

Preach the Word

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 July 2016

Preacher: Rev Kenneth M Ferguson

[0 : 00] With the Lord's help, I'd like to turn back and consider the words we have in this portion of Scripture we've read. In the New Testament, on the second letter of Paul to Timothy, in chapter 4.

And if we could read again verses 6 to 8. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is 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. And these are the very, well this letter is the last letter written by the Apostle Paul.

And the words of our text were written as Paul was imprisoned in a cell in Rome.

[1 : 33] And he was imprisoned because of the Gospel. And he was awaiting execution by the Emperor of Nero. And the year was around 66 AD.

And commentators believe that the Apostle Paul was around 64 years old at this particular time.

And when he begins the chapter, he is addressing Timothy in particular.

When he says, Paul, as it were an elderly statesman, by way of coming to the end of his life in the ministry, I know he is directing and encouraging and exhorting young Timothy as to how to preach and to clear the word of God in his own generation.

It is very interesting. If you go back to chapter 3 at the beginning of chapter 3 of this letter, he says there, ■illJones 4 of 11 rather than lovers of God and having the appearance of godliness but denying its power and so on.

It's as if he says at the beginning of chapter 3 the kind of atmosphere and the kind of society into which young Timothy would have to preach the gospel.

[4 : 07] One of the American evangelicals talks about preaching in our present day not in relation to this context but generally and he says we must preach into the wind.

It's as if there is a gale blowing and the gale is not from heaven it is a gale of sin a gale from hell blowing in the world into society, among other people and the apostle Paul knows the answer to the predicament of people in that kind of climate and that kind of atmosphere and he says to young Timothy preach the word it is the word of God that they need they don't need to be encouraged to praise folk or to involve themselves in carnal activities and worldly activities and so on and so forth which so many people strive for day by day but our generation like the apostles generation needs to hear the word of God and you know what it says in verse 16 of chapter 3 he describes the scriptures breathed out by God he says and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness and we have the scriptures here and he says you turn away from listening to every advice that comes from mere man and focus on the scriptures and declare the scriptures in your life and by your conduct and then having said all these things he approaches the end of his letter and it's as if he is sitting in this prison cell in Rome and he sees as it were beyond the bar and he looks over his past year spent in the ministry he looks back that's the first point

I want to highlight and secondly he looks around him to his immediate circumstances and then he looks as I said beyond the prison bars into the great eternity that awaits him he says I am already being poured out as a brief offering the time of my departure has come I have fought the good fight finished the race kept the faith henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and so on I would like first of all to say one or two words about his thoughts about his present situation having spent his life the sins of his conversion the saving Christ you remember the way the Lord so clearly arrested the apostle on the road to Damascus while he was in the midst of trying to persecute the church and cause as much

damage to the young church of Christ as he could and the Lord addressed him from heaven and converted his life to himself so how does he describe his situation in the prison well verse 6 he says I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come isn't it amazing the way he describes his present situation I am being poured out as a drink offering now the commentators of the scriptures or on the scriptures they lead us back to a practice that was appointed in the Old Testament in relation to what the apostle here is saying and it is in relation to the offering of the burnt offering focusing particularly maybe on the sacrifice of the lamb of the morning and evening sacrifice in Israel and the lamb was offered up as a burnt offering completely burnt as a mark of dedication to the Lord this was something that was done morning and evening in Israel the burnt offering said of the people where we are dedicating ourselves to you Lord at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day and the burnt offering of the lamb spoke these words and at the end of that burnt offering a certain amount of wine was taken and poured out at the base of the altar and that marked the end of that offering and this is what we see the apostle Paul referring to here when he says I am already being poured out as a drink offering it's as if he is lightening his life to an offering of dedication to the Lord from the time he started serving the Lord Jesus Christ it's as if he has been sacrificing himself not holding himself back from serving the Lord but giving himself wholly to the Lord in service so that's what he counsels us to do in Romans chapter 12 when he says to each one of us who seek to follow the Lord these words at the beginning of chapter 12 in Romans I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship or as I say in the authorised version which is your normal mental service and we see here that that's the kind of picture he's bringing before us that he is saying

[11:08] I have given myself totally to the service of Christ up until now and I am now coming to the end my drink offering is about to be poured out I am just about at the end of my service and of the road and he puts another angle on it as well at the end of verse 6 not only does he use the picture of this sacrifice and the pouring out of the wine to mark the end of it but also he says at the end of verse 6 the time of my departure has come the time of my departure has come the word he uses there in the original the time of my being loosed has come it's as if he has been tied in to serve as in the gospel all of these years and now he says the time of loosing has come some of the

Greeks used to have this word used when they would describe a beast of burden coming to the end of the day's work let's say it was a horse drawing a plough or a cart and at the end of the day when the horse was finished his work the man in charge of the horse would start opening the ties the reins of him and so on so that he was completely free of the reins and everything that was associated with his work in the field and he could walk off into his stall and have a race that's the kind of picture we have given to us by the apostle Paul here it's as if he has said well I have been in the harness of the gospel all of these years

I have been working hard saving Christ but the time now has come when he is going to open all this harness of me that I have been tied in with all of these years the time of my departure of my losing has come and one more thing in relation to this losing some people use it to describe when a ship was ready to move away from its mooring and head off into another country and those of you who have been at sea will know that there are a number of ropes at the stem and at the stern of the ship and when it comes to the time for the ship to move off they start casting off ropes and eventually they've just got one rope at each end singled up and that's exactly the way the apostle sees himself here most of the ties as it were he has had to the service of

Christ in the Lord have been released have been opened and he is ready to move off into another sphere of labour in heaven isn't that an amazing picture he's given to us he's there in his prison cell and he says as he thinks about himself well the time has come and I have given my life in service of the gospel and death awaits me soon I have given my life tied in harnessed in happily and lovingly to the work of Christ preaching and serving him but the time of opening is just about here what about us have we ever been tied in happily with

Christ Jesus in the service of the gospel have we been happily united to him in the work of the gospel have we gone down the road with him plowing us away in service of the kingdom of God have we begun to sacrifice ourselves giving ourselves holy to him in willing loving service as the apostle so clearly has done when he came to the end of his life and this is the way he describes it but then the following verse 7 he gives some thought to the way he has lived his life and there are three things he mentions in verse 7 he describes his life as a good fight

[16 : 40] I have fought the good fight again I have finished the race and thirdly I have kept the faith let's see what he says about I have fought the good fight the good fight well you know there are so many enemies that lie in wait for the Christian once you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ it's as if you enter an arena where there are so many enemies awaiting you to try and discourage you to try and frustrate you for making progress in the work of the gospel we have the world against us we have the power of flesh against us and we have Satan with all his wiles set out against us to try and deviate us from the work of the gospel and the path of dedicated holiness and the apostle says well I have known this fight and I have been involved in it the word here I have fought gives us the idea of this man wrestling for all it was worth against all the powers of darkness and evil that tried to turn him away from following the Lord Jesus I he says have been given strength to fight a good fight why does he call it a good fight well I am sure it is a fight that was ultimately going to be victorious because greater is he who is in us and with us and he who is in the world and he knew the power of Christ enabling him to fight and prevail upon the enemy of his soul time and time and time again you see

Christians are on the winning side however feeble they might feel and however discouraged we might feel and however difficult the path might be the Christian is on the winning side because the Lord is with his people he was with them going through the wilderness and away from Egypt despite the difficulties and trials that lay in the way they nevertheless were led safely on because the Lord was their great director and he was with them to bless he said I have fought the good fight maybe you have begun this fight of faith you are aware of powers of darkness powers within yourself that are at variance with the love of the gospel and the spirit of holiness the powers of the flesh and the carnal behaviors you see the apostle himself says elsewhere that the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh so we cannot do what we would like to do in

Romans chapter 7 he pictures that marvelous struggle that the Christian has but then comes to say wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from the body of this death and then he climaxes by saying praise God to the Lord Jesus Christ he has known the sight of Christ in his fight and although there were dark days and difficult situations he knew the power of the gospel the power of Christ the power of the Holy Spirit and he says I have fought the good fight and then the second thing he says in verse 7 is I have finished the race I have finished it now there are all kinds of races races when you consider the

Olympic games or games of that nature and evidently this is the kind of picture that the apostle is using because he would have known about the Greek games in his day and he is using that imagery to bring the Christian life before us and he says I have fought that race the race the Christian fights is a race that begins at conversion a race that begins with the new birth it is not a race that we undertake in our own strength or that we start in our own strength it is a race into which we have placed by the spirit of God and he says this is the way walk ye in it this is the way and there may be things in your race and your life that

[22 : 30] I haven't got in my life at all like some races in the Olympics have hurdles others haven't some races have shot others along whatever kind of race it is set out for us by the Lord himself and you know the apostle started this race way back when he said in response to the Lord Jesus on road to Damascus Lord what do you want me to do for you what would there have me do that was the beginning of that path and he started running in obedience to the Lord Jesus though there were difficult days in his life difficult aspects to this race some days he was climbing some days he experienced great opposition sometimes he was beaten he was taken out for dead this man knew what it was to run this race and experience the many difficulties and fights of that race that he had to run the question for us is have we begun to run in the way of obedience have we begun to run the race of faith have we begun to run live in our lives looking unto

Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith this must be the focus of our life that was the focus of his life and he ran his race looking to Christ and seeking to obey him and to do what he asked of him but now there is it's just about time looking back he may have thought of many hurdles that he had to leap over and difficulties he had to negotiate out through the years and at times we're like that ourselves aren't we there are situations that come our way and say well I will not be able to get over this not be able to fulfill this task this is far too difficult a hill for me to climb this is a long road I feel so lonely I feel that things are just not going to work out they say that the marathon runner feels a particular loneliness when he runs outside of the stadium all on his own maybe the wind against him and maybe rain and all kinds of thoughts going through his or her mind the race becomes so

lonely and so difficult and maybe that could be true of some

Christians as well who have been on the road a long time and many of those who they knew in the earlier years have been taken away into him and now they feel a measure of loneliness continuing to run this race and the apostle he says I have finished it by the grace of God he finished it and it's only by the grace of God we begin it and continue it and at last finish it and then thirdly he says in verse 7 I have kept the faith I have kept the faith he means I believe the body of the scriptures the word of God as it says in the apostle Jude's letter short letter the faith once delivered to the saints the whole of the

Bible and he says I have kept it I have kept it he wasn't as selective in only preaching one side of the gospel but he preached the whole counsel of God as he says in Acts chapter 20 when he addresses the elders from Ephesus at my readers and he says I haven't kept back anything from you I have preached unto you all the counsel of God and we must be careful to remember that God is not only a loving God but he is a just God and he punishes evil we remember that there is not only a heaven but a hell also we remember that there is foreordination and we remember there is free offer of the gospel we have to respond to the free offer of the gospel and the apostles offered to preach all of these things and we in our day need to preach all of these things and to promote every aspect of the word of

God not to hide anything from other people not from ourselves but expose our own lives and hearts and minds to the whole counsel of the scripture and let the scripture search us out and correct us when we are weak and give us grace to go on in the face of all difficulties and trials and the apostle here says I I have kept the faith when it comes to the end of our life it is wonderful to be able to say with a clear conscience we have kept the faith we by grace have been able to stand upon the scripture in every situation and as we preach it and as we live for the Lord that we keep our feet four square on the word of

[29 : 05] God on the word of God there are so many influences nowadays to try and water down the doctrines of the gospel but you see that's not going to work what we have to do is to be faithful to the word of God as we have it and the apostle has put this on record that he has kept the faith or this also may mean that he has kept believing in Christ he has continued believing in the Lord Jesus as his only savior as the only one able to save him from his sin able to keep them to the end and present him faultless in the presence of his glory with exceeding joy and he has committed himself to him and kept committing himself to him in every situation of life

I have kept feet you know these words I believe speak to us all in some measure they search us out and ask us well are we fighting the good fight are we fighting the fight at all against sin against this world, against the evils that we fight within us, and are we fighting in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ call upon me in the day of trouble he says, and I will answer you, and you will glorify me it asks us, have we finished our race have we begun our race, what kind of race are we running what kind of lifestyle do we have, is God at the center of our life but he needs to be what are we doing with the time the Lord is giving us in the world, and are we keeping the faith so that's the second thing, and the third thing is this as he looks forward, he says nothing about the awful predicament that awaits him by way of being executed at this point he is saying something far more glorious henceforth he says there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day only to me, but also to all of our love he is appearing he is talking about the idea of coming to the end of this race and still carrying forward this idea of being in a stadium and seeing runners coming to the end of the race and receiving a laurel wreath or some kind of acknowledgement that they have won and at least finished the race but he says that's not the kind of thing I'm looking for

I'm looking for something far more substantial and that is laid up for me according to the Lord's own promise the crown of righteousness what does this really mean?

crown of righteousness well it's as if the Lord acknowledges with all of his people who have lived a righteous life in this world that he's going to crown that righteous life lived in this world with a heaven and a glory in agreement with the righteous life that they have lived they are going to have a fitting glory they are going to have something that is to crown their righteous life and that is a crown of righteousness a crown of glory as it says it elsewhere the Lord Jesus Christ has acquired all his people an everlasting inheritance that is incorruptible and undefined and that fades not away that is reserved in heaven for them and this is what the apostle says it is laid up for me he says it's as if he says it's God my name on it

I who have lived a righteous life a life of faith through the grace of God and the Lord is going to acknowledge that at the end of my life whatever Nero does with me with my body whatever happens to me physically I know that this is my inheritance from the hand of a gracious God from the hand of the righteous judge he says I am going to receive a crown of righteousness from him on that day he is looking at a particular day and I believe it's the day of the resurrection although at the point of their death the souls of believers are being perfect in holiness and revidgedly pass into glory nevertheless their bodies that rest in their graves till the resurrection will not enter into the experience of that glory until the resurrection Lord and that's the ultimate the ultimate the ultimate longing that the people of God have that they have the resurrection body and the whole personality experience the blessings of heaven when Daniel hears the voice of the Lord in chapter 12 go thou thy way the Lord says to Daniel until the end be and thou shalt rest you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days he has said to him you go on living the life that you have been living and if we had time we could go through the book of Daniel and show the aspects of that man's holy and godly life the way he dedicated himself to living for God in various situations standing up for God and for what was right and true and the Lord said you continue in that boat and when it comes to the end you will rest and stand in your allotted place and some people believe that the word standing means standing on the resurrection or the body having been raised incorruptible and full of glory and full of power like unto the body of Christ stand in your allotted place at the end of the days what an amazing hope the Christian has he is looking as it were through the bars of the prison and it is that the bars of the prison don't really exist anymore the guard isn't outside as it were anymore the guard doesn't mean anything to the apostle anymore in comparison to this marvelous hope that he has but what is ahead of him there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the righteous judge will award to me on that day come ye blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world and here he has put this angle on it there is a crowning day for all of God's people the apostle included who suffered so much and who was despised so much and who had so much done to him and against him

[38 : 11] just maybe like yourselves feel so often that the whole world is against you every circumstance is so difficult unbearably difficult nevertheless the time will come when you will stand in your allotted place and be crowned with the crown of righteousness and the righteous judge will say I see no fault in them and they are mine forever and ever to be with me and then it goes on not only he says is he going to give me that crown but also to all who have loved his appearing everyone who loved the appearing of Christ now when we think of ourselves we think of the appearing of Christ in the scriptures and we think of the number of times that we may have had a glimpse of him in the scriptures and the number of times that we have longed to see him more clearly and more deeply understand his glory and know his fellowship we long to see him and to know him more and more in the means of Christ as we are this evening we long to see him isn't it true of you this evening that you haven't come here to be seen by other people you have come here in order to see a glimpse of the glory of Jesus Christ a glory of his kingship of his work as mediator of his wonderful grace he stood upon his people that you might know it for yourself isn't that what has taken you here this evening that I might know him and the power of his resurrection the apostle Paul says and the fellowship of his sufferings maybe you complain like somebody else that his visits to you are so infrequent and also that when he does visit that the time he spends with you is so short but you know where there is love is appearing it is more precious to you than anything else in the world to have a moment of the fellowship of the Lord

Jesus Christ by his word and by his spirit and then the apostle includes you in all of what he is saying here he will award a crown of righteousness to you on that day because you have loved his appearing well how do we stand in comparison to what the apostle here is saying he is ready to be poured out as a drink offering and he is about to be loosed from this world it is as if he is saying I have given my life in the service of the gospel happily harnessed up with Christ in the plough of the gospel but the time to move on has come he has given me grace and he is now about to give me the glory then he says I have fought a good fight finished the race kept the faith how do we stand with that do we fight against sin do we hate it with perfect hatred do we turn away from it unto Christ Jesus

I was thinking this morning of the woman of Samaria and the marvellous interview that he had with her at the well in John chapter 4 and I hadn't thought of it before in this respect but when it comes to her confronting him trying to hide as it were from his interrogation of her and he says to her go and

get your husband and she says I am the husband eventually he comes to say to her I am the Messiah Jesus said when the Messiah comes he will show us all things I can speak to you I am he the next thing we see is she leaves her water pot that she had come to collect water with at the well and she goes away to tell people about Jesus come see a man who told me all things that ever I did it's not this of

Christ the water pot I think marked her old life it's as if it was something that was associated with the kind of lifestyle she was living coming out to the well at midday when everybody else was in their houses sleeping out as it were she might get water and go back and continue living in the way she was living which doesn't seem to have been a wholesome godly life at all but when the Lord relieved himself to her she left her water pot and went away it's as if she left her sinful life with Christ himself he alone was able to deal with it he alone was able to cleanse her from her sin he alone was able to give her new life and a new beginning a new focus and a new way of speaking come see a man who told me all things that ever

I did how do we stand on this have we left our sin at the feet of Jesus at the cross of Christ have we left all our burdens there well if we are able to do so the Lord indeed will give us to know what his love means and his grace means and he will give us to know that he will never leave us nor forsake us despite the fact that we may be in prison or whatever other sufferings may come our way the Lord will enable us to go on to finish our ways and at last receive from him the crown of righteousness because he is a righteous judge giving to his own righteous people the glory that he has promised them he giveth grace and glory and will withhold no good from them who walk uprightly may the

[45 : 10] Lord bless these also let us pray help us O Lord to bow before thee this evening with humble spirits acknowledging our sin before thee and our need of being cleansed our need of being strengthened to save our need of being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation salvation O bless each of us we pray bless this congregation as they witness for thee and give them to know the action of thy holy spirit from on high giving them to show forth the praises of him who called the mud of darkness into thy marvellous light bless us as we sing thy praise in conclusion of what you've seen for

Jesus sake we will bring your worship to our close singing in sing psalms from psalm 16 and verse 8 to the end psalm 16 and it's on page 17 of the psalm verse 8 before me constantly I said the Lord alone because he is at my right hand I am not the earth in the throne therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope and wavering but you will not allow my soul in death to stay nor will you leave your holy one to see the tombs decay you have made known to me the path of life divine bliss shall I know that your right hand joy from your face will shine psalm 16 verses 8 to the end which dies to see before me constantly

I set the Lord alone because he is at my right now I will not be overgrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope but wavering for you will not allow my soul in death to save nor will you leave your holy walk to see the tombs decay you have made known to me the path of life divine which shall

I know what to write a joy from your face will shine love love the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forever more so there will be when you you want the one you