

2 Timothy 9**2 Timothy 4:9-22****August 25, 2013****The Rev. Dr. Robert S. Rayburn**

Tonight we conclude this series of sermons on Paul's letters to his younger colleague Timothy; there were twenty-three in all. Next Lord's Day evening we begin with one of the few remaining books of the Bible that I have never preached through: the Prophecy of Zechariah. I'm already greatly enjoying and profiting from the study of that book and I'm confident you will as well.

As we said last time, vv. 9-22 are something of a postscript to this second letter to Timothy, the last of his New Testament letters. The argument of the letter was concluded in the previous few verses and what remains amounts to personal remarks. Those remarks, however, are illuminating and important and interesting in a variety of ways. This too is the Word of God and profitable for us; it likewise roots our faith in real history and the life of human beings, such life as we have experienced it ourselves. So let's consider these final verses and what they have to tell us about Paul's life and our own.

Text Comment

- v.9 The great apostle to the Gentiles, titan that he was, remained a human being, with hopes and longings such as fill the heart of any human being: for companionship, for encouragement, and so on.
- v.10 Titus had by this time concluded his assignment in Crete, where he was when Paul wrote the letter to him that bears his name, and was now at work establishing the church on the eastern coast of the Adriatic sea opposite the eastern coast of Italy.
- v.11 Whether Luke simply often visited the apostle in his prison cell or was somehow with him in his prison cell we are not told. It has often been thought that as Paul typically often used secretaries to write his letters, it was Luke, the author of the Gospel and the Book of Acts, who actually penned this letter to Timothy as Paul dictated it. [Mounce, 590]
- v.12 Paul was suffering from isolation. He was not friendless, to be sure, even in his Roman prison he had contact with other human beings, but some of his close associates had left on other assignments and one man in whom Paul had long invested affection and confidence had deserted the ship. In all likelihood Timothy was personally acquainted with, if not a friend of all of these men. Demas is mentioned in both Colossians and Philemon as one of Paul's fellow-workers. One wonders if this was the first Timothy had

heard of Demas' defection. It is easy to imagine him reading and re-reading our v. 10 and saying to himself: "I can't believe it! Demas?" We are not given any details but it is not hard to believe that Demas resorted to flight in the face of the increasing persecution of Christians in Rome at that time. Instead of eagerly longing for the appearing of the Lord, he proved himself to be in love with this world. [Moule in Stott, 118] Of course, Paul doesn't say that Demas *got* this present world; only that he loved it.

The reference to Mark is particularly significant because it is the proof that the rift between Paul and Barnabas had been healed. You remember that years before they had parted company because of an argument about Mark, who was Barnabas' nephew. Mark, remember, had petered out on what we nowadays call Paul's first missionary journey (related in Acts 13 and 14). He had found the going tough and had quit and gone home. Later, when Paul and Barnabas were ready to set out for a second preaching and church planting tour, Barnabas had wanted to take Mark along, feeling that he had learned his lesson apparently, and Paul, apparently feeling that he had not, had refused. The resulting impasse had led to Paul's taking Silas with him and Barnabas taking Mark and going elsewhere. But here is Mark, part of the apostle's entourage again, and not just a part, but a particularly valued associate.

Tychicus, who had also carried to their intended destinations Paul's letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and to Titus, was it seems to carry this letter to Timothy who was then in Ephesus. Apparently, Tychicus was to be Timothy's replacement in Ephesus when Timothy left to see Paul in Rome. Paul **is** here seen moving pieces on the chessboard.

- v.13 We don't know who this Carpus was. He lived in Troas. Perhaps he owned the home at which Paul had presided at that memorable service during which Eutychus had fallen asleep and tumbled from the window! But we have here a touching glimpse of the great man's last days: as winter approached he knew he was going to be cold, as you can imagine. There would be no fire in the stone cell. Not long before his martyrdom in Belgium, near the end of more than a year that he spent in prison, William Tyndale wrote a letter, very similar in some respects to these remarks of Paul. This was written to the governor of his prison:

"I beg your Lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here for the winter you will request the Commissary to be so kind as to send me, from the goods of mine which he has, a warmer cap; I feel the cold painfully in my head and am afflicted by a perpetual catarrh [or cough], which is most increased in this cell; a warmer cloak also, for this which I have is very thin; a piece of cloth too to patch my leggings. He has a woolen shirt if he will be good enough to send it.

And I also ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evening; it is wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all, my Hebrew Bible, Grammar and Dictionary, that I may spend my time in that pursuit. But if any other decision has been taken concerning me, to be carried out before winter, I will be patient, abiding the will of God, to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, whose Spirit (I pray) may ever direct your heart.” [In Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, 379]

Paul also missed his books as an intellectual such as Paul would be expected to. We’d love to know what these papyrus and parchment volumes were: the OT in Greek, early copies of drafts of the gospels, copies of his own letters, notebooks and diaries, works by Greek and Latin philosophers?

One wise commentator remarks that a person is “never for one moment denaturalized by grace.” That is, we still need friends, we still need warm clothing when it is cold, and we still need the tools of our trade. [In Stott, 121-122]

- v.14 Alexander was a very common name in that time and we don’t know anything more about this man, though he may be the man Paul excommunicated, of whom we read in 1 Tim. 1:20. If so, his opposition to Paul took the form of a personal vendetta. It is thought that he may have had something to do with Paul’s second arrest. If he were the informer who brought Paul to the attention of the authorities, and if this happened in Troas, as v. 13 may suggest, then Timothy, who would pass through Troas on his way from Ephesus to Rome, needed to be on guard against Alexander as well. [Mounce, 593, 600]
Remember, William Tyndale was caught by those who had been searching for him for years because an erstwhile friend, to whom he had just loaned some money, informed on him to the authorities.
- v.16 The “first defense” would have been the preliminary hearing prior to the actual trial. We don’t know the specific charges leveled against Paul but we know from Roman historians that Christians were accused of a wide variety of crimes against the state and society, from atheism to treason, even “the hatred of the human race.” There were hate crimes in those days as well!

Paul would have been permitted to employ an advocate and call witnesses at this preliminary hearing but, obviously, association with someone like Paul was risky and, among those who might have spoken or even appeared at his defense, there was no one willing. The fear that kept them away, however, was a very different thing than the malicious opposition to the gospel itself that motivated Alexander. So rather than speaking of coming judgment, as he did in Alexander’s case, Paul was quick to ask for

their forgiveness. This preliminary hearing was Paul's Gethsemane, deserted by his friends, facing alone the agony of the prospect of death. [Stott, 123]

- v.17 But, of course, Paul was not alone and the Lord helped him. The suggestion is that those in the court that day heard an account of Jesus Christ and an appeal to find salvation in him. One commentator describes the scene this way:

“It is quite possible that this event, which the Apostle of the Gentiles regards as the completing act of his own mission and ministry, took place in the forum itself... But at any rate it would be held in a court to which the public had access; and the Roman public at this time was the most representative in the world... In that representative city and before that representative audience he preached Christ; and through those who were present and heard him the fact would be made known that in the imperial city and before the imperial bench the Apostle of Christ had proclaimed the coming of his kingdom.” [Plummer in Stott, 125]

Delivered from the figurative lion's mouth; Paul had become a New Testament Daniel.

- v.18 Paul's doxology here is addressed to the Lord Jesus. Words that could only be spoken of God are here spoken of Jesus. The doctrine of the Trinity had not been worked out in the form it eventually would be, but the materials with which to work it out lie on every page of the New Testament.
- v.19 We know, of course, Priscilla, which is a diminutive form of Prisca, and Aquila from the book of Acts and Paul letters to the Corinthians and the Romans. Onesiphorus was mentioned as a faithful friend of Paul in 2:16-18. He had come from Ephesus to Rome to visit Paul.
- v.20 Erastus may be the same man identified in Rom. 16:23 as the city treasurer of Corinth, a man with some significant position. Trophimus was a native of Ephesus -- Miletus is the port city near Ephesus -- and had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. This obiter dictum about his health seems a minor detail, but it is of some consequence in regard to the question whether miracles continued to occur in the later apostolic period. We don't hear of them occurring in the later books of the NT and it does not seem that they did. Paul, who in some period of his ministry could heal people who merely touched something that *he* had touched, now must leave a valued assistant behind because he was sick. No one was being miraculously healed by this point in the first century.

v.21 The last four people mentioned were Christians of the church in Rome whom Timothy must have met on a previous visit to the city. The Linus may be the same Linus whom both Irenaeus and Eusebius mention as the first bishop of the church in Rome following the deaths of Peter and Paul. That Paul knows to send their greetings suggests that all of them had visited Paul during his imprisonment, perhaps frequently. If they were among those who did not stand up for him at his first hearing, his mentioning them here is evidence of Paul's forgiving spirit, such as he expressed it in v. 16.

“Come before winter” is not simply a way of saying, “Get here as soon as possible because I don't know how much longer I will be alive.” Sea travel ceased in the winter; so if Timothy were unable to make it to Rome before winter, it would be some months more before he could even set out for Rome. There is something quite lovely in this urgent desire for Paul to lay eyes on his younger friend once more. God made friendships important to a happy and fruitful human life. Paul was not married, at least not at this point, not during his Christian life, and the companionship he needed was supplied by his assistants and fellow workers. It is an unreal **sort of** super-spirituality that imagines that having Christ we have no need of others. God made us for friendship and made us to need it.

v.22 The “your” of “your spirit” is singular, in reference to Timothy himself. The “you” of the last phrase is plural, indicating probably that the letter to Timothy was intended to be read to the church as well, though the plural pronouns could be a reference to those whom he had just greeted, such as Prisca, Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

And so Paul ended his work as the Apostle to the Gentiles. The work that had begun suddenly and utterly unexpectedly some thirty years before on the road to Damascus would, according to church tradition, end some weeks or months later when he was beheaded near the third milestone on the Ostian Way, the road that linked Rome to Ostia, the seaport some eighteen miles to the west of the city.

Later in September, I am to attend the inauguration of the new president of our Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. I am to stand in for my late father, the first president of the institution and the longest serving. He was followed in turn by William Barker, Paul Kooistra, Bryan Chapell, and now Mark Dalbey. They hope to have all four of the previous presidents present at Mark's inauguration as the fifth president of the seminary, but, as my father died in 1990, he will be there in effigy, as it were, by representation. Hence my presence at the service.

All of this set me to recollecting the end of my father's life. He died in hospital one night in January of 1990, a victim of metastatic colon cancer – it is hard for me to believe that it's been more than 23 years now -- but I remember it very distinctly because the Lord gave me a great

gift that night. It had gotten late and, while it was obvious that he was not going to live much longer, no one knew how much longer it would be. He was unconscious -- had been for several days -- and so while my siblings remained in the room I took my mother home. While I was gone, they thought he had died. He stopped breathing for some time, minutes on end, but then, suddenly, to everyone's surprise, including the nurse, he began to breathe again. Shortly after I got back to the hospital, he stopped breathing for good and so I was able to be at his bedside when he died. I've always been very grateful to the Lord for the kindness he showed me that night.

Perhaps you have had an experience like mine. You are looking at your parent lying there in the hospital bed, or in his or her bed at home, aged, ill, not longer for this world, soon to die, and you find yourself thinking back over what you know of their lives. You recollect what you were told about the experiences they had as a child, as a youth, their young love -- my father was engaged to be married once, but the engagement was broken and it was some years later before he met my mother -- and then all that went into his or her adult life. In my father's case, there were the terrific accomplishments of his youth -- champion pianist of the state of Kansas, winner of the national oratorical contest at sixteen years of age with the resulting photo-op with President Hoover on the White House lawn -- his Wheaton College years, his early work with his evangelist father, pastorates in Nebraska and Texas while earning three theological degrees, his marriage to my mother, his service in Europe in the Second World War, his deposition from the ministry in the old Northern Presbyterian Church, his pastorate of the College Church in Wheaton and his sudden departure from that pastorate for service as a chaplain paratrooper in the Korean War, and then the years spent establishing Covenant College and Covenant Theological Seminary, his conducting of the college chorale, his teaching generations of seminary students, the books he wrote, the thousands of sermons preached all over the country and all over the world, his creation of the Mendelssohn society in St. Louis and conducting bi-annual concerts of the great composers' sacred works, and on and on.

He was no Apostle Paul, though at the fete they held for him upon his retirement from the presidency of the seminary in 1977, a PCA pastor who had been his chaplain's assistant in Korea and who had always been a great admirer, said that Dad was a greater theologian than John Calvin and a greater preacher than Charles Spurgeon. Regarding those remarks Dad said afterward that it was the first time in his life that he actually wished he were dead! No; no Apostle Paul, or John Calvin, or Charles Spurgeon, but still, a notable legacy! There are some Christians still alive whom he led to Christ, two thriving institutions continue their kingdom work, and I meet men and women all the time in my travels who speak gratefully of his influence upon their lives. *That* is a legacy.

Now we all have our gifts and our callings from the Lord, we all have our various stations in life, and they are very different, certainly different from my father's, but we are all to ask ourselves:

“what will be *my* legacy?” “What will be the sum of my life when it is over?” “What will I leave behind when my working day is done?”

When I first arrived here in 1978 there were few young people, but through those early years we became primarily a church of young adults with young families. When we elected our first group of elders many years ago, they were all young men, in their late twenties and early thirties, because young men were all we had. But those young adults are now in their fifties and approaching their sixties. Their children are adults themselves. How old was Paul when he died? We cannot say for sure, but a good guess was that he was in his mid-sixties or thereabouts. It is high time for some of us to consider the question.

But it is also time for the younger among us to consider the question, because, if Paul is any example, the legacy of one's Christian life is not created in a few years at the end, but throughout the course of a faithful, fruitful life of Christian work and kingdom service. There are many things in life one cannot do quickly at the end. You cannot raise your children that way, you cannot make a holy marriage that way, you cannot form the godly habits of a man or woman of prayer, of the Word, and of gospel witness that way, you rarely can make up for years of spiritual sloth with a few years of hard work later in life, and, even if you thought you might, few will actually do so. It is a simple fact of life that the best way, and *usually* the only way, to end your life well and with the satisfaction that comes with faithful service is to continue to do to the very end the good things, the right things, the true things, the valuable things, the important things, that you have been doing all your life long.

Paul remained a sinner. He tells us that and we can hear his frustration as he does so in Romans 7:14-25. But he also was a faithful Christian and Christian worker and we can hear his satisfaction over that in the verses we read last time, 4:6-8. So what do we see in Paul that shows us, who also continue to be sinners and to need the forgiveness of God every day, who need to ask forgiveness of others again and again, I say, what does Paul show us about how to live even our still sinful lives to the end so as to leave behind a legacy of faithfulness and usefulness, and to be able to leave our lives in this world with satisfaction.

Well, look at the man. He's in prison. He is confined in a cell all day every day. But his mind and heart are free and roving all over the world all the time. From his cell he is dispatching workers hither and yon to do the work of the kingdom of God. He's building the church in one place, putting out a fire in another, sending instructions to this man and to that man, doing it all through the younger men who have gathered around him, a small army of Christian soldiers doing battle on behalf of the kingdom of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. It never occurred to Paul to retire from the field. There was too much to do; too many critical things to accomplish.

What is more, he found himself facing the preliminary hearing in his case all by himself. And, long accustomed to seizing every opportunity to speak on Christ's behalf as he was, he turned his legal hearing into an evangelistic meeting and a good number of Romans of considerable influence heard the gospel explained and were urged to put their **faith and** confidence in Jesus Christ for the life to come. Do you think, as I do, that it is very likely that there were some in Rome when Paul wrote 2 Timothy who had become Christians as a result of how Paul defended himself in court that day? This man never quit! That was part of the legacy he left for Timothy: an example of indefatigable labor on behalf of the gospel of Christ!

We may, to be sure, at some point stop working at the job by which we earned our living, but we are never finished with the work of the kingdom of God or the service of our King. That should take us to our last day, our last breath. There should be about us, as there was about Paul, an air of being about the King's business. We are not, to be sure, all given, as Paul was, the privilege of maintaining all our powers to the very end.

It has sometimes happened that even great Christian men have hung on to their ministries too long. John Newton did. Near the end he would forget where he was in his sermon and not know how to continue. When officiating at a wedding his mental lapses became an embarrassment. He lost his place in the liturgy several times and, at one point, had to ask the congregation, "What do I do here?" But he still wanted to preach. His friend William Bull commenting on Newton's strong opinion that he was still able to preach good sermons, remarked, "Everybody else shakes his head and laments that he preaches at all....His understanding is in ruins, yet its very ruins are precious." [In Aitken, *John Newton*, 343]

So they felt about a pastor of mine who made it to fifty years as the pastor of his church but probably should have concluded his work several years before. But William Bull was right, whether or not the man should have quit or been made to quit, *his spirit was exactly right!* That spirit, that commitment to the Word of God, to the gospel, to the people of God, to work on behalf of the kingdom is what made Paul's life so useful and so beautiful.

Only some of you will remember the names Cornelius van Til and J. Oliver Buswell. Van Til was professor of apologetics first at Princeton and then at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He was an immensely influential thinker in 20th century American evangelical Christianity. Buswell was president of Wheaton College in the 1920s and 30s, the youngest college president in the country at the time, at just 31 years of age -- he put Wheaton on the map really -- then for years was professor of theology at Covenant Seminary. The libraries at both Wheaton and at Covenant bear his name.

VanTil and Buswell were adversaries in some ways: both philosophically trained, one from a Dutch Reformed background, the other the product of American Presbyterianism, one a smoker

and drinker, another a teetotaler, holding to different ideas about apologetics, each the intellectual father and leader of his own conservative Presbyterian denomination. Think of them as something akin to Paul and Barnabas, who had that falling out over Mark and had gone their separate ways. But like those two men, they eventually healed their breach. When both men were old and retired from their life's work, and after Dr. Buswell had suffered a stroke, Dr. van Til visited him in the hospital. He found Dr. Buswell sitting up in his hospital bed drilling himself on Hebrew vocabulary with flash cards! According to their abilities and opportunities they were still at work in the ministry of reconciliation, repairing an old division between Christian brothers, and they were still at work at their calling as teachers of the Word of God.

But take the point: they didn't *start doing that* when they were old men. They did that as old men because they had been doing it all their lives! It was *the habit* of their life; it was *their way* of life. Paul and such men as these were possessed with what the poet de la Mare called "a sovereign energy of mind." These were men who really were longing for the Lord's appearing, well aware of the impending end of life, the inevitable accounting that would follow, and how much they would then want to have served the Lord faithfully and fruitfully every moment of their lives. For them to live really was Christ and to die really would be gain!

And you younger men and women. Those who wait to become hard workers in the service of the kingdom of God, those of you who are sitting thinking you definitely want to do that, but honest with yourself you recognize you're not planning to do it tonight or tomorrow, take warning: if you don't act "now," it is very likely you won't act at all. Those who wait to become hard workers in the service of the kingdom of God rarely do. It is much harder and so much less likely to become a hard worker when age and infirmity are slowing you down and when the momentum of long-established habits of spiritual laziness is almost impossible to overcome. No, not tomorrow; today! Not next year, but this week. Whether it is your reading of the Word of God, your life and work of prayer, your witness to friends and neighbors – putting something of Christ in your conversations with them -- whether it is your repentance from sin in your marriage, your family relationships, at work, your commitment to begin contributing to kingdom work in this way or that; I say, whatever it is, do it *now* so that it becomes the habit, the way, and the daily business of your life, so much that when you are old you will still be doing such things, still have your mind full of the larger issues of life, and still be looking for ways to serve the Lord and the gospel. Make your old age move by the still unspent momentum of your earlier life. You will have Paul's old age and end, when you have Paul's mid-life and Paul's early life as a Christian. Teach us, O Lord, to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom!

And look up as Paul did. It is the sense of the approaching end, the Lord's drawing near, that so obviously constrained and motivated this man at the very end and will motivate you as well. Here is Father Zossima on his deathbed in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*:

“I bless the rising sun each day, and my heart sings to it as of old, but now I love its setting even more, its long slanting rays and the quiet, gentle, tender memories that come with them, the dear images from the whole of my long and blessed life -- and over it all divine truth, tender, reconciling, and all-forgiving! My life is drawing to a close. I know that, I feel it. But I also feel every day that is left to me how my earthly life is already in touch with a new, infinite, unknown but fast approaching future life, the anticipation of which set my soul trembling with rapture, my mind glowing, and my heart weeping with joy...”

Paul, we read last time, had a similarly happy and hopeful attitude toward his soon-coming death, violent as he knew it would be. We can, in fact, almost hear Paul saying a similarly beautiful thing about his life as he counted down the days and thought about what lay ahead of him as a man who all his Christian life loved the appearing of the Lord. Indeed we did hear him say it in the previous verses: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord will award to me on that Day...” Beautiful. What an end! But perhaps neither Paul nor Dostoyevsky put it as beautifully as Augustine [*The Trinity*, I, 3, 5]:

“Let us set out on the street of love together making for him of whom it is said, ‘Seek his face always.’ (Psalm 105:4).”

That is what we see in Paul: a life lived *with intention, with high purpose, with the Lord set always before him, his coming again always of the forefront of the mind’s eye*. And that is the legacy he has left for us, the example we are to follow, the spirit we are to emulate, to pray for and to practice. Imagine him, if you can, awaiting the flash of the sword that will end his life. What do you see on that great man’s face? Calm? To be sure. A wry smile? Perhaps. I think it not unlikely. A look of gratitude? Surely. A faithful man who had served the Lord until the very end and loved doing so; surely if there were a man who could die with serenity and even with joy and eager expectation, it was Paul. It was his faithful life that made for that death. His faithful life made his death what it was. Think of a similarly faithful man, Charles Wesley, and the last lines of verse the great hymn-writer ever wrote: “O could I catch one smile from Thee, and drop into eternity.”

That is how the faithful servants of the Lord think about death and how they come to die, in the confidence and assurance bestowed upon them by a faithfully lived life of useful service that has taken them, no matter their sins, right up to the gate of heaven. So no dilly-dallying, you and I. No more. Time, high time, to make much more of our opportunities, of our gifts and graces with which to serve the Lord while we may and to establish that habit of Christian work and service that will carry us, as it did Paul, happily and fruitfully right to the end.

Let the victors when they come
When the forts of folly fall,
Find thy body near the wall.