



I want to share with you some final words of some famous people. As you hear these words, what thoughts come to your mind?

General John Sedgewick, Union commander in the American Civil War, shot at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House in 1864 while looking over a parapet at the enemy lines: "They couldn't hit an elephant at this distance."

Pancho Villa, Mexican revolutionary leader: "Don't let it end like this. Tell them I said something..."

James Rodges, murderer, on being asked for a final request before a firing squad: "Why, yes! A bulletproof vest."

David Hume, the atheist: He cried: "I am in flames!" His desperation was a horrible scene.

Voltaire, the famous skeptic: Voltaire died a terrible death. His nurse said, "For all the money in Europe I wouldn't want to see another unbeliever die! All night long he cried for forgiveness."

A Chinese Communist, who delivered many Christians to their execution, came to a pastor and said: "I've seen many of you die. The Christians die differently. What is their secret?"

And my favorite: Ruth Bell Graham—poet, writer, and wife of Evangelist Billy Graham—who passed away in 2007 at 87 years of age. "I saw a sign on a strip of highway once that I would like to have copied on my gravestone. It said, 'End of Construction. Thank you for your patience.'"

If you knew your death was imminent, what would your final words be? If you had just a short time to live, what would your final words of wisdom be? What have you learned that you would want to make sure you left clearly for the next generation?

Harvard psychologist and researcher Daniel Gilbert opens his best-selling book *Stumbling on Happiness* with what he calls "The Sentence." The Sentence begins with these eight words: "The human is the only animal that"

How did Gilbert finish The Sentence? What is the defining feature of our humanity? Gilbert is a secular psychologist, but his answer is insightful. He said, "The human being is the only animal that thinks about the future [Human beings] think about the future in a way that no other animal can, does, or ever has, and this simple ... ordinary act is the defining feature of our humanity."

Today we are going to get a glimpse into the final thoughts and the final parting inspired words of the Apostle Paul as he thinks about his future and the future of the church. His words were

directed to his young pastor protégé Timothy, a man he has mentored and trained and had spent much time with and grown very close to. Timothy was a Gentile from Lystra who converted to Christ when Paul planted a church in his town, and after being disciplined by Paul God had called Timothy to serve as pastor of the Church at Ephesus. We know that Timothy was talented, but also a timid leader.

Before we study Paul's final words, we need to get caught up on what has happened in the history of the church as we see recorded in Chapter 30. We are almost done with The Story; only one more chapter to go after this one.

We left last week learning about Paul's three missionary journeys to plant churches in Syria, Asia and Greece. Paul planted dozens of churches as he fulfilled his calling to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Eight to ten years of travel by foot, camel or boat. He was beat up, faced starvation, rejection, church conflicts, sin in the church, but he persevered. He made sure that everyone, including us, understood that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. Along the way Paul made the deepest kind of friendships with those he ministered to.

He challenged these baby churches and us today to embrace our freedom in Christ, and to attach ourselves to the most beautiful and loving Higher Power there is. Then he taught us the importance of trusting and surrendering to that Higher Power every day by living each day in an awareness and sensitivity to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as the only one who can truly change a life. Then he warned us to not allow ourselves to drift into legalism on the one hand, or abuse our freedom and offend or sin on the other. But rather, serve one another in Love.

Paul was warned that his life would be in danger if he returned to Jerusalem. In fact, on the way back to Jerusalem a prophet named Agabus came over to Paul and took Paul's belt and tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" They pleaded with Paul to not go back to Jerusalem. And Paul responded, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Into the Jerusalem Fire

Paul arrives back in Jerusalem in 58 AD. In the eyes of the Jewish Leaders he had committed a terrible crime. He had reached

out to the Gentiles. So they seized Paul and tried to kill him but the Roman commander arrested him, which actually saved his life. When the Roman Commander found out that Paul was a Roman citizen, he released him and then had him go before the Jewish leaders. Paul demonstrated incredible courage to share the gospel before these people who wanted him dead. Then the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Take courage as you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

The commander in the lower story didn't want Paul, a Roman citizen, killed on his watch, so he had Paul transferred to Caesarea to the north about 50 miles. There Paul stood before the Roman Governor Felix, and Felix basically didn't know what to do with Paul either so he kept him under house arrest for about two years, hoping Paul or one of his friends would offer him a bribe for his freedom. But no bribe came.

The Journey to Rome

Paul appeared before other leaders in Caesarea. Eventually these leaders saw their best option was to ship Paul off to Rome and let Paul make an appeal as a Roman citizen to Caesar himself. Acts 27 tells us in great detail about the boat trip from Caesarea to Rome. It was a very dangerous trip. They hit storms, were blown off course, and eventually they were shipwrecked on the island of Malta. Paul preached and ministered to the crew, passengers, guards and natives throughout. It took three months to get to Rome.

For two more years he once again lived under house arrest, this time in Rome. In fact he rented his own house and guests came to visit him. It was here where Paul wrote Philippians, Ephesians and Colossians and Philemon.

After being released from this first Roman imprisonment, most historians believe Paul actually went on a fourth missionary journey where he visited many of the churches he had planted in Asia and Greece. It was in this time in between arrests that Paul likely wrote 1st Timothy and Titus. And now we reach the final one to two years of Paul's life. Paul is arrested again.

Nero is the Emperor of Rome. Nero was a crazy and evil man. He declared that the Christians in Rome were responsible for all of the Empire's problems. Persecution of Christians was now becoming common and not the rare exception. This time Paul wasn't placed under house arrest. He was chained to a wall in a dark wet dungeon awaiting his execution by beheading. Paul was not getting out.

Paul's second letter to Timothy was written from this Roman jail. The letter reveals to us that Paul was taking an inventory of his life, his ministry, and the future, and in particular the future of the church after his death. Paul is getting ready to pass the baton to the next generation of leaders and he directs his parting words to young pastor Timothy in Ephesus. Knowing at this point in his life he will not escape death, he pens these words for posterity.

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:6-7).

I think all of us would like to be able to say that some day, but how is that possible? Here are two questions that our text answers for us this morning: 1) How can I fight the good fight and finish well? and, 2) What's my responsibility to the next generation?

Let's try to glean wisdom from Paul.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers (verses 1-3).

Paul is remembering who he is, and where he is going, but did you catch that little phrase "whom I serve." "Timothy, when things get tough, remember who you are, where you are going, and whom you serve."

Remember Whom You Serve

How do we encourage the next generation of Christ followers? How do we finish the race well? Here is a story from a man who has run the race well. And today, he is about at his finish line.

In January 2000, leaders of Charlotte, North Carolina invited their favorite son, Billy Graham, to a luncheon. Billy initially hesitated to accept the invitation because he struggles with Parkinson's disease. But the Charlotte leaders said, "We don't expect a major address. Just come and let us honor you." So he agreed.

After wonderful things were said about him, Graham stepped to the podium, looked at the crowd, and said, "I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who this month has been honored by *Time* magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of each passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his other pocket. It wasn't there, so he looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat by him. He couldn't find it. The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.' Einstein nodded appreciatively.

"The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket. The conductor rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are. No problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.'

Einstein looked at him and said, "Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going."

Billy Graham continued, "See the suit I'm wearing? It's a brand new suit. My wife, my children, and my grandchildren are telling me I've gotten a little slovenly in my old age. I used to be a bit more fastidious. So I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and one more occasion. You know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to immediately remember the suit I'm wearing. I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am, I also know where I'm going." And Billy also knows whom he serves.

When we struggle, when we look around at the chaos and grind we experience in our lower story, we question the Upper Story sanity of being sold out to serving God. When we are tired, when we face our daily challenges at work, in our family, when we feel like the enemy is winning, when we feel like quitting, we need to remember. We can feel secure. Because of Christ we now know who we are. We can feel hopeful because we now know we have been given life and eternity, and we can feel confident because we now know who we serve on this planet.

Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also (verses 4-5).

What a great reminder of the potential impact we have on the next generation. Whether it is our kids or our grandkids or someone else's, we have opportunity to pour into the next generation. How do you pour into someone else? How do you disciple? Look at Paul's example: He is faithful in prayer, he is connected in friendship, he is affirming in his speech, and he taught truth.

Paul reminds Timothy of his Godly heritage. Timothy's father wasn't a believer but he mentions his mother and grandmother and their "sincere faith." What an encouragement to you parents. Maybe you are in a marriage where your spouse doesn't share your faith in Christ. You're thinking, "Will my children ever get it?" Keep planting seeds, keep praying for them, keep exposing them to the Scripture. Continue to model real faith. Show them how your faith makes a real difference as you live out your life.

And what an encouragement to grandparents: Don't underestimate your influence. Maybe your grandkids don't live around you; maybe their parents are far from God; continue to speak into their lives. You can be the impactful people in their lives.

Not only are we to pour into others, we are also to be poured into. Have you ever asked someone to pour their life into yours? Have you ever sought out spiritual mentors? I don't know how one can grow more like Christ without serious relationships.

Remember the People Who Impact You

Mike Schultz, Ron Reitveld, Chris Johnson, Mick Boersma, Dale Wollery, Jeff Davis, Doug Ripplinger, Gaylen Nagel. You likely don't know any of these guys, but they impacted me and without them I wouldn't be in ministry today. There are the Paul's in my life. On the other side, do you have a Timothy in your life? Who has God placed in front of you that you can impact? Wouldn't it be great for each one of us to be both a Paul in our lives on one side, and then Timothy in our lives on the other?

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline (verses 6-7).

To finish the race well, Paul is saying, use your gift; serve the church.

Remember Your Spiritual Gift

I don't have the same gift as you, and I don't have the same calling as you, but every one of us has been given a unique gifting to put to work designed specifically to build up others in the faith. Get some accountability. Ask someone else to blow on you to fan your gift back into a flame. Some of us here have had their fire on low for a while. For whatever reason, your flame has become a flicker. If that is you, what are you to do? Stir up the coals, blow on them, get back into the race.

But what if you are afraid like Timothy? What if you don't think you have what it takes? The answer is in verse 7. I may not have the same gift as Timothy, but I have the same Spirit. The word for fear, or timidity here is a lack of moral strength. His spirit produces power to stand up to opposition, power to step up and fulfill the call, a spirit of love that looks like sacrifice, and a spirit of self-discipline or of a sound mind to stay level headed when ministry comes unglued.

Next Paul looks deeper into Timothy's heart struggles.

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God (v. 8).

Remember to Not be Ashamed

Why would we be ashamed of the gospel message today? As I share my faith I know that there is an attitude today that whatever you want to believe is fine. If it works for you, that's cool. But as soon as we say this isn't just for me, this is for you too, and as soon as we say Christ isn't just a way but **the** way, we are judged as intolerant. That can be embarrassing. Maybe Timothy was ashamed as well of knowing that Paul was in chains. It was a social stigma to be in prison in chains. Paul was not guilty of any crime but society was treating him as a hardened radical worthy of death, as a danger to polite society. Paul is telling Timothy to choose suffering over being ashamed.

Timothy was in a position to avoid suffering if he backed off his commitment because of shame. And then just as Paul anticipated that Timothy was getting wobbly on this, Paul presents a beautiful picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Saying this is why we are willing to suffer. This is who we are, this is where we are going, and this is why we serve him.

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day (verses 9–12).

Paul is saying, such a glorious message, a glorious mission, a glorious future is worth the suffering. I know **him!** I can entrust my life to **him!** That brings confidence that allows Paul to suffer and not be ashamed.

It's one thing for a man to talk about being sold out for Christ. It's quite another to literally pour out your life as an offering to God. There is irony throughout God's upper story where he shows us that holding on to our current life will mean forfeiting a life that we desperately seek to bring eternal meaning.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (verses 13–14).

Paul closes this section with a final charge.

Remember to Stay Committed to the Truth

He says keep the pattern of good teaching you saw and heard from me Timothy. Now you build on it as you fan the flame of your gift to the next generation. I pass the baton, it's your turn to give truth to others. Just make sure you give that good teaching, and couple it with faith and love, otherwise your good words will ring hollow to your listeners.

There is an encouraging theme that flows through this passage that we don't see at first look. Remember, for this young timid man he needs to understand that there is power outside himself to run the good race. What is this power? It's the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is a thread that starts back in verse 7, "*For the Spirit of God does not make us timid.*" Verse 8, "*Join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.*" And finally verse 14, how do we guard the Gospel? "*We guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*" We don't have what it takes to run the good race. But we have God within us, strengthening us, giving us courage.

Like Paul, there are many men and women today enduring imprisonment and even death because of their commitment to run the race and pass the baton no matter what. Kayla Mueller, 26 years old, was captured by ISIS, and on February 10, 2015 U.S. officials confirmed Muslim extremists had murdered her while in captivity. In the spring of 2014 as a captor she wrote to her family. The letter begins with her assurance that she'd been treated well. She goes on to apologize touchingly to her family for the suffering that she's put them through because of her captivity. Then comes this:

"I remember mom always telling me that all in all in the end the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our creator b/c literally there was no one else." Kayla goes on to relate how "by God and by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in free fall. I have been shown in darkness, light, and have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it." She concluded, "Please be patient, give your pain to God. I know you would want me to remain strong. That is exactly what I am doing. Do not fear for me, continue to pray as will I. By God's will we will be together soon. All my everything, Kayla."

We are in a race and we have a baton that's been passed to us. How will we run the race?

Remember who you are and where you are going and whom you serve.

Remember the people who've impacted your life. As you run your race, consider who you might impact.

Remember your spiritual gift and put it to use.

Remember to not be ashamed of the gospel, but pray for courage and strength if suffering is called for as you proclaim the glorious message of hope.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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