

Study Four - Final Instructions

2 Timothy 4:1-22

Prayer Father God, we are privileged to be able to read your word openly and discuss it without fear of persecution and imprisonment. We thank you for the saints who, in the past, suffered for their faith that we might have the freedom to be here at this moment, opening the Scriptures and learning from them. May we not take this privilege lightly, but take to heart what you have to teach us, learn from it and grow in faith, that we might faithfully serve you and all those to whom you lead us. Amen.

Comment The art of letter writing seems to be slowly dying, in the face of a social media revolution. We can effectively send a postcard from our holidays to hundreds of friends instantly with the touch of a phone camera and an app such as Facebook, Twitter or similar. These apps also have an advantage in that it is not expected that the length of any message will be very long - generally it is the images that convey the message.

Paul preferred to use descriptive images that carried the ideas he wanted to get across, and because this letter was intended primarily for one individual he could add the personal touch which is not easy to achieve in a Facebook posting. He can share things with his friend that perhaps he wouldn't have thought of doing in one of his more open letters, like his disappointment that trusted friends have deserted him after his imprisonment, and a desire to have the coat and notebooks that he left behind when he was taken into custody near to hand again. These are important to Paul and he trusts Timothy to get these to him. He is also able to share personal greetings from Christians known to both of them.

So much of our communication now is of a temporary nature, not intended to be preserved, of the moment. It is unlikely that any of our social media postings will be preserved for posterity, to be unearthed in the future by our relatives from a dusty box in the attic and read with interest as a historic document. Maybe that's a shame - or not!

Discuss

Have you any letters written by or to your parents and grandparents, or photograph albums handed down from one generation to another? How important are these in understanding your family history, and where you come from? Will you have anything similar to hand down to your grandchildren?

Key Verse

'Preach the Word: be prepared in season and out of season, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.'
(part of 2 Timothy 4:2)

Discussion

- Q1** In verse 1 Paul reminds Timothy (and us) that ultimately we face judgement. How much difference would it make to our daily lives if we remembered that the work we do, and service we offer, will be tested by Jesus Christ?
- Q2** There is an urgency in Paul's tone as the letter draws to a close. The message is not a temporary few words of text on a status update online, but one of life and death. Preach it in and out of season, is the call. What does this say to you?
- Q3** How are we to avoid the perils of verse 3?
- Q4** Is the Gospel message less appealing to some people than others? Who are less likely to respond, and conversely who are more likely to be receptive to its call? Is there anything we can do to address this issue?
- Q5** In verse 6 we discover that Paul has come to the conclusion that he is unlikely to see freedom this time, and more likely to become a martyr for his faith. At the end of a Roman meal there was a kind of sacrifice where a cup of wine was taken and poured out as an offering to the gods. This is the picture he paints. He's offered everything else to God, now it's time to give even his life. But the word he uses for 'departure' in verse 6 can have a meaning of loosening bonds, unyoking an ox from the plough and loosening the ropes of a tent or boat. Are these helpful pictures of death for a Christian?

- Q6** Demas (verse 10) is listed as one of Paul's fellow workers in verse 24 of the letter to Philemon, and gets a mention in Colossians 4:14. Why might a loyal friend and co-worker have decided to throw the towel in and desert Paul?
- Q7** Paul is in prison. What do verses 11-13 say about him as someone who has a very uncertain future and considers (v 6) that he is on borrowed time?
- Q8** Paul had a team of workers, we read some of their names in verses 9-10. How guilty is the Church of expecting the Minister to do everything, and how willing should we be to take our place as part of a team?
- Q9** It's sometimes nice to get external evidence for historical events. In verse 11 Paul says that only Luke is with him. In Acts 27, written by Luke, we get a first person plural account (we) of the sea journey to Rome, where it seems obvious as we read it that Luke was with him. It is possible that an accused prisoner was allowed to be accompanied by two slaves, and Luke may have gone with him in this guise, as he had medical knowledge (Colossians 4:14). What does that tell us about Luke, and also about our reading of Scripture?
- Q10** In the final greeting which closes this letter various people are named, and they are not all unknown to us. Check out Acts 18:1-3, 2 Timothy 1:16, Acts 19:22 and Acts 21:27-29 which cover the characters named in verse 19. These were all people who had helped or accompanied Paul in the past.

How well do we remember those who have been part of our spiritual journey? Share some experiences of people who, though you may have lost touch, you would like to thank.

Takeaway

Think about the instruction to preach the Word in and out of season. What should your response be?

Prayer

Pray for churches in your area which are mission-centred and active in the community.

‘The Gospel announces that Jesus came to acquit the guilty. He came to judge and be judged in our place. Christ came to satisfy the deep judgment against us once and for all so that we could be free from the judgement of God, others, and ourselves.’

(Tullian Tchividjian)

‘The Scriptures were written, not to make us astronomers, but to make us saints.’

(Matthew Henry)

‘It is not the punishment but the cause that makes the martyr.’

(Saint Augustine)

‘Remember the sufferings of Christ, the storms that were weathered... the crown that came from those sufferings which gave new radiance to the faith... All saints give testimony to the truth that without real effort, no one ever wins the crown.’

(Thomas Becket)

‘In the primitive church, it was customary for the Holy Eucharist to be celebrated on the anniversary of the death of a martyr - if possible, on his tomb.’

(Sabine Baring-Gould)

‘The spiritual path - is simply the journey of living our lives. Everyone is on a spiritual path; most people just don’t know it.’

(Marianne Williamson)