

Preach the Word

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to the portion that was read earlier, 2 Timothy, Chapter 4. The days of our years are filled with frightening threats. I think that the absence of the newspapers in New York City has probably been responsible for more release from cardiac tension on the part of our 8 million people than any other single thing might have been. I am not sure of that, but I am convinced that the constant assault upon the minds of 8 million people by some 9 newspapers, and two or three times a day for many of them, has the effect of keeping us staring at the problems and the difficulties, until we rather lose sight of the fact that much is transpiring around us that ought to be of great encouragement, and ought to cause our hearts to rejoice.

The Apostle Paul was facing execution. He was in prison when he wrote to Timothy. There was a soldier in full uniform with the helmet, and all of the breastplate, and skirt of metal, carrying full arms, that was shackled to him by a chain round the wrist of Paul, leading to the wrist of the soldier on the one hand, and on the other two men guarding him. It is there, this overtone of judgment, this overtone of destiny. He feels that his days are numbered. He recognizes that his time on earth is short. He realizes that this captivity is terminal as far as he is concerned. Earlier at Colossi, he had written, saying that to die was to gain, but he would live for their glory, and blessing, and spiritual benefit, but not now, not now. How simple are his needs. He says, Come to me, Timothy, I am lonely. Everyone has had to go. Demas forsook me. He got frightened by all that is happening, and loving this present world he chose to leave me. He has given up the work. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and he is ministering there. Titus went into Dalmatia. Luke is with me. Faithful Luke is here. And then, one of the sweet things, "Bring Mark. Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (II Tim. 4:11).

Do you remember what happened when Barnabas chose Mark? and he and Silas divided. Something has happened in the apostle's heart. He realizes that this man who was called the son of consolation saw in young Mark, though he had failed and had gone somewhat the same as did Demas actually, that the fact that he had gone once did not mean that there was not place in God's plan for him. And though Mark had rather hurt and wounded the valiant Paul, because Paul could not conceive of failure, in that sense; Mark timid, youthful, and rather frightened by — well who wouldn't be? Every place Paul went there was either a revival or a riot, and sometimes both. And when you see the man whom you esteem as God's servant lying under a heap of rocks outside the village for dead, it would not be hard for you to start looking at train schedules, and saying, I wonder if there is something home express, that is. And Mark did that.

And now the years have passed, and so Paul there in this prison says, "Bring Mark. He is profitable to me." He has gone on. He has grown. He has laid hold of the Lord, and this early failure and defeat. Bring him.

And then Paul, just living a few days, said, I am cold. Nero was mighty careful about his prisoner not getting away, but he lets them sleep cold at night. And there is no central heating in this prison, down two or three flights in a stone building in Rome. I remember we had in our home as a child a picture of the ruins of Rome, and a friend who had been to Rome came and said, You go down those stairs, right in our picture, and go down two flights, you will come to the room in which it is said that Paul wrote to Timothy.

And so he said, "The cloak that I left with you at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee" (II Tim. 4:13). I need that coat. It is so cold here. Winter is coming. Just a simple little thing. He is not greatly interested in all the politics that are happening; that is, tradition tells us that the reason why Nero had put him in prison, the Roman Emperor had seen to it that he was held, was that one of the Emperor's concubines had been won to Christ. And when the Emperor returned here was someone in whom he had taken great pleasure had found pleasure in the Lord Jesus, and this, though the thought had been that there was nothing worthy of death in Saul after he had gone to Rome and pled before the Emperor, this was the last straw and so now he knows there is no hope, there is no escape; because there is a personal animosity on the part of the Emperor. And so he said this was going to be a very lonely time until I am executed. I want companionship. I'd like to have you come, Timothy. I want Mark to come. Bring me the coat.

But notice, if your Bible is open to verse 13, especially the parchments, the books, but especially the parchments. I am confident that by this time, 65 A.D., 66, that several of the New Testament records, we know Mark's Gospel had already been written, and others had, Paul's letters, of course; and he is asking for these books. Now in my mind I contrast what had been written by the apostles, many of them perhaps in the New Testament, and the parchments were the Old Testament Scrolls, and he wanted them; for he must feed his heart upon the Word of God, in such days as he was facing.

I see in this the fact that, as we look back on the year, and begin to prepare at least to send in your income tax, decide whether this has been a year of profit or loss, you are going to have to remember that the Word of God was right when it says, Godliness with contentment is great gain. They that would be rich fall into many temptations. I suppose most of what we get out of life besides the privilege of living it is just our board and room. You recall, perhaps, hearing of the very wealthy man, owner of mills down in South Carolina, that died. And the word got around the village, and the people were on the steps of the General Store, discussing how much he left. And finally the boy that they called the village idiot, not a very complimentary term, and probably not even true, but nevertheless it was how he was known to the people there in their gentleness, he stopped and focused his eyes on the last speaker and said, Why, he left it all. And this is the answer to all of life. You leave it all. And this year is going to be left by you. By tomorrow night at midnight, you are leaving it all. Oh, you are carrying with you into next year some memories. You carry into next year some provisions that have been the fruit of your labor, and others in your behalf, but as far as 1962 is concerned you are leaving it all. And, as you look back on it, you had shelter of some kind, you had clothing, and you had food. And very little, perhaps residue, that you are carrying. Be that as it may.

Paul said, I need a place to sleep, some food to eat, books to read, some companionship to share the thoughts and deep desires of my heart. Life is made very complicated, and probably in this complication is the source of much of our spiritual poverty. And so here is a man that has labored. He does not have much of a pension plan; he does not have a great accumulation of wealth. He is not looking forward to retirement. He is an old man. His hair is grey. His face is lined. His back is stooped, and if you would lift a little coat that covers his back, you would find that there was scar tissue there. He had been bruised and beaten time, after time, after time.

What does the world owe to this little man? What does our heritage today trace to him? He would say, My life is soon over, just a few things that I need to finish it, and I am leaving everything. I wonder as you take your leave of this wonderful, frightening, awesome year, 1962, if the silence of the presses and perhaps the quiet of your own heart will afford you an opportunity to look backwards and find out what you are leaving as a heritage. Oh, it is not the money that if you were to die would be sought by relatives and friends. It is not the place that, if you were to move, someone else would covet. It is not the apartment that someone would be so glad to get if you were to be transferred. These are not the things we are talking about. We are talking about the great heritage that Paul left, and to which he refers when he gives this statement of his preparation. I am ready to be offered, the time of my departure is at hand. As you look back over 1962, can you say, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, and I have kept the faith? Three things. And this is the measure of his heritage. This is what he left us. And this what you are leaving, as you leave this year. You are either leaving this, or in your trail you are leaving heartache, and defeat, and failure, and a heritage of grief. Unless I can say this, and you can say this, in some measure, then we leave very little. And in that day when we stand before Him, 1962 may be a year of disappointment and grief. I have kept the faith. Let us begin there.

What faith does he refer to? "Faith of our fathers living still, in spite of dungeon, fire and sword," wrote Frederik Faber¹. This faith, this testimony, this heritage of truth that had come to him by apostles whom he sought to persecute unto death, this heritage of truth that had come to him through his Judaistic background, and all the rabbinical teachings that he had received, all the promises of Messianic expectancy on the part of Israel, this faith that had come to him with the revelation of Jesus Christ there on the road to Damascus when he met Him and saw that He was alive, and all the promises to Israel, and all the preachments of the prophets, and all of the testimony of the disciples was confirmed because he met Jesus Christ face to face. And this caused his faith to be founded upon the Rock, and established, so that it would not waver through all the years of

¹ "Faith of Our Fathers" By Frederick Faber, 1849.

contest and assault that was coming to him, as to us, for he had the pressure of his Judaistic past, and the pressure of the gnostic present, when there were philosophers assailing the truth then, as there are today. But you see, he had met Jesus Christ somewhere along before, and so he could say, I have kept the faith.

Have you have a revelation of Jesus Christ to your heart? We saw this in detail last Lord's Day morning. Have you just heard about Him, or have you heard Him? Have you seen writings concerning Him, and pictures painted of Him? Or, have you seen Him with the eye of your heart? Is this faith something that is rooted and grounded in experiential reality? or is it just established in family interest? Can you say, I have kept the faith? Faith that is founded upon the Word of God as the inspired testimony, that includes all it declares concerning Jesus Christ, as God come in the flesh, living a sinless life, dying on the Cross for sinners, gloriously raised from the dead, triumphantly reigning, sitting at the right hand of the Throne on high. I have kept the faith.

But it is not only the faith revealed that he has kept, and held to be so against all the test that would be levelled against it, it is not only the faith as a noun, but there is another sense: I have kept believing. How easy it is to cast away our confidence. How easy it is to lapse in unbelief. In Hebrews, the 12th Chapter, we find that the writer, whom I am please to think was Paul, but others may not agree, but the writer of Hebrews 12 says, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1). And what sin is it that so easily besets us if it is not unbelief, the sin that is in good standing, the sin that is welcome in any living room, in any parlor, anywhere, almost that is. The only place it is not current is in Heaven. And so he said, All of these things which seem so against me, all of these problems which seem levelled at my heart's peace and rest, all that would seem to be just an accident, because God's back was turned-in the midst of all of this, I have kept the faith, I have kept believing. Nothing has changed my attitude of confidence and trust in God.

Is this true of you in the past months? Or have you been disappointed? Have you allowed your heart to become filled with bitterness? Have you brought into this year, and carried with you through it a root of unbelief? Would God that our hearts all could affirm, Yes, we have kept the faith, not only the faith in His historic proportions, but our attitude of believing that faith, of resting in Him whom it exalts, and extols, and sets forth before our eyes. Can you say, I have kept the faith?

If you could not, then the way to prepare your hearts for the months to come is to confess to the sin of unbelief. And incidentally all sin is related to unbelief. And thus, any sin that you have committed in the past 12 months is a sin based upon the fact that you somehow felt in that moment that God did not care, and was not concerned, and did not see, and would not do what He said. But He will, and He does, and He is. And so, it would seem to me if we look back to any sin, perhaps it is the sin of bitterness, and then it is to be confessed as the sin of unbelief plus bitterness. Perhaps it is the sin of thievery. It is the sin of unbelief, plus thievery. Perhaps it is the sin of lying. It is the sin of unbelief, plus lying. If you had been as confident that God is aware of you, and you are in the center of His sight and you are seen by Him, then you would have kept the faith. And it was in that moment when you felt that somehow God was so far away, and so removed, and so disinterested, that you could afford to take a chance. Paul said, "I have not only kept the faith, but I have kept believing." There has been a constant attitude of trust, and rest, and confidence in Him, in spite of what I have seen.

Smith Wigglesworth², one to whom I refer so many times, because of the fragrance of a life almost forgotten, except in a few messages that he delivered, just a tradesman from England, but Wigglesworth knew and loved the Lord. And he said, I do not believe what I see. I do not even believe what I feel. I only believe what is written. What I see is changed and will change. What I feel has changed and will change. What is written is unchangeable. This is the testimony of Paul, "I have kept the faith."

But let us move back. And moving backward, let us see what else he said. I have finished my course. Do you realize that your failure to trust, your failure to obey (and trust and obey are sides of the same coin), and when you obey you trust, and when you trust you obey. You cannot separate the two without destroying the coin of the realm. "Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey,"³ is a child's song we seldom sing, but one that ought to be before us

² Smith Wigglesworth (1859-1947) A British evangelist who was important in the early history of Pentecostalism.

³ "Trust and Obey" Words by John H. Sammis and Music by Daniel B. Towner, 1887.

constantly, because faith and obedience go side by side, hand in hand. They are joined inseparably together. And thus it is that he could say, I have finished my course.

Do you realize that God had a plan for your life? What has happened in regard to that plan the past 12 months? Has it been forwarded or hindered? You see, Paul wrote in Romans, Chapter 12, and verse 2, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service, and be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2). Good, acceptable, perfect, and Paul says, I have finished my course. And he has found it good.

Oh, Paul, what about the time they beat you with rods? Three times they did. Was this good? acceptable? and perfect? Yes. What about the time you were three days and three nights shipwrecked, and clinging to a floating spar? Was that good? Yes. What about the time they threw rocks on you and left you for dead? Was that good? Yes. Yes. Good, acceptable and perfect will of God.

And so you look back over the year. You know... and your bitterness comes, and your resentment comes, and anger comes. Paul, what about you? Why weren't you bitter against Demas, and he who betrayed you, and Alexander, and these others to whom you refer? Well, you see, it was the good, and acceptable and perfect will of God. I have finished my course. And somehow in his inscrutable wisdom, he saw that this was part of His plan.

Just earlier when Miss Corrie ten Boom⁴ was speaking to us, she presented to us a most remarkable object lesson, and those of us that were here saw it and appreciated it, when she held this little cloth down all covered with scraggly threads, utterly meaningless; and then she turned it over, and there was a crown of beautiful jewels. And how often we view life, just as she pointed out so effectively, and see only the zigzag stitches, and fail to realize that from His point of view there is a wonderful pattern. Paul looks back upon it now, and he says, Prison, stripes, shipwreck, stones, my course, my course, all of it included in my course, good, perfect, acceptable will of God.

What is the alternative? Your course. Your course. Where is your course going to lead you? Well there is only one way to go, there is only one chart to follow, only one compass against which you can put your one lodestar stone against which you can put your compass when you leave His course, and that is the course of this world, and the god of this world, and the principles of this world, and shipwreck is the end, grief and heartache.

So Paul could say, I have kept the faith, I have finished my course. Then there is something else that he said: "I have fought a good fight" (II Tim. 4:7). Writing to Timothy here, he said, that Timothy was to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He is to be a soldier. Well, yes, this is true. And we are to be soldiers of Jesus Christ. But I do not think that when he says, "I have fought a good fight." He is talking quite about this.

I think rather he is referring to what he wrote in Ephesians, Chapter 6, where he tells about a conflict with, "not flesh and blood, but principalities, and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this age" (Eph. 6:12). And he has realized that he has been panoplied with the whole armor of God, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, his loins girt about with truth, his feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, and he is fighting, not against men, not against personalities; but he is fighting against the god of this world. He is fighting against principalities and the rulers of the darkness of this age. He is fighting against a host of wicked spirits, the powers of evil, the powers of darkness, and he has been in constant encounter with these powers; because he has been constantly standing for Jesus Christ.

But if he said, I have fought a good fight, then he has to have fought first that battle with himself. This is the first battle which we all encounter, the battle with what I am, the battle with my attitudes, the battle with my appetites, and the battle with me. And there is only one place to win this victory over your greatest foe, and that is at the Cross, crucified with Christ. And Paul is

⁴ Cornelia "Corrie" ten Boom (1892-1983) A Dutch Christian, who helped Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust.

saying, I have fought a good fight. He is talking about bringing his body under, bringing himself into subjection, and the place of victory is in union with Christ at the Cross. And so he is saying, I have seen that when Jesus Christ died, I died. And though there has been conquest and conflict, nonetheless I have been prepared through the days of the years to stay there, crucified with Christ that there might be released into my heart, and mind, and spirit, the resurrection victory of the Son of God. I have fought a good fight against that principal foe of myself. I have fought a good fight against the world that is controlled by the god that rules it, the prince of which our Lord said He had nothing, nothing in common, nothing to share. And so he has not only seen himself crucified with Christ, but he has seen himself buried with Christ, and thus insulated to the world, and all that it would give to allure and entice, and to draw us with siren like voices to the rocks of our defeat and our failure. And so he says, I have fought a good fight against the world, residing, and abiding hid buried with Christ.

And then he said, I have fought a good fight against the third of my foes, the devil. For it is the flesh, the world and the devil that we are encountering. And he said, I have seen that I have been seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This is the place of my resting. I have seen myself armored with that whole armor that God has provided, and because of my union with Him in death, in burial, in resurrection, and enthronement, I have been able now to fight, not with flesh and blood, not with carnal weapons of man's warring, not with eloquence and forensic talent, I have fought with weapons that are spiritual and mighty to the tearing down of strongholds. I have fought a good fight.

Paul has understood something of the privileges in relationships that are his. He is a mature Christian, and he is writing of a mature relationship to the Lord, and a mature battle with foes, not other than personalities. He is not just speaking of having fought, as he earlier talks about, as children tossed to and fro with every whim of doctrine, as we have said sometimes in the past. He did not want the people to whom he ministered just to be sort of in a play pen where they would be kept through the 30 years or more of their walk, and then to be dragged on casters into heaven, still infants; forgiven, yes; pardoned, yes. but still biting and pulling hair, and scratching and gauging, and snarling at one another. This is not a child's battle of personalities with personalities. He is talking about foes that have been identified, and to whom he has been commanded to stand, against whom he is to stand; Himself, for he is his greatest foe; the world, which is arraigned against Christ; and the devil who controls the world and entices the flesh. And so he says, I have fought a good fight. He has understood his weapons, and he has understood his panoply, and he has understood his position, and he has fought a good fight.

I wonder what the past holds in the light of this? Can you look back to '62 and say, I have kept the faith? I have kept on believing? Can you look back and say, I have finished my course this year; I have walked in the will of God. Oh, there have been detours, there has been the dead end street here and there, but I have wanted the will of God, and He has brought me to it. Can you say, I have fought a good fight, not against people, but against principalities, not against things but against the world as a principal, not against others but against self. I have fought a good fight.

Now notice what he sets before himself as the goal for his diligence. There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not me only but all them that love His appearing. Do you love the appearing of the Lord Jesus? He has not come yet in 1962. I am hoping He will before the year is out. There is no greater joy to the child of God than the fact that the Lord could come. And I look for His imminent appearing. I know not how you may feel, but when I take leave of my family, as I must once or twice a week, and bid them goodbye and turn the car away and head from them, I do it with the realization that the Lord could come or call us.

But I am looking for Him to come. Oh, how lonely our hearts become for Him. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Come. But you know, to say you love His appearing is one thing, and I find that it is a constant discipline of my heart. It is so easy to say, Oh, come, Lord Jesus, come. But it is another thing you understand, to say that there is a discipline to the hope of His coming. And every man that hath this hope in him purifyeth himself. It is the constant work of coming again to the Fountain of cleansing for our years have been marked by failure. It is a constant coming again to the place of brokenness, for if this is what is before us; nevertheless it was the apostle that likewise told us that we were to ever appear before Him as suppliants for mercy, pleading for grace. And so to love His appearing to keep short accounts with God. To love His appearing? To walk in brokenness. To love His appearing? Is not to let the sun go down on anything that separates between Him and you. There is a crown of righteousness of which we could speak, but right now I think it behooves us to speak about the fact that, whereas the year will

soon be over, and the book is closed, never to be opened, or altered again, we are to recognize that the failures of the past are to be the encouragement for us to take hold of His grace for the future, the victories of the past are likewise to encourage us to take hold of Him for the future. And as you go into 1963, I trust that you will carry with you no unfinished business. If there has been sin that has cluttered and corrupted, and corroded your heart, then today is the day to meet it. For, by His cleansing and His grace in your life, the past can be removed, and its stain washed away. And by telling Him that you are utterly unable to fight this good fight, and finish this course, and keep the faith by and of yourself, you then come to the place where He can. You see, all the failure of 1962 was mine and yours, and all the victory was His: And He is adequate for 1963, and if we will just get out of the way, and let Him be in us what He is, then 1963 can be a year filled with greater joy for us and glory for Him. Might it be so, until we can say with the apostle, 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 His appearing. Let us bow our hearts in prayer.

A moment of reflection, a moment of inquiry, a moment of identifying yourself with the text and the message, God's message to your heart, a moment in which you are going to decide whether you will go as you came, or whether in the inner chamber of your heart you are willing to break; and if mercy be needed, plead for it; if confession be needed, make it; if appropriation be needed, exercise it. Meet Him. Behold the Bridegroom cometh, Go ye out to meet Him. He is willing to meet you on the terms of your need, and He will. These hours between now and midnight tomorrow night could be the hours of great spiritual blessing, revival blessing in your heart, if you are willing not to dissipate them, fritter them, but to use them wisely for eternity.

Our Heavenly Father, we are before Thee now, an eternity bound group of men and women. How we thank Thee for all the blessings of the past. How occupied we have been with things which are but passing news; the headline of the moment becomes just the wrapping paper of the morrow. Grant to us that we shall be occupied with the things of eternity, and that we shall realize that we, too, are living for that hour when we will see Him at His appearing. Grant to us, therefore, Heavenly Father, wise hearts, hearts that are made wise with wisdom that is in Christ and from above. And should there be one without the knowledge of sins forgiven, might they in the wisdom that Thou dost give, even now, open their heart's door and invite Him in, to save and to cleanse. Christians that have soiled themselves with the world through which they walk, might they hear the warm, drawing voice of Thy Spirit, offering cleansing and pardon, provisions Thou hast made for our battle, and our walk and our course. Give to us that wisdom that lays hold of all that Thou hast intended for us. Meet us now. Send us away, encouraged, and strengthened. And grant that these next hours, until the year closes, shall be filled with joyous and profitable reflection, and meditation. For the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the blessing of our own hearts, and the lives of others. Amen.

Let us stand for the Benediction. Now may the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting covenant make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be the glory now and forever. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, December 30, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.