

2 Timothy 1:12 (C) 68086

Bible Treasury: Volume 13, Happy Close, A (1:12)

2 Tim. 1:12

The words of "such an one as Paul the aged" would at all times be pregnant with deep interest; how much more so when they are his parting words, his paternal legacy. What marks this epistle is the blending of the most solemn truth with the greatest tenderness. It is the utterance of chastened affections, and the language of a man who, in the midst of unparalleled trials, can look into the past without regret, and into the future with the confidence of triumph. Yet nothing looked more unlike triumph than the circumstances in which the apostle was. From chapter 1 he states that "all in Asia had turned away" from him, and such was the contagiousness of defection, that his own beloved son himself needed the exhortation, "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner." When we come to the last chapter, the sight is that of a battle-field, where, when the fight is over, a list is drawn, not alas! of wounded only, but of deserters as well, the commander himself heading the first class. But faith rose above appearances, and then it was that the victorious prisoner could say, "I know," and "I am persuaded." Blessed confidence!

Great is that end of the journey which resembles in what can be imitated that of our blessed Lord. He, the Author and Finisher of faith, resisted unto blood, striving against sin, but did it by self-surrender. So His faithful servant Stephen, whose end Paul recalls long afterward in these touching terms, "And when the blood of thy martyr, Stephen, was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiments of them that slew him." And so now the persecutor of that day, condemned and worsted in human eyes, can with inexpressible satisfaction say, "I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure [release] is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." Like his Master,

No end is more sweetly triumphant than this. He had fondly cherished it before, when he said, "I count not my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus." He was now being gratified in this respect. The few years that elapsed between his last interview with the elders of Ephesus, and his last defense before the Roman tribunal, had been, as he knew beforehand they would be, fraught with many a danger and sore temptation; hence the charm, now that the last contest was over, of saying, "I have finished." This means he was conscious of having left nothing undone, or half-done, of his extensive service, "That by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear." O that each of our days went towards such an end! that we knew more of this holy and sober confidence as regards our feeble service!

In the first epistle we find the apostle in the full active energy that produced such immense labors, and, in beautiful consistency with it, we see a spirit not slow to rise in indignation against those who gave up "a good conscience," and the indignation sternly expressed in these words, "Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme;" but in the second, whilst his estimation of a "pure conscience" has in nowise been lowered, he seems to feel that it was now best to leave it to the Lord to deal with such cases as that of Alexander; and although the latter had been frightfully bitter and wicked towards the apostle personally, he calmly says, "The Lord reward him according to his works"-not in the least anxious to have the last word himself.

Then, next, when he thinks how the ranks of his fellow-soldiers had been thinned by desertion, he sorrowfully says, "Only Luke is with me," instead of qualifying the conduct of the deserters by withering words as it deserved, he enters into the difficulty of standing the storm, and gently adds, "that it may not be laid to their charge." So with the blessed Master, in the hour of His incomparable trial, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" The servant said, "Only Luke;" but that was one to watch with him; whereas the yet more deeply tried Lord had none-no, not one. And, then, the gentleness of His rebuke! "Sleep on now, and take rest." How true that in all things He must have the pre-eminence, even in sorrow, and in the patience that tribulation worketh! Yet it was the faithful apostle's lot to have, at this trying final moment, the precious words made good to him, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord;" and thus the conformity is completed by linking together these two blessed utterances: "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me;" and, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me."

This much for his immediate circumstances. But the scripture heading this paper takes in a wider range yet. It was not merely in the face of death that he could say, "I know," "I am persuaded," but in the face of rapid declension in the church, which would culminate in nothing less than the awful picture so faithfully drawn in chapter 3: 1-5. And why not? Man is at the best but a broken reed, and when the last page of his sad history is read, faith turns towards another, and says, with immense delight, "He is able." Steadfast peace and perfect confidence are thus maintained, the clouds not allowed to weigh the spirit down, nor to dim the light of His blessed countenance. We are so foolish, and so forgetful of our good-for-nothingness, that we often need trials, in the shape of disappointments, to cast us more absolutely upon the Lord. Were our faith stronger, the trials would not take this shape. With Paul it never came to that. He was given to witness that which was most painful, and to predict that which was most terrible; yet the peace of his spirit and the confidence of his heart remained unmoved, undisturbed. He knew "WHOM" he had believed. The abstract way in which he speaks of the Lord is very telling. It is the peculiar feature of John; and the way of one who is so engrossed with His person, that he cares for naught beside. "Whom" and "Him" convey the thought of profound, yet holy, intimacy.

It was not only, I apprehend, with regard to his own individual safety that he said, "I know," and "am persuaded." We may fairly conclude that the "deposit" alluded to in this verse is more than himself. The very manner of his conversion had taught him Christ's estimate of and love for the church" Why persecutest thou ME?" and ever afterward was this the prominent feature of his own character. It was by this standard that

he measured his former life and path. To him there was nothing so humbly had as that he had "persecuted the church of God." How these words tell of the intense love he now bore it, of the beauty and excellency he now saw in it, when looking upon it with the eye of Christ! Oh, for more of a kindred feeling in us! We need it pressingly. Much of our dryness and narrowness is due to the lack of it. We need not fear lest this feeling should produce indifference to the evil of the church. Is Christ indifferent to it? Nor shall we be; but tenderness will cause us to make more frequent use of the basin and towel, and more unfrequent use of the stone and of the sword. We shall not lose thereby. I cherish the thought that this "deposit" comprised that church which, next to Christ, Paul loved most. When he had committed it to the care of its Nourisher and Cherisher, he could calmly speak of the worst times, saddest departure, and darkest evil, as powerless to sever it from that diligent care. And beyond this present dark and evil day there is a day mentioned—"that day"—when all will look different from now.

"THAT day." How suggestive! It needs no other qualification; it stands alone in the estimate of Christ, as His "hour" stood alone in the estimate of God—this for suffering, that for joy. It is the time when He will "present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." The spots and wrinkles tell of failures and cares with which we are sorrowfully acquainted. Do you want comfort in the midst of this heart-breaking scene? Think of "THAT day." Our apostle thought of it, as well as of the present faithfulness of God's grace, and the sufficiency of His word, when he spoke to his beloved Ephesians, even then yet so fresh in their first love, the words of Acts 20:29, 30. Wolves and perverse men might, and would, make a fearful havoc in that best and most fertile of the apostle's fields, where a labor of "three years and a half, night and day, with tears," had produced such an abundant harvest; and in the field would grow tares, in the shape of giving "heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith." But, notwithstanding all, he who knows the love of Christ to the church does not faint, because he can reckon upon Christ being fully gratified in "that day;" and if He, surely we also.

Faith never surrenders anything to man and his unfaithfulness, and when God prepares it by His word for dark shadows and blighting winds, it refuses to stop therein, and passes right beyond, where Christ is seen, unchanged and unchangeable, and where the church stands as closely connected to Him and as cherished by Him as ever.

May our hearts be more filled with this enlarging love! And while we grieve and sorrow over our own faults and the faults of all, let us remember that God has not given us the spirit of cowardice, "but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." C.

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