

Paul's Epitaph

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Preacher: Tom Holland

[0:00] We are getting so close to the end of 2 Timothy that we can almost touch it.

! And we will move into Titus.

Don't know exactly how long we'll spend in Titus, but it's not a very long book in the schedule.

Basically, when we're through with Titus, we're going to be finishing up the year.

If we finish too soon, we might do a video or two to finish out and be off for the summer and pick it up next fall. And I'm going to work on Mike Dursham to be the teacher next fall.

We'll see how that works. Yeah. I hear you. Anyway, we're glad you all are here. We're getting very close to the end.

[1:10] And Paul has been writing to his young protegee, Timothy. And as I said last time, final words are important words.

And we tend to remember them when they're spoken by a dying loved one or a friend. And by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul has left us basically his epitaph.

And it's a triumphant epitaph. Here's his words to us. 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 6 to 8.

Now, we all remember that Paul had an encounter with the Lord Jesus 30 years earlier.

It was the defining moment of his life. Everything changed for Paul. Even the name.

[2:49] He was Saul. And I'd like to inject here, because that's a great passage in Acts where the Lord calls out from heaven and says, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

And we like at VOM to point out that Jesus was in heaven. Paul said, well, who are you, Lord?

And he said, I'm Jesus whom you're persecuting. How was he persecuting Jesus? Jesus is in heaven. Well, he was persecuting the church. Jesus' church. And when Christians are persecuted, and they're being persecuted right now around the world, they're ultimately persecuting Jesus.

And he will settle that score. We talked about that in here yesterday morning. But everything changed for Paul, including his name.

Now, put it in context. Paul was the great persecutor of the church. When he was saved, he was on his way to Damascus with letters of arrest.

[3:54] He was going to arrest Christians, bring them back to Jerusalem. What do we think was going to happen to them? You know, get a slap on the wrist? They're all going to become Stephen.

He'll be martyred. So Paul, who was the great persecutor, becomes the great defender of the church. You know, I read once, and I believe it, Paul never in this life recovered totally from being the persecutor.

You know, he would say, I'm the least of the apostles, and I'm not worthy to be numbered among them. It bothered him because he was the instigator of Stephen's death, you remember.

He held the coats so the guys could throw the rocks harder. And I think it took a washing in heaven for Paul.

I would love to have been the fly on the wall when he saw Stephen. You know, and Stephen no doubt embraced him. Now he is in a Roman prison, and he knows this is going to be his final words to Timothy and by extension to the church through the centuries.

[5:11] He will leave prison as a martyr. And Paul knows this. In his spirit, he knows the time of departure has come. Now Paul is concerned about Timothy and the church.

There is still the battle raging. And by the way, this same battle is raging today, probably even more so. But the battle was raging with the church that Timothy pastored in other churches over the influence of false teachers.

They had invaded the church. Timothy, of course, is in Ephesus. And, you know, you can read about the Ephesian church in Revelation and what happened to them. You got a lot going for you, but you left your first love.

You're now into cold orthodoxy. There's no warmth here. You've left your first love. Pray we don't become an Ephesian church, other than Ephesian-type church.

But false teachers were prevalent in this day, and they continue to invade the church in our day. Paul's instruction to Timothy and all true believers is to resist the onslaught of evil and error that tries to corrupt the church.

[6:41] But there was also a calmness surrounding Paul. He was confident in the Lord's ability, but also in the Lord's willingness to care for his church and to care for those that minister in his name, in the name of the Lord.

So Paul is going to leave Timothy and he's going to leave us his life's epitaph. And he's going to do so by examining his present situation.

He's then going to review his past, and then he's going to finally make comments concerning the future. So we're going to do it in a little different word order.

Instead of past, present, future, we're going to do present, past, future. For the present, this is what he had to say. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

There's no doubt Paul was ready to die in the service of the Lord. Some believe he did. He was stoned. Some would say stoned to death.

[7:56] I think he was severely injured, and the Lord rescued him. But Paul knew that he was going to die in the Lord's service.

Now we know that Paul was a Jew. He described himself, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as a Hebrew among Hebrews. He had a very deep understanding on a human level, not the spiritual level yet, in his younger days, but on the human level of the Old Testament.

I personally believe Paul was on the fast track to become the high priest. I think he was in the management system to one day be elevated to high priest.

Well, you have to know the Old Testament, at least on human terms, to get there. When Paul talks about being poured out as a drink offering, he's making reference to an Old Testament concept in the sacrificial system.

The sacrificial offers were done in strict compliance with God's instructions in the early books of the Bible, principally the Pentateuch.

[9:14] And in the book of Numbers, we learn that Jews and even Gentiles who lived among them were to give offerings. They gave first a burnt offering, had to be a qualified animal.

They were to follow it up with a grain offering, and finally they were to offer a drink offering as the final stage of sacrifice. Paul had offered himself in his ministry as a living and holy sacrifice ever since his encounter on Damascus Road.

That was his living sacrifice, his ministry. Now he offers his dying sacrifice in the form of a final sacrifice in the drink offering, being poured out.

Now we cannot be dogmatic about this, but some believe that Paul may have been referring to the type of death he would suffer for the Lord.

He is going to be beheaded. And when that happens, your bodily fluids are poured out. And some theologians believe he was making reference to that.

[10:37] I don't know if he was or not. But we do know this. Faithful soldiers bear the scars of battle. Richard Wurmbrand comes to mind, and I knew Richard, and he had the battle.

He had the scars of battle. In fact, he was appearing before the U.S. Congress in the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and Human Rights Commission back in the mid-60s, and they were asking about, well, were you tortured?

We never asked Richard a question like that. He stood up in the hallowed halls of Congress and took his shirt off. Very famous photograph. You can see it in Tortured for Christ, the book Tortured for Christ.

He took his, by the way, I think that's required reading to get into heaven. Took his shirt off, took his T-shirt off, and boy, he was scarred from 14 years imprisonment because he wouldn't deny Christ. So Paul is making this offering, and he bore the scars of battle. He bore the scars of spiritual warfare that consumed so much of his life.

[11:48] And by the way, that war hadn't ended. It's still going on. Listen to this. Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane.

That's how I saw Paul would say. I'm more so, in far more labors and far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I've spent in the deep. I've been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren, have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food and cold and exposure.

By the way, that's 2 Corinthians 11, 23 to 27. You know, when you read that list, it's kind of easy to see that Paul at some times only had Jesus.

There wasn't anyone else to turn to. The supreme mark that Paul and others have left is to give their lives for the cause of Christ.

[13:09] First, millions have done so. Millions have become living sacrifice and even dying sacrifices. Some do so to this very day.

Somewhere in the world. Somewhere in the world today, a Christian died for his faith. That happens. Several. Since his conversion, though, Paul was willing to give his life for the cause of Christ, and now that willingness would turn into a reality.

It's going to happen. Paul said that the time of his departure was at hand. He did not mean that he's going to die that day or that hour, but he could see his death on the horizon.

It might be a few months away, but it was approaching. Clouds of approaching death followed Paul, but they never darkened his view of life.

He never said, Oh, woe is me, you know, and wrung his hands. Paul viewed death the same way we should. It was a laying aside of an earthly dwelling and an embracing of eternity.

[14:27] Paul knew that an infinite, glorious life lay ahead and rest from the battle would come when he was safely with the Lord.

Now, for the Christian, death is exchanging the burden of earthly life for the eternal joy of heaven. And, you know, we can't even imagine.

I mean, Paul, you know, was called up to the highest heaven, and he said, I don't know if I was in the body or in a trance or a vision, but I was called up there and I can't even talk about the things I saw.

We got guys write books about it. Paul said, I can't even talk about it, the amazing things I saw. So, he knew that his departure was near, but he did not face such with a spirit of hopelessness or futility.

He, like all true believers, had received a divine promise from the God of the universe that if he trusted in him, eternal life was assured.

[15:39] And for him, there would be no sting of death. No sting of death. Just a release into the presence of the Lord. I think often of Lazarus, you know, that great passage in John 11.

You know, Jesus didn't do Lazarus any favors. He brought him back to this earth, you know. I remember the play that was written, a fictional play, but it was called Lazarus Laughing.

And, you know, they said, the Pharisees come to him and say, if you don't stop talking about Jesus resurrecting you, we're going to kill you. And Lazarus goes, go ahead.

It's okay. It doesn't bother me. It doesn't bother me. Well, that was Paul's presence. And then he starts to talk to Timothy about the past in verse 7. I have, past tense, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. So, Paul next is going to reflect on the past. And since his conversion, Paul had lived for the Lord every minute of his life.

[16:48] Every minute. we can only speculate what the world would be like if there were millions of Pauls on earth. Just think what it would be like.

I believe the 144,000 in Revelation after the church is raptured, I think that 144,000 are going to be Peter's and Paul's walking around here.

But just imagine what this would be like. Paul, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, did great things for the Lord. He did them in the power of God.

And that's why he can speak of the past with terms such as have fought, have finished, and have kept. That's the power of God in Paul's life.

And Paul approached the end of his life with no sense of failure. There was no unfulfillment, and let me add a caution there, that word's not in spellcheck, I added it.

[17:47] And there's no incompleteness. With the Lord in control, he lived life to the fullest. Could there be a principle there for us?

With the Lord in control of our lives, he lived it, like Paul, he lived it to the fullest. Now, God had called him to a specific ministry, and he had fulfilled his calling.

And that would be quite a way to depart this life, having fulfilled the calling that God laid on each of us. Think of the joy of knowing that you had fulfilled those things that God had called you to do.

And Paul is going to issue a command to Timothy, fulfill your ministry. He's passing that along, and Timothy's going to pass that along.

that's been passed down to true ministers of the gospel, such as Brother Don, fulfill your ministry.

That has been passed down to our very day.

[18:52] Could we live our life in such a manner as to honor God and accomplish what he had set before us? Paul was able to accomplish much because he operated under five foundational truths concerning his ministry.

And first of all, Paul understood something, and if we don't understand this, then we're behind the eight ball. We're at a loss.

But Paul, first of all, understood that he was in a spiritual struggle. There is a spiritual battle out there. It's spiritual warfare. It's inside.

It's outside. It's everywhere. I think if we could see with physical eyes what was really going on, we'd be appalled and alarmed.

And I think the church, particularly the church in the West, all churches are persecuted in some form or fashion, but not like the churches I've dealt with in China and Vietnam and other places, they understand that.

[20:04] But a church in the West, I think, has lost sight of the fact that we're in spiritual warfare. You're not going to hear much about it on television, I can tell you. But there's a war going on, a spiritual war that's taken a lot of prisoners captive.

And it wants our children, wants our young guys. And one of the forces is the Internet internet and television and these things. Paul understood that he was in a spiritual struggle.

And if we don't understand that, we've lost the war before we've even entered into the battle. We have to come to grips with it. It says he has fought, and that's from a Greek word meaning, it means agonizing, agony.

These words were frequently used in athletic contests, and Paul loved to give athletic metaphors.

The Greeks were famous for athletic contests, so we still do the Olympics to honor the Greek concept, although the modern Olympics I don't think are much like the originals.

But the words denote great struggle, particularly when Paul used them in a spiritual vein. I agonize, I'm in agony. he and we are in constant battle.

[21:28] What do we battle? We battle the world. We battle the devil. But guys, let me tell you where the battle is really joined. We battle the flesh.

That is where the battle is joined. We battle the flesh. And trust me, we all battle it, and I probably do more than all of you.

It's tough. The world I'm in, it's tough. We battle the flesh. When it comes to the flesh, we are presented new battle fronts every day.

Something happens. And there's a second point here though. In addition to realizing he was in a spiritual struggle, Paul also knew he was fighting for a noble cause.

God does not save us solely for us. He understood that. to fight the good fight because he was serving the true God of the universe. And he had talked to him.

[22:33] He had heard from him. And we can hear from him. He's talking out through that book. But he said, this is a noble cause. God does not save us solely for us.

That's kind of a byproduct. He does so first for his glory. Your salvation was for the glory of God.

And it's going to be an eternal glory. There are going to be people in heaven praising the Lord and lifting up his name and honor and glory to the Lord. We are saved to fulfill his holy calling on our life.

We are saved to be witnesses to a darkening and dying world. Does it seem to you guys that the world is getting pretty dark? Man, it's getting dark.

It is getting dark dark. We must be prepared to do battle for the Lord every day because it's a noble cause.

[23:43] It's a noble cause. Paul also recognized the importance of self-discipline. That is another area where in the West, especially, I think, we've come up short.

The only useful servant is one who will stay the course. And I think Paul clearly stayed the course. The Lord knew better than he used me for that.

He used Paul. Our divine mission encompasses a period of time from conversion to home going. Do you understand that?

That's the breadth or the length of our ministry. From the time we're saved until the time we're called home. Guys, there is no retirement in the Christian life.

It doesn't exist. It does not exist. I had taught some elderly ladies in our church here years ago. And they said, but what can we do? We're home bound.

[24:41] I said, you could pray for missionaries. You can go to every country in the world through prayer. There's so much you can do. But there is no retirement plan in this life for the true believer.

We must focus on our service to God. When we don't, the world rushes in to fill the void. Like the writer of Proverbs said, we need to look straight ahead and let our gaze be to the front.

We're looking this way. The writer of Hebrews said, there were two things that could hinder the Christian. One was an encumbrance, and the other was sin.

An encumbrance is not evil in itself. It may be something that weighs us down, that inhibits us from accomplishing the divine mission. We engage in a lot of stuff that is not sin, but it's unnecessary. It's just add-ons and time-consuming. I think in some respects this is the wood, hay, and stubble that the Lord talks about.

[25:54] It's going to be burned up. Gary Turner, a pastor of Arkadelphia, now with the Lord, a young guy, a great guy. I heard him preach a sermon once over there called, The Great Bonfire in Heaven.

talking about wood, hay, and stubble. And it's going to be consumed. It's not going to stand the test. Only gold, silver, and precious stones will survive that fire.

These things are not necessarily evil, but they do not bring any spiritual value and will be burned up. Now sin, though, robs us of what we have gained in our spiritual walk.

we can prevent sins and encumbrances from infecting our lives by walking as Jesus walked. And how did he walk? He walked in holiness.

He walked in holiness. And when I say that, it's so impossible, but it is again, it is not in this life going to be unto perfection, but it should be the direction, the direction of our life.

[27:00] Paul's fourth foundational principle to live the Christian life was recognize what a treasure time was. Time is a creation of God.

We only have so much time on this earth to live out our life and complete the task the Lord has given us. I had Thanksgiving with Diane's uncle, Kenneth, and actually he's been in this church. Mike, you met him. I don't know if you ever remember that, but Kenneth was a retired Waco police officer. Good guy. Good guy. He's three months older than me.

Had Thanksgiving with him. And I said, Ken, I want to talk to the family about the Lord because a lot of them don't know him. He said, have at it because he did know the Lord. And I said, you know, Ken, all of us may not be here next year. He said, I know. And two months later, he dropped, was dead before he hit the ground.

We only have so much time. And Paul understood that. We have time to live out our lives and complete the task the Lord has given us.

[28:08] Whatever your ministry is. Life is lived in the present, but how many of us try and live it in the past or in the future? You know?

God gives us an unlimited amount of love, mercy, grace, and so many other things, but God's gift of time he gives us on earth to accomplish his will for our life is fixed and limited.

It's finite. His mercy, his grace, infinite, but the time we have is finite. You know, I saw a book one time, I don't think I read it, but it was, I think it was the ten things you can't do in heaven, and the first one was witness.

who are you going to witness to? You know? If you're going to do that, you've got to do it here. You've got to do it here. You're not going to be witnessing in heaven.

God measures time out, and it is different for every person. It is different for every person. And then the fifth principle that Paul lived by, he lived by the word of God.

[29:21] And the word of God directed all that Paul did. He was directed by the word of God. He controlled everything he said and did.

That's why he could say, I've kept the faith. And you know, let me point something out too. The word of God revealed Christ to Paul. He would preach the word of God.

He'd preach Jesus. And you know what word of God he had? The Old Testament. The new hadn't been written yet. I mean, look at what we have now. And he wrote a bunch of those books.

I didn't give a number. But he was pointing out Jesus in the Old Testament. Dr.

DeHaan, he was going to write a book and reveal Jesus through the Old Testament. when he got to doing the research, he said, I better limit this to the Pentateuch.

[30:22] And finally he wrote Jesus in Genesis. That was the only one he could do. He said something I always remember. He said, Jesus is in every verse. Sometimes he's out front and very obvious.

Sometimes he's in the shadows. But until you find him, you haven't understood that verse description. That was M.R. DeHaan. That was M.R. DeHaan. Mark this thought down. God does not require success.

God requires faithfulness. We have a contract janitorial service at the police department. It's a company they hire, they fire.

I have nothing to do with that. We pay them. I don't even pay them. The city hall pays them. There's a young woman in there that was cleaning. She was a nice girl. A new convert.

She's had some difficult past with us, but a new convert. Basically, she got fired. Not anything we said.

[31:31] I thought she was doing a decent job. She was spending all her time witnessing and not working. God has called us to work. We've got to honor that. Her problem was, and I'm actually going to write her a letter.

When she would share Christ with someone and nothing happened, she thought she was a failure. Guys, I used to think that about a church service.

Thirty years ago, we'd have the sermon, we'd have songs, we'd have a hymn of invitation. If no one came, I said, well, we failed today. We didn't fail.

We were obedient to what God called us to do. We preached the word. We sat under the preaching of the word. And God, again, doesn't require success, he requires faithfulness.

I think of the missionary Robert Thomas. It's an easy name for me because my youngest son, Robert Thomas Holland, named after both grandfathers. Robert Thomas was a missionary called to minister in an area today we would call Korea.

[32:43] It didn't go back by that name when he ministered. And he learned the language, and then he worked and raised money and printed thousands, tens of thousands of New Testaments in that language.

took him years of preparation. And finally the opportunity came for him to go to Korea to reveal Christ to those people.

And they were savages. They were savages. He finds a sailing ship that will take him by the country, but as they approached the land, the captain of the ship said, I won't dock here.

I'm not going to weigh anchor. I'm not going to lower the anchor, brother. And he said, I will give you a little boat. And he said, you can row in. Well, they loaded all these Bibles in bags, and Robert Thomas starts rowing to shore.

And as he's approaching, all these guys come out, and they're standing on the beach with swords. Robert Thomas lands. He's yelling at them in their language, Jesus, Jesus.

[33:56] and he's throwing Bibles at them, Jesus. And he lands, and they grab him, they walk him up, they kneel him down, and a guy walks up and cuts off his head.

He prepared about seven years to go to that country. He served there physically on land about 30 seconds.

Now, a lot of people look at and say, what a wasted life. What a failure. Very interesting though, the natives, they had no clue what this book was.

They'd never seen a book. But they took the Bibles, and carefully, one by one, they tore the pages out, and they papered their huts.

Tens of thousands of Bibles. And for 150 years, people read the wall and got saved. That's what they called it, reading the walls.

[34 : 56] They'd go to those huts, and they'd read the walls. And thousands got saved. And you know, God had it all figured out. Nothing took God by surprise in the life or the death of Robert Thomas.

There's another story told, and that of William Borden. Borden might be a name familiar to you, Derry, heir to the Borden Derry fortune, set to inherit millions of dollars.

He was the heir. He was supposed to run the company, trained to run the company. Well, William Borden got radically saved. Went to college, went to seminary, and spent seven years in preparation.

He wanted to minister to Muslims in western China. And he booked passage, and he got as far as Egypt and became deathly ill with cerebral meningitis.

Is that something? I'm going from memory here. And he died in Egypt. On his way, fully prepared to minister to the Muslims of China.

[36 : 18] And the Bible that was in his hands when he died was sent back home, and he had three entries in a blank page, and he dated them.

The first one said, no retreat. He said, I'm going forward. His family tried to talk him out of it. He said, no retreat.

And then he wrote, no reserves. He said, there's nothing left in reserve here. Unreservedly, I'm going to minister. And then on the day of his death, he dated, and he said, no regrets.

He served his Lord. He served his Lord. God saw that. And then Paul talks about the future. Verse 8, in the future they have laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

You know, Paul trusted the words of the Lord. I mean, how could he do else? How can you go from the persecutor to the champion of the church without trusting the words of the Lord?

[37 : 40] He knew that in the future there awaited him a crown of righteousness. Those who fight a good fight and finish the race set before them and finish the course have a crown in their future.

That is why in this life we are to lay up treasures in heaven. I'm very familiar with that verse of the scripture, but I've never done a detailed study of it. Earthly treasures, though, disappear.

Heavenly treasures are eternal. One man has said, that's your eternal bank account. When the Texas oil man, Sid Richardson died, his wealth at the time was estimated at \$600 million.

Doesn't sound like much, does it? I mean, I could use it, but given inflation since his death, it would be several billion dollars that he was worth.

Well, at his funeral, every businessman in the oil industry came for miles. Primarily, they wanted to be seen by their colleagues. They flew in Billy Graham to give the funeral.

[39 : 00] He knew Sid Richardson. I had a friend of mine tell me that there were two petroleum lawyers on the first front row, and one of them was his father-in-law. And they were sitting on the front row, and one of them whispered and said, how much did Sid leave?

And the other one whispered back and said, he left it all. Boy, that's profound. He left it all. Sid Richardson didn't take any of that to glory.

He was a believer. As far as we know, he didn't take any of that. We have an earthly treasure that we're going to leave here someday. It may not be much, but it's all earthly, and it's going to decay and be gone.

I've always said, being the police chief, there are going to be three types of people at my funeral, those who want to make sure I'm dead, and those who think they might get a little something, and those will be there just for the atmosphere of the thing.

I don't know where Diane fits and all that. We need to be busy storing up heavenly treasures.

[40 : 11] You know, there's two things that can never happen to a treasure in heaven. It'll never rust, and there'll be no moths. There's no moths in heaven.

I'm going to write a book right there, because moths can't destroy your heavenly treasure. Laid up carries with it the idea of safely stored and carefully guarded.

Now, whatever treasures are being spoken of here, the most important thing is not accomplishment as much as motives. What's your motivation?

What is your heart telling you when it comes to serving the Lord? That's motive. Do you do things for the applause of men, or do we do them out of obedience to the Lord?

Huge difference, right? Huge difference. If a man sets out to do a great work for the Lord, but is thwarted through no fault of his, the reward's the same.

[41:21] The reward's the same. Again, I would point out William Borden, Robert Thomas. There are many others. Now, the crown spoken of here literally means a surrounding on the head.

And remember, like these Olympic athletes back in those days, they ran 26 miles so they'd receive a wreath of garland that last about a week, you know, and then it would decay.

Garland's wreaths were given for people that were great in war, they got it, and great in athletics.

Paul says we should run to receive the wreath.

Receive the wreath. Interesting, the wreath perishes, but the crown of righteousness that the Lord Jesus gives never perishes. Never perishes.

And what are we going to do with those crowns? I think we're going to lay them at the feet of Jesus.

You won't even hardly see mine. We'll have to bring Don's in in a dump truck.

[42:36] You know, they're so huge. We'll have to help carry that thing. But it's this surrounding and it'll never perish. Who receives the crown of righteousness?

All who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ through faith. The scriptures say the crown is given to all who love his appearing. Paul was striving for the same thing that we should be striving for.

to one day hear words from Jesus and he's already heard them. And we should strive to hear well done, good, and faithful servant.

You can read about that in Matthew 25, 21. I searched my heart today and I can't think of any greater words in all creation.

To stand before the creator God and hear him say well done, good, and faithful servant. Now I don't know where you're at spiritually, I know where I'm at, but I've got a long way to go.

[43:52] And I don't know how much time I've got. But God will pick you up wherever you're at, point you in that direction. You have a crown awaiting you in the words, well done, good, and fruitful.

Thank you. Thank you.