

Meeting your End. 2 Timothy 4:6-22

How do you live when you are expecting to die?

One of us, who has faced the near prospect of death from cancer, said that at the least you stop buying new clothes.

But besides adjusting your purchases, how do you live well, when you are expecting to die?

That is not a bad question for all of us to think about, for we are all expecting to die.

Some of us may regard our death as such a remote possibility that we have never engaged with the reality of our death – though recently Covid may have shaken our complacency.

Some of us may have been so shaken by the death of someone close to us that we have given it quite a bit of thought.

And then occasionally we might be in the situation, as a friend of mine was, in knowing your death was no longer a remote possibility but a certainty in the next few months.

He had had a long battle with a kind of blood cancer and now the drugs that suppressed the multiplication of the cancer cells had stopped working. In consultation with his doctors the decision was made to stop all but palliative care –

And he knew when that decision was made he would die in the next two to three months. He lived expecting to die.

But whether we think our death will be like his in a clearly anticipated time frame, or sudden, or after a lingering decay – we can and should all expect to die.

So how do we live well, expecting to die?

That is the challenge the human condition presents to each one of us – living well while expecting to die

The apostle Paul was living as someone who expected to die.

Not immediately – he was anticipating he would have a few more months, time for Timothy to come from Ephesus to Rome

But certainly, when the legal process he was engaged in concluded, as he has made clear in vv. 6-7

*2 Timothy 4:⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, **and the time for my departure is close.** ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.*

He is expecting to die.

Yet, as we will see, he is still living an engaged, purposeful and confident life – he is living well.

As we face our own death Paul in facing his death is a God given encouragement and model for us in living well so that we die well, and he is that because he points us to the source of a life lived well in the face of death – the Lord Jesus.

Engaged

With people

The first thing that strikes you as you read these verses, the last he wrote in the New Testament, is just how engaged Paul is with people – fellow workers and friends.

Sheer number – 10-12, 19-21

*2 Timothy 4:*⁹ *Make every effort to come to me soon,*¹⁰ *because Demas has deserted me, since he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.*¹¹ *Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry.*¹² *I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.*

There are seven including Timothy in vv. 9-11, six mentioned by name.

And readers of the New Testament would have met them all in other writings of Paul except Crescens. Titus and Luke are Paul's trusted assistants and companions. Tychicus was a bearer of Paul's letters to Ephesus and Colossae [Eph. 6:21-22, Col. 4:7]. Mark was someone who had abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey, and Paul had refused to take him with him on his second missionary tour [Acts 13:13, 15:38]. But that relationship had been healed – and Paul wants his company for he is useful in ministry, someone Paul can now rely on.

*2 Timothy 4:*¹⁹ *Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.*²⁰ *Erastus has remained at Corinth; I left Trophimus sick at Miletus.*²¹ *Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, as do Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters.*

And then there are Paul's friends and fellow workers still in Asia vv. 19-20. Old and respected friends and co-workers– Prisca and Aquila, dear to him, of whom he wrote in Romans that they had risked their necks for his own life. The household of Onesiphorus who had sought Paul out in his imprisonment.

And Paul takes the opportunity to fill Timothy in about mutual colleagues, about their movements – Erastus and Trophimus, not healed despite being a companion of the apostle. And Paul is joined in sending greetings by some in Rome – of whom little is known.

Paul is immersed in relationships, aware of people's comings and goings. He hasn't withdrawn or turned in on himself.

Immersed in relationships even if they cause him grief. He is plainly grieved by the departure of Demas

– even if it meant grief v. 10 Demas

Demas has deserted me, since he loved this present world

Demas is someone we know of from Col. 4:14 and Philemon 24 as one of Paul's faithful assistants. But now, in Paul's time of need, he has deserted him.

And what really grieves is the reason for his desertion

'He loved this present world'. We are not told he apostasised, had abandoned faith in Jesus.

Rather he has abandoned the way of the cross by abandoning his service with Paul in Rome for the safer, more rewarding, Thessalonica. He had sought to save his own life, rather than lose His life for Christ. He may even have continued to have a place in the life of the church there, for it is easy to veil love of this world. We can leave our post talking of greater usefulness elsewhere, but be directed there not by our Lord, but by our own ambition.

We are not told that his departure was motivated by fear, or boredom, or want. Just that he loved the life of this age more, his decisions no longer directed by love of Jesus but by that love of the world that drives out love of the Father [1 John 2:15-17].

And even though it may appear reasonable to others, it meant he had also abandoned love of Jesus' people, deserting his brother, leaving him to the rigours of imprisonment

Such a haunting way to have your life summed up

But those few words *Demas has deserted me, since he loved this present world*

Always make me think how I would behave when exposed to loss or hardship, for the gospel, for loving Jesus' people? How will you?

We can boast of great loyalty, but our hearts can be deceptive – and it is easy to find reasons for leaving hard places, rationalise our decisions.

I have had to think hard about this in retiring from the senior minister position for I am as capable of rationalisation as any. Is it because I am being realistic about my aging and its effect on my capacity in light of the needs of the church for someone with more energy – which I am convinced of, or have I been seduced by the world into thinking there is a time of life when we can withdraw from service to focus on self?

That latter, or course, is a lie. At every stage of life believers must make it our aim to please the Lord Jesus, but there is a need for realism and an obligation to think of what will serve and promote the work of the congregation

Time will tell, and I pray that the Lord will make clear the opportunities for doing good that will continue to honour him.

We all have choices to make as we move through life, choices that are to be guided by love of God, not love of the world which is passing away.

To make them we need to be living with our hearts open before the God who searches the heart and pray with the Psalmist that God in His mercy

Psalm 139:²⁵ Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the everlasting way.

- Concerned for Timothy v. 14-15

And just as Paul is grieved for Demas, he is concerned for Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did great harm to me. The Lord will repay him according to his works.

¹⁵ Watch out for him yourself because he strongly opposed our words.

He warns him of Alexander the coppersmith. Alexander's identity is unknown. Perhaps he is the same Alexander mentioned in 1 Timothy whom Paul had put out of the church [1 Tim.1:20], still smarting and determined to harm Paul – perhaps even by betraying Paul to the authorities, informing on him. We don't know for sure, but whoever Alexander was

Paul does not seek revenge for the harm Alexander has done him.

He can leave it to God, as Paul had instructed the Romans. He knew God has said "It is mine to avenge. I will repay" Rom. 12:19, and God would exercise his justice on opponents of the gospel. Confident of this, the end of Paul's days were not wasted in bitterness and anger. He is freed from that by his conviction of God's justice.

But he is keen to alert Timothy to the danger, for Alexander is not just opposed to Paul, but to Paul's gospel, the gospel entrusted to Timothy. Timothy as he finishes in Asia and journeys to Rome is to guard against Alexander's malice.

With the spread of the gospel v. 10-12

And notice what we also see in Paul's engagement with people. While Paul is longing to see Timothy, knows he needs company, he is still sacrificing himself for the gospel, denying himself to promote the welfare of the churches. He continues to send his coworkers away from him to serve elsewhere. There is no suggestion Crescens and Titus have deserted Paul. Rather, like Tychicus, they have been sent out by Paul, sent away from him, to continue to nurture the congregations Paul has planted through his preaching of the gospel.

Facing his end Paul lives well

His is not the self-absorption of self-pity

Nor has he allowed himself to be overwhelmed with grief or fear

To be captured by bitterness at the way others have wronged him

To ruminate on what might have been

Trusting the Lord Jesus, confident in Him as we heard in vv. 8 and 17-18, knowing His presence, he continues concerned for and engaged with others, seeking, as he is able, their welfare

If Paul in the face of death can do that, is that the way you are living in your relative health and security?

Are you continuing to be concerned for, to care for, to pray for others?

And in answering that – be specific, name them to yourself

Or are you just absorbed in your own trials and difficulties and frustrations?

Trusting the Lord, confident in His concern and presence, are you living caring for and engaged with others, seeking as you are able their good – for we see in Paul that is part of what it is to live well in the face of death.

And we also see in these verses that even as he is engaged with others Paul continues realistic about his needs. There is no suggestion of his embracing a life denying asceticism or accepting mind numbing and unproductive boredom.

Realistic

2 Timothy 4:⁹ Make every effort to come to me soon, ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak I left in Troas with Carpus, as well as the scrolls, especially the parchments.

²¹ *Make every effort to come before winter.*

Temporal Needs

Paul knows, and accepts, his needs, his human needs

He accepts his need for Companionship v. 9,11 and assistance – the companionship of Timothy and the assistance of Mark. He is open and unashamed about it – make every effort, bring Mark. He wants them with him

He accepts his need for Physical v13 provision. He asks, as winter approaches, for his cloak, a warmer outer garment to ease his discomfort.

He accepts his Intellectual needs. The scrolls are literally ‘books’ – here most probably papyrus documents. But the parchments – especially the parchments - were more expensive material, and could refer either to material on which Paul could write, but more probably the books of the Old Testament. Paul is determined to be intellectually active, to be reading and writing.

He didn't think – ‘what's the use’. He knew He had to keep feeding His mind, stimulating it with study. He knew He had to keep feeding his soul, needed the good work of scripture he has just written about [2 Tim. 3:15-17], strengthening his trust in Jesus and equipping him to live through his present circumstances as a follower of Jesus.

Christians as people of the Bible are people of books, and we should discipline ourselves to continue to be so. God's Word has been given to us in written form, thankfully, for Books are more durable than videos, the information more accessible and permanent. If Paul in prison called for books and did not let his mind become idle we must not

let our minds become idle, for the vacant space will be filled by other, less worthy, thoughts. If he, who had seen the risen Jesus, needed the encouragement of the Scriptures [Rom. 15:4], how much more do we?

Paul recognised and took steps to meet his needs – needs we all have – for companionship, for the care of our bodies, for intellectual stimulation and spiritual sustaining.

Those needs are an expression of our common humanity, the way we are made

We should own them for ourselves, and like Paul be active in making provision for them. No shame in ringing someone up and asking them to go for a walk, in buying what you need to care for yourself, in talking with others about what you are learning from the word, or what you are reading.

And we should Recognise and anticipate these needs in others, especially those who are deprived of them by isolation, or sickness, or want

There are many opportunities to provide companionship, or food, or intellectual engagement, especially for those who are alone.

Those needs are always there – in all.

Realism about our needs will help not only us, but our practicing that love of one another our Lord commands.

As he anticipates his end Paul is engaged, realistic about his continuing needs, but above all he is confident in the Lord's help and conscious of His presence.

Purposeful, Hopeful, Confident in the Lord vv. 16-18, 22

2 Timothy 4: ¹⁶ At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that I might fully preach the word and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

2 Timothy 4: ²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.

Paul continues purposeful, hopeful and confident in the Lord

Paul's first defence was the public preliminary hearing that decided whether Paul had a case to answer, whether he would proceed to the full formal trial.

We are not sure what the charges were against him, although we know Christians were popularly accused of atheism – because they did not worship the gods;

of cannibalism, because people misunderstood the Lord's supper, the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood;

and of 'hatred of the human race' because they were perceived as being disloyal to Caesar on whom the welfare of the world, its peace and stability, was thought to depend!

That's quite a serious charge sheet, one which concerned matters at the heart of Roman rule.

Paul was entitled to have an advocate with him in the preliminary hearing – but he had no-one to stand with him. "Everyone deserted me" he wrote. We should not understand that as every Christian in Rome, but everyone who was qualified to come to his aid in court, to assist him or give evidence on his behalf.

But he is generous to their frailty, seeking mercy from the Lord for them, that they not be held to account for it.

And Paul did not have his hope in them, was not relying on them, but the Lord – and so he could bear their weakness with compassion.

But his observation does stress that humanly speaking, he was alone.

Which makes what he says next all the more powerful

¹⁷ *But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that I might fully preach the word and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.*

Deserted by all, yet not alone. He knew the Lord's presence and was sustained by His strength.

And by our Lord's help Paul was able to continue to discharge His calling.

His arrest and trial, his imprisonment and suffering, were not purposeless.

They were an opportunity to continue his ministry, to run his race to the end – by fully preaching the word, the proclamation of Jesus, to expound the gospel in its fullness in Rome, that great cosmopolitan city.

Jesus had called him to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles [Gal. 1:16, 2:7-9]. Paul had said to the Ephesians that *"This grace was given to me – the least of all the saints – to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ"* Eph. 3:8

Before King Agrippa Paul had testified that the risen Lord Jesus had appeared to him and said *"I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and as share among those who are sanctified by faith in me."* Acts 26:16-18

Paul was faithful to his calling. He engaged in his imprisonment and trial with purpose, to make the gospel known, the same purpose for which he lived.

And he had found that the Lord was faithful to him.

'The Lord stood with me.. and I was rescued from the lion's mouth'

Though not set free he was not sentenced to execution immediately. As a Roman citizen Paul would not have literally expected to be thrown to the lions. But Paul is reflecting that just as the Lord rescued his faithful servant Daniel, so the Lord had rescued him.

Not just from death, but from unfaithfulness.

Just as the Lord had strengthened Daniel to be faithful when challenged to stop worshipping God, so the Lord had strengthened him when challenged to stop serving Him in the preaching of the gospel, In fact, it was the opposite – he had proclaimed it fully in the heart of Gentile power, at the centre of the Roman world.

And Paul continued confident of His Lord's continuing help and rescue, and so he continued hopeful in the face of his expected death

¹⁸ *The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

Evil works - The malice of an Alexander, the accusations of pagans, the lies told about Christians – they won't achieve their aim in silencing and destroying Paul.

In fact they will only serve his salvation

For Jesus is Lord – risen from the dead, the descendant of David spoken of in Psalm 2 who rules the nations with a rod of iron – and He will rescue his servant as he promised

And He has prepared a place for His people, which Paul knew was better. To depart and be with Christ he said in Philippians is better by far [Phil 1:23]. His Lord is faithful and Paul will share in His kingdom, in the resurrection and the new heaven and earth.

Paul isn't fearful but confident in Christ, and facing His death He praises Him, praises the one for whose sake he is now standing trial – to Him be the glory for ever and ever! Amen.

Paul's engaged, realistic, purposeful life in the face of his end was sustained by his confidence in the Lord Jesus, his consciousness of His presence, and the knowledge of His Lord's grace. Paul knew himself to be a sinner, a persecutor of the church, the least of the apostles, the least of all the saints [1 Tim. 1:13-15], one who had been called to the Lord Jesus and His service by grace, and grace alone.

And so with his final words he bequeaths that presence and grace to Timothy

2 Timothy 4:²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.

With that final prayer he knew he had asked for Timothy all that Timothy will need to continue faithful in His turn

Firstly, the presence of Jesus with Him, and the consciousness of that presence – the presence Jesus promised to all His people [Matt. 28:20]

If God is for us Paul had written in Romans, who can be against us.

And If Christ is with us, who can overcome us

We are never alone, never abandoned to our own resources,

Never alone, even in death when all we love must leave us

Believer – are you confident of Christ with you

Sometimes we might think of that uncomfortably, uneasy about our sin

But in reality – it is our hope and confidence, for the Lord Jesus Christ is gracious

And that is the second thing Timothy must know, be always conscious of. Grace, the grace of our Lord Jesus

The grace that saves [Eph. 2:1-10]

The grace that is sufficient in our weakness [2 Cor. 12]

The grace in which we stand [Romans 5:1-2] in the eyes of the living God

God's generous, free, kindness to us in Christ, His determination in love to save us, His viewing us with the favour with which He regards His Son

In weakness

When we slip up in sin and feel we cannot draw near for forgiveness again

When conscious of our need for help because of our frailty

When the challenge seems too great

Timothy, and we, can rely on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The grace that rescued us when we were sinners will not abandon us when we are servants

That adopted us when estranged from God will not leave us when we are seeking to live as sons.

What Paul had known from Jesus from the time of His calling – His grace and presence, this is what he prays for Timothy, confident that the Lord will answer

And so he faces his end – not anxious about those he loves and will leave behind

He has entrusted them to the Lord who has shown him grace and kept Him to His eternal kingdom – and that is enough

The Life that is ready for the end of life. [Living to die, because we are dying to live]

Engaged

Realistic

Purposefully engaging with the work the Lord has given Him

Because He is confident – of the Lord Jesus' grace, presence and faithfulness

That is the way Paul faced his end

Not bitter towards those who had sought to harm him, not fearful of what awaited him, not withdrawn from loving those close to Him, not anxious for those He loved

But trusting His faithful Saviour and looking forward to the heavenly kingdom and the crown of righteousness

Trusting and Praising His almighty and gracious Saviour

¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

Believer, that is the way each of us should live now as we await our expected end

For we trust the same Lord,

WE know the same grace – that saved us

And our Lord Jesus is with us

And He will not fail of His promise.

He is the Jesus of Paul's gospel [2 Tim. 2:8-13], risen from the dead, the promised Son of David with an eternal kingdom

Who will bring us to reign with Him for He is faithful, will never deny Himself

He is mighty to rescue us and bring us to His heavenly Kingdom

Living the engaged, realistic, purposeful and hopeful lives of those who trust Jesus, we will be always ready for our end

Whether it comes suddenly

Or we have the strange experience of knowing it will come in an anticipated month or two

Or whether ours is the lingering decay and departure of the very elderly

Is that you, is that the way you are living now

Engaged with others – concerned for their welfare, encouraging them by your interest, living with real relationships

Realistic about the needs of your humanity and so sustaining yourself, and realistic about the needs of others and so loving them well

Living a purposeful life – in obeying your Lord, engaging as you can in making disciples, seeking opportunities to do good, trusting that He can deliver you from every evil and bring you safely to reign with Him

Is that you?

Praising your saviour

Conscious of the Lord with you

Relying on His never failing grace

And if not – Pray that in your fears and failings you will know more and more of the presence and grace of your Saviour

So that you live well now as you expect the death that overtakes us all unless our Lord returns first

He will hear – He is gracious and faithful.

The Lord be with you spirit. Grace be with us all.