

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for May 9: Paul offers words of wisdom, encouragement_50304

April 30, 2004

Posted: 5/03/04

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Paul offers words of wisdom, encouragement

2 Timothy 4

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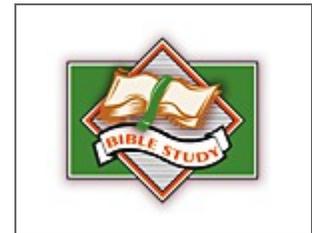
Living in God's presence (4:1-5)

Imagine you have a few days to live. You have one final opportunity to write to a friend. What do you say? How do you say it?

Paul found himself in precisely that situation. Facing imminent execution, he penned his final instructions and reflections to Timothy. He urged his young partner to remain faithful to the gospel and the task to which God had called him. Because Timothy faced strong opposition from false teachers who littered the church's landscape, Paul used his response to his impending death to encourage Timothy's continued faithfulness. Paul

offered these words with utmost seriousness and somberness.

God's servants shoulder an awesome responsibility. Paul offered his words with the realization that Christ determines his servants' destinies. While Paul would face an earthly judge who could order his execution, he claimed he served a living Christ who would ultimately judge both living and dead. Christ's appearance would finalize his kingly reign. Paul appealed to his young friend with the assurance of God's ultimate triumph.



Paul summed up Timothy's task by charging him to “preach the word,” which Paul elsewhere defined as, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). Any occasion is appropriate for heralding the gospel. We should proclaim it even when we do not feel like it. We should preach it when we face opposition.

Preaching includes correction, rebuke and encouragement. Preaching turns those who have wandered off back to God's way. It rebukes (a stronger term than “corrects”) those for whom gentle persuasion was inadequate. It inspires those who struggle to remain faithful. Preaching speaks specifically to each person's situation. Care and consideration for one's feelings and for true doctrine should characterize Timothy's exhortations.

Paul anticipated a time when Christians would reject the gospel's truth and pursue teachings that teased and gratified their desires. These Christians would search for teachers who would scratch their itching ears. Tragically, Paul indicated they would find many teachers who would accept this unhealthy role.

Timothy needed to remain faithful to combat false teaching. Careful observation of these teachings would reveal whether they were true or false. He had to keep up his guard to protect the church from the encroachment of such teachers. Paul summed up Timothy's work in these situations—endure hardship, preach the gospel and fulfill all the tasks to which he had been called by God.

Looking to the future (4:6-8)

Knowing his time left on earth was short, I imagine Paul paused, smiled and thanked God once again for Timothy's friendship and faithfulness. He closed his eyes and reflected upon the future of the work he had started as he passed the torch to the next generation.

He shared his testimony as a final encouragement for Timothy. Paul recognized his life had not been wasted even as he wasted away in prison. He pictured his impending death as a final offering to God. His life was almost, but not quite, over. The Romans considered Paul their prisoner. He considered himself God's prisoner and rejoiced he could offer himself freely to God. Paul had wrestled forces aligned against Christ. He had finished the course of many years. I envision Paul's life as a marathon—bursts of speed, fatigue and struggle, and a dogged determination to finish. Through it all, Paul remained faithful to Christ and his gospel.

Paul professed no regrets. All that awaited Paul in this world was execution. What awaited him in the eternal world was the crown of righteousness. The garland, given to winners of athletic events, suggests both victory and immortality. The Lord, the “righteous Judge,” would crown his faithful servant Paul with eternal life. Paul then remembered and included all those others who had longed for Christ's appearing and who would join him triumphantly at the finish line.

Trusting in God (4:16-18)

As this letter and his life drew to a close, hear Paul again singing praises in prison (Acts 16:25). He sang alone because colleagues had deserted him. He prayed God might forgive them. (Could Paul have been remembering Stephen's death?) Although so-called friends might forsake him, God remained faithful to strengthen him. Because God strengthened him, Paul continued to proclaim the gospel. Based on past testimonies before the authorities, I suspect Paul's defense included telling the story of his conversion.

God had delivered Paul from “the lion's mouth.” He was convinced God “would rescue him from every attack.” Paul's assurance that God would bring him “safely to heaven” suggests God would enable him to remain faithful to the gospel through this final stage of his life. Quite fittingly and in true Pauline character and fashion, he praised God's faithfulness, “to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Question for discussion

- ◆ What wisdom has God provided for you to share?

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