

Old Soldiers Never Die

Introduction. In April 1951, General Douglas MacArthur was relieved as the United Nations Commander in Korea and Japan. When he returned to America after fourteen years abroad, he was given a hero's welcome and invited to address a joint session of Congress. On April 19, 1951, he gave one of the most memorable and dramatic speeches ever heard in America. At the end of the speech, he quoted a soldier's parody of a nineteenth century gospel hymn: "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away."

We are not here today to talk about MacArthur. I want to tell you about another old soldier, a soldier of the cross. His name was Paul. As we read his words in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, he is coming down toward the end of the way. Most likely, in a few short months, Paul's life would be over. But his soul, his spirit, the real Paul would live on forever and ever with the Christ whom he loved.

The final words of dying men and women usually are stripped of hypocrisy and reflect accurately their true beliefs and feelings. On his deathbed, the French statesman Talleyrand wrote, "Behold, eighty-three years passed away! What cares! What agitation! What anxieties! What ill-will! What sad complications! And all without other results, except great fatigue of mind and body, and a profound sentiment of discouragement with regard to the future, and of disquiet with regard to the past!" How different are the words of Paul as he neared the end of his earthly life. They are a triumphant epitaph. With an economy of words known only to a Holy Spirit-inspired writer, he not only affirms his own spiritual triumph but also offers forceful motivation for every believer to live a life of faithful service to Christ. Indeed it is true that old soldiers of the cross never die.

I. ***Paul Had A Wonderful Career As A Soldier***

- A. There was a time when Paul hated Christ and the cross. He fought against the gospel with all the zeal and fervor of his soul (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). When Paul crucified himself with Christ, he gave all to the Savior. He said he was dead to the old life and that he was living only for Christ (Galatians 2:20).
- B. Too many of us are mixed up with the things of this world (James 4:4). Our time and energy is spent and we have no chance to do anything for God. When we try to get others to do something for the Lord and the church, they tell us they are too busy. When you are too busy to do something for God, you are busier than God wants you to be. Will a bench warmer make it to heaven

(Matthew 25:24-30)? Theodore Roosevelt once said:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checked by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in a gray twilight that knows neither victory or defeat.

- C. Paul also said that a soldier of the cross must learn to endure hardship (2 Timothy 2:3). He was certainly a worthy example of this great truth. No one probably ever suffered as much for Christ as Paul did (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). When he obeyed Christ, his family and friends turned against him. Have we ever suffered anything for Christ? Have we ever made a sacrifice for Him? Paul did this and calls on us to do the same (Romans 12:1). Paul was loyal to Christ above everything and everyone else.

II. ***How The Old Soldier Felt About Death***

- A. Paul knew that his time had come. He had probably been sentenced to die. This was the last letter he ever wrote. He said, "I am ready to be offered." This would be a sacrificial offering. Paul was ready to be poured out as a drink offering. This not only brings to mind the Old Testament sacrificial system (Exodus 29:40-41) but also the beheading which was the prescribed method of death for enemies of the Roman state. His blood would indeed be poured out for the Lord.
- B. When Paul wrote, "The time of my departure is at hand," he was using a nautical term. It was time to hoist the anchor and move out over the ocean. When a ship sails out of one harbor, we expect it to anchor soon in another harbor. Paul knew that when he moved out of this life, he would cross the ocean of death and anchor his soul forever in the city of God.
- C. Paul taught all of us the value of time (Ephesians 5:15-17). God gives many gifts without limit -- His love, His grace, His Son, His

blessings. But His gift of time is strictly measured.

- D. Observe what Paul says about death (Philippians 1:21-23; 1 Corinthians 15:19; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-8). If we can say that we have lived for Christ when we die, we will gain everything.
1. We will gain a freedom from aches, pains, sorrows and troubles. All our burdens will be forgotten on the beautiful shore. Everything that has plagued us in our life will be gone (Job 14:1).
 2. We will gain fellowship. Paul saw Christ on the road to Damascus. I am sure he never forgot that sight, and he desperately wanted to see it again. I hope that we will have the passion to see Jesus.
 3. We will gain a fullness of knowledge. We wonder why a wicked person prospers and we have difficulties. We wonder why a good, useful person leaves this world and a sorry person is left behind. We may never know in this world, but in the better land we will know and understand. We will see that the problems which seem so hard for us to understand were really blessings in disguise.
 4. We will gain a home in heaven. We have a place so much better prepared for us than the accommodations here on earth (Revelation 7:15-17; 22:1-5). We stand to advance ourselves so much by passing on to the other realm.
- E. Paul's imminent death was not a dark cloud because death held no peril for him (2 Peter 1:14). It was a move from his demanding and painful life on earth to the infinitely glorious life of peace and rest to come.

III. ***The Old Soldier Looks Back On Life***

- A. Paul said, "I have fought a good fight." He looks upon life as a battle to be fought, a victory to be won. He said on one occasion that he was not fighting flesh and blood, but the evil dominion of Satan (Ephesians 6:12). That is a fight which never ends. Paul's life was one in which no sacrifice was too great and no commitment was too demanding.
- B. Paul had to fight the enemies of the gospel. They knew how faithful Paul was, so they tried to block his work for the Lord (Philippians 3:18). When Christians get busy for God, those enemies start to show up. They say, "It is all right to be a member of the church, but you should not give so much time to it." They might say, "It will not hurt to miss one Sunday or Wednesday night. Everybody does it." Many Christians will give in. They soon go astray and lose their influence. Let me ask you this question:

Did you ever see anyone who had a great influence for God who did not put Christ and His church first? If you want to please God, you must fight temptation, set your face toward the goal and follow Him all the way (Matthew 6:33; Luke 9:62).

- C. Paul went on to say, "I have finished my course." He looks upon life as a race track (Hebrews 12:1). We can almost see Paul straining every nerve as he runs the race for the Lord. As he comes near the end of his life, he says, "It is all over now. I have triumphed at last because my Lord ran at my side" (2 Timothy 4:17). God has a course for us to run. Will you run it?
- D. Paul also said, "I have kept the faith." The Lord personally entrusted him with great truths, and Paul not only preached them (1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11), but he lived them in his life and wrote them for us in his letters. God owes more to Paul for preserving these truths than to any other man.

IV. ***The Crown Awaiting The Old Soldier***

- A. One day Paul would be led out to his place of death. He looked beyond this and saw a crown waiting for him. This word was most commonly used of the wreath placed on the heads of winning athletes, much like medals are placed around the necks of Olympic champions today. It was the same word for the crown of thorns on the Lord's head (Matthew 27:29). It was the only prize ancient athletes received, and accordingly was cherished as a great treasure (2 Timothy 2:5).
- B. Forgotten now are all the hardships endured for Christ. Forgotten are the stripes, forgotten are the days and night in prison, forgotten are the shipwrecks, forgotten are the abuses, forgotten are all the tears that he shed and all the blood that he poured out. This made up for it all. Christ was waiting to welcome him. Heaven was waiting for the old soldier.
- C. Are you having a hard time? Is your body afflicted? Have your friends forsaken you? Do you face difficulties? Trust in the Lord and he will see you through (Job 13:15). Paul did not say that this crown was exclusively for him. If you love Him and keep His commandments, the crown will be for you too (Revelation 22:7, 12, 14, 17).
- D. Some day you will do you last day's work. Some day you will have your last night's sleep. Some day you will endure your last pain and face your last disappointment. If you have lived a faithful life, Jesus will say, "I will give you rest."

Conclusion. Wouldn't it be tragic for someone, having gone through this life to miss what lies beyond? The marvelous fact is, no one has to miss it. Are you uncertain, unsettled, unhappy or unsaved? If you want to go to this home on high, then we invite you to the cross of Christ. At the end, you can go home to be with the Lord forever. All you have to do is obey the gospel of Christ. Have faith (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), confess your faith in Jesus (Matthew 16:16), and be baptized for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38).