

"I Am Already Being Offered ..."

"... and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

These are immortal words from Paul, familiar to every Bible student. Paul's words *"the time of my departure is come"* needs no explanation. For years he had been incarcerated, although unjustly. His fate had for many years been uncertain. He had appealed to Caesar to avoid a certain death at the hands of his Jewish enemies. But, the Roman Emperor was capricious -- none knew what his whims might be on any certain day. Sometimes Paul had confidence he would be released from prison (Phil. 1:25). At other times his confidence was not so certain. But, by the time this last letter was being written to Timothy, Paul's fate was certain: he would face the executioner. He would *"depart and be with Christ;"* which in his letter to the Philippians, was *"very far better."*

For those who were responsible for his imprisonment in the first place, he prayed for them to come to the knowledge of truth. He prayed for his brethren that they might have the same composure and resolve as he. He longed for the solace of seeing his "son" once more, that he might be with him when that "better end" came.

He had no doubt that he would die. He also had no doubt about what would be his fate once that death penalty had been exacted upon him. He would be with Christ. He would receive the crown of righteousness which he had, in various epistles, written but sometimes expressed in different ways. He looked for the resurrection; he waited for the appearing, coming, and revelation of Christ. He looked for *"that day."* How could Paul be so confident? Paul was confident because he had ...

Fought a good fight. Our life as a Christian is likened unto a warfare. We are to put on the whole armor of God. Timothy was urged to war the good warfare. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. Revelation depicts a "great battle" which Satan wages against those who are the saints of God. In his life, Paul had waged a good warfare.

Finished the course. It isn't sufficient to begin; one must press on *"toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* The letter to the Hebrews was written with the aim to remind those brethren that if they

shrank back, then God's soul had no pleasure in them. They were reminded that Israel (with the exception of two lone souls), although starting toward Canaan, never reached that land because of their unbelief. The lesson from the Hebrews is that if we do not finish the course we will not reach our "Canaan." We must be "unmovable;" we must not weary in well doing, for *"in due season we will reap, if we faint not."*

Kept the faith. In Paul's mind, there was only "one faith." He expressed that very thought in Ephesians 4:4-6. He had spent his years in doing just what Jude urged: *"Contend earnestly for the faith which once for all hath been delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3). The faith is the doctrine of Christ which we must hold -- if we would be faithful to Christ. Paul had not veered from the faith. He had waged battle against those who would compromise it; who would add to it, who would deny it. Not he. He spent his life defending and proclaiming the faith.

Little wonder then that Paul expected to receive the crown of righteousness; that ultimate goal of being just with God. But he assured Timothy that same crown was available to all others who loved the appearing of our Lord. Let us live in such a way that we may have the same confidence when the time for our own departure comes!

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