

# Introduction to 2 Timothy Chapter 4

## *Finish the Race: The Final Charge, the Finished Course, and the Crown That Awaits*

Second Timothy chapter 4 is the last chapter of the last letter Paul ever wrote. Everything in the letter has been building toward this final chapter: the charge not to be ashamed in chapter 1, the call to be strong in grace and endure hardship in chapter 2, the warning about perilous times and the sufficiency of Scripture in chapter 3 — all of it reaches its culmination here, in the most solemn charge of the letter, the most personal testimony of the apostle, and the most poignant closing of any New Testament epistle.

The chapter opens with the most formally solemn charge in the Pastoral Epistles: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom — preach the word. The solemnity of the charge is matched by the simplicity of its content. All the theological depth of the preceding chapters, all the pastoral instruction and the doctrinal formation and the warning about false teachers, comes down to this: preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching. The charge is urgent because the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching — and that time, Paul implies, is already arriving.

The pivot of the chapter comes in verses 6–8, where Paul shifts from the charge to Timothy to the testimony about himself. I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. The three athletic and military metaphors that follow — I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith — are among the most celebrated and most personally resonant sentences in all of Paul's letters. They are the testimony of a man who has done what he was given to do, who has run the course that was set before him, and who stands at the finish line not in defeat but in the confidence of the one who knows that the crown of righteousness awaits him.

The closing verses of the chapter — and of the entire letter — are among the most humanly vulnerable passages in the New Testament. Paul names the people who have deserted him, the people who have harmed him, the people who stood with him, and the people he longs to see. He asks for his cloak, his books, his parchments. He is cold. He is isolated. He is approaching the end. And in the middle of this human vulnerability, he writes one of the most confident doxologies in the New Testament: The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. The chapter that began with the most solemn ministerial charge ends with the most personal and most confident eschatological hope. This is how Paul finishes.

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## Opening Prayer

*Heavenly Father,*

*We come to 2 Timothy chapter 4 as the final chapter of the final letter — and we come with the awareness that we are reading something that was written from the edge of death by a man who has spent his life in the service of the gospel. The charge Paul gives to Timothy in these verses is the charge he has lived himself, at the cost that the closing verses make visible: the isolation, the desertion, the imprisonment, the approaching execution. We come to this chapter needing both the charge and the testimony — the charge that tells us what the ministry of the word requires, and the testimony that shows us what it looks like to have done it faithfully to the end.*

*Lord, give us the seriousness that the opening charge demands. The presence of God and of Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead is the context in which the ministry of the word is conducted — not the presence of the audience, not the approval of the institution, not the metrics of the platform. Let the awareness of that presence be the formation of our approach to the proclamation. Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching. Let the simplicity of the charge be the clarity of the calling.*

*And give us the courage to pursue the testimony that Paul offers in verses 6–8. Let us fight the fight that is worth fighting. Let us run the race that is set before us without abandoning the course when it becomes difficult. Let us keep the faith when the pressure to abandon it or dilute it or accommodate it is at its most intense. And let us do all of this with the confidence of the one who knows that the crown of righteousness is laid up for everyone who has loved His appearing — not only for the apostle, but for all.*

*In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## 2 Timothy 4:1–5

*The Final Charge: Preach the Word in the Presence of the Judge of the Living and the Dead*

- (1) I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;*
- (2) Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*
- (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;*
- (4) And they shall turn away their ears from the truth,*

*and shall be turned unto fables.  
(5) But watch thou in all things,  
endure afflictions,  
do the work of an evangelist,  
make full proof of thy ministry.*

## **The Context**

The charge of verses 1–2 is the most formally solemn in all of Paul’s letters. The phrase I charge you before God and Christ Jesus is the language of a legal oath — the invocation of the most ultimate witnesses and the most ultimate judge as the context in which the charge is given. The judge of the living and the dead is not a rhetorical flourish. It is the theological reality that gives the charge its weight: the one to whom Timothy is ultimately accountable is not Paul, not the congregation, not the institution. It is the Christ who will judge every act of ministry in the light of the final day. The appearing and the kingdom are the eschatological horizon that makes the present charge urgent: the judge is coming, the kingdom is coming, and the ministry of the word is conducted in the awareness of both.

The content of the charge is disarmingly simple: preach the word. After all the theological depth of the preceding chapters — the God-breathed Scripture, the sound words to be guarded, the pattern of teaching to be held fast — the charge resolves into this single imperative. Preach. The word. The be ready in season and out of season adds the dimension of timing: the proclamation is not to be calibrated to the seasons when it is welcome. It is to be maintained whether the reception is favorable or hostile, whether the audience is receptive or resistant. The reprove, rebuke, exhort add the three modes of the proclamation: the confrontation of error, the confrontation of sin, the encouragement toward the good — all conducted with complete patience and teaching.

The warning of verses 3–4 is the pastoral explanation for the urgency of the charge. The time is coming — and Paul implies it has already begun to arrive — when people will not endure sound teaching. The Greek for not endure is *anechomai*, to bear up under. Sound teaching is not merely boring or inconvenient for the person who will not endure it. It is unbearable — it makes demands on the character and the loves and the allegiances that the person who has accumulated teachers according to their own desires is not willing to meet. The itching ears are the ears that itch for novelty, for stimulation, for the teaching that confirms the desires rather than confronting them. The accumulated teachers are the supply for the demand that genuine proclamation refuses to meet.

The counter-charge of verse 5 is the response to the description of the itching-ear culture: but you — be sober-minded in all things, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. The you is emphatic in the Greek. Against the backdrop of the teachers who supply the itching ears, Timothy is to be the minister who refuses to supply the itch — who endures the suffering that the refusal produces, who does the work of proclamation regardless of the

reception, who fulfills the ministry that was entrusted to him in the presence of the God and the Christ who will judge it.

### **Plain American English**

*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is going to judge both the living and the dead — and I say this in view of His coming and His kingdom — I solemnly charge you: preach the word. Be ready to do it whether the time seems right or not. Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. Because the time is coming when people will not put up with sound teaching. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will surround themselves with teachers who tell them what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn away from the truth and chase after myths instead. But you — keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and carry out your ministry to the full.*

### **Key Observations**

**“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom”**: This signifies **The Ultimate Accountability of the Ministry of the Word Is Not to the Audience, the Institution, or the Metrics — but to the Christ Who Will Judge Every Act of Ministry at His Appearing.**

The invocation of the divine witnesses and the divine judge as the context for the ministerial charge is the most important theological framing in the passage. Everything about how the ministry of the word is conducted — what is preached, what is omitted, what is emphasized, what is softened — is conducted in the awareness that it will be evaluated not by the audience’s response but by the judgment of the Christ who will judge the living and the dead. The minister who preaches to please the audience rather than to be approved before God — the workman who needs the audience’s applause rather than the master’s approval — has lost the most fundamental orientation of the ministry. The charge is given before God and Christ Jesus. The ministry is conducted before them as well.

**“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season”**: This signifies **The Simplicity of the Central Charge — Preach the Word — Is the Distillation of Everything the Letter Has Said About the Ministry of the Word into Its Single Most Essential Imperative.**

The resolution of all the theological depth of the preceding chapters into the single imperative preach the word is one of the most important moments in the pastoral theology of the New Testament. All the instruction about the God-breathed Scripture, the pattern of sound words, the accurate handling of the truth, the four dimensions of scriptural profitability — all of it exists in the service of this: preach the word. The word is the resource and the proclamation is the act. And the in season, out of season adds the unconditional dimension: the proclamation is not subject to the conditions of welcome or resistance, favorable cultural winds or hostile ones, receptive audiences or resistant ones. Preach the word. When it is welcome. When it is not.

**“They shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables”**: This signifies **The Itching-Ear Culture Is the Precise Inversion of the Ministry That Verse 2 Commands — the**

## **Accumulation of Teachers Who Supply the Desired Stimulation Rather Than the Truth That Makes Demands.**

The itching-ear culture that verses 3–4 describe is the demand side of the supply problem that the false teachers represent. The false teachers do not create the appetite for teaching that confirms desires rather than confronting them. They supply an appetite that already exists. The people who accumulate teachers according to their own desires have first refused to endure the sound teaching that demands something of them — the teaching that confronts the error, rebukes the sin, and calls for the obedience that genuine formation requires. The itch for something other than the truth is the condition that the false teacher exploits. The minister who preaches the word faithfully will find that the itching-ear culture turns away from the ministry — and must be prepared for that turning, because the alternative is to become one of the accumulated teachers who supply the itch.

**“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry”:** This signifies **The Counter-Charge to the Itching-Ear Culture Is Not a Different Communication Strategy but the Same Faithful Ministry Conducted with Sober-Mindedness, Endurance, and the Fullness of the Evangelistic Commission.**

The but you of verse 5 is the emphatic counter to the cultural drift of verses 3–4. The response to the itching-ear culture is not a more sophisticated approach to the audience’s desires, not a recalibration of the message to meet the demand, not the development of a communication strategy that makes the sound teaching more palatable. It is the sober-minded, suffering-enduring, evangelistic, ministry-fulfilling faithfulness of the person who has understood that the ministry is conducted before God and Christ Jesus and not before the audience. The four imperatives of verse 5 — be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry — are the full description of the counter-cultural faithfulness that the itching-ear culture demands from the faithful minister.

### **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Conduct the Ministry of the Word in the Awareness of the Ultimate Accountability That Verse 1 Establishes:** The invocation of the divine judge as the context of the ministerial charge is the most important corrective to the minister whose primary accountability has shifted from the approval of God to the approval of the audience. Every decision about what to preach, what to emphasize, what to soften, what to omit is a decision made in the presence of the God and the Christ who will evaluate it on the final day. The minister who finds themselves consistently making decisions that avoid the confrontation of error, the rebuke of sin, and the demand of genuine obedience — because the audience might not respond well — has lost the primary accountability that verse 1 establishes. Recover it. The ministry is conducted before God and Christ Jesus. Preach accordingly.

**2. Refuse to Become One of the Accumulated Teachers Who Supply the Itching Ear — Even When the Refusal Is Costly:** The itching-ear culture of verses 3–4 creates enormous pressure on the faithful minister to supply what the culture demands rather than what the God-breathed Scripture provides. The accumulated teachers are not all charlatans. Many of them are gifted communicators who have allowed the demand for comfortable teaching to shape the content of their proclamation over time. The faithful refusal to supply the itch will cost: the

congregation will turn away, the platform will shrink, the metrics will decline. This is the affliction that verse 5 calls the minister to endure. Endure it. The alternative is the accumulated-teacher role that supplies the itch and loses the word.

**3. Fulfill the Ministry to the Full Rather Than to the Level That the Current Reception Seems to Warrant:** The make full proof of thy ministry — fulfill your ministry — of verse 5 is the call to the completeness of the ministerial investment regardless of what the current reception suggests about its value. The minister who reduces the scope and depth of the ministry investment in proportion to the apparent receptiveness of the audience is not fulfilling the ministry. They are calibrating it to the audience's response. The fulfillment is the full investment: all four dimensions of the scriptural profitability of chapter 3, the complete patience and teaching of verse 2, the sober-mindedness and endurance and evangelistic work of verse 5. Fulfill the ministry. Not the portion of it that is currently welcome.

### **How This Relates to Today**

The itching-ear culture that verses 3–4 describe has never been more precisely applicable than in the contemporary media environment in which the ministry of the word is conducted. The algorithmic platforms that distribute religious content are, by design, optimizing for the content that generates the most engagement — which is consistently the content that confirms existing beliefs, stimulates existing desires, and avoids the friction of genuine confrontation. The preacher who allows the algorithm to shape the proclamation has allowed the itching-ear culture to determine the content of the ministry. The accumulated teachers of verses 3–4 are, in the contemporary context, the content creators whose metrics are highest because their content is most perfectly calibrated to the desires of the audience rather than the demands of the word.

The solemnity of the charge in verse 1 — before God and Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead — is also the most direct available corrective to the ministry that has been shaped primarily by the desire for institutional survival, numerical growth, or cultural relevance. The ministry conducted in the awareness of the divine judge is not indifferent to these concerns. But it does not allow them to determine the content of the proclamation. The word is preached because the word is true, because the God who breathed it has commanded its proclamation, and because the Christ who will judge the living and the dead will evaluate the faithfulness of the proclamation by the standard of the word and not by the standard of the audience's response.

***Key Lesson:*** *\*The final ministerial charge of 2 Timothy is given in the most solemn possible context — before God and Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead — and its content is disarmingly simple: preach the word, in season and out of season, with reproof and rebuke and exhortation and complete patience and teaching; and the counter to the itching-ear culture that will turn away from the truth is not a different strategy but the same faithful ministry conducted with sober-mindedness, endurance, and the fullness of the evangelistic commission, regardless of what the current reception seems to warrant.\**

*The Finished Course: I Have Fought, I Have Finished, I Have Kept — and the Crown That Awaits*

*(6) For I am now ready to be offered,  
and the time of my departure is at hand.*

*(7) I have fought a good fight,  
I have finished my course,  
I have kept the faith:*

*(8) Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,  
which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day:  
and not to me only, but unto all them also  
that love his appearing.*

### **The Context**

The for of verse 6 connects Paul's testimony directly to the charge he has just given Timothy. He has called Timothy to preach the word, to endure suffering, to fulfill the ministry — and now he gives the reason for the urgency: because I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. The drink offering was the libation poured out on the altar as the final act of the sacrificial ritual — the completion of the sacrifice, the act of total self-giving that Paul sees his approaching death as. He is not being executed. He is being poured out. The reframing of his imminent death as a sacrificial offering is the apostolic imagination at its most theologically transformed.

The three perfects of verse 7 — I have fought, I have finished, I have kept — are among the most celebrated sentences in the New Testament, and their power lies precisely in their simplicity. There is no boasting in them. There is no claim of flawless performance or perfect accomplishment. There is the straightforward testimony of the man who was given a fight to fight and fought it, a race to run and ran it, a faith to keep and kept it. The fight has been the good fight of faith, the contest worthy of the effort. The course has been finished — the race is complete, the distance has been covered. The faith has been kept — the deposit of chapter 1, the pattern of sound words, the gospel of the risen Davidic Christ — has been transmitted intact.

The statement of verse 8 is the eschatological completion of the testimony. The crown of righteousness that is laid up — the perfect tense in the Greek, already stored and waiting — is the prize that the righteous judge will award on that day. The judge of the living and the dead of verse 1 is here the righteous judge — the one whose judgment is perfectly aligned with the truth of the race that was run and the fight that was fought and the faith that was kept. And the most pastorally generous addition in the verse is the expansion of the crown beyond Paul: not to me only, but to all who have loved His appearing. The crown is not the apostle's exclusive reward. It is the common inheritance of everyone who has loved the appearing of the Christ who will bestow it.

## Plain American English

*As for me, I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure is very close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is a crown of righteousness waiting for me — which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day — and not only to me, but to everyone who has longed for His return.*

## Key Observations

**“I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand”:** This signifies **The Reframing of Imminent Execution as a Drink Offering and a Departure Is the Apostolic Theological Imagination at Its Most Transformative — Death Is Not Defeat but the Completion of the Sacrifice and the Beginning of the Journey.**

The two metaphors Paul uses for his approaching death — the drink offering and the departure — are both chosen with theological precision. The drink offering is the final act of the sacrificial ritual: the total giving of the self in the service of the worship that the whole sacrifice has constituted. Paul’s death is not an interruption of his ministry. It is its final and most complete act — the total self-giving that completes what the whole life of ministry has been offering. And the departure — the Greek is *analisus*, a loosing of moorings, the setting sail of a ship — is not the ending of existence but the beginning of the journey to the destination that the whole course has been pointing toward. The metaphors together transform the prospect of execution into the completion of a sacrifice and the beginning of a voyage. This is the apostolic imagination at its most theologically transformed.

**“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”:** This signifies **The Three Perfects of Verse 7 Are the Testimony of the Completed Ministry — Not the Boast of the Perfect Performance but the Straightforward Account of the Person Who Did What They Were Given to Do.**

The power of the three perfects is inseparable from their simplicity. Paul does not say I have fought flawlessly, or I have run the fastest race, or I have kept the faith without wavering. He says I have fought the good fight — the fight worth fighting, the contest that was worth the effort. I have finished the course — the distance has been covered, whatever the pace. I have kept the faith — the deposit has been transmitted intact, whatever the cost. The testimony is the honest account of the person who was given a specific assignment and completed it — not the boast of the person who completed it perfectly, but the quiet confidence of the person who can say, before God and Christ Jesus, that they did what they were given to do. This is the testimony available to every person who fights the fight, runs the course, and keeps the faith that is entrusted to them.

**“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day”:** This signifies **The Crown Is Already Stored and Waiting — the Perfect Tense of the Greek Establishes the Certainty of the Eschatological Reward Before the Day of Its Bestowal.**

The perfect tense of *is laid up* — the Greek *apokeitai*, already stored away and waiting — is the grammatical expression of the eschatological certainty that grounds Paul’s confidence. The crown is not a future possibility contingent on the quality of the performance. It is a present

reality already stored in the keeping of the righteous judge, waiting for the day of its bestowal. The certainty of the stored crown is the resource for the endurance of the present suffering — the same eschatological ground that Paul identified in Philippians as the source of the contentment that survives every circumstance. The crown is laid up. The righteous judge has stored it. The day of its bestowal is certain. These are the realities that transform the prospect of imminent execution from the end of everything into the eve of the award ceremony.

**“Not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”:** This signifies **The Expansion of the Crown Beyond the Apostle to Every Person Who Has Loved the Appearing Is the Most Pastorally Generous Statement in the Passage — the Reward Is Not the Apostle’s Exclusive Prize but the Common Inheritance of the Whole Community of the Faithful.**

The addition of not to me only is the pastoral generosity of the man who could have used his unique apostolic standing to claim a unique apostolic reward but refuses to do so. The crown of righteousness is available to every person who has loved His appearing — who has lived in the genuine orientation toward the return of the Christ whose appearing is both the eschatological event that the crown anticipates and the love that the crown rewards. The love of the appearing is not a specific emotional state or a particular eschatological position. It is the orientation of the whole life toward the coming of the One who will be the righteous judge and the crown-giver: the orientation that has shaped the fighting and the running and the keeping that verse 7 describes. Every person who has lived with that orientation receives the same crown.

### **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Cultivate the Apostolic Imagination That Transforms the Prospect of Loss, Suffering, and Death into the Vocabulary of Sacrifice, Departure, and Completion:** The transformation of Paul’s imminent execution into a drink offering and a departure is not a denial of the reality of death. It is the application of the theological imagination to the reality of death — the re-description of what is happening in the light of the eschatological reality that makes the re-description true. The person who faces loss, suffering, or death with the vocabulary that Paul employs here — not denial, not resignation, but the genuine theological re-description of what is happening in the light of the sacrifice completed, the journey begun, the crown waiting — is the person who has been formed by the eschatological imagination of the gospel. Cultivate that imagination. It is the most important resource available for the hardest circumstances.

**2. Pursue the Three Perfects of Verse 7 as the Goal of the Ministerial Life — Not Flawless Performance but Faithful Completion:** The testimony of I have fought, I have finished, I have kept is available to every person who takes up the specific assignment they have been given and sees it through to completion. The fight does not have to be spectacular. The race does not have to be fast. The keeping does not have to be without wavering. It has to be genuine: the actual engagement with the fight, the actual covering of the distance, the actual transmission of the faith intact. Pursue this — not the spectacular performance that generates admiration, but the faithful completion that can be offered to the righteous judge without apology. This is the testimony that the crown rewards.

**3. Live in the Orientation Toward the Appearing That the Crown Rewards and That Transforms the Present Suffering into the Eve of the Award:** The love of His appearing that verse 8 identifies as the qualification for the crown is the description of the eschatological orientation that shapes everything about how the present life is lived. The person who loves the appearing is the person who sees the present suffering in the light of the future glory, who evaluates the present fight in the light of the coming prize, who endures the present loss in the light of the stored crown. This orientation is not escapism — it does not remove the person from the present engagement with the fight and the race and the keeping. It is the resource for the engagement: the confidence that the crown is laid up, the judge is righteous, and the day of the bestowal is certain.

### **How This Relates to Today**

The three perfects of verse 7 are among the most quoted sentences in Christian funeral homilies and memorials — and rightly so, because they are the most honest and most generous description of the completed Christian life available in the New Testament. They do not promise the spectacular. They do not require the heroic. They describe the faithful: the person who fought the fight that was given to them, ran the course that was set before them, and kept the faith that was entrusted to them. This description is available to the grandmother whose ministry was the transmission of genuine faith to a child who became Timothy. It is available to the unheralded pastor of the small congregation who preached the word faithfully for forty years. It is available to the believer who suffered in obscurity and was never celebrated by any platform. The crown is for all who have loved His appearing.

The eschatological confidence of verse 8 — there is laid up for me a crown — is also one of the most important resources available to the contemporary minister who is navigating the discouragement that the apparent failure of faithful ministry can produce. The person who has preached the word faithfully and seen the congregation turn to the accumulated teachers of verse 3, who has endured the suffering of verse 5 and seen no visible fruit, who has kept the faith and seen nothing to show for the keeping — that person needs the eschatological confidence of verse 8. The crown is stored. The judge is righteous. The day of the bestowal is coming. The apparent failure of the present is not the final accounting.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The testimony of I have fought, I have finished, I have kept is the honest account of the person who did what they were given to do — not the boast of perfect performance but the quiet confidence of faithful completion — and the crown of righteousness that is already stored and waiting is not the apostle’s exclusive prize but the common inheritance of every person who has loved the appearing of the righteous judge who will bestow it; the drink offering and the departure are the apostolic re-description of imminent death in the light of the eschatological reality that makes both metaphors true.\**

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## **2 Timothy 4:9–18**

*The Isolated Apostle: Desertion, Danger, and the Lord Who Stood with Me*

*(9) Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me:  
(10) For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,  
and is departed unto Thessalonica;  
Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.  
(11) Only Luke is with me.  
Take Mark, and bring him with thee:  
for he is profitable to me for the ministry.  
(12) And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.  
(13) The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus,  
when thou comest, bring with thee,  
and the books, but especially the parchments.  
(14) Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil:  
the Lord reward him according to his works:  
(15) Of whom be thou ware also;  
for he hath greatly withstood our words.  
(16) At my first answer no man stood with me,  
but all men forsook me:  
I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.  
(17) Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me;  
that by me the preaching might be fully known,  
that all the Gentiles might hear:  
and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.  
(18) And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work,  
and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom:  
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

## **The Context**

The personal details of verses 9–18 are among the most humanly revealing in the New Testament. Paul, who has just written the most confident testimony of the completed ministry — I have fought, I have finished, I have kept — now writes with the full weight of his isolation: come to me soon, because Demas has deserted me, having loved this present world. The contrast between the theological confidence of verses 6–8 and the human need of verses 9–18 is not a contradiction. It is the portrait of the complete person: the man who is fully confident in the eschatological outcome and fully aware of the human cost of the present circumstances.

The desertion of Demas is the most painful detail in the passage because Paul names the reason for it: having loved this present world. Demas is not described as a false teacher or a theological apostate. He is the person who, at the critical moment, chose the present world over the imprisoned apostle — who allowed the love of what the present age offers to displace the loyalty that the gospel demands. The contrast with Onesiphorus of chapter 1, who searched diligently for

the imprisoned apostle and was not ashamed of his chains, is stark. Demas loved the present world. Onesiphorus loved the apostle. The same imprisonment produced two opposite responses.

The requests of verse 13 — the cloak, the books, the parchments — are among the most humanly touching details in all of Paul's letters. He is cold. He needs the cloak he left at Troas. He is still reading, still studying, still engaging with the texts that have formed his ministry. The especially the parchments — the urgency about the written materials — is the portrait of the scholar-apostle who even in the final days of his life is still the person most formed by the engagement with the sacred texts. The ministry of the word has been the whole of his life, and it is still the whole of his life even now.

The account of the first defense in verses 16–17 is the most dramatic detail in the passage. At the first hearing — presumably the preliminary hearing before the Roman authorities — no one stood with him. Everyone deserted him. And Paul's response to the desertion is the most generous in the letter: I pray God that it may not be held against them. The echo of Stephen's prayer at his stoning — Lord, do not hold this sin against them — is unmistakable. Paul has learned, or been given, the same generosity toward those who abandon him that the first martyr showed toward those who stoned him.

The statement of verse 17 is the theological center of the closing section: but the Lord stood with me and strengthened me. Against the backdrop of the universal human desertion — all men forsook me — the Lord stood. The preposition is significant: not with me in the sense of standing nearby, but the Lord stood by me, stood alongside, was present in the way that every human companion had failed to be. And the purpose of the strengthening is not Paul's personal comfort but the proclamation: so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished and all the Gentiles might hear. Even in the first defense before the Roman court, the ministry of the word continued.

### **Plain American English**

*Do your best to come to me soon. Demas has deserted me because he loved this present world too much, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Luke is the only one still with me. Pick up Mark and bring him along, because he's very useful to me in the ministry. I've sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the coat I left with Carpus at Troas, and bring my books — especially the parchments. Alexander the metalworker has done me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for it. Be on your guard against him too, because he vigorously opposed everything we said. At my first defense, no one came to support me — everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood right beside me and gave me strength, so that through me the message would be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles would hear it. And I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

## Key Observations

**“Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world”:** This signifies **The Desertion of Demas Is Named with Theological Precision — Not Apostasy, Not Cowardice, but the Love of the Present Age That Displaced the Loyalty the Gospel Demanded.**

The naming of Demas — who appears earlier in the Pauline letters as a co-worker (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24) — and the specific identification of the reason for his desertion is one of the most diagnostically precise descriptions of a specific spiritual failure in the New Testament. Demas did not abandon Paul because he had become a false teacher. He did not desert because he was a coward. He deserted because he loved this present age — because the specific love that the present age offers displaced the loyalty that the gospel demands in the moment when the gospel’s demands were at their most costly. The love of the present world is not the dramatic apostasy of the theological rebel. It is the quiet, incremental displacement of the love of God and the love of neighbor by the love of the comfort, security, and approval that the present age offers. Demas is the ordinary failure of the person whose loves have not been fully redirected.

**“Only Luke is with me”:** This signifies **The Most Isolated Moment of the Most Productive Ministry in the New Testament Is the Two Most Humanly Devastating Words in the Closing Section — and They Are the Context in Which the Lord Stood by Me.**

Only Luke. The two words are the most humanly devastating in the passage. The apostle who has been surrounded by co-workers, who has written of the communities of faith that his proclamation has established across the Mediterranean world, who has named the colleagues and the churches and the households that have been formed by the gospel he has proclaimed — this apostle, at the end, has only Luke. The isolation is the human reality of the ministry that has been too costly for most of its participants to stay with. And it is precisely in this isolation — only Luke, all men forsook me — that the Lord stood by him. The presence of the Lord is most clearly visible against the backdrop of the absence of everyone else.

**“The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments”:** This signifies **The Requests for the Cloak and the Books Are the Most Humanly Revealing Details in the Letter — the Apostle Is Cold, and the Scholar Is Still Studying.**

The pastoral and personal significance of the requests of verse 13 is easily missed in the rush to the theological confidence of verses 17–18. But the requests are the most humanly present moment in the chapter — the moment when the apostle’s embodied, physical, intellectual needs are visible in all their ordinary reality. He is cold. The Roman imprisonment is not the comfortable house arrest of Acts 28. He needs the cloak. And he is still reading, still studying, still engaging with the books and the parchments — especially the parchments, which are likely the Old Testament Scriptures that have been the formation of his whole theological life. The scholar-apostle who proclaimed the God-breathed Scripture is still in the grip of the same Scripture in the final days of his life. The ministry of the word has been the whole of his existence, and it remains so.

**“Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, that all the Gentiles might hear”:** This signifies **The Lord Who Stood**

## **by the Abandoned Apostle Did So Not for the Apostle's Personal Comfort but for the Completion of the Proclamation That His Standing Made Possible.**

The but the Lord stood with me of verse 17 is the theological center of the closing section — the point at which the human story of desertion and isolation is interrupted by the divine presence that transforms it. The Lord stood by me: not the Lord was with me in a general sense, but the Lord stood alongside, was present in the specific, personal, crisis-meeting way that the abandoned apostle needed. And the purpose of the standing is stated with characteristic Pauline precision: so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished and all the Gentiles might hear. Even the first defense before the Roman court is a ministry opportunity — the proclamation goes forth to all the Gentiles who hear the Roman proceedings. The Lord's presence is purposeful: it is the strengthening for the proclamation that the proclamation requires, given in the moment when the proclamation is most at risk.

**“The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever”:** This signifies **The Eschatological Confidence of the Closing Doxology Is the Most Theologically Assured Statement in the Chapter — the Delivery Is Certain, the Kingdom Is the Destination, and the Glory Is Already Being Offered.**

The final statement of verse 18 — the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom — must be read with the awareness of what Paul knows about his immediate future: he expects to be executed. The rescue is not from the execution. The preservation is not the avoidance of martyrdom. The delivery from every evil deed is the preservation of the faith, the proclamation, and the person through every form of evil that can be directed against them — up to and including the execution that is coming. And the heavenly kingdom into which he will be brought safely is the destination that the departure metaphor of verse 6 is pointing toward. The doxology — to whom be glory forever and ever — is the spontaneous overflow of the eschatological confidence into the worship that the confidence produces.

### **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Examine the Love That Is Competing with Loyalty to the Gospel and Name It with the Precision That Paul Names Demas's:** The love of this present world that caused Demas to desert is not identified in the text as a dramatic or spectacular form of worldliness. It is the ordinary love of what the present age offers — the comfort, the security, the approval, the freedom from association with the costly and the disgraced — that displaced the loyalty the gospel demanded at the moment of maximum cost. Examine your own loves with the same diagnostic precision. What is the specific present-world love that is competing with the loyalty that the gospel demands? Name it with Demas's precision: having loved this present world. The naming is the first step of the flight that chapter 2 commanded.

**2. Receive the Lord's Standing Presence as the Specific Provision for the Moment of Maximum Human Desertion:** The but the Lord stood with me of verse 17 is the theological provision for every believer who is in the moment of maximum human desertion — the moment when all men forsook me is the accurate description of the present circumstances. The Lord's standing presence is not the substitute for human community, though it sustains in its absence. It

is the provision that is most fully visible when human community has failed to provide what it was supposed to provide. In the moments of greatest isolation, the Lord stands by. The strengthening He provides is purposeful: for the proclamation that the isolation might otherwise silence. Receive the provision. Continue the proclamation.

**3. Hold the Eschatological Confidence and the Human Need Simultaneously — as Paul Does Throughout the Closing Section:** The movement of the closing section between the human need — come soon, bring the cloak, only Luke is with me — and the theological confidence — the Lord stood with me, the Lord will rescue me, to Him be glory forever — is the model for the integration of the fully human and the fully confident eschatological person. The eschatological confidence does not remove the human need. The human need does not undermine the eschatological confidence. Both are present, both are real, and the person who holds them together as Paul does is the person who has been most fully formed by the gospel — the one who can say I need my cloak and I am confident that the Lord will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom without any tension between the two.

### **How This Relates to Today**

The desertion of Demas is one of the most commonly repeated patterns in the contemporary church: the person who begins well, who is counted among the co-workers of the gospel, who is named alongside the faithful — and who, at the moment when the cost of the association becomes most visible, discovers that the love of what the present age offers is stronger than the loyalty the gospel demands. The love of the present world is not always the dramatic departure into obvious sin. It is often the quieter choice of the comfortable distance — the maintained association with the gospel without the maintained loyalty to the imprisoned apostle, the continued participation in the religious community without the continued identification with the costly and the disgraced. Demas is the person in every congregation who is present when the cost is low and absent when it is high.

The requests for the cloak and the books are also one of the most important pastoral details in the chapter for the formation of a theology of ministry that takes seriously the embodied, physical, intellectual reality of the minister's life. The apostle who wrote the most theologically profound letters in the New Testament was cold in a Roman prison and needed his coat. The scholar who engaged most deeply with the God-breathed Scriptures still wanted his books and parchments in the final days of his life. The minister's physical and intellectual needs are not a distraction from the ministry. They are the needs of the person through whom the ministry is conducted — and attending to them, as Timothy is being asked to attend to Paul's, is itself a form of service to the ministry.

**Key Lesson:** *\*The closing section of the final letter brings together the most confident eschatological testimony — the Lord stood with me, the Lord will rescue me, to Him be glory forever — and the most humanly vulnerable personal details — Demas has deserted, only Luke is with me, bring the cloak and the books — in the portrait of the complete apostle who has fought the fight, finished the course, and kept the faith, and who holds the human need and the eschatological confidence simultaneously, without allowing either to diminish the other.\**

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## 2 Timothy 4:19–22

*The Final Farewell: The Names, the News, and the Grace That Closes Every Letter*

*(19) Salute Prisca and Aquila,  
and the household of Onesiphorus.  
(20) Erastus abode at Corinth:  
but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.  
(21) Do thy diligence to come before winter.  
Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia,  
and all the brethren.  
(22) The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit.  
Grace be with you. Amen.*

### The Context

The closing greetings of verses 19–22 are the final words of the final letter — and they are the words of a man who is conducting the full range of his pastoral relationships from a Roman prison in the last weeks of his life. The greetings to Prisca and Aquila — the husband and wife who have been among the most consistent co-workers in Paul’s ministry across multiple cities and decades — and to the household of Onesiphorus, who was commended in chapter 1 for his unashamed loyalty, are the pastoral maintenance of relationships that have been among the most significant in the entire Pauline mission.

The detail about Trophimus left sick at Miletus is one of the most practically significant pastoral details in the closing verses. Trophimus is ill, and Paul has left him behind — which means that the apostle who healed many people in the course of his ministry did not heal his companion. The sovereignty of God over illness is not overridden by the apostolic gift of healing. The servant of the Lord who is ill is not ill because of a failure of faith — Trophimus is ill in the company of the apostle whose ministry was accompanied by signs and wonders. The pastoral care of the sick is not the guarantee of their recovery. It is the faithful attendance to their need in the awareness that the outcome is in God’s hands.

The urgency of do your best to come before winter is the most practical of all the requests in the closing section. Winter closes the sea lanes. If Timothy does not come before winter, he cannot come until spring — and Paul does not expect to be alive in spring. The urgency of the request is the urgency of the man who wants to see his son in the faith one more time before the departure of verse 6 becomes the arrival that verse 18 anticipates. Come before winter. There may not be another opportunity.

The final blessing — the Lord be with your spirit, grace be with you — is the most compact and most complete benediction in the Pauline letters. The Lord with the spirit: the personal, indwelling presence of the Lord Jesus Christ with the innermost life of the person who has received this letter. Grace with you: the same grace that opened the letter in verse 1:2 — grace, mercy, and peace — now closes it in its simplest and most essential form. Grace. The whole letter has been about grace: the grace in Christ Jesus that is the strength for the ministry, the grace that enables the fight and the race and the keeping. And it ends with grace. The last word of the last letter of the apostle is the first word of the gospel.

### **Plain American English**

*Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, and to the family of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed on in Corinth, and I left Trophimus behind sick in Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters here send you their greetings. The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you all. Amen.*

### **Key Observations**

**“Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus”:** This signifies **The Final Greetings of the Final Letter Are the Pastoral Maintenance of the Relationships That Have Been Most Faithful Across the Longest Time.**

The greetings to Prisca and Aquila — who appear in Romans 16:3–4 as the people who risked their lives for Paul and whom all the churches of the Gentiles thank — and to the household of Onesiphorus — commended in chapter 1 for searching out the imprisoned apostle in Rome — are the final pastoral act of maintaining the relationships that have been most significant and most faithful across the whole of the ministry. The final letter is not only a theological document. It is a pastoral document: the maintenance of the network of relationships through which the gospel has been proclaimed and received and lived. The greeting is the last available act of the presence that the imprisonment prevents from being physical.

**“Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick”:** This signifies **The Illness of Trophimus Left Behind by the Apostle Is the Most Practically Significant Corrective to Any Theology That Makes Illness the Sign of Insufficient Faith or Inadequate Apostolic Power.**

The matter-of-fact mention of Trophimus left sick is theologically significant precisely because it is so matter-of-fact. There is no explanation, no theological justification, no account of why the apostle whose ministry included the healing of many did not heal his companion. The sick man is left sick. The apostle continues the journey. The sovereignty of God over illness operates independently of the apostolic gift of healing and independently of the faith of the sick person. The pastoral implication is immediate and important: the believer who is ill in the presence of the faithful, the prayerful, and the apostolically gifted is not ill because of a failure of faith or a lack of apostolic power. They are ill because God, in His sovereignty, has determined the course of their illness. The faithful care of the sick continues regardless of the outcome.

**“Do thy diligence to come before winter”:** This signifies **The Urgency of the Final Request to Come Before Winter Is the Urgency of the Man Who Knows That Winter May Close Not Only the Sea Lanes but the Window of Time in Which the Visit Is Still Possible.**

The pastoral weight of do your best to come before winter is the weight of the man who knows what winter means in his present circumstances: the sea lanes close, the travel becomes impossible, and the execution that is coming may happen before spring reopens the routes. The request is the most urgent in the letter precisely because it is the most human: not a theological charge, not a pastoral instruction, but the longing of the father for the son, the longing of the isolated prisoner for the companionship that Onesiphorus showed was still possible for the person willing to search diligently. Come before winter. The door may close before spring.

**“The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you”:** This signifies **The Final Benediction of the Final Letter Is the Most Compact and Most Complete Available Summary of Everything the Gospel Provides: the Personal Presence of the Lord and the Grace That Has Been the Resource for Everything the Letter Has Called For.**

The two-clause benediction that closes the letter is the distillation of the entire letter into its most essential elements. The Lord with the spirit: the personal, indwelling presence of the Lord Jesus Christ with the innermost life of the one who has received the charge, the warning, the testimony, and the final requests of the letter. And grace: the same grace that opened the letter in 1:2, that chapter 2 identified as the resource for the strength the ministry requires, that has been the ground of everything Paul has called Timothy to do and be. The last word of the last letter is grace — the first word of the gospel, the resource for every form of the work, the provision that sustains through every form of the suffering. Grace be with you. The letter ends where the gospel begins.

### **What This Means for Us Today**

**1. Maintain the Pastoral Relationships That Have Been Most Faithful Across the Longest Time as the Primary Network of the Ministry:** The greetings to Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus are the pastoral maintenance of the relationships that have been most significant and most faithful across the longest time. The contemporary minister who invests most of their relational energy in new relationships — the current congregation, the recent co-workers, the latest platform connections — while neglecting the maintenance of the long-term faithful relationships is investing in the wrong direction. The people who have been most faithful across the longest time are the most significant relational assets of the ministry. Maintain them. Even from prison. Even by letter. Even in the final weeks.

**2. Develop a Theology of Illness That Is Shaped by the Matter-of-Fact Reality of Trophimus Left Sick Rather Than by the Implicit Promise That Sufficient Faith Prevents or Heals Every Illness:** The theological correction of Trophimus left sick is available to every believer who has been told — explicitly or implicitly — that illness is the sign of insufficient faith, inadequate prayer, or spiritual failure. It is not. The companion of the apostle whose ministry included signs and wonders was left sick by that same apostle. The sovereign God determines the course of illness in ways that are independent of the faith of the sick person and the power of the person praying for them. Receive this correction. It is the pastoral provision for

every believer who has been damaged by a theology of illness that makes the sick person responsible for their illness.

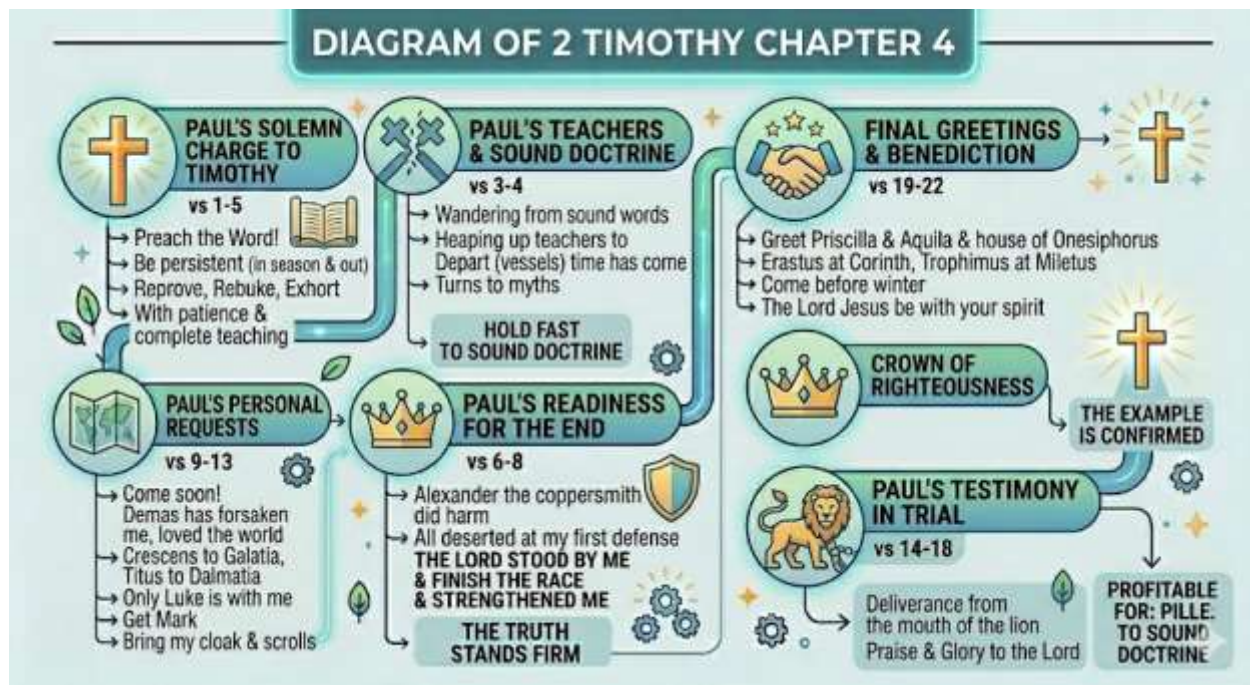
**3. Receive the Final Benediction as the Summary of Everything the Gospel Provides and the Resource for Everything the Ministry Requires:** The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit and grace be with you are not merely conventional closing formulas. They are the specific provision for the specific needs that the letter has identified: the Lord's presence for the isolation that Demas's desertion and the imprisonment have produced, and the grace that is the resource for the strength the ministry requires, the endurance the suffering demands, the proclamation the itching-ear culture makes costly. Receive the benediction as the provision it is. The Lord is with the spirit. Grace is with you. Everything the letter has called for is resourced by what the benediction provides.

### **How This Relates to Today**

The detail about Trophimus left sick at Miletus is one of the most pastorally significant correctives available to the contemporary prosperity theology that treats illness as the sign of insufficient faith or inadequate prayer. The theology of healing that makes the outcome of prayer for healing dependent on the quality of the faith of the person praying or the faith of the person being prayed for has no adequate answer to Trophimus left sick by the apostle Paul. The sovereignty of God over illness is not a concession to theological weakness. It is the foundation of the honest, compassionate, faithful pastoral care of the sick that does not promise what God has not promised and does not condemn the sick person for the illness that God has not prevented.

The final benediction — the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, grace be with you — is also one of the most important models available for the close of every act of Christian ministry. The letter that began with the charge not to be ashamed, that moved through the metaphors of the soldier and the athlete and the farmer, that warned about the perilous times and celebrated the sufficiency of Scripture, that climaxed in the testimony of the fought fight and the finished race and the kept faith — this letter ends with the two most essential provisions of the gospel. The Lord is present. Grace is available. Everything else in the letter has been about what to do with these two provisions. The ending is the reminder that the doing depends on the receiving.

***Key Lesson:*** *\*The closing greetings and the final benediction of 2 Timothy are the pastoral completion of the most personal and most urgent letter in the Pauline corpus — the maintenance of the faithful relationships, the honest acknowledgment of the illness that sovereignty permits, the urgency of the come before winter that knows the window may close, and the final provision of the Lord's presence with the spirit and the grace that has been the resource for everything the letter has called for — the last word of the last letter of the apostle is the first word of the gospel: grace.\**



## Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

*We close 2 Timothy chapter 4 — and with it, the entire letter — standing at the finish line of the apostle's race and receiving the full weight of everything his final letter has given us. We have received the most solemn ministerial charge in the New Testament: preach the word, in the presence of God and Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead. We have received the most confident personal testimony: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. We have received the most humanly vulnerable closing: only Luke is with me, bring the cloak, come before winter. And we have received the most eschatologically assured doxology: the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom — to Him be glory forever and ever.*

*Lord, form in us the character of the minister who preaches the word in season and out of season, who endures the affliction of the itching-ear culture's turning away, who fulfills the ministry to the full regardless of what the current reception warrants. Let the awareness of the divine judge before whom the ministry is conducted be the formation of the approach to the proclamation. Not the audience's approval. Not the platform's metrics. Not the institution's endorsement. The presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will evaluate the faithfulness of the proclamation on the final day.*

*Give us the testimony of verses 6–8. Let us fight the fight that is worth fighting. Let us run the course that is set before us without abandoning it when the circumstances make the running*

*hard. Let us keep the faith — the deposit of the gospel, the pattern of sound words, the God-breathed Scripture that chapter 3 celebrated as the provision for the perilous times. And let us live in the orientation toward the appearing that the crown rewards: the love of His coming that transforms the present suffering into the eve of the award ceremony.*

*And in the moments of maximum human desertion — when only Luke is with us, when Demas has loved the present world and departed — let the but the Lord stood with me of verse 17 be the provision that sustains the proclamation. The Lord stands. He strengthens. He preserves through every form of evil up to and including the final form. And He brings safely into the heavenly kingdom the person who has fought the fight, finished the course, and kept the faith. To Him be the glory forever and ever.*

*Grace be with you. Amen.*

***Soli Deo Gloria**  
Glory to God Alone*