

Famous Last Words

2 Timothy 4:9-22

Reading other People's Mail

Whenever you read any of the Epistles (a fancy word for letter),

You should understand that you are reading some else's mail.

The funny thing, however, is that this is not merely personal mail.

These are letters written to a group of people - churches.

They didn't have tweeting, texting or e-mail back then.

They wrote out a letter painstakingly by hand on expensive ink and vellum.

(Ink & Vellum/Papyrus were not cheap like paper is today.)

These letters were couriered by hand and took months to deliver.

The churches that received these letters copied them by hand
and passed them on to other churches.

As time went on, these letters were collected, saved, copied and so on.

When the Bible was collected in the 3rd Century

A Personal Yet Public Letter

We know it is addressed to Timothy who Paul mentored in ministry.

But on another level it is written to the whole church.

Notable Encouragement & Advice:

Discipleship & Mentoring (2:2)

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

The Value of Bible Teaching (3:16)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Pastoring in a Time of Individual Moral Relativism (4:3)

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Famous Last Words

The uniqueness of this letter

is that it may well be the very last recorded words of the apostle Paul.

Have you ever thought of what your last words might be?

Have you ever had any special last words to you that you always remembered?

But this is not just a letter with theological ideas about ministry and God.

It is also a very personal letter.

All of Paul's writing touch on teaching

but this one has a very special personal dimension to it.

Personal Feelings

It may be difficult to sort out because this is not an organized lesson like his other teaching letters.

It reads like a person who writes what is being thought or felt.

Let's visit some of these feelings.

Paul's Situation

Paul is writing this letter from Prison.

He was under arrest by Emperor Nero who persecuted Christians.

Abandoned (v.10)

By Demas who loved the world.

Opposition (v.14)

Alexander the metalworker.

No details as to what this opposition was - likely unpleasant.

Perhaps he was the one who slandered Paul and his faith.

Accused (v. 16)

No one defended Paul.

But things did not look like they went well.

He was saved from the lions because he was a Roman citizen.

Other Christians were thrown to the lions in the coliseum.

Loneliness

Good friends Crescens, Titus & Tychicus away in ministry. (v.10b)

Paul Wrote a letter to his other disciple Titus.

Tychicus was a companion and scribe for Paul - specifically Romans.

Left only with Luke - who was also the author of the Gospel.

What do you do when you feel alone, uncertain, wrongly accused, desperate?

Paul's Response

Friendship

Paul calls out to his friends.

He calls for Timothy. (v. 9)

He has Luke. (v.11)

He asks for Mark. (v.11)

Possibly the same mark who years before had deserted him.

The Mark who caused Paul to part ways with his own mentor.

Paul was not forgiving in those days.

A Principled idealist perhaps.

He broke fellowship with Barnabas because he would not forgive.

But things were different now.

He wanted Mark to come.

He even says, "He is helpful to me in ministry."

Paul, older, wiser, has reconciled with and forgiven Mark.

I am sure Mark was a different man as well.

He wants his coat and his scrolls as well - personal effects of comfort.

Do you have such Friends?

It takes time to have true friendships.

It takes grace and understanding.

It takes effort & sacrifice.

In fact the thing Paul had in common with these people was Jesus.

We are not friends because we share an interest.

We are friends because Jesus brings us together.

Forgiveness

Mercy

Paul does not seek revenge on Demas - he will let God judge. (v.14)

For those who deserted him he says,

"May it not be held against them." (16)

These are the same words he heard from Stephen's lips.

Stephen who he help stone to death when he hated Christians.

Indeed the same words that Jesus spoke on the cross:

"Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."

Paul has become like Jesus in learning to let go and forgive.

Who do you need to forgive?

Faith - Trust

Despite the fact that everything looks bleak,
Even standing before Nero his accuser,
He felt the very presence of God - not just a turn of phrase.
And he said his piece about Jesus, who is God, risen from the dead.
His trust is unwavering.
Remember, he saw Jesus face to face on the road to Damascus.
That day on he learned to live with God.

When hard times come, do you still trust God?
Sometimes we don't know until those times are actually upon us.

But isn't this all there will be at the end of all things?
Faith, Hope & Love?

If you have ever wondered what the Christian life is meant to look like,
If there is a goal to set,
It is not a bigger church a bigger house a bigger family.
It is not the American or Canadian dream
It is not about comfort, skill, career, position, fame, fortune or reputation.
These are not wrong things, but they are never the goal of the Christian life.

The Christian life is about friendship, forgiveness and faith.
The love of God, of one another and our neighbour.
Do this and you will live.

Share an experience of friendship.
Share about forgiveness.
Share about faith.