

PAUL'S EPITAPH

Acts 28, 2 Tim. 4

EPITAPHS ILLUSTRATION: As a Pastor my calling requires me to spend more time at the cemetery than the average person. At my last church the only walking track they had in the city was around the cemetery. Somewhere along the way I picked up the hobby of collecting Epitaphs. Some people collect coins, some collect stamps I collect Epitaphs. Here are a few of my favorites.

Silver City, Nevada

Here lies a man named Zeke. Second fastest draw in Cripple Creek.

This one was in Savannah, Georgia

*Here lies old Rastus Sominy Died a-eating hominy
In 1859 anno domini*

On an Auctioneers tombstone :

*Jedediah Goodwin, Auctioneer. Born 1828
Going! Going!! Gone!!!*

I think this is my favorite

Effie Jean Robinson 1897-1922

*Come blooming youths, as you pass by ,
And on these lines do cast an eye.*

As you are now, so once was I;

As I am now, so must you be;

Prepare for death and follow me.

Which is not funny at all. But underneath, someone had added:

*To follow you, I am not content,
Until I know, Which way you went.*

Have you ever stopped to think about your Epitaph?

Adrian rogers *"until a man is ready to die he's not yet prepared to live."*

*The primary thing you need to know about Paul was that he was a man prepared to die,
and I want to show you why.*

CONTEXT: In Acts 28:11-14 we see the journey Paul took from the Island of Malta to the ultimately arrive in Rome. I want to begin in the middle of verse 14.

14b. And so we came to Rome.

One of the main goals of Paul's life had been to take the Gospel to Rome. Rome was the capital of the World. Water runs downhill, if a man can win the mountain the valleys would soon follow. So Paul wanted to see a great church established in the city of Rome.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells the Christians there - I have longed to come to you for many years. Now he has arrived.

¹⁷ After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. ¹⁸ When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. ¹⁹ But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. ²⁰ For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." ²¹ And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. ²² But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

²³ When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, **testifying to the kingdom of God** and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴ And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. ²⁵ And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ " 'Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." ²⁷ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' ²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

³⁰ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

The book of Acts ends around 60AD. Sometime after verse 31, Paul is tried and set free. After he is released Church History tells us that he went to Spain for 2 - 3 years. Remember, in their mind Spain was the uttermost part of the Earth. When Jonah ran from God he set out for Tar-shish a city in Spain.

Then in July of 64AD something happened - a great fire swept across Rome. You heard the story that Nero fiddled while Rome Burned. History tells us that Nero blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians - and a great persecution resulted.

Peter and Paul were arrested.

- Peter was crucified upside down, because he felt he was not worthy to die in the same way as his lord.
- Paul as a Roman citizen could not be crucified - so he was beheaded in 65AD.

Before he was martyred Paul was held in custody at the Mamertine Prison in Rome while awaiting his death Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy - it is there I want to conclude this series with what I believe was Paul's Epitaph in **2 Timothy 4**.

I'd like to spend the remainder of our time there and talk to you about the Epitaph of a Kingdom Man.

1. A Kingdom Man's Present Expression - 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ For I am already (presently) being poured out as a drink offering.

The drink offering was the final acts of sacrificial worship prescribed by God to conclude a day of burnt offerings. So all day lambs were sacrifices, birds, bulls, then when the day drew to a conclusion the alter burning red hot - a chalice of wine would be poured on the alter and according to Numbers 15 it provided a pleasing aroma unto the Lord.

Can you imagine the sizzle as the wine was poured out - a substance that had taken years to produce - from the planting of the vine, the pruning of the vine until one day it brought forth fruit. The grapes were harvest and stored, they were allowed to age for perhaps months. Until finally it was proper wine for drink. Then in an instant all of that time that went into producing the substances was turned into a faint sizzle on the red hot alter of God. Paul said that's my experience.

I'm poured out, I'm given out, I've done all I can do to further the Kingdom of God and all that remains is a faint sizzle.

Paul was nearing the end. He possessed no great wealth. He had no wife of children. He owned no home or land. His life had not been about amassing treasure.

Philippians 3:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

2 Tim. 6:1b and the time of my departure has come.

I love that word departure. He didn't say I'm about to die - He said, "I'm about to depart"

The Greek Word is analysis - from which we get our word Analysis. In the Greek it speaks of a sorting out, a separation. So Paul viewed his impending death as a sorting or separation of his Spirit from his body.

The Latin translation of the New Testament uses the word for **Resolution**. It's a musical term. Great composers seek to develop **dissonance**, a musical tension that begs to be resolved. Then they give us Resonance. They resolve the tone. Paul says for him departing from this life is the grand RESOLUTION of all of the stress of his life.

As such it is not something he fears or avoids - but looks forward to with great anticipation.

Philippians 1:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

2. A Kingdom Man's Past Experience -

¹ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Paul describes his life with 3 metaphors - As a Boxer, As a Runner, and As a Soldier

a. **As a Boxer** - I have fought the good fight

A great boxer in Paul's day was marked by his ferocity.

Have fought is from the verb *agonizomai* As one would guess, they are the source of our English "agonizing" and "agony."

Paul is saying, "I have agonized in my attempt to ferociously attack the enemy".

Commenting on that verse, William Hendricksen writes,

It had been a fight against Satan; against the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness in the heavenlies; against Jewish and pagan vice and violence; against Judaism among the Galatians; against

fanaticism among the Thessalonians; against contention, fornication, and litigation among the Corinthians; against incipient Gnosticism among the Ephesians and Colossians; against fightings without and fears within; and last but not least, against the law of sin and death operating within his own heart. (*New Testament Commentary: Expositions of the Pastoral Epistles* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965], 315)

Men - Do you fight the good fight of faith? Do you earnestly contend for the faith? Do you fight spiritual battles for your family? Do you seek to demolish the enemy's strongholds? Have you strived to the point of shedding your own blood in your struggle against sin?

a. A Runner - I have finished the race,

If a boxer is marked by his ferocity a runner is marked by his endurance.

The type of race Paul is referring to is not a 100 yard dash, it's a marathon. No one celebrates FINISHING a 100 yard dash.. but you celebrate FINISHING a marathon.

I will never forget meeting in accountability with Pat Merchant and him saying, "Zach, the Christian life is a marathon, not a 100 yard dash". Oh how true it is.

I am not impressed by the person who draws great attention, attempts BIG things in a fit of feverish emotion - More and more, I'm impressed by consistency, stamina, reliability.

What Eugene Peterson calls, "Long obedience in the same direction".

- When it comes to your Quiet Time - are you consistent? Do you have a place, and a time that you visit daily to pray and read your bible?
- How about in regards to giving - Do you occasionally drop a big gift in the bucket...or do you consistently give a portion in keeping with your income? I'd rather have the man who consistently tithes than the man who gets worked up in a fit of emotion and writes a check for \$10,000. Over the course of time, the occasional big gifts don't build churches - consistent tithes do.

The mature christian man has established a pattern of life that isn't necessarily remarkable or extraordinary, but it is sustainable.

The world is changed when ordinary men live ordinary lives with Gospel intentionality.

c. A Soldier - I have kept the faith.

A boxer is marked by his ferocity, a runner is marked by his endurance and a soldier is marked by his fidelity (faithfulness)

A soldier is not considered great because he won a battle, but because he obeyed his fulfilled his duty and obeyed his commanding officer.

In his autobiography, "American Sniper" Chris Kyle told his stories of achieving the most kills of any sniper in the U.S. forces. But he went to great lengths to make it clear that his victories were simply a matter of being at the right place at the right time. His comrades in arms who faithful to their duties, but didn't have as many opportunities deserve just as much honor, glory and respect as he did.

LISTEN - You may not achieve all that Paul achieved. But that's not the question - the question is are you faithful over what you've been given.

- God does not require that his men be successful - he requires that you be faithful.
- Success is God's business, Faithfulness is your's.

3. A Kingdom Man's Future Expectation -

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Laid up carries the idea of being safely stored and carefully guarded. A certain part of their heavenly treasure is stored up in advance by believers themselves.

James 1:12 (ESV)

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the **crown of life**, which God has promised to those who love him.

1 Peter 5:4 (ESV)

⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading **crown of glory**.

Here Paul says that there is a crown of righteousness waiting for him.

I remember growing up and hearing about all of the various crowns we would receive in heaven and I remember thinking - won't that look odd? A man with all those crowns on his head. Well, from what I can tell these all refer to the same crown.

The Lord Jesus will literally crown you, with Glory, Righteousness and Life on that day.