

YOUR PARTING WORD MATTERS

Today's Text: 2 Tim. 4: 1-22

Extracts:

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...But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and *the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a 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: 1-8]

On Tuesday, January 10, 2017, the US 44th President, Barack Obama, delivered his Farewell Address from Chicago, Illinois, his adopted hometown.¹ With an approval rating of 60% (CNN/ORC Poll) as his term drew to an end, Obama ranked among the best in American history, exceeded only by Bill Clinton (66%- January 2001) and Ronald Reagan (64%- January 1989). After detailing his achievements, he thanked his family, Vice-President (Joe Biden) and his family, staff and all American citizens. Then, he rounded up by saying, "I leave this stage tonight even more optimistic about this country than I was when I started" and ended with "Yes, We Can; Yes, We Did; Yes, We Can."

Look at his parting words- he gave hope when he began (Yes, We Can); he delivered on his promise (Yes, We Did); and he offered hope for America's future (Yes, We Can). Those are indelible words. We all may have occasion to express parting words, such as while retiring or advising newly married children moving away, or even at our point of death. What memorable words do you want to pass on? In today's Bible study, Paul is in the evening of his life and he leaves his mentee, Timothy, with some important parting words that we can benefit from. Our parting word matters and we should take it seriously. So, this lesson is for all of us.

¹Story is based on the following sources: FP Staff, "Full text of Barack Obama's farewell speech: It's been an honor to serve you, I won't stop," Jan. 11, 2017; <http://www.firstpost.com/world/full-text-of-barack-obamas-farewell-speech-its-been-an-honor-to-serve-you-i-wont-stop-3198370.html>; and Jennifer Agiester, "Obama approval hits 60% as end of term approaches," CNN, Jan. 18, 2017; <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/18/politics/obama-approval-rating-cnn-orc-poll/>

1. Background: Never can say “Goodbye!”

Do you know that it is a *privilege* to be able to say goodbye to someone you love? Some people may go to sleep tonight and wish family members, “Good night; see you tomorrow.” The following day, they are dead- gone forever without saying goodbye. Therefore, when we have the privilege to say goodbye, we should not squander it. Our parting words matter.

Opportunities to part are many and varied. For example, aged parents may be about to die and need to leave a message of hope for their family members. Children are going to boarding school and leaving home for the first time. So, parents may have words of encouragement for them. Children are getting married and may need to move far away from home. Therefore, mummy and daddy may have useful things to pass on. People are retiring from work in an organisation where they have worked in the past few decades. How do they and the people they are leaving behind say goodbye to one another? In all those circumstances, we may encounter some or all of the following feelings:

a) *There is a void to fill*

A void is created because existing relationships will be disrupted. For example, after the death of Jacob (Israel), the brothers of Joseph said, “Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him” [Gen. 50: 15]. After Jesus had ascended to Heaven, His disciples and family members went up into an upper room in Jerusalem and they “all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” [Acts 1: 12-14]. It is a state of disorientation.

b) *And we may really not be ready for it*

No matter how much we may want to put on a bold face, the likelihood is that most of us are not ready for it! For example, in spite of Paul’s words of hope to the church elders in Ephesus before his final journey back to Jerusalem, “***they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck... sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more***” [Acts 20: 37-38]. In the song, *Never can say goodbye*, by the Jackson 5 (1971), the lyrics said, “Even tho’ the pain and heartache seem to follow me wherever I go; Tho’ I tried and tried to hide my feelings that always seem to show; Then you try to say you’re leaving me and I always have to say no; Tell me why is it so? But I never can say goodbye.”²

The truth is that most of us are not ready. Even when the death of a family member who has been terminally ill in hospital for years should be bold relief, we still weep and feel unprepared. We never can say goodbye.

² <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jackson5/nevercansaygoodbye.html>

c) *So, the one leaving owes hope to those being left behind!*

Therefore, the one who is leaving owes those being left behind some ***assurance of hope***, which is ***anchored on the credibility of the departing party***. For example, the children of Israel knew that Joseph was the main buffer between them and the Egyptians. So, at the point of his death, Joseph said to his brethren, “I am dying; but ***God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob***” [Gen. 50: 22-24]. When David was about to die, he called young Solomon who had been saddled with the heavy burden of building God’s temple and said to him, “May the LORD give you wisdom and understanding. . . ***Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be discouraged.***” He went on to show Solomon how much trouble he had already taken to provide money, material and skilled men to help him with the task [1 Chron. 22: 12-16]. Armed with such hope, you can then see why Solomon was able to ask God for wisdom after his father had gone [1 Kgs 3: 1-15].

From the foregoing, we easily see the significance of our parting words. Whether it is from aged parents or siblings, children or relatives, fellow workers in the church or other organisations, even to those we call our adversaries or enemies, that parting word matters and we need to pay serious attention to it. That is why Paul’s parting word for Timothy, his spiritual son and mentee, will be most helpful in today’s study to prepare us for the heavy burden that we bear on the matter.

2. Lessons from Paul’s parting message

Paul was old and in prison. He knew that ***his days on earth were numbered*** but he ***needed to unburden his mind to his spiritual son, Timothy***, the young pastor in charge of the Ephesian church. He was expecting Timothy to visit him and he wrote this letter, urging him to come quickly, preferably before the winter [2 Tim. 4: 9, 21]. Therefore, the letter served two purposes- to invite Timothy to visit and as a parting word from a departing elder and mentor. The following points are of interest to us:

a) *He prepared Timothy for the ‘sad’ news*

Timothy needed to be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist and fulfil his ministry [v. 5]. A time would soon come when some members of his congregation would not endure sound doctrine but act according to their own desires "because they have itching ears [and] heap up for themselves teachers. . . they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" [vv. 2-4].

Paul could have been speaking to our generation. Today, there are as many denominations and congregations as there are entrepreneurs in the field of religion! They are less interested in salvation- they concentrate more on attracting worshippers who are interested in user-friendly places of worship. It is such evangelists who live in the most luxurious homes, fly the latest jets that they own and undermine transparency and accountability by putting close family members in charge of the church accounts. To such and all of us, Paul has warned through Timothy that the Lord Jesus Himself “will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom” [v. 1]. The sad news is that time is running out and the older (and more committed) generations of evangelists are on the way out.

b) *He delivered his valedictory with hope*

Paul wrote [vv. 6-8]:

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 me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

You can imagine how Timothy received that valedictory “speech.” Paul his mentor was about to die! Who would he run to from now on with all the pressures on the young pastor in a cosmopolitan church? But look at the fine print. That man had suffered and yet had kept his faith. He knew where he was going, where the Lord had laid for him a crown of righteousness. He assured Timothy that that same crown was not only for Paul but also for all those who have accepted Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. What a message of hope!

In that classic, *This world is not my home*, Jim Reeves, the famous American country music singer, said (1962)³:

*This world is not my home
I'm just a-passing through
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue.*

*The angels beckon me
From heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore.*

³ <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jimreeves/thisworldisnotmyhome.html>

On July 31, 1964, barely two years after releasing that song, Jim Reeves died in a private plane crash at the age of 40.⁴ So, just as Paul spoke about his death from prison at old age, Reeves was actually sending his fans a farewell word about his own death. Your parting word matters!

c) *Then he drew attention to what he had shielded from Timothy all the while*

Parting time is also an opportunity to let those you are leaving behind know the challenges/problems/pains that you have kept or shielded away from them over the years. You can imagine Timothy's shock to know the pains that Paul had borne over the years. For example, [2 Tim. 4: 9-16]:

- ✓ Only Luke the physician was with him- understandably. Crescens had gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia, and Tychicus, Paul had sent to Ephesus;
- ✓ Demas had forsaken Paul, having loved this present world, i.e., backslidden. Alexander the coppersmith had done Paul much harm and Timothy should beware of him for he had greatly resisted the word of truth;
- ✓ Paul's cloak and books (especially the parchments that contained his letters), he had left with Carpus at Troas. You can see why he wanted Timothy to come before the winter!
- ✓ At Paul's first defence, no one stood with him but all forsook him. Nevertheless, he had forgiven all.

You can imagine how much stress parents, bosses and leaders box away from their protégés and mentees that they have to reveal in due course, when it is no longer harmful (or helpful to conceal). The fear, possibly, is that doing so earlier could aggravate the parting tension.

d) *He left Timothy abundant hope based on the Lord's faithfulness*

Perhaps to strengthen Timothy's morale, Paul wrote, ***“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me***, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also, ***I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom***. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!” [vv. 17-18]. In other words, Paul was assuring young Timothy that no matter how many afflictions he might encounter in his ministry, the Lord would deliver him out of them all [Ps. 34: 19].

In general, what you say at the point of saying goodbye to others can mean much. It can become prophetic or regrettable. You may not have the chance to

⁴ <http://www.jango.com/music/Jim+Reeves/ full bio>

change your mind or your words. Therefore, if it is with people you love, speak the truth and give them hope. If it is with your enemies or people you disagree with, put mercy and forgiveness over your hurt. In due course, your parting words will ring an authentic bell in the ears of your successors. You may wind up being retrospectively appreciated by your detractors. Therefore, your parting word matters. That is Paul's message for all of us today.

3. Conclusion: Follow the example of Jesus!

As Jesus was winding up His earthly ministry, He told His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. ***I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also***" [Jn 14: 1-3]. What a blessed hope for all true believers! While dying on the cross, He said, "***Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do***" [Lk 23: 34]. That includes all sinners from Adam to the end of the age! On the day that He ascended into Heaven, He added (for those He was leaving behind), "Lo, ***I am with you always even to the end of the age***" [Matt. 28: 20]. It was, therefore, not surprising that after His ascension, His disciples "returned to Jerusalem ***with great joy***, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God" [Lk 24: 50-52]. His parting words mattered to them- and still do to us today.

So, follow the example of Jesus. Give your life to Him and He will introduce you to His Father. With your salvation assured, you can speak with authority and hope to those looking up to you for guidance and direction. When you finally leave them, by retirement or death, their hope will be strengthened on account of the parting word you have left them. They may shed some tears for missing you but joy undermines pain because of the hope and faith that you have built in them.

Your parting word matters.