

Paul's Final Years

by Steve Gallagher

Paul's final years were marked by his release from confinement, his travels, and his writings to Timothy and Titus, which addressed the growing threat of false teachers and Gnosticism.

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Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:6

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Description

This sermon concludes the life of Paul and the Book of Acts, highlighting his release, travels, and imprisonment in Rome. It explores the challenges faced by early Christians in the Roman Empire, including persecution under Nero. The sermon reflects on Paul's faithfulness, trials, and ultimate martyrdom, emphasizing his unwavering commitment to the gospel despite opposition and hardship.

Transcript

All right, here is our final message in the life of Paul, and our final message through the Book of Acts. Actually, Acts Chapter 29, if Luke would have written it, but he didn't. So, we will cover some incidents that happen after the Book of Acts, just to kind of wrap up Paul's life.

So, it seems as though Paul is released from his confinement in the spring of 63, acquitted of all the charges against him. How long he lived after that is open for debate, and different people believe different things, but it seems like the consensus of the guys who are mostly into his story, it seems that most of them would say either three-and-a-half years or four-and-a-half years after he's released, he continues on. So, Paul gets out and he's free to go wherever he wants, and I'll get into that story here in a minute.

But first, I want to take a step back, and I want to talk a little bit about what life had become like for Christians in the Roman Empire at this date. First of all, it's amazing how many Christians there are in Rome by the time Paul is released. I mean, it just seems like there's a lot of people have gotten saved, and either directly through his ministry or indirectly through other people who he was ministering to and so on.

So, there was, I don't know, hundreds maybe, maybe more, maybe thousands by then, I'm not sure. It certainly grew quickly. But anyway, it's hard to say at that point in 63, how many there were.

But Christianity was considered a Jewish sect by the Roman authorities. And this was an extremely important designation because of two Roman laws that I want to touch on real briefly. Number one, there was a law forbidding any new religion being established in the Roman Empire without being sanctified officially.

So, that would have made a real problem for Christianity, just that alone. But secondly, there was a cult of emperor worship. Not that many people were into it.

It's really more of a thing of the ego of these tyrants that kind of, I don't know, promoted that. And all of the people who were around them, who were kissing up to them, trying to appease them, trying to stay on their good side. So, anyway, there was this emperor worship thing, and it seems as though maybe once a year or whatever, depending on where you were at in the Roman Empire, you were expected to take a pinch of incense and put it at the altar of the divine emperor.

And thereby, you're showing that you're worshiping him, you're paying homage to him. And it was kind of an enforced patriotism by the Roman Empire. It was kind of a test of loyalty to the empire.

Well, the Christians wouldn't do this. And so, they started having problems. The Jews were exempted from all of this because the Romans figured out it is impossible dealing with the Jews.

They're just so difficult, just as a people. So, they just exempted them from this. It just makes for a more peaceful empire.

And so, the Christians, as long as they were looked at as Jews, it wasn't a problem. But what happened was, as time went on, and more and more people were becoming Christians, and an increasingly larger percentage of them are Gentiles, the Romans started figuring out, wait a minute, this is a new religion. And so, when they started figuring that out, then the Christians became suspect.

And kind of, there was a hostility developing within the Roman authorities, just that. None of this had to do with Nero. It wouldn't have mattered who was the emperor at the time.

This was just kind of empire-wide, this sentiment that was growing towards the Christians. Well, anyway, in 64, this terrible fire sweeps through Rome. Many people believe that it was Nero who had that fire set.

And apparently, I think it was 12 out of 14 districts burned to the ground. So, most of the people in that city were destitute, homeless. They were in trouble.

And at the same time that this happened, Nero had this massive building project going on. He was building himself a magnificent palace that he called the Golden House. And so, you have these two things going on at the same time.

Then the fire happens. Well, instead of focusing on the needs of his people, who are in real trouble, I mean, they're destitute, imagine like over in Syria right now, all the many thousands of people are living in refugee camps and so on, just trying to survive. And your president or whatever is taking all his resources to build himself a beautiful palace and doing nothing for his people.

That's what Nero was in. And for instance, there were regular grain ships that would go to Egypt and just fill up with wheat and corn and so on and bring it back to Rome. And that's what fed the people.

But he used those ships, instead of getting the grain the people needed, he used those ships to get these exquisite building materials for his palace. And there's a lot of growing resentment amongst the people, amongst the Roman Senate, just throughout. And I guess he's figuring it out somehow.

So he's got to get the heat off himself. So he finds a scapegoat, which happens to be the Christians. This new sect that has grown up this, to them, this superstitious thing that comes out of Palestine.

And he blames them for starting the fire. So that just opens the door for him to persecute the Christians. I want to read something that the Roman historian Tacitus wrote.

This was written like 50 years after this, so about 110 AD or so. And you'll see the hostility just from the Roman authorities in general, or Roman citizens in general, towards Christianity 50 years later. You'll just see the way he wrote this.

But let me just read this. To kill the rumors, in other words, the rumors that he had started the fire himself, Nero charged and tortured some people hated for their evil practices, the group popularly known as Christians. The founder of this sect, Christ, had been put to death by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, when Tiberius was emperor.

Now, that's quite an affirmation of the gospel story right there from a Roman historian who was anti-Christian in his bias. That just says something right there. Anyway, their deadly superstition had been suppressed temporarily, but was beginning to spring up again.

Not now, just in Judea, but even in Rome itself, where all kinds of sordid and shameful activities are attracted and catch on. First, those who confessed to being Christians were arrested. Then, on information obtained from them, through horrible torture, no doubt, hundreds were convicted, more for their anti-social beliefs than for fire raising.

In their deaths, they were made a mockery. They were covered in the skins of wild animals, torn to death by dogs, crucified, or set on fire, so that when darkness fell, they burned like torches in the night. Nero opened up his own gardens for this spectacle and gave a show in the arena, where he mixed with the crowd or stood dressed as a charioteer on a chariot.

As a result, although they were guilty of being Christians and deserved death, people began to feel sorry for them. For they realized that they were being massacred, not for the public good, but to satisfy one man's mania. And that's, wow, for a historian, a totally secular person to recognize and see it for what it was, is a really amazing thing.

All right, so that is the climate of the Roman Empire that Paul is living in. And not just Paul, but of course, all the believers of that day. So, Paul gets out in 63, and he begins traveling.

His travels, we can piece them together, sort of. But they only are like meager scraps of information, that we can derive from some passing comment that Paul made in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Or there are some things that early church fathers written also.

But I'm gonna put it together as best as I can see it happened. It may not have happened in this order, but probably he did go to all these places. But for the sake of just getting it out there, I'll lay out one possible order that Paul visited these different places.

So we know in Philippians 2.24, he had told the Philippians just before he went to trial. Remember, he wrote the book of Philippians right before he went to trial and was acquitted. So this was not that long before, a month before or whatever.

He told them that he hoped to visit them very soon. So we're going to assume that that's the first thing he did. He gets out of Rome, and he goes all the way, maybe jumped on a ship, and goes all the way around the boot of Italy, goes around Greece, and gets up into the Aegean Sea, and makes it up there to Macedonia.

I don't know, that's possible. Or he may have visited other places first on the way. But anyway, let's say that he went straight to Philippi.

There's nothing else we know about it. But he had also told Philemon some months before that, that he had hoped to visit them, the churches there in the Lycus Valley, Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae. So let's just assume that he went down into Asia, the province of Asia, stopped in Ephesus, spent time there, no doubt.

And finally went inland into this other area to Colossae. And then we also know that he wanted to go to Spain. In Romans 15, he mentions it a couple of times, that he's desirous to go there to preach the gospel.

And to extend out, to push the boundaries of Christianity into a new frontier. And in this case, we don't have just his desire mentioned, but early church fathers said that he did indeed go to Spain and preach the gospel. It's possible he may have spent a couple of years there, trying to get things established there and advancing the cause of Christ there in Spain.

And as I mentioned last week, it would make sense, because when that terrible persecution broke out, the first person they'd be looking for is Paul. So it would make sense that he would not be in the normal areas, that he would be off in some other area. They wouldn't know that or whatever.

So anyway, he ends up back in the Aegean Sea area. And we know that he went to Ephesus. And 1 Timothy 1.3, he told Timothy, he mentioned to Timothy that he had left Timothy there.

So obviously, if he left him there, then he had been there. And then he went up to Macedonia, which I'll get to in a second. If you remember the last time he was in Ephesus, he on the way to Jerusalem, he had stopped in Miletus, actually not Ephesus, but he stopped in Miletus and met with the Ephesian elders.

Remember that? And he just shared some things with them. And he warned them. I'm going to read what he said.

I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you. Man, what a terrible foreknowledge to have to live with. Not sparing the flock and from among your own selves, men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore, be on the alert. So he warned them what was going to happen. And apparently, that's exactly what happened.

Because now when he, this is what, five years later, he writes to Timothy from Macedonia. I'll get to in a minute. I'm going to go over some things he said here.

1 Timothy 1 verse 3. Listen to what he said. As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God, which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. So in other words, they were spiritual amateurs trying to act as though they were in a position to instruct other people. And they were just making a mess out of the church because it just brings a lot of confusion.

And when you have people strong in their own personalities, exerting themselves, you know, and trying to get followers to come after them. Okay, and then in verse 18, he says this, this command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.

So whoever these guys were and whatever they were saying, and we'll hear about Alexander here in a minute again, they were saying something that was blasphemous towards Jesus. Maybe they were calling into question his divinity or who knows what, maybe some kind of Gnostic teaching. In fact, look here at verse 20 of chapter six, he tells Timothy, Oh, Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith.

So right there, you get another sense of the Gnosticism that was growing during his time there. There, all right. So next he goes to Macedonia, as I just mentioned, and he wrote 1 Timothy there.

And his two main purposes for writing this epistle was number one, to give Timothy written documentation, something that he would have forever, endorsing his ministry to other people. Timothy's a younger guy, and there are probably older men who didn't want to submit themselves to his authority and so on. But Paul is endorsing Timothy's authority over the leaders there.

And he's basically installing him as the bishop of that area. And he's telling these people, this is my representative here in Asia. Obey him, listen to him, submit to his authority.

And he tells Timothy, don't let anyone disrespect you because you're a young man. So the other thing that he's trying to do in that epistle is lay down a structure of the church and also to lay out guidelines for how a pastor's life should look and how a deacon's life should look. So there's an understanding that the hierarchy of Christian leadership is built entirely on the character of the man, the walk he has with God, his inward life, his humility, his wisdom, his love for God and people.

Those are the things that establish the hierarchy. And you look at the American church, would you say that that's the case here? No, not hardly. We have completely twisted it around to where it has really, it's all based on personality and talents and abilities and so on.

So anyway, that was what was behind his epistle to Timothy. And the next thing we see is that he travels to Crete with Titus. Now, let me just say a couple of things about Titus.

We know that Titus was an early and trusted disciple of Paul. If you remember, Paul mentions in Galatians 2 when he's talking about going to Jerusalem to meet with the elders there in the Jerusalem church, that he had a Greek with him, excuse me, and that Greek was Titus. So that was all the way back in 49 AD.

Now, where are we now? 15 years later. This is all the way back in 49 AD. So Titus had to be one of his earliest converts.

I'm not sure where Titus is from. But anyway, the next thing we hear about him is in the whole exchange of letters with Corinth. You remember that it was Titus who he entrusted to represent him to this wayward church.

So it was Titus who took 1 Corinthians, that took that strong rebuking letter to them, went back and forth between Paul and them. So it was Titus that Paul entrusted that job to. So he obviously had a lot of respect and trust for him.

But what's interesting is that Titus is never mentioned in the book of Acts. Luke never mentions his name. And that's just interesting to me.

Maybe it's because they never were around Paul at the same time and they didn't really have much connection and he just wasn't big in Luke's mind. I don't know. Who knows why he didn't mention him, but he's not mentioned in there.

But anyway, we can see that Paul and Titus travel to Crete. And well, let me just read some verses here. In Titus 1.5, he gives his commission to Titus.

He says, for this reason, I left you in Crete. So again, obviously they were there together and he left Titus there and he went on to wherever. That you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.

And then in chapter two, verse 15, he says, these things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. You know, you see the same kinds of language in Titus and first Timothy.

There's a lot of similarities in these two letters and they were written very close together. You know, again, you see Romans and Galatians, you see Ephesians and Colossians, and now you see first Timothy and Titus. You know, these pairings of these letters, books that Paul wrote, you know, at times they're close to each other.

But anyway, the similarities are there with first Timothy and it's the same purpose. He's documenting for Titus, his endorsement of Titus's ministry and also laying out the guidelines for the church and spiritual leadership and so on. And let me also read a few verses, some things that Paul said about false teachers to Titus, because it's apparently false teachers had made it into Crete and there were churches in various cities there across that island.

And, you know, who knows the damage that they did there amongst those churches. But let me just read some verses. Titus 1.10, for there are many rebellious men.

That right there, I mean, that, if I had to, I was gonna say, define a false teacher with one word, maybe rebellious would be it. I don't know. It certainly would be right at the top.

For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. You know, so he's exposing their motives, exposing what they're doing and so on. Then he tells Titus in verse 14, not to pay attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. You know, this cynicism of unbelief. But both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

They profess to know God, but by their deeds, they deny him being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. And man, those things could be said about so many false teachers in our day. You know, they profess to know the Lord, but if you look at their lives, you realize that they're frauds.

Anyway, chapter three, verse nine, but avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the law for they are unprofitable and worthless. In other words, these false teachers, one of the things they would do is they would try to engage you in banter, you know, and try to get you into a dispute, an argument, a debate about ideas and stuff. It's so much like what goes on now, like especially the emergent church, doing the same thing.

Usually have some smooth talker who's, you know, at the forefront and he just knows how to, I don't know, work his words. And unless you are really good at doing the same thing and debating, it's very hard to stand up to them. You know, we just have to preach the truth and let the truth stand for what it is and not get ourselves into those kinds of situations.

I know for myself, I will not debate anyone. You know, I will speak the truth and if they don't like the truth, then I just have to put them in God's hands. And I think that's what Paul's attitude was.

Anyway, he goes on to say, reject a factious man after a first and second warning. Knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned. And you know, that's also kind of an important principle for us here at Pure Life Ministries, that if you get someone in here who just refuses to, I don't know, just be in the flow that God is in, in this place and is argumentative and debating and just causing problems, you warn him, you warn him again.

And if he's, you know, still in that rebellious spirit, then he's got to go. And you know, it may seem unmerciful, but what's unmerciful is to keep someone in the camp who's causing that much trouble for all the other sheep. You don't want to do that.

All right, so anyway, he leaves Titus in Crete to kind of, you know, he goes down there and he visits the churches, kind of makes his presence known, maybe tries to establish some order. And then he leaves Titus there to just kind of maintain things and make sure they get established in the right way and, you know, so on. At some point, he picks up Trophimus and then he leaves Trophimus in Miletus because he got sick.

You can see that in 2 Timothy 4.20. And at some point, he goes to Corinth and he left Erastus there in Corinth. So apparently Erastus and Trophimus had been traveling with him also. Maybe they were down in Crete with him.

I don't know. But right around this time is when he wrote the book of Titus and sent it to Titus. And, you know, in that book, well, I'll just mention it here right now.

He said to Titus in chapter three, verse 12, when I send Artemis or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Neapolis for I have decided to spend the winter there. All right. So he's going to send another guy down there to Crete to take Titus's place in leadership there.

And then he wants Titus to meet him in Neapolis. Now, Neapolis is not Neapolis. All right.

Neapolis is the port city outside of Philippi up on the Aegean Sea in the north part of the sea there. That's Neapolis. Necropolis is on the other side of Greece, on the western side of Greece, up a little ways, you know, maybe, I don't know, a hundred miles northwest of Corinth.

And, you know, it's the only place that's mentioned in the Bible, as far as I know, Necropolis. But it seems as though he probably spent the winter there. And if my dating is right, this would have been the winter of 66 to 67 AD.

At some point, he leaves there and he ends up in Troas. So he goes back to the Aegean Sea area and he ends up in Troas, you know, again, up in the northern part of the Aegean Sea area up there. This must have been in the spring of 67.

And it seems as though that's where he was arrested at. Now, Paul is a wanted man. You know, there was a hot persecution going on.

There's a lot of hostility and suspicion. Some of the stories they told about Christians were just unbelievable. It's kind of like what we experienced here in northern Kentucky, you know, especially the early five or ten years when we first got here.

Some of the stories they told about us and so on. It's just unbelievable what people will say and what they will believe. And they made stories up that they were, you know, having these, they were sacrificing children, they were having orgies, just horrible things that they told about the Christians.

It was just not true. And anyway, there was a lot of suspicion and hatred for the Christians. And so when that is the flow of the world, for instance, like now, over the last ten years, especially since Mike Johnston completely failed in his ministry all those years ago, now the homosexual agenda has completely taken over the American culture, all because of Mike Johnston.

And, you know, so now, you know, it is politically incorrect to say anything about homosexuality being sinful or anything like that. Right? Isn't that right? And, you know, so it was kind of like that, that it was now not okay to be a Christian. And, you know, they were despised by everyone.

So people would be on the lookout or at least just be sensitive if they heard that the Apostle Paul was in town, you know, they're going to go to the authorities and, you know, some Roman soldier, what a feather in his cap to be the guy who arrests the Apostle Paul, the main guy behind this insurrection in the Roman Empire. So anyway, they got him. And it seems like they got him at Troas because he left personal items there, his parchments, his books, and his cloak, you know, and those are things that he would take with him traveling.

So it seems like he left there in a hurry. Maybe he got arrested there or maybe he ran for his life and got caught somewhere. I don't know.

But anyway, he was arrested. And if he was arrested in someplace there, which I assume, then it would have been a Roman contingent that would take him all the way to Rome and deposit him now, not into rented quarters, but now into a dungeon in Rome. Let me read what Coney Barrenhausen say.

Paul passed to his dungeon and there as the gate clanged upon him, he sat down, chained night and day without further hope, a doomed man. To visit him now was no longer to visit a man against whom nothing serious was charged. It was to visit the bearer of a name which the emperor and his minions detested.

It was to visit the ringleader of those who were maligned as the ones who began a deadly calamity. Talking about the fire. Merely to be kind to such a man was regarded as infamous.

No one could do it without rendering himself at the very least liable to the coarse insolence of the soldiers. If a Christian were charged with being a Christian on the ground of his having visited Paul, how could he deny the charge? How, without denying it, could he be saved from incurring the most extreme danger? And keep in mind that Paul was mostly protected because he was a Roman citizen, but that wasn't there for 90 some percent of these other believers. They were not Roman citizens and therefore because they're not Roman citizens, they could be subjected to any kind of horrible death, horrible torture, thrown to the lions, whatever.

You know, would you want to go visit Paul? When knowing that you got to go right into that prison and all these guards and all that hostility. Anyway, it seemed as though most of his followers scattered. One man braved the dangers to visit him, a guy named Onesiphorus, who in 2 Timothy chapter one, well, let me just read it real quick, verses 17 and 18, talking about Onesiphorus, well, 16, the Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.

But when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me. The Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. And you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.

So here was an Ephesian Christian who really stood by Paul bravely. And it's very possible that it cost him his life because when he gives greetings to the household of Onesiphorus at the end of this epistle, 2 Timothy, he sends greetings to the household but doesn't say anything about him. You know, so I don't know what happened to that man, but you know, he apparently was a faithful, loyal soldier to Christ.

All right, so Paul spends some amount of time imprisoned in this dungeon, could have been several months. And it seems as though there's a two-part trial that's going to take place or takes place. And the reason I say that is because Nero, you know, when we arrest a guy for multiple charges, he's brought into trial for all those charges, all in one trial, okay? But for whatever reason, Nero would have a trial for each charge.

So, you know, this is one charge and they would have a trial and then they'd shut that trial down. He'd be the guilty or innocent. And then if he was innocent, let's say, then they'd move on to the next charge.

So that was Nero's way of doing things. So it says there in 2 Timothy that all forsook him at his first trial. And I don't think that was the trial in 63 because he was still pretty honored, even amongst the Romans at that time.

I don't think that's what it was referring to, well, most people don't think that. It had to be the first part of the trial here. So apparently he's brought to trial probably for treason.

My guess is that they charged him with being the instigator of starting the fire in Rome. And the reason I think that is because he was apparently acquitted of that charge, whatever that charge was. If he would have been found guilty of that charge, then the fact that he was a Roman citizen would not have spared him from a horrible death.

He could have been thrown to the lions or whatever. And as we'll see here in a minute, he said that he escaped the mouth of the lions. And I think that that's probably what it's referring to.

Some people think that that's figurative for Nero, but I just don't tend to think that. I think it's literal that he was, whatever that first charge was, probably treason. He was found innocent.

If it was to do with the fire, maybe somehow he was able to prove that he wasn't even in Rome when that fire was started. Maybe he had some proof of that. And so that charge was dismissed.

But there was still a second charge that was not as serious, but it was serious enough for him to be executed. And so did he write Second Timothy before that second trial or after? I don't know. It's kind of hazy to me because if you look in chapter four, verse six, he says, the time of my departure has come.

Now that sounds like he's already been convicted. He's already been sentenced to death and he's waiting any moment for the soldiers to show up and executing. But if you look at verse eight, he says, in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, etc.

So that makes it sound more like off in the distance. And then also in verse 21, he tells Timothy, make every effort to come before winter. So that doesn't sound like his death is imminent either.

So, again, it's just guesswork, but I tend to think that he hasn't yet come to a second trial, but the handwriting's on the wall. He knows what's coming. And so he knows death is imminent, but not that imminent.

And he's not sure how long it's going to be. Now, I thought it would be good to just read the fourth chapter of Second Timothy, just because this is like the epitaph of this man's life that we've been studying. And I just think it would be good to read this.

So let me start here. Second Timothy 4.1, I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. Now, considering the situation, do you think that those words might have carried some weight with Timothy? Knowing the life that stood behind those words, knowing that Paul's days were numbered, that when he said this, it wasn't just some, you know, we read these verses as if they're nothing, but they were something.

They meant something very heavy and solemn and weighty when he first wrote them to Timothy, and they should be taken by us in the same way. And especially when you consider the next two verses, which is a prophetic word. Paul wasn't even thinking of the end times, probably, or maybe he was, I don't know.

But certainly these verses apply to today, to the apostate church. For the time will come when they, meaning the church, will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. And, you know, we have seen this over and over and over.

Paul constantly having to deal with the false teachers of his day. But he is seeing a time off in the future when it's going to be even worse. And he could not, I want to say he could not imagine, but maybe he did get a side of it.

What trouble the church is in now. But you be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For 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 course. I have kept the faith.

In the future, 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. Make every effort to come to me soon.

For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me, has gone to Thessalonica. And this present world is not the word cosmos. It's the word aeon, right? This present age.

So in other words, he's living for now. And this isn't so much of a worldliness spirit like we tend to think of. This is more of a run for your life because I'm terrified that I might lose my life.

For the sake of Christ. It had more to do with that, what he's saying here about Demas. And the others he mentions here, you don't get the same sense that they deserted him in that sort of way.

I mean, he makes a special point to kind of put his finger on Demas as someone not to be trusted now. Anyway, Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.

Pick up Mark and bring him with you for he is useful to me for service. What a blessing to see Mark completely restored to Paul now. The Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

When you come, bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. Now this is probably the same Alexander he mentioned in the first epistle that had blasphemed the Lord.

Probably the same. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Now, ominous words.

You don't want those words spoken about you ever. Be on guard against him yourself for he vigorously opposed our teaching. At my first defense, no one supported me but all deserted me.

May it not be counted against them. You know, Paul understood that what these people were facing and he didn't hold it against them. He really did.

Verse 17, but the Lord stood with me and strengthened me so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished. And that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.

Okay, that was his first part of his trial. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. Greet Priscilla and Aquila in the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.

Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you. Also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Wow, the final words of Paul the Apostle.

All right, so Paul goes to trial before Nero. Let me read what Farrar says here. Paul before Nero.

If indeed it was so, what a contrast does the juxtaposition of two such characters suggest. Nero, not yet 30 years of age, was stained through and through with every possible crime and steeped in every degradation. And Paul had spent his whole life in the pursuit of truth.

And the practice of holiness. And now these two men were face to face. Imperial power and abject weakness.

They stood face to face. The representatives of two religions. Christianity in its dawning brightness.

Paganism in its despair. And their respective positions showed how much at this time the course of this world was under the control of the prince of the power of the air. For incest and matricide were clothed in purple and seated amid the incense of splendor without limit and power beyond control.

And he whose life had exhibited all that was great and noble in the heart of man stood in peril of execution, fettered and in rags. All right, so anyway, Nero is insane at this point. Absolutely demon possessed and insane.

Who knows? He probably went into a fury. I don't know. It's hard to say, you know, what exactly happened.

But anyway, Paul ends up convicted and condemned. And the early church fathers are all unanimous about the fact that Nero was the one who sentenced him to death. Now we know from history that Nero died in June of 68.

And since Paul had asked Timothy to come to him before the winter, it's likely that he was executed in late summer or fall, and I'm going to say of 67. It could have been 66. It could even have been before, but my guess is 67, just a few months before Nero himself died.

Wow, talking about two different destinations. Let me read what Coney Barron-Hawson said and Farrar, and then we're done. The small troop of soldiers were marching, though they knew it not, in a procession more truly triumphal than any they had ever followed in the train of general or emperor.

The place of execution was not far distant, and there the sword of the headsman ended Paul's long course of sufferings and released that heroic soul from that feeble body. And then Farrar, no blaze of glory shone on Paul's last hours. No multitudes of admiring and adoring brethren surrounded his last days with the halo of martyrdom.

Near the spot where he was martyred, it is probable that they laid him in some nameless grave. How little did anyone know that the apparent earthly failure would in reality be the most infinite success. Who that watched that obscure and miserable end could have dreamed that Rome itself would not only adopt the gospel of that poor outcast, but even derive from his martyrdom and that of his fellow apostle, referring to Peter, her chief sanctity and glory in the eyes of a Christian world.

God buries his workmen, but carries on their work. It is not for any earthly reward that God's heroes have sought, not even for the reward of hoping in the posthumous success of the cause to which they have sanctified their lives. All questions of success or failure, they have been content to leave in the hands of God.

Their one desire has been to be utterly true to the best that they have known. And that certainly is true of the apostle Paul. So it's an ignominious ending to a very noble life.

And just like his savior, he was murdered for nothing more than living a selfless life. That was all, you know, that they had to lay at his charge. But what a contrast.

Stepping out of the realm of time under control of the spirit of the age, you know, where he was despised and treated like dirt, treated like the lowest, like he said earlier, the dregs of the world, treated like that. And then in an instant, to step into that eternal realm where our wonderful, wonderful Lord is incomplete. Complete control.

What a contrast. What an amazing thing. And I always, for myself, as best as I can, I always want that in the forefront of my mind.

That is the great goal and objective is to, is the day that we go across that line, go across that river into the eternal. And Paul is there. And he's been there 2,000 years, you know, and nothing but joy and bliss and busy for the Lord still, but without all the suffering and opposition and the devil to deal with and all of that.

Free, completely, utterly free. Now, that's the end of the life of the apostle Paul. What a great heroic life it was.

Amen. So that's the end of our series on Acts. And that's the end of our series on the apostle Paul.

I hope it was a blessing to you guys. God bless you.

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