

2 Timothy 4

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[0 : 00] To be seated and to turn to 2 Timothy 4. 2 Timothy 4. So it's been a busy morning already, isn't it?

! Lots of things you've heard, but do not forget we meet for prayer on Wednesday night. We'd love to see you there. 2 Timothy 4. We're coming to the end of this series on 2 Timothy.

And what you've really got at the end of 2 Timothy is Paul's final words, his last words. Oscar Wilde's last words are interesting, aren't they? Apparently, this was Oscar Wilde's dying ultimatum. He said, either this wallpaper goes or I do. But boom. General Sedgwick was a commander in the American Civil War in 1864. He stuck his head over the parapet.

And he said, looking at the enemy below, they couldn't hit an elephant from that disk. Those were his last words. It's gone down well, hasn't it?

[1 : 02] And so here are Paul's last words. And surprisingly, when you consider his circumstances, his last words are not about him. Paul is not complaining about his aches and pains.

He's not complaining about the unfaithfulness of his people. He's not speaking about those people who should have supported him. His last words are about Jesus and about people. And that really shouldn't surprise us.

Because that is what the Apostle Paul's whole life was about when you look at it. It's what Christian ministry is really all about. It's about Jesus and his people.

The conditions that Paul is in here would make wormwood scrubs look like the Ritz. He's in dreadful conditions. He's lonely. He's deserted.

He's been deserted by his friends. Look at verse 16. It's a sad verse. At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. This is the man who's converted them, really.

[2 : 10] Thousands upon thousands of people have been converted under this man's ministry. They've become Christians. They've been added to the church. Hundreds and hundreds of churches have been planted in the Mediterranean basin. This man has written more books of the New Testament than anyone else.

And here are these people sitting in churches that he had planted, reading books that he had written. And none of them came to help him and support him. No one even to give him prayer support.

And no one to be a character reference for him. No one to sit at the back of the courtroom as moral defense. He says, everyone has deserted me.

No one has come to my sight. And yet he says, look at verse 17. Don't you love it? But the Lord stood by me. And it's interesting, isn't it, to notice how the chapter opens and closes.

Where is he? He's in a filthy, squalid hole in the ground, facing execution by his friends. He doesn't even have a coat. Look at verse 13. He's not got a blanket.

[3 : 11] But what he wants is a blanket and a Bible. And where is he? Look at verse 1. I charge you in the presence of God. In the presence of God. And look at verse 22. The Lord be with your spirit.

That's how it begins and ends. In the days of the Cold War. There's the story of the atheistic school teacher who was trying to indoctrinate her class.

She had everyone come up to the front of the class to write on the blackboard. God is nowhere. God is nowhere. One by one, the members of the class had to come up to the class blackboard. And they would write on the blackboard, God is nowhere. But there was one little brave girl who was a Christian. And she was from a Christian family.

And she came to the front of the class. And she wrote on the blackboard, God is now here. God is now here. Same letters.

[4 : 15] Different meaning. And here's the Apostle Paul. And people would say to him, well where's your God now? Where's your God when you need him, Paul? Everyone's deserted.

God is nowhere. And Paul says, no. God is now here. Everyone has deserted me. But the Lord has stayed at my side. I'm in a hole in the ground facing execution.

But I'm in the presence of God. That's a wonderful thing, isn't it? I would be a fly on the wall of Paul's prison cell. And to hear him in his very last days. To be a witness of the final words. And that's what we're going to do.

So let's listen to Paul's final farewell. What you've got here is verses 1 to 8. Is a solemn heart stopping charge. A solemn, serious heart stopping charge.

And so for Paul, the fighting is all but over. The battles are largely in the past as far as he's concerned now. But for Timothy, who he's writing to, it's all in the future. And so look at this.

[5 : 18] One, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is judge to the living and the dead. And by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word. Preach the word. And the next bit.

Verse 5. As for you, Timothy, always be sober-minded and do a suffering. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry. The command is preach the word.

And everything is kind of subservient to that. And so why does he need to do the work of an evangelist? Why does he need to preach the word and do the work of an evangelist?

It's because the truth that any church or any denomination is only ever one generation away from extinction. Do the work of an evangelist.

That is a solemn charge to church leaders. These are my dying words. Preach the word. Do the work of an evangelist. It's not that doing the work of an evangelist is something different from preaching the word.

[6 : 18] I think that's a real mistake. Paul is not saying, make it part of your job description to do a little bit of open air or a little bit of door-to-door. No, preach the word. And as you preach the word, make sure that you're doing the work of an evangelist.

In fact, you're not preaching the word unless you're doing the work of an evangelist. It's why I think in preaching, the kind of narrow, this is a gospel sermon and this is a teaching sermon, it's actually very, very unhelpful.

You're not preaching the word unless you're doing the work of an evangelist. And so, can you see what 2 Timothy is all about?

The whole thrust of this letter, we've seen it in four sermons, haven't we? The burden of Paul's writing in Timothy is guard the gospel. So, how do you guard the gospel? You cannot guard the gospel unless you're preaching it.

And so, here at IPC, we won't keep the gospel here at IPC unless we're passing it on. It's not like precious treasure that you put in a museum.

[7 : 28] The only way you can preserve the gospel is by preaching the gospel. A sad irony today is you often find, don't you, kind of evangelicals, evangelicals who are not really into evangelism.

People who believe the gospel, they know the gospel, it's been handed down to them, they can spell it out, they know the pattern of sound words, they know the sacred deposit, but they're not actually into sharing it with others. They're not into using their lives to share this wonderful treasure that they've been given.

And then on the other hand, there are people out there who are full of enthusiasm, their will-meaning, they want to pass on the gospel, they're really zealous, but they're clueless as to what the gospel really is. They don't know the pattern of sound words, their well-meaning, but they're ignorant.

Can you see that the only way that the gospel is going to be preserved in this church is by preaching it, by giving it away? And so do the work of an evangelist, preach it in season and out of season.

He's saying to the church leaders, he's saying to the church, whether you like it or not, whether you feel like it or not, whether people will listen to you or not, whatever the culture, whatever the climate. Don't allow the indifference of the church, or the antipathy of the culture, to drain your enthusiasm for gospel work.

[8 : 58] Do the work of an evangelist. This is my solemn charge. Do it in season and out of season. Somebody said, probably tongue-in-cheek, if evangelism was a crime, would there be enough

evidence to convict you?

It's an important question. Here's the problem that Paul is addressing here. And it's important, and it's a solemn and heart-stopping charge, because Jesus will be the judge of that question, not Nero. So look at verse 1. Can you see that? In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead. Jesus is going to judge this issue, and God himself is going to be the witness.

And so in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is the judge of the living and the dead, preach the word. Do the work of an evangelist. And of course, this is directly applicable, isn't it, to preachers of the gospel, to elders, to leaders.

But this is Paul's solemn charge to us right down through the generations, and to us as a church family. There's a wider implication of that. You guard the gospel. You preserve the gospel by proclaiming it.

[10:13] It's a solemn, heart-stopping charge, isn't it? Secondly, it's a heart-rending appeal. It's a heart-rending appeal.

I can't stand the heading of verse 9. If you see just above verse 9, the ESV has put a little heading there. It's called Personal Instructions.

I don't know what kind of clown put that in, really. It's really unhelpful. Because it basically says, isn't it, they're random, unconnected thoughts. Paul suddenly remembered, oh, there's all these people I've got to talk about.

It's not like that at all. And if you think verses 9 to the end, those lists of unpronounceable names, if you think they're unconnected, think again.

Because what you've got in verse 9 onwards is a list of poignant and powerful demonstrations of what does it mean to guard the gospel and to stick with the gospel and to finish the job. Look at verse 9.

[11:11] You've just got to feel for what Paul is saying. Verse 9, do your best to come to me soon. Verse 10, Demas, he loved the world and he's deserted me.

Gone away. Verse 11, only Luke is with me, Dr. Luke. Verse 13, when you bring the cloak, bring the scrolls and also, most importantly, don't forget the parchments.

He's asking for a blanket and a Bible and some Banner of Truth books. Verse 14, he names and shames it. It's a GDPR nightmare.

Verse 14, Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm. And at verse 16, at my defense, no one came to my support. Everyone has deserted me.

Not a character witness, not a prayer supporter. It's poignant, isn't it? And then verse 17, he says, Lord stood by me, strengthen me, so that through the message, the gospel might be fully proclaimed.

[12:13] And the Gentiles, the world might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. Don't forget, this is Nero's time. Nero was the man who thought of throwing Christians into the lions.

He came up with that idea. Would they have thrown the apostle Paul to the lions? Well, I doubt it. He's a Roman citizen. But I can't imagine they cared very much about the paperwork.

His file could have easily been misplaced. But even if he was to escape as a Roman citizen from being thrown to the lions, we know, don't we, that the devil is described as a prowling lion who prowls around looking for those he might devour.

And so Paul is in extreme need in extreme circumstances and Satan comes along to put the boot in. And Satan would have so loved to have seen the apostle Paul recant.

Satan would have loved to see the apostle Paul give way to self-pity. He would have loved it if he could have made Paul feel so sorry for himself that he'd give way to bitterness and self-pity.

[13:18] He would have won a great victory. But look at verse 17. Satan wanted to destroy me but I was rescued from the lion's mouth. Verse 21. And winter's coming.

Do your best to get here. I think it should tug at our heartstrings. This is the man who's writing to Timothy who under God you and I owe our salvation to.

He's our apostle. It should tug at our heartstrings when we read these verses. And it's not only very heart-rending it's heart-searching.

Because these are people that he's talking about. People like you and I. Every church will have people like this. The good, the bad, the indifferent.

They're all there in Paul's final paragraph aren't they? What you've got here is a kaleidoscope of church life. One of the wonderful things I think about the apostle Paul is he is always surrounded by people.

[14:27] Always training. He's always with someone. He's always caring for someone. He's always seeking to teach someone. He's always with people. And people disappoint you. Don't they?

And people let you down. And sometimes people are a delight. And sometimes people are an encouragement. And sometimes people are a wonderful surprise.

And it's all here. Sometimes people leave the church for us then. For Demas in love with this present world has deserted me. And he's gone to Thessalonica.

Cretans gone to Galatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Sometimes people leave the church. Sometimes they leave the church because we've sent them away like we did with Emmanuel Church Brentford.

That's a wonderful thing. Sometimes people leave the church and they're here for a short time and they're part of the church family and then they go off to serve the Lord in another part of the country. Sometimes people leave the church because they want an easy life in the countryside.

[15:38] But it's a wonderful thing to send people away. I think it's an exciting thing when people leave IPC to serve God and the gospel. Some churches I go and preach in.

That never happens. Well, Cretion has gone to Galatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Titus to Dalmatia. But sometimes people leave for other reasons and it's pretty painful, isn't it?

Why did Demas go to why did he go to Thessalonica? I think Demas is the great example of verses 3 and 4.

You know verses 3 and 4 they're these people with itching ears that don't want the hard truths. And they accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.

They find teachers that will reaffirm what they want to hear. And Demas is a good example of that. You can grow a church in London quite easily if you tell a congregation what they want to hear.

[16:51] It's always a temptation for any preacher. It's particularly a temptation when you've been in a church for a long time like I have. But there's a kind of deal that you and I make which is totally unspoken where I won't bother you if you don't bother me.

And we'll exercise this wonderful self-affirmation every Sunday to tell people what they want to hear. I don't think Demas probably stopped going to church.

I think maybe the ministry in Thessalonica was just a little bit less demanding and a little few less corners. Whatever.

It's clear isn't it in verse 10 Demas didn't want to be challenged about living for the next world because he wanted to live for this world. And so that's why he goes off.

He didn't want to live with an eye to Jesus Christ who is the judge of the living and the dead and will one day come again. He wanted to live for this world. So he deserts Paul and he goes and finds somebody who will tell him what he wants to hear.

[17:52] Then there are the encouragements. Look at Luke. There's only Dr. Luke the GP. Only Luke is with me and Mark.

It's a delight isn't it to find Mark in these verses because in verse 11 Paul says Mark he's useful to me. The to me isn't actually there in the original.

Mark is just useful. Bring Mark because he's useful. That's a bit of a surprise isn't it because if you know the story of John Mark from the rest of the New Testament John Mark left the first missionary one of the missionary journeys because he wanted to go home.

He missed his mum. And Paul tried to take him on a missionary journey and halfway through it got too rough and John Mark goes home. And so here's 20 years after and it's wonderful to find that Mark is here and Paul is describing him in this way.

The man who was once a quitter who once ran away because ministry was too tough Paul says actually this guy is so useful bring him to me I can't do without him. He's part of the team.

[19:04] Isn't that wonderful that God is the God of the second chance isn't he? You read your Bible in the book of Jonah what does God say to Jonah? God says Jonah arise go up to Nineveh and what does Jonah do?

Jonah gets up and he goes in the opposite direction and we read don't we that the word of God came to Jonah a second time arise and go to Nineveh and this time he did. It's a wonderful thing

isn't it when the word of God comes to you a second time when you've screwed up the first and when we've been disobedient and we've run away when we've been afraid and we've quit when we've been too scared to open our mouths when we've stuffed up you think of the apostle Peter three times he denied the Lord do you remember that?

And he must have thought I've done it and I've done it in public the Lord can't use me and Jesus comes back from the dead do you remember and he says to the women go and find my disciples and tell them and particularly tell Peter to meet me in Galilee Peter gets a special mention and when they gather together Jesus says to Peter feed my sheep that's like saying isn't it to somebody who's embezzled the church funds we're going to make you the church treasurer it's a vote of confidence Peter I know that your repentance is genuine I'm going to entrust the most precious thing in my care to you those for whom I've died and here's John Mark Paul says and he's useful to me there's a way back maybe you're having a midlife crisis it might not be midlife but you're having the spiritual equivalent of a midlife crisis you've made promises to the

Lord and you've made promises to the Lord that you do certain things and you'd be a certain someone and you've not done them and you've not been them and it doesn't look like you ever will and you wonder is there a way back and maybe you've wandered off track maybe you've got lost and you wonder will I be any use to the Lord well God is the God of the second chance and I need to tell you this morning that you can still finish well you can still have a fruitful Christian life even though you've stuffed up big time even if you've let the Lord down badly this week you can come back and God can give you a second chance God can give you a second wind to serve him verses 17 to 18 I'm really moved when I read these verses 17 and 18 but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me so through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it so I was rescued from the lion's mouth the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safe into his heavenly kingdom who are these

Gentiles in verse 17 do you know who they are who are they they're you and I Paul saw himself as the apostle to the Gentiles he prayed that God would bring him to Rome the capital city of the then known world so he could take the gospel of Jesus to the known world so that he could bring the good news of the Lord Jesus to the far flung parts of the empire so now God has answered his prayer not in the way he would have wanted but he's in Rome he's in this stinking hole in the ground its headquarters he's in the command center for God's mission of the world to bring the gospel to the British Isles and Paul is getting the gang back together again he's assembling his team because he's looking beyond his own lifetime looking to the generations to come he's gathering his best people to make sure that after his head is chopped off that the gospel will still go forwards and people will be saved and people will be heard about the Lord

[23 : 03] Jesus and so can you see it's not about me it's about him we sing don't we happy if with my latest breath I may but gasp his name and that's Paul not feeling sorry for himself not full of regrets not only thinking if only I'd taken a different path if only I'd not taken that job if only I'd not got kicked out of university if only I hadn't gone to Damascus on that day happy if with my latest breath I may but gasp his name let me try and apply this look at the names in this paragraph and ask yourself where do I fit in because you're somewhere in there Jesus said if you're not for me you're against me so ask yourself am I for him and probably there are people in this room who are not for

Jesus and the alarming truth Jesus says if you're not for me you're against me Alexander the coppersmith look what it says in verse 14 he did me a great deal of harm you can feel the hurt can't you but there's no hate I think it's interesting isn't it he recognized the harm done to him but verse 14 I'm not going to repay him there's no vengeance there's no bitterness in Paul there's hurt of course there is but he doesn't hate verse 15 beware of him yourself for he strongly opposed our message there'll be people in churches and in denominations who will strongly oppose the message people like Demas who have fallen in love with the present world you say to me this morning how dare you judge me preacher man how dare you judge the congregation in front of you I don't know you I can't read your motives can I

I can't but God is judging you God's word does and we're all here under God's word today and the word of God corrects rebukes and encourages and Paul says to the Corinthians he says if you judge yourselves you will not be judged but it's better surely isn't it to judge yourself today and be under the searching word of God than to face Jesus on judgment day and be judged then and so you this is how serious it is you have a window of opportunity to judge yourself in the light of what the Bible teaches where do you fit into this group of people are you a Demas who do you love what

do you love is this world what you dream about and what you plan about your heart being drawn to the things that are temporary and if that is you then you're Demas or is it the world to come are you in the race

Paul says I've run the race I fought the good fight well are you in the ring or are you watching are you on the track or are you in the stands are you in the race in the fight or just looking on and so judge yourself today so that you will not be judged and if you're a Demas that is not good and you need someone to look you in the eye and ask you the tough questions you need someone to take the word of God and correct and rebuke you that's why you need to be here in church not just for hearing the preaching of God's word but the sharing of our lives being in each other's homes coming here and being honest with one another allowing God's word to correct and rebuke us and maybe you're like John Mark this morning you've stuffed up you've made a mess of things and you need someone like Barnabas to come alongside you a son of encouragement to put his arm around you and get you back on track maybe that's what you need today well where will you find a Barnabas you'll find him in this church family that's what fellowship is all about and some of you here are going through a tough time you're like Paul in prison maybe you feel like Paul that you've been let down by other Christians that's easy to feel isn't it I keep meeting people who've been let down by other Christians who've been badly treated by other people and they're full of sourness and bitterness and their lives have been blighted by the whole experience but let me plead with you this morning don't give way to self-pity don't give way to sourness and bitterness you need someone to stand with you someone like Jesus you need to know Jesus with you Jesus says I will never leave you nor forsake you the soul that on Jesus has leaned for a pose he will not he cannot desert to his foes that soul though all hell should endeavour to shake

[28 : 21] Jesus says I'll never no never no never forsake that even if the church lets you down and even if your fellow Christians don't understand you there is one who will stand alongside you and his name is Jesus and he will never leave you nor forsake you so a heart solemn heart stopping charge a searching heart rending appeal and then really quickly a final foot stomping farewell from Paul there's a survey done of people who are over the age of 95 in the US and the question was asked for people who were over the age of 95 what would you change if you had your life over again what would you do differently number one they would take more time to reflect on life rather than simply reacting to it take more time to reflect on life rather than simply reacting to it number two they would have liked to have taken more risks number three they would have liked to have done more things that would have outlived them

I think if the apostle Paul had lived at the age of 95 which he didn't he wouldn't have been able to give any of those answers because Paul didn't just react to circumstances he was proactive he knew what he was about he'd been commissioned on the Damascus road to take the good news of the Lord Jesus to the Gentiles to the world and he strategized about it all the time and he certainly lived beyond his lifetime didn't he Paul went out with his boots on verse 16 look at the way Paul goes out verse 16 and my first defense no one came to me to stand by me but all deserted may not be charged against them but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it and Paul goes out the way that he came he goes out sorry he goes out the same way as

Jesus doesn't he did you notice that echo deserted by friends executed by enemies and what does he say he says father forgive them they don't know what they're doing remember Stephen the first Christian martyr the stones are raining down on him and what does he say he says lay it not to their charge and so here's Paul deserted by his friends left in a sticking hole in the ground ready to be executed and what does he say he says may it not be held against them because he dies in the confidence that Jesus will bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom he's got his bag packed and he's ready to go he writes his own obituary look at verse 6 he says I'm already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come I fought the fight I finished the race I kept the faith there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day not only to me but also to those who have loved experience a great verse to have written on your tombstone

I love this quote from Pilgrim's Progress Mr. Valiant for truth he says this my sword I give to him that shall succeed me and my courage to him that can get it my scars I carry with me as my witness that I have fought the Lord's battles as he entered the river he said again death where is thy sting and as he went down deeper he said grave where is your victory and so he passed over and all the

trumpet sounded for him on the other side that's the way to go it was an early church leader who said the day will come when men will call their dogs Nero and their sons Paul exactly what's happened isn't it well done good and faithful servant enter into the joy of your Lord let's pray