

In last week's message... I led off by quoting the final words of a few famous people. I am going to do the same this week... because there is such a contrast with the last words of the Apostle Paul... (which we have come to – in 2nd Timothy)... and what we might have expected. ... The final words of men and women who are on their deathbed are usually stripped of hypocrisy and reflect accurately their true beliefs and feelings.

Listen to these very honest words said by Napoleon Bonaparte on his deathbed:

“I die before my time; and my body will be given back to the earth, to become the food of worms. Such is the fate which so soon awaits the ‘Great Napoleon;”

Not long before he died, Mahatma Gandhi, confessed:

“My days are numbered. I am not likely to live very long-perhaps a year or a little more. For the first time in my fifty years, I find myself in a slough of despond. All about me is darkness. I am praying for light.”

FINALLY - Does the name “Charles Talleyrand” ring a bell for you? ... He was a French statesman... who was best known for his ability to survive any kind of hardship - and still remain on top. ... As a matter of fact... if you are (ever) in France... and a French national were to call you a “*Talleyrand*”... you should probably feel complimented. ... It means that you always seem to land on your feet - no matter what difficulty you have to face... or how severe the turmoil is... you will end up well.

(You see) Before the French Revolution.... Charles Talleyrand was a member of the French aristocracy... (the upper class of lords and ladies). The French Revolution was all about murdering and over-turning this system... and when they did... once all the dust had settled... Charles

Talleyrand was still a French nobleman. ... Somehow through cunning and craftiness... he managed to emerge (not only with his life)... but with his upper class position of a statesman... ..However when Charles Talleyrand faced his life's greatest challenge – (death at an old age) - he wrote the following words on a piece of paper and laid it on the nightstand beside his bed:

“Behold eighty-three years passed away! What cares! What agitation! What anxieties! What ill-will! What sad complications! And all without other results, except great fatigue of mind and body, and a profound sentiment of discouragement with regard to the future, and of disquiet with regard to the past!”

As we come to the Apostle Paul's final words... we need to realize that Paul had every reason to feel resentful. ... He had been the target of abuse for years. ... He had endured dozens of betrayals... undoubtedly mourning the sorrow of each one. ... He had borne the brunt of false accusations as attempts to silence him. ... He had endured danger... imprisonment... flogging... and even stoning for the sake of the gospel.

There is little doubt in my mind that... by the time Paul wrote these final words to Timothy... he looked much older than he should have... (stooped and scarred)... probably aching from every (once-broken) bone in his body. It would not have been unreasonable for him to expect (and for us to expect) that God would give him a comfortable retirement - as a reward for such dedicated service to the Lord and His church.

Instead... Paul languished in Rome's cold... dripping... subterranean Mamartine prison... mud... dust... and stench coated his existence and seemed an appropriate symbol for his life. ... He was now a nobody... having lost his high-born status. Such was his reward for his committed

following of Jesus! ... Here he was a poor man... shivering in inadequate clothing... living out his last hours on earth. ... Apart from Luke... he was bereft of the presence of friends... and was forsaken by his onetime followers. ... Charged with rabble-rousing against Rome... he suffered contempt and abuse from his jailers.

Paul had become a joke among his enemies. ... They reasoned that his final miseries were proof that God was not with him. ... And as he languished in his dungeon cell... his work in Ephesus was being torn by religious wolves like Hymenaeus and Philetus... who taught that the future resurrection of believers was past... and that all the prosperity of Heaven was to be the experience (right now) of every Christian.

*Name it and claim it, that's what faith's about!
You can have what you want if you just have no doubt.*

If the health and wealth preachers of Paul's day (as well as our own day) are correct – in telling us that strong faith will always bring you prosperous health and prosperous bank accounts – then the Apostle Paul had NO FAITH at all! ... (Folks!) The health and wealth preachers are false-teachers. They are exactly what we saw in last weeks passage of what the end-times would have...

2 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)

³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,

In sharp contrast to these false-teachers... Paul's perspectives at the end of his life... (his dying perspectives)... tell us how to live and how to die.

Notice how (unexpectedly) our passage today is a glorious declaration of personal triumph.

2 Tim 4:5-8

Paul sounds very triumphant... doesn't he? ... This seems so remarkable when we consider his miserable circumstances that he was in when he wrote this. There is no bitterness... not a shred of feeling sorry for what he has missed out on. ... In the other people's last words (which I read at the beginning of today's message)... they sounded confused and disappointed. But not Paul. He is victorious!

If the Lord tarries... you and I (one day) will lay on our deathbed.... If that happens... how can we be like Paul... instead of these other examples...? How can we look back and exude such joyful accomplishment ...? ... What is the secret for living and dying well...?

Verse five (in today's passage) is the answer. 2 Timothy 4:5 is the summary of this entire letter. It condenses all of Paul's final instructions to his beloved disciple in a single verse. "*Timothy do these four things!*" ... These words gather up in very brief form all that he was expecting Timothy (and us) to do. ... Within this verse... are some of the most important dying words that any man has ever spoken. ... One verse says it all. ...If I had only one verse out the entire Bible to show me what I am to emphasize in my Christian life here on earth... this would be it.

Now class! Here is your homework assignment for this week. (I'm giving it to you early – so the rest of our time this morning can further instruct you and motivate you to do it.) ... I want you to memorize 2 Timothy 4:5... (it's short; you can do it in 5 minutes)... and then pray everyday this week that

God would make these four things true for you. Everyday... ask God to develop these qualities in your life. (Land on your feet with this. Com'on now! ... Be a "Talleyrand!")

So now... let's read the verse (again)... and then I will explain the qualities that are mentioned...

2 Tim 4:5

- The first trait is: "*Always be sober minded.*"
- The second is "*endure suffering.*"
- Third – "*do the work of an evangelist.*"
- (And) Fourth – "*fulfill your ministry.*"

People are going to follow false teachers... but as for you... make sure that you live by these four characteristics.

"*Be sober-minded.*" The Greek term *nēphō* means to have your mind clear of anything that might impair your thinking. Drugs and alcohol will certainly impair thinking... but those are probably not what Paul was primarily writing about. There are so many things that impair our minds. Impair them from what? Impair us by keeping us from hearing God's voice (or being able to discern what He is saying to us... or wants from us.)

If we are angry... our minds can be impaired. Pride will also mar God's messages to us... as will discouragement... immoral thoughts and desires... Greed would be another. ... Dealing with our sinful attitudes and thoughts... (confessing them right away – the moment you discover them - and asking God to forgive us) is how we stay sober-minded.

Be sober-minded... keep your head on straight... remain stable in an upside down world. Don't be angry... proud... discouraged... greedy... or allow lingering immoral thoughts. Keep your cool and presence of mind. Confess wrong thoughts and attitudes – all day... every hour.

Paul demonstrated what sober-mindedness looks like in this same chapter... verse 16. After saying that everyone deserted him in his first defense... you know that he must have been disappointed. But Paul writes in verse 16: "*May it not be counted against them...*" He doesn't write: "*I hope they all die and burn!*" He is not reckless. He is sober-minded.

Likewise... pray everyday this week that God will keep you sober-minded all through the day. Then... confess any pride... anger... greed... immoral thoughts... etc. THE MOMENT you become aware of them. ... Second – pray for God's ability to endure suffering. This may be connected to the third one... "*do the work of an evangelist.*"

When we dare to speak the truth of Christ... we will **not** always be welcomed with open arms. ... We read in the Book of Acts that when the apostles evangelized... they got one of two responses — either a revival or a riot. ... We too should expect some hits when we speak God's message. ... We may cause a riot or two... but somewhere we might start a revival.

"*Endure suffering.*" This has been a frequent theme in this letter. ... EXPECT IT! ... Paul has written many times about the difficulties and the persecutions that Christians may have to face. ... He has already exhorted Timothy to "*endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ Jesus,*" (2 Tim 2:3).

That is a clear answer to the idea being widely taught today (that... when you become a Christian... God smooths everything out for you... that He protects you from all problems and dangers... and does not let you suffer any disappointments.) ... LISTEN! - Scripture stands solidly against that. As in this verse... Scripture exhorts us to endure hardship... to endure suffering. ... The health and wealth preachers are FALSE TEACHERS!

But even if you have not bought into the falsehoods of the prosperity gospel ... many Christians feel that something is wrong with their faith... if they have any trouble... any difficulty in their life. ... No! ... The apostle faithfully reminds us that there **will** be trouble... that those who seek to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ... A painless ministry is a shallow and fruitless ministry.

The **third trait** Paul gave in verse 5 is: "*Do the work of an evangelist.*" It is important to note that Paul does not say to Timothy "**be** an evangelist". In other words... proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ is an important work for **all** of us - whether or not we feel we have that gift.

Do you need to improve in evangelistic faithfulness? ... (If you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior... then I don't think that you DARE say "no").

So let me remind you of a few ideas. ... Remember that you do not work alone! ... The Holy Spirit is the great Evangelist - Who opens eyes for people to believe. ... Successful witnessing is sharing the good news about Jesus Christ *in the power of the Holy Spirit*... and leaving the results to God. ... Further... remember that we speak out of the overflow of our hearts. ... Therefore... fill your own heart with the gospel daily. "Every

day... remind yourself what the gospel has done for you and who you are in Christ. Then let us arise and tell others about the Savior of our souls.

Finally... Paul says: "*fulfill your ministry.*" ... (You know)... so often we look at our service to the Lord and to the Church as something we opt to do. We either chose to do it... or we chose not to. ... And, Boy! ... Isn't God so fortunate when we decide to exercise our option and do a little something for Him...? ... He should be ever so grateful!

But Christian... let me tell you something. There is a definite call that is placed on every true believer's life. There are specific jobs for which God has brought you into His kingdom to perform. Philippians 2:12 tells us that with fear and trembling (that perhaps we have not taken it serious enough) we are to get busy with those tasks. ... "*With fear and trembling-work it out!*" You are not saved by doing good works. But you are saved in order to do preordained work that God set aside and has assigned just for you.

... [P A U S E] ...

Remember your assignment class. Everyday this week you are to pray and ask God to enable you to do these four things: "*keep your head in all situations... endure hardship... do the work of an evangelist... and discharge all the duties of your ministry... do not quit until the end. Keep on until you have done all that the Lord has sent you to do.*"

For the time that we have remaining... we are going to be looking at our motivation to do these four things. (And let me tell you NOW)... It is so that we might have an epitaph at the end of our life... like Paul had. ... Let's look at the motivating/victorious epitaph that Paul writes for himself.

2 Tim 4:6

Here we find two different word pictures of the same thing. The first is taken from the Old Testament system of sacrificing. ... What was the drink offering?

There were no specific instructions given by God to the Israelites concerning the drink offering. ... However... it is mentioned again and again in Exodus and Leviticus. ...The wine was taken and poured over the sacrifice... which (of course) was really hot because it was on a brazen altar with fire underneath it. ... You know exactly what would happen. The drink offering would go up in steam. It would just evaporate and disappear.

The image of what Paul is saying here is astounding. *“I have just poured out my life as a drink offering on the sacrifice of Christ. My life will soon disappear... and all that will be seen is Christ...”*

Many Christians try to be remembered by having their names chiseled in stone... or by having a building named in their memory. ... Paul was not interested in that type of thing. He says: *“My life is a drink offering poured out; Christ—not Paul—is the One who is to be exalted.”*

But as gruesome as all this is... Paul seems to have no regrets at all. He does not view it as a disaster (a thing to be feared.) ... Paul was triumphant. ... It is clear that Paul did not think of himself as about to be executed... but rather as offering himself to God.

The second word Paul employs, “departure” had a variety of meanings in the New Testament’s original language. I will let William Barclay explain the victorious meanings of this word.

“(a) It is the word for the unyoking of an animal from the shafts of the cart or the plough. Death to Paul meant rest from toil. He would be

glad to lay the burden down... (b) It is the word for loosening bonds or fetters. Death for Paul was liberation and a release. He would exchange the confines of a Roman prison for the glorious liberty of the courts of Heaven. (c) It is the word for loosening the ropes of a tent. For Paul, he was breaking camp. He had taken many journeys across Asia Minor and Europe. Now he was setting out for his last and greatest journey. (d) It was the word for loosening the mooring ropes of a ship. Many a time Paul sailed the Mediterranean and had felt the ship leave the harbors for the deep waters. Now he is to launch out into the greatest deep of all; he is setting sail to cross the waters of death to arrive in the Heaven of eternity.”

Notice how every meaning of this word radiates some sort of sweet... triumphant... sense of **continuance**. Whether it is the release of a farm animal from it's yoke after a hard day of labor... a soldier loosening the stakes of his tent to move on... or a ship lifting anchor... tossing off the ropes... and rising on the tide so the winds can carry her to sea... they all picture a pleasing ... exultant ... extension ... and readiness for a new day.

That's what death **is** for the child of God. It is a release (and an exchange) for us. ... Once we have completed the assignments God has for us... we trade the burden of our earthly life... for the eternal joy of Heaven.

There can be no greater satisfaction than to know that you have fully accomplished all that the Lord has called you to do. ... Will you have such confidence...? ... Look how Paul continues his triumphant epitaph.

2 Tim 4:7

How is it that anyone can make such a claim about their personal spiritual faithfulness and achievement? ... You can't – without first recognizing that your life on earth is a **constant struggle**. Each of these analogies Paul used in this verse depict this reality.

A struggle involves great effort and energy. Many believers today do not recognize that the Christian life is a struggle. Consequently... they do not **exert** the necessary spiritual and physical vigor. ... In terms of their spiritual walk... they try to put everything on **autopilot**.

But we can never make such claims about our own achievement... unless we fully recognize that we are in a titanic struggle – and exert the appropriate amount of energy. ... Second... we must fully recognize that our spiritual work is very **noble**.

Notice how Paul doesn't just call it a fight. It wasn't just a fight. It was "**the good fight**." It was all to fulfill his Holy calling... to be a witness to an unsaved world. Can there be any struggle on the face of this earth that is more important than this?... No! But you see... many believers don't really believe this. ... Do you?

Third... Paul recognized that he had a divinely appointed course from which he was **not to wander**. ... He finished his course (his prescribed race.) ... Some years earlier he told the Ephesian elders that his goal was to finish his course (Acts 20:24). ... Now he could say triumphantly, "***finished it.***"

From the time you were first saved to the time God calls you into His divine presence - God has *had* a well-defined course for your life. Earlier I mentioned Philippians 2:12 which tells us that we are to work out what God has worked in to our salvation. (And we are to do this with fear and trembling) in case we might miss something that He is expecting us to do. A parallel verse is Ephesians 2:10.

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

A lot of believers don't want to think about this truth. They would rather see their only responsibility is to attend church every once in a while... and give a little money sometimes (if it won't hurt too badly.) ... God says that (if you are saved) then He has plans for you to discover each and every day. You have a course to run... a race that you are in.

No one... (not even Paul)... chooses his or her course. The course is prepared for us. We can choose (however) whether to run it. ... Do you know the will of God for your life? Are you in the plan of God? ... Is there a purpose for your life? (ABSOLUTELY! – if you are a Christian.) ... Most of the people in America are trying to be happy. ... Happiness is not something that you find by looking for it. It's there automatically when you get on the course that God has given you... and you stay on it.

... [P A U S E] ...

The fourth principle of Paul's life that we see in 2 Tim 4:7 was that "*I have kept the faith*"... he wrote. ... The word, "*kept*", *τηρω*, carries the idea of "watching over"... "heeding"... and "preserving." ... Paul watched over and protected the Word of God." He treasured it and kept it from being mistreated or distorted (by those who would try to twist it and use it for their own purposes.) ... He answered its critics. ... He warned those who would try to make it say things that it does not say. You and I need to keep the faith in the same way in the midst of a Biblically illiterate culture.

2 Tim 4:8

There is such strong irony surrounding this verse. ... Paul wrote it from his prison cell knowing that he has been condemned by Nero. By the world's standards... Paul was a failure... and he had been judged by Nero (the very embodiment of earthly success.) ... In terms of wealth... Nero had the wealth of the empire. Paul owned nothing more than the filthy clothes on his back. ... In terms of power... Nero ruled the entire Mediterranean world. Paul probably couldn't even stand erect in his cell. But the realm of eternity judges differently. Where are the two men now?

Paul's endurance... perseverance... and faithfulness... makes perfect sense... in the light of his eternal perspective. His eyes were on Christ's future appearance.

Christ's return is (for the most part) an academic or intellectual concern in churches today. ... *"Let's look at the facts as to why Christ's return is close at hand..."* ... *But* the joyful... personal element... is all together missing... much of the time. ... A.W. Tozer wrote (back in the 1960's) that the *"longing to see Christ that burned in the hearts of those **first** Christians seems to have burned itself out. All we have left are the ashes..."*

Do you possess an interest in having the correct doctrine about His return...or do you have a love-inflamed desire to look upon His face...? You may be a premillennialist... a postmillennialist... or an amillennialist. But I have news for you: there's no reward for holding any one of those views. The question is: Do you *love* His appearing? ... To love His appearing means that you have a close relationship with Him. ... Genuine believers are those who love Jesus' appearing.

A sure evidence of saving faith is having your heart set on Christ. (You see) unbelievers dread Christ's coming... but believers long for it. Jesus is our "blessed hope." ... This vision will keep you running your race. Do you see Jesus? There He is. You are getting closer. Keep running. Keep fighting. Keep guarding.

... [P A U S E] ...

As we close today... now is a good time to consider two searching questions that we see in Paul's self-proclaimed eulogy. (Answer them honestly.)

Question 1: When you remember the events of your past, are there regrets that you need to address? Now is the time to ask that question (while you have the time and the ability to do something about regrets... before they haunt you at your deathbed.)

Have I offended or harmed someone without having made it right? Is that person alive? Have I apologized and attempted to restore that relationship?

Perhaps it was a friend... or a family member... and they have long since passed into their own eternity. (You can no longer go to them.) If that is the case... have you taken your offenses to the foot of the cross and sought the Lord's forgiveness... and allowed Him to relieve you of that burden? ... Are you truly free of lingering guilt? ... Have you accepted the consequences of your foolish and sinful behavior and are you now experiencing God's full mercy? ...What I am asking is: Have you repented fully... received the Lord's grace... and now turned to walk in a new direction...?

Perhaps... when you look back... you have a different kind of regret. Is there a person you need to **thank**? ... Someone who deserves to hear your sincere appreciation for his or her positive impact? ... Don't save that for the person's eulogy. ... Take time *now* to express your gratitude.

Address regrets now... before they poison your spirit... or steal joy from the days you have yet to live.

Now here's the second question in order to apply today's passage.

Question 2: Can you claim the assurance of some future reward, some future crown? ... Paul knew what awaited him... regardless of how or when he died. In addition to eternal life — which he did not earn... but received by grace through faith in Christ — he fully expected to receive a number of honors he **did** labor to earn. ... Do you have any such anticipation? ... The Bible mentions five crowns:

- **The crown of rejoicing** (Phil. 4:1)—for leading others to faith in Christ
- **The crown of righteousness** (2 Tim. 4:8)—for eagerly awaiting Christ's return
- **The crown of life** (Jas. 1:12)—for suffering for the glory of God
- **The crown of glory** (1 Pet. 5:4)—reserved for elders and ministers who serve congregations willingly, faithfully, and consistently
- **The crown of mastery** (1 Cor. 9:25)—for keeping the flesh in subjection

Revelation 4:10–11 projects a beautiful image of believers (twenty-four elders in heaven)... casting their crowns before the One Who awarded them. ... As we all join this magnificent act of worship... stop and imagine yourself there. ... What will you bring to that wondrous ceremony?