

ST. PAUL'S LAST WORDS

– *DECEMBER 12. – II TIMOTHY 4:1-18. –*

Golden Text: – "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."
– Phil. 1:21.

SURELY saintly was the heart which wrote, For me to live in the world is for a member of The Christ to be living here, serving by self-sacrifice the cause of righteousness – Truth. Equally true was it that for him to have died and rested from his labors, to await the resurrection morning, would have been gain. So far as his own character development was concerned, it was evidently finished. He remained by God's grace, that he might further serve the Lord's flock – including us who have since lived. He thus wrote to the Philippians about A.D. 62, when circumstances intimated that his death was imminent.

Four years later, A.D. 66, St. Paul wrote his last Epistle to Timothy, who was then Pastor of the Ephesus Church. The Emperor Nero was showing greater hostility than ever against Christians, and circumstances indicated that St. Paul was to be a martyr very soon. Sometimes he addressed Timothy as "his son" in the Gospel. He evidently felt great confidence in him as a sort of successor in a general "care of all the Churches." Hence to him he now wrote special warnings and commendations and prophecies respecting the Church's future.

The Gospel should be preached, and nothing else – when convenient and when inconvenient, to the preacher – whenever opportunity offers. The importance of having the Church well indoctrinated was emphasized by the fact that with prophetic vision St. Paul perceived that the "great falling away" mentioned in his other Epistles and by the Lord might be expected to come in speedily after his death. The mission of the Gospel was not the

conversion of the world, but to call out from the world the Church to be glorified with the Redeemer at his appearing and Kingdom. It might be necessary for Timothy to reprove, rebuke and exhort, but if so, all should be done patiently and with instruction, explanation, doctrine. Faithfulness was enjoined in view of the fact that the time was nearing when "*sound doctrine*" would not be appreciated, nor even be endured by the Church.

THE FIGHT, THE COURSE, THE FAITH, THE CROWN

The reason for the deflection would be an unsatisfactory condition of heart in the Church, a lack of faith in the Lord's supervision – "itching ears for something new." They would seek teachers who could tickle their ears. They would be more pleased with style and oratory than with Truth. They would find such teachers as they were seeking, who would turn their ears away from the hearing of the Truth to fables. Would Timothy succumb to such influence? St. Paul hoped not. "Watch, then, in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of a Gospel bearer; make full proof of thy service to the Lord, for I, Paul, am now ready to be offered and the [R4527 : page 362] time of my departure is at hand." – Vs. 5,6.

Not egotistically, but for Timothy's encouragement, St. Paul wrote, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (Vs. 7,8.) What a grand testimony – and at the conclusion of a grand life nobly lived, or rather nobly sacrificed, after the Lord's example, laying down his life for the brethren! He suffered for Christ's sake, as a servant of his Gospel message. How grand the incentive for us who are seeking to walk in the same narrow way! Our opportunities for sacrifice and service are less

indeed, but the Lord reckons to each of us according to the heart, the intent. He that is faithful in that which is least would be faithful in greater things. He that is unfaithful in little things gives no proof that he would use large opportunities properly.

The secret of St. Paul's labor was the Divine approval to be manifested in granting him a share in the "First Resurrection." (Phil. 3:10.) This would be "a crown of righteousness" – glory, honor, immortality, association with Christ in his Millennial Kingdom. He knew of his own whole-heartedness in the Lord's service and knew that the Lord was not unjust to forget his work and labor of love. Nevertheless he did not expect reward until "*that day*" – until the morning of the Millennial Day, the morning of the Resurrection Day. Then the Redeemer, as the Head, and his Church will give to each faithful member an abundant reward – not to St. Paul only, but to all those who similarly love his appearing – his manifestation in Millennial Kingdom glory.

The number, even amongst Christians, who love the Lord's revelation in Kingdom glory is comparatively small. Some prefer that he shall delay to appear that they may add farm to farm or house to house, barn to barn, million to million. Such instinctively feel that the King of glory would not approve of many of the methods in vogue for such additions as they covet. Others have family schemes. Others have unscriptural theories which lead them to look elsewhere for blessings rather than to the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of his Kingdom.

His fight, as the Apostle explains elsewhere, was not with carnal weapons. He, the New Creature, fought with and gained the victory over his mortal body, bringing it more and more into subjection to his new mind. Recognizing Satan as "the Prince of this world [age]" and the fallen angels as his assistants, he perceived and taught that these had much to do with the iniquity

prevailing in the world – that they deceived mankind into false doctrines and evil practices. He blamed not men so much as the ignorance and blindness by which Satan deluded them. "In whom the god [R4527 : page 363] of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine into their hearts." (2 Cor. 4:4.) Recognizing the spirit of error as the spirit of the world, he resisted in himself and sought to assist all of the brethren to similarly fight a good fight against every pernicious influence, doctrine and practice.

He had finished his course. He recognized as a Christian that he had certain lessons to learn in the School of Christ and this was a part of his *course* of preparation for joint-heirship with Christ in the glories of the Millennial Kingdom. The course included not merely theory, but also practice. He not only theoretically learned about Christ, but experimentally. He became a partaker with him in the sufferings of this present time. And sympathetically he was permitted to enter into a large degree of knowledge of the "mystery" of the Divine Plan hidden from the world. Not only had his own course of instruction been a thorough one, but he had been given a post-graduate course as an ambassador for his Lord and Redeemer and as an Apostle for the brethren, the Church. Moreover he recognized the fact that all such as became members of the Body of Christ are so directly under the Divine supervision and regulations that their times are in God's hand – all of their affairs of life, temporal and spiritual. As the Master's death could not occur "until his hour was come," so likewise it is with his consecrated members.

He had kept the faith and the faith had kept him. Many do not realize how important are knowledge and a correct faith. "My people perish for lack of knowledge" is the Lord's testimony. And their faith can keep pace only with their knowledge, for faith must have a basis. A correct life depends greatly upon a correct faith. Why did our forefathers burn one another at the stake in a diabolical manner? Because they were governed by error. False doctrines, styled by the Apostle "doctrines of devils," had been presented to them and they

had believed them. And the legitimate outcome of the wrong belief, the wrong faith, was wrong doing. Believing that God purposed the torture of his creatures for centuries in Purgatory or for untellable millions of years in eternal torment, they copied the misconception of the Almighty in their lives, to our horror.

But St. Paul had kept the faith – the true faith once delivered unto the saints – faith in the Redeemer's sacrifice; faith in its application on our behalf; faith in our justification by the Father on that account; faith in the glorious promises of God's Word; faith in the Lord and faith in the brethren. Surely it means something to keep the faith – especially when we realize that our great Adversary, Satan, is on the alert continually to take it from us or to turn or twist it to our loss or injury.

The crown mentioned, the Apostle had seen for many years with the eye of his faith as a part of the Lord's promise. He had absolute confidence in the Lord and in the promise he had received from him. That crown had been his cause of rejoicing for many years, not because of pride or ambition, but because of love and benevolence. He would love to receive that crown because it would be the mark of Divine appreciation and love for him; and a mark of his faithfulness. He esteemed it because it would afford him untold opportunity of blessing his fellowmen in association with his Lord and the brethren on the plane of glory during the Millennium.

He hoped for this crown, but did not hope to receive it at death. He knew the Bible teaching on the subject of resurrection – that this was his God's provision for the communication of his blessing, first for the Church, and subsequently for the world. He knew and taught that there would be "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." (Acts 24:15.) He desired to have a share with his Redeemer in all of his glorious Kingdom work and he knew that it could not begin until the completion of this Gospel Age, when all the elect Church, as members of the Bride of Christ, would share in "*his* resurrection," to glory, honor, immortality and glorious Kingdom privileges. – Phil. 3:10,11.

It was for this reason that he proceeded to declare that the crown was *laid up* for him – awaiting him – not at death, but at the time of his resurrection. That crown the Lord would give to him and to all others in the attitude of heart to appreciate his revelation at the Second Advent – "that day." True, not many at the present time love his appearing. The majority, not only of the world, but also of Christians, seeking but not finding in pleasures, riches, honors of men, have certain ambitions along these lines which they would like to satisfy first, and then possibly they might be willing for the Lord to establish his Kingdom. But, no! by the time their lives have been spent in such pursuits, they are usually thoroughly disappointed and bewildered and generally further than ever from seeking the Kingdom.

None but this class will receive this crown. Thank God, the remainder will not be tortured, but, on the contrary, will be blessed by their crowned brethren, from whom, as the Christ of God, will go the blessings of restitution through the agency of the Millennial Kingdom. Eventually all the blind eyes of understanding will be opened – eventually all will see the great Messiah, though invisible to the natural sight. Then every knee shall bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God.

St. Paul closes his exhortation by reciting that in his trial before Nero some in whom he had full confidence had forsaken him and he concludes that the Lord, nevertheless, stood with him and strengthened him and that he had every confidence in his care to the end of the way.

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