

Dear Heavenly Father,

Praise

Paul said, “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” (2 Tim 4:8). I praise you today as the righteous Judge who has promised to reward each person according to their works. You stand by me and strengthen me, and I am confident that you will bring me safely into your kingdom (2 Tim 4:17–18). Glory to God!

Today in Your Word

Today you shared with me Paul’s last recorded letter. It was written to Timothy from the prisons of Rome, and Paul knew that this time he would not be set free. Sometime after writing his letter to Titus, Paul was arrested and taken back to Rome as a criminal (2 Tim 2:9). His second imprisonment was very different than his first. Before, he had his own rented house; now he was kept in close confinement. Before, he was surrounded by friends; now only Luke was with him (2 Tim 4:10–12). Before, he had hoped for freedom; now he expected to die (2 Tim 4:6). As I read, I was struck by the fact that although Paul spoke candidly about his difficulties, he was not depressed or discouraged. Instead, he was trusting in you and relying on your strength (2 Tim 4:17). He said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7). I want that to be my testimony, not only at the time of my death, but also at the close of each and every day! Paul’s last letter could have been all about himself, but instead it was focused on Timothy, whom Paul loved as a son. Two years earlier, much of Rome had burned to the ground, and Nero blamed the Christians. It was now very dangerous to be known as a follower of Christ, and it was also dangerous to have contact with leaders of the church like Paul. Many believers, including some of Paul’s coworkers, had chosen to put their ministries on hold and disappear from sight, and Paul knew that Timothy faced the same temptation. It was during this time of fear and doubt that Paul urged Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:6–7). This teaches me that I should never be ashamed of the gospel or of those who preach the good news. Instead, I should share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, not in my own strength, but through your power. Paul went on to call Timothy to a life of dedicated service to you, and his words are meant for me as well. I, too, should endure to the end for the sake of the gospel (2 Tim 2:10). I, too, should teach sound doctrine and avoid useless quarrels (2 Tim 2:14–16). I should understand that difficult times will come, and with them will come false teachers (2 Tim 3:1–9). I should make it my goal to follow Paul’s teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions and sufferings, for “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:10–13). As I do these things, I must keep your Word at the center of my life, for every verse has been breathed out by you and is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16).

Reflection

Paul’s letter makes it clear that Timothy’s faith was genuine and that he had all he needed to do the work of the ministry. Yet Paul urged him to action, again and again, and commanded him to work hard for the sake of the gospel. Am I fanning into flame the gift you have given me? Am I doing my best to present myself to you as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth?

Request

Father, help me to avoid being entangled in the busyness and cares of life and keep my aim focused on pleasing you. I want to be like the hard-working farmer who labors faithfully for his reward.

Thanksgiving

Thank you for the grace which you gave me in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of my Savior. He has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim 1:9–10). Praise the Lord!

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Suggested Hymn: “Shall I Be Ashamed” – Charles W. Naylor.

Meditation Verse: 2 Timothy 2:24–25.