



In this issue:

What Would You Write?
p. 1

Press on with
Endurance unto
Perfection p. 3

Famous Last Words p.
4

If These Were My Last
Words To God's People
p.5

What Would You Write?

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Tim. 4:6-8 NKJV

Paul knew when he wrote this letter that he would soon be departing this life and he gave Timothy many admonitions in this last letter that he would write. In chapter one he exhorts Timothy, “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began...” (2 Tim. 1:6-9).

In chapter two Paul encourages Timothy, “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:1-3).

In the beginning of chapter three Paul warns Timothy that in the last days perilous times will come when men will become lovers of themselves and money. He further admonishes Timothy, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:10-12).



And in the beginning of chapter 4 Paul entreats Timothy, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

If I knew that I was going to die next week, what would I say and write to the Lord’s people, his church?

And this brings us back to Paul’s affirmation of hope in verses 6-8 of chapter four. Paul had fulfilled his ministry; he had done what God had given him to do. He was ready to move on now that he had completed this last letter to his son in the Faith, Timothy.

If you had one last word of comfort and hope to give to the Lord’s people, what would it be? As I am well aware, this could be the last article that I will write. Although my end is not as imminent as Paul’s seemed to be when he wrote to Timothy, I know that this life could end for me any day. If I knew that I was going to die next week, what would I say and write to the Lord’s people, his church, today?

Most of us have probably at some point in our life had an Isaiah or Job moment.

When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, we read, “And the posts of the door were shaken by

the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:4-5). By an Isaiah or Job moment I mean a time when we realized just how majestic and awesome God truly is. God is bigger than we expected.

When Job realized the magnitude of God he confessed, “Then Job answered the Lord and said: ‘I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, “Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?” Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, “I will question you, and you shall answer Me.” I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:1-6).

The reason I bring these passages to mind is to remind myself that I serve an awesome God who is bigger than I could ever, in my finite understanding, conceive of him. My understanding is limited at best.

I have written to men around the world that I know and respect and have asked them this question. I asked them to write and share with us what the Lord leads them to say. Over the next year or so I will be sharing those articles I receive. I pray that their thoughts will inspire and encourage our readers.

L Scott Gage

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Press on with Endurance unto Perfection

If I were certain that my time of departure was at hand, I would entreat my brethren to give prayerful attention to three texts which have become familiar friends to me.

First, Hebrews 6:1, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.”

The Christian life is a journey. We must go on unto perfection...

The Christian life is a journey. We must go on unto perfection, a process requiring us to understand elementary principles while expecting us to move on toward perfection or maturity. We are to complete the building, not engage in perpetual foundation laying. The foundational principles are important, essential, and required, but the foundation must be built upon.

These principles form the heart of the good news of Christ Jesus but the goal of the process, the going on unto, is to become like Christ. We must journey in the direction of maturity in Christ. The aim of the disciple is to become like his master. (Matthew 10:25) In fact, Jesus said that this was enough, enough of a challenge and ultimately enough of a blessing. You and I must surrender all that is not like our Lord and embrace all that is like Him in order that we may demonstrate Christ in every relationship. We are called to be His ambassadors and we must faithfully fulfill that calling. This is an exhortation from the mind of God and represents His divine will for all that call upon His son’s name.

Second, Philippians 3:7-14, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness

which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

The process the Hebrew writer, who may have been Paul, describes as going on unto perfection, is now described as pressing toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The two statements are equivalent. Jesus is the perfection we are going unto; Christlikeness is the goal of the upward call toward which we press.

The process...is now described as pressing toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The course which Paul was called to run compelled him to great sacrifice. Paul’s divine mission required him to relinquish his position of influence and power among his fellow Hebrews. The necessity of preaching the gospel to the Gentile nations forced Paul to give up his home, his business, and his family. Paul willingly gave up all of these and declared them of no importance at all when compared to Christ. Paul turned away from all in order to gain Christ. Gaining Christ, knowing Christ, being found in Him was more important to Paul than any earthly accomplishment, position, or possession. Paul wanted to know Jesus in an ever-deepening fellowship. He desired to grow more and more like Jesus, even if that meant suffering and death. Paul seeks to attain to the resurrection of the dead, to follow Christ into death and then to follow Him into life everlasting. Most will not be called to sacrifices of the magnitude required of Paul. But all will assuredly be called to sacrifice. The journey demands that of us. We must sacrifice self and selfish ambition, and all that would stand

between us and the goal, the prize of perfection in Christlikeness.

In order to pursue that prize, Paul chose to forget things which were behind him, whether success or failure, victory or defeat, joy or sorrow. This is a hard lesson to learn and perhaps even more difficult to emulate. Often, we recall the past, relishing the sweet taste of our accomplishments or grieving in bitterness the sorrows of our failures. We must certainly learn the lessons that our past teaches. We know that we learn from failure as well as success. We do well when we examine our past failures and successes and seek the lessons to be learned and having learned those lessons, apply what we have learned to the future. But we must not be focused on the past tense. We must be focused forward, looking to the prize.

Paul knew that dwelling on the past limits our ability to move into the future answering the upward call. Defeats and victories of the past are snares that alike entangle us, impeding forward movement. We must choose not to remember, not to look back whether in joy or sorrow, but to fix our attention on the present and heed the call to the future. We must always be reaching forward, always pressing, straining for the prize.

Third, Hebrews 12:1-3, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Our Christian life is a race, a marathon, not a sprint.

Our Christian life is a race, a marathon, not a sprint. We are referred to the testimony of a great cloud of witnesses who testify that in order to run with endurance, we must lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, while looking to Jesus. We must follow their example, laying aside all that hinders, looking to Jesus.

We know that when we look to Jesus, we see the perfection for which we aim. We see with His eyes, the tawdry nature of all that we would hold

onto of the pride of life and the lust of the flesh. We see the cost of our sinfulness and the depth of the riches of the mercy of God given to us in Him. We see the necessity of the sacrificial life we are called to live, the race that must be run, the goal toward which we press. We see the love of God compelling us to press on unto perfection, to run with endurance the race set before us. In a world crying, "We want to see Jesus!", I pray He will be seen in us.

J. R. Smith
Mustang, Oklahoma

"Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me; All His wonderful passion and purity; May His spirit divine, all my being refine. Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me."

Famous Last Words

Blues singer Bessie Smith died saying, "I'm going, but I'm going in the name of the Lord."

William Henry Seward, architect of the Alaska Purchase, was asked if he had any final words. He replied, "Nothing, only 'love one another.'"

When Harriet Tubman was dying in 1913, she gathered her family around and they sang together. Her last words were, "Swing low, sweet chariot."

As Benjamin Franklin lay dying at the age of 84, his daughter told him to change position in bed so he could breathe more easily. Franklin's last words were, "A dying man can do nothing easy."

Football coach Vince Lombardi died of cancer in 1970. As he died, Lombardi turned to his wife Marie and said, "Happy anniversary. I love you."

Actor Michael Landon, best known for Little House on the Prairie and Highway to Heaven, died of cancer in 1991. His family gathered around his bed, and his son said it was time to move on. Landon said, "You're right. It's time. I love you all."

If These Were My Last Words to God's People

From time to time my thoughts have wandered into whether or not I will know and have opportunity to prepare for my last words to the church and family. Since there is only a step between life and death for us all, the answer to that question is: only the Lord knows.

What message, what Biblical truth, what will be most helpful to those left behind? What words would be more likely to be remembered are hard to know. How do we narrow down the whole counsel of God, which is vitally important to keep the Lord vibrantly living in the heart and mind? I am not sure we can.

What message, what Biblical truth, what will be most helpful to those left behind?

I recall the last words Moses had to say to the Israelites. He knew his time was about over. He was headed to the mountain top to look over across the Jordan River into the promise land. He would die there, and God would bury him. So, what did Moses say?

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His Judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You shall not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Deut. 30:15-20).

Love the lord, walk in His ways, keep His commandments, obey His voice, hold fast to Him. This may seem somewhat repetitious; but Moses made it ever so clear that making this choice was theirs to make and the blessing or the curse would follow them. This great man of God who had dealt with Israel's rebellious nature knew how important it was for the people to love God. Because of their love for Him they would respect and reverence Him by following His will. God had already chosen them. He had already preserved them and rescued them. But it was their choice whether to love Him back because He had first loved them.

I recall the challenge that Joshua made to all Israel and their leaders in his farewell address:

“Now, therefore, reverence the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which is beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:14-15).

Joshua took up the mantle from Moses and led the people into the homeland after their forty years of wandering. He led the fight to drive out the idol worshiping people in the land. Joshua told the people, “Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth,” (Joshua 23:14). He knew, as did Moses, that these would be the last words he would share with God's people. In the same manner as Moses, he sets before the people their choice. He had made his decision for himself and his family. He charged them to make their choice to whom they would be faithful. The reverence and service to the Almighty had to be in sincerity and truth. His final words were to place in the hearts and minds of God's people their choice.

Never at a time in my life have so many people living around me made the choice to ignore God, to disclaim any allegiance to Him, and to choose a life of worldliness. All of God's people who are still left on this earth with whom I have been preaching and teaching are now facing a culture

without a strong influence of God's Will. Here is a great concern to me; so much of the Christian community has turned to living in and for this earthly life. Faith has failed to bring believers into worship, to develop their talents to become workers in God's Kingdom and then to offer their time, talent, and treasures to the Lord because they love Him. God's people told Joshua, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods..." (Josh. 24:16). But they did. Here is a question, asked with great urgency; what can we do to help our fellow believers to make the choice of life and serve the Lord? The unbelieving world needs converting. Much of the believing world needs reviving! Let us address what Jesus said of others, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me" (Mark 7:6).

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I would have to include in my final address a declaration of gratitude for God's faithful people who have walked before me and beside me in this life. God blessed me with the privilege to be born into a Christian family. Worshipping God was a choice that had been made before I came into the family. That choice to love God first and most never changed. Hundreds of saints in the congregations where I grew in stature and in the Lord gave so much encouragement. Constant worship, Bible study at home as well as with the church, great Bible preaching, and fellowship among a spiritually minded brotherhood has provided me with encouragement and love. I would not even begin a list of those who have helped me in my choice to love and serve the Lord. I would like to have the opportunity to express my personal gratitude to all those with whom we have worked and worshiped. So many have gone on to be with the Lord. For anyone reading the article who has been one of my faithful examples: Thank You!

Giving thanks is an acknowledgment of the blessings bestowed upon us. I would encourage us to count our blessings. By doing so, I believe the choice to love God, to be faithful and/or a return to being faithful will follow. The love of God and our Savior will constrain us! (2 Cor. 5:14)

Max Pratt
Ballinger, Texas

"When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed; When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost; Count your many blessings, name them one by one; And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

"Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear? Count your many blessings every doubt will fly; And you will be singing as the days go by.

"Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God hath done. Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your many blessings see what God hath done."



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