keep under my body, is not the confession of a defeated man. It is rather the testimony of a triumphant man who is recognizing that as long as we live our lives in the body there is a disciplined aspect of Christian living which we've got to take seriously. As I had occasion to say yesterday afternoon in another connection, you never find St. Paul when he's rightly read and understood, and you never find any other inspired writer of Holy Scripture teaching that the human body as such is evil.

That was a heresy that afflicted the early church, and it was carried over from Greek philosophy at least one school of ancient philosophy, and it's never been recognized as Christian. The body is not sinful in itself. There is no sin, for instance, in sex as such, a thing which some young people need to be taught.

In a day when sexual excesses and uncleannesses are so rampant, and when sexual problems bulk so big and so blackly, may I add, in the lives of many people, individuals and families, we need nevertheless to recognize that inherently there's nothing evil about sex. It is the undisciplined and the un-Christian and

the unregulated expression of sex that leads to all manner of impurity and iniquity and depravity. What is required is that by the power of the indwelling Lord through the Holy Spirit, we shall recognize that these bodies of ours are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and that there are instincts and appetites and passions that are God-given, but undisciplined, unregulated.

They can destroy us and destroy the happiness and the loveliness of the lives of others who are close to us, but kept under and expressed in keeping with the mind of Christ and the purposes of God for marital happiness and the welfare of the family and of society. They can be an immensely useful and beautiful part of life. Now, let nobody get the idea that when I talk about Paul as a fighter, saying, I keep under my body, that I want you to think of him as just biting his lips or clenching his teeth and fighting this battle in his own strength.

Oh, no. See the difference between Christians who know the secret of victory through the indwelling Christ and Christians who do not is that if you don't, you fight for your victory, but when you know Calvary and all of its implications for your life, you don't fight for victory, you fight from victory. The victory has been already won in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it is for you to recognize that fact and let his mighty power, which is the power of the Holy Ghost, be released in you and through you, that you may subdue every instinct and every passion and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

And if you fail, and you may fail because, as the Major said the other night, we don't teach sinless perfection, we don't teach non-temptability as the state of the victorious Christian, if you fail, remember that your failure doesn't mean that Christ is a failure, it means that for the moment, at least, there has been a break in the contact with him, who is the source and the center and the secret of all power and all holiness and all victory. If a trolley bus--we don't have any trolley cars in Chicago anymore, I believe-- but if in the old days a trolley car or a trolley bus now starts out in the morning and does what it's supposed to do, maintains its schedule, carries its load, performs its service, all morning long and at a quarter to twelve, just before noon, the trolley jumps off the wire, the bus is dead on the track, it can't haul a passenger, it can't make a schedule, it's absolutely dead on the track. Well, what do you do? You don't hold a committee meeting and say, well, I never did believe in buses anyhow, it's no good.

And yet that's what some people do. They'll come to Keswick and enter in, perhaps, to a real blessing, and then they're defeated at some point in their life later, and the devil will say, well, you see, there's nothing in it, all those speakers at Keswick that just got excited, they don't even live it themselves, and there's nothing in it. And the devil will try to get you back to jog along at an old, dying rate in your Christian life again.

What do you do if the trolley is off the wire? Well, you will re-establish the contact between the trolley and the wire, because there's just as much current flowing in the wire as there was all morning long, and the moment you re-establish the contact, you've got a bus that can pull its load and maintain its schedule and do what a bus is supposed to do. Take that to your heart, if you will, and let God show you how real and yet how constantly relative, that is, relative to the source of the power, is the victorious life. Sometimes Paul's fighting was at the level not of his own personal life so much as it was at the level of evil in the lives of men about him.

Paul one time said, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus. Now, there are expositors who believe that Paul meant us to understand him quite literally there, and he had a bout with wild beasts. There are others, and

I'm trying to agree with them, who think that Paul is speaking figuratively of vile and evil and stubborn and relentless men who opposed Paul's gospel and Paul's Christ and Paul's apostleship, and he said it was a real tough one.

And when he says, I fought with beasts at Ephesus, he doesn't mean by that that he fought as a carnal man or an evil man or a vindictive man or a resentful man. It means that he had to take a stand, and however costly it was, he had to maintain it for the freedom of the gospel and the glory of Jesus Christ. There are times like that in your life and mine.

Most of us don't know much about really fighting with beasts at Ephesus. I've traveled recently in parts of the world where people do. I know right now of an outstanding churchman in a part of the world where I've been within the recent weeks who was arrested by the Communists, and they tried to wring a confession from him, charging him with something of which he was not guilty at all.

They threatened him with all sorts of things and began to torture him, and finally, as a last resort, they said, we're going to give you the water treatment. And they made him lie perfectly flat and began to force water through his nostrils in relentlessly steady amounts. And before the moment when in his strangulation he was about to pass into unconsciousness, he looked at those his vile persecutors and said, I serve a Christ who never told a lie and who has never permitted his followers to tell one either.

It's fighting with the beasts at Ephesus. There is naked evil in this world these days, my friends. You and I don't encounter very much of it in our neighborhoods.

That's the reason why we ought never to complain that little things we may have to face for Jesus Christ's sake, but we have some fellow Christians in this world that are up against it in its unmasked and malignant manifestation. Paul says, it has not been a losing battle. Life for this redeemed man was a warfare, and under the great captain of his salvation he had won it.

He speaks in these triumphant tones at the very end. Sure I must fight if I would reign. Increase my courage, Lord.

I'll bear the toil, endure the pain supported by thy word. Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas? Thy saints in all this glorious war shall conquer though they die. They see the triumph from afar, by faith they bring it nigh.

Life is a battle, and this redeemed man. Secondly, in the summing up, Paul says, I have not only fought the good fight, I have finished my course. Ah, then.

For a man like Paul, life is not only a battle, and he had won it through Jesus Christ, but life is a race, and he had finished it. He had successfully completed the course. I have finished the race, is the way the Revised Acts.

Now this rather readily and immediately recalls to the minds of many of us a word that you will find in the twelfth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. I have waived for the moment the question of whether or not Paul wrote Hebrews. Traditionally he did, though there are some very sober reasons for doubting whether he did it.

A mother-inspired and appointed servant of God did. But whether Paul wrote it or not, what he says here is completely congenial to his thought and the things that he says elsewhere in his writings. Wherefore,

you remember at the opening of chapter twelve, wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, and here the writer, whoever he was, he is asking us to imagine a great arena, such as they had in ancient times, in places like Athens and Rome.

A great arena packed with spectators. We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses. Let us, who are down here in the arena, down here in the contests that have been set and announced for the day, let us run the race that is set before us.

And in describing that race, do you remember what the writer said? Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us. And that's not the happiest translation. It's the sin which doth so closely cling to us.

The stubborn sin. Suggestive at least, I won't dogmatize on this, suggestive at least of that last stronghold of sin of which the old Puritans used to speak in such drastic language. Richard Baxter, John Owen, talking about the frightful hostility to the mind of Christ that there is in this principle of self, self-assertiveness, self-centeredness, self-will, self-sensitiveness.

Let us lay aside the sin which doth so closely cling to us and untrammelled, free as a runner should be, let us run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus. There's a word there that I think perhaps some of us have not fully appreciated. Let us run with patience.

Now the word patience, as we ordinarily use it today, suggests somebody who is very even-tempered and never has any ill temper. And that's a lovely thought too. We are very plainly taught in Scripture that while there is a holy anger, a great deal of what passes for anger is not holy and is no reflection of the loveliness of Christ at all.

As one of our distinguished Christian authors of our day has said, bad-tempered Christians have really done more harm than drunkards. But that isn't quite what the apostles say. Let us run with endurance, with a fine, undeviating steadiness, looking unto Jesus.

The Greek here is even stronger. It's a guess of double action. Looking away from things that would bid for your attention, that would allure your attention and distract your attention, and looking away from these, concentrating upon the Lord Jesus, the author and the finisher of your faith.

I hope that after Ketik there will be in you, by the grace of God, in all of us, that kind of steady, firm, purposeful, trustful, undeviating loyalty to Jesus. Looking away from things and circumstances and people unto him. Never falter, never flinch until the veil is parted and we're in his presence.

Some people are great to start a thing, but they don't finish. Jesus talked about those people, you know. He said, don't be like a man who goes out here and starts to build, puts the tower half up, doesn't finish it, and people come along and say, this man started to build, but he wasn't able to finish.

Don't be like that. Don't start to run this race. The Galatians did.

And Paul had to look at them and say, you did run well for a season. Who did hinder you? Here you are in the ditch, instead of being right on the highway, with your eyes fixed on Jesus. The first time I was ever in Alan Redpath's land was many, many years ago, before I had the joy of knowing him, knowing that he even existed, or he that I existed.

I heard a delightful story from a Salvation Army officer who had gone through the Welsh Revival, and he said they were having a tremendous meeting one night when that revival was at its height. And a young man got up and gave a testimony, and had been recently converted to Christ, and he was simply flaming with ardor for Christ and overflowing with joy, and he said, friend, I feel as though I'm on the gospel ship, and she's doing 20 knots an hour, which in those days was fast going for a ship, the beginning of the century. And not to be outdone, another young man got to his feet, also recently brought Christ, and he said, well, friends, I feel as though I'm on the gospel express, and she's doing 60 miles an hour.

Whereupon said my Salvationist friend, a dear old white-haired Welsh saint arose. And she looked around, she said, I want to tell the young men something. First of all, if they don't look out, their boilers will blow up.

And secondly, I want to tell them that by the grace of God, I've been doing it afoot for 40 years. With endurance, with endurance, with a steadfast, undeviating devotion to Jesus Christ. Paul said, that's the way the race has been run.

I've finished my course. Then there's a third thing that follows in this summing up. I have kept the faith for a redeemed man like Paul, the life in Christ is a battle, and his servant have been victorious in it.

For the redeemed man in Christ, life is a race, and Paul had won it. For the redeemed man in Christ, life is a trust, a stewardship, and Paul had kept it. I have kept the faith.

Now there's a double meaning in that, I think we are justified in saying. The first is very intimate and personal, Paul had kept the faith in the sense that the faith which found its center in Jesus Christ had remained that across the years. The day Christ captured him, Paul said, I send everything else to the junk pile upon which I might depend for my salvation and my standing with God, and now it's Christ and Christ alone, my atoning sin bearer, upon whom I rely and in whom I stand, and I count all things but Lord's.

Now Paul maintained that attitude, he kept the faith in that sense. But there is another meaning, a more objective meaning. Paul not only kept the faith in his own heart, but he kept the faith in the churches.

When the faith, that is the body of revealed truth as it is in Jesus Christ, Christ incarnate, born of a virgin, living a sinless life, dying an atoning death, rising again, making a spoil of the powers of hell and of death, ascending to the right hand of the majesty, sending the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier and empowerer of his church, when this faith was threatened anywhere in the churches, Paul was right there to defend the faith and to maintain its integrity and its purity and its sufficiency as it was centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. I've kept the faith not only in my own heart subjectively, but objectively as its defender and interpreter in the churches. Life is a stewardship, a trust.

We've been put in trust with the gospel, Paul says elsewhere, a stewardship, and Paul had kept it. What a testimony. Well then there is the finishing up.

Now in verse 6 you have a remarkable twofold description of death. First of all he says, I'm on the point of being sacrificed. What is death for the Christian? A grim and ghastly thing? No, it is the last act of self-giving which crowns the whole offering of life.

Literally, I'm being libated. The libation was the drink offering, sometimes water and sometimes wine, that was poured on top of the sacrifice. Now for Paul, his whole life had been an offering, and it should be for you and me.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your body as a living sacrifice. His whole life had been death. And now death, the act of dying, is the libation, the final dedication, self-giving, which crowns the whole of life.

Not only a libation, but it's a liberation. For he says in the second clause of verse 6, the time of my departure is at hand. The word departure is the most interesting and impregnant word here.

It's the word from which we get out of the Greek, our English word, analysis. The time of my annulus is at hand. There's a variety of meanings.

Sometimes a farmer would use it. Comes to the end of the day, and down at the end of the furrow, he unyilks the oxen from the plow. Says, I'm going home to rest.

It's his departure. It's the sailor's word. A sailor is ready to leave one port and go to another, and so he severs his ship from the key or the dock.

He unmoors it. That's the meaning of this. The time of my unmooring is at hand.

My vessel is going out to a port that human eyes can't see. It's the philosopher's word. When at last, light dawns, and he's able to resolve a knotty problem with which he's been wrestling.

Life is full of mysteries here. We see through a glass darkly, but death for the believer, if death for Paul, is going out where the mysteries are unraveled. Now we know in part, but then shall we know also as we are known.

Isn't that a wonderful way to die? This is facing the end. Not dismally, not self-pityingly, not despairingly, but triumphantly. And then the laying up.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, and a crown of glory, and a crown of rejoicing, and a crown of life. This is the crown of righteousness. This is the fitness, not the worthiness, but the fitness that crowns the life of those who have made Christ their righteousness.

Beautiful word in the letter to Sardis, among the seven letters of Revelation. Thou hast a few names in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments. They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

Now worthy there doesn't mean merit. Not because they merit it, but because they've been fitted for it. And if you are going to enjoy the presence and fellowship, the eternal oneness of yourself with Christ in the glory, you must know fellowship with Him in His righteousness and holiness here and now.

And then He'll lay up for you and give you at long last the crown, the summing up. Life is a battle, but I've won it by His grace. A race, but I've finished it.

A trust, but I've kept it. The finishing up, ah, the time of my departure is at hand. I'm making my final sacrifice to the Lord who won me.

And the laying up, He waits for me with the crown, the fadeless crown of His own righteousness. Let us pray. Breathe Thy Holy Spirit upon Thy Word, our God, and upon our waiting, worshipping hearts, that there may be a living apprehension of this truth and the glorious realization of it day by day in our experience.

For Christ's sake. Amen.

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