

# FAITHFUL LAST WORDS

1 TIMOTHY 1:15    MAY 23, 2018

Turn with me to 1 Timothy, chapter 1. We're going to start a new little series tonight: *Faithful Sayings*.

This week, Billy Graham's will was released to the public. While most of it is just boilerplate legalese, it does contain one final plea for the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Here are a few small portions of what Mr. Graham wrote:

*I urge all who shall read this document to read and study the Scriptures daily and to trust only in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. When you read this I will be safely with Jesus in Paradise... Time on earth is short.*

*I ask my children and grandchildren to maintain and defend at all hazards and at any cost of personal sacrifice the blessed doctrine of complete Atonement for sin through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ once offered, and through that alone. I urge you to talk with the Lord in a life of separation from the world and to keep eternal values in view.<sup>2</sup>*

Those are just a few of the fine closing thoughts Billy Graham shares there on the first page of his last will and testament.

As Paul the Apostle's life came to a close, he wrote 3 final letters: First Timothy, Second Timothy and Titus. We call them the Pastoral Epistles because they were written to two younger pastors and contain great teaching on the subject.

These letters were composed by Paul after many long years in the ministry, having learned and experienced a mind-boggling amount in his service to the Lord. These letters were written about 15 years after Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, 5 to 10 years after his letters to Corinth. And though the final phase of Paul's life isn't meticulously documented for us, it's clear (at least in 2nd Timothy) that he knew the end had come. And so, in one sense, these letters become a last will and testament, written to his beloved sons in the faith.

As he wrote to them, 5 times he used a distinctive phrase: "This is a faithful saying." It's unique to Paul, but reminds us of what John records Jesus saying so often in his Gospel: "Verily verily I say to you."

Of course, when we come across Jesus saying that or Paul saying, "*this* is a faithful saying," it doesn't mean the *other* things are insignificant or less trustworthy. But at these points an extra effort is being made by the speaker. 5 times in these 3 letters Paul takes the time to say, "Listen here, read my lips." As readers, when we come to these passages we're to stop and turn up the volume. Something crucial is being said that we cannot afford to miss.

When you list out all 5 of Paul's 'faithful sayings' you discover that they have a pretty wide scope and variety. They speak of life and the afterlife. They speak of physical exercise and spiritual ministry. They contain joyful encouragement and severe warning.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://relevantmagazine.com/current/last-will-billy-graham-asks-family-defend-gospel-cost/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://mediaweb.wsocvtv.com/document\\_dev/2018/05/18/Billy%20Graham%20Will\\_11713417\\_ver1.0.pdf](https://mediaweb.wsocvtv.com/document_dev/2018/05/18/Billy%20Graham%20Will_11713417_ver1.0.pdf)

But all 5 passages are categorized by Paul and by the Holy Spirit as *faithful*. That means they are *trustworthy*. They are more than just good - you can hang your hat on them. Even more than that, like a well made carabiner, we can rest the weight of our lives on these secure words as we climb every mountain. A couple of times Paul gives an additional description to these 'faithful sayings' calling them "worthy of all acceptance." Meaning that the sayings in *whole* are rock solid for our lives and they will be for *all* people in *all* places at *all* times. These are precious truths that we can not only lean on, but also appreciate.

So, we have 5 final, key statements from Paul, given as parting instructions to his beloved, true sons in the faith. So what exactly is on the list?

The first faithful saying is found in First Timothy, chapter 1, verse 15. There Paul says:

**1 Timothy 1:15 - <sup>15</sup> This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.**

Now, this is almost surprising in its simplicity, especially when you consider that Timothy is no greenhorn. He's not in his first semester of theology. He's a seasoned pastor and missionary, who lived and served alongside the great Apostle. Timothy had started assisting Paul well over a decade before he read these words.

And yet, this is the first and foremost of Paul's faithful sayings: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

There are many reasons to start here. *First* of all, this is the single greatest truth of all human history. Without these 9 words, no other efforts or discoveries or expressions have any significance at all. What would it matter for man to write all the peace treaties in the world or travel between galaxies or cure cancer if Christ did not come to save? No, this is the most *significant*, the most *faithful* saying of all. He *did* come and He came to save sinners.

A *second* great reason for this to be the first faithful saying is that this simple phrase actually contains a great deal of doctrine. The words 'Christ Jesus' identify the Messiah as Jesus of Nazareth, the GodMan. The fact that He came *into* reminds us that He is not *of* the creation, but exists outside of it. The fact that He came *for sinners* indicates that Christ is sinless, perfect and able to bridge the gap between God and man.

But a *third* great reason for Paul to start his list of 5 faithful sayings with what we find here is that this is the fundamental, bedrock basis that the Christian faith *must* be built upon. This is a truth that we cannot leave behind any more than you could leave behind the ABCs and hope to make a language. If you wanted to communicate a message to someone in English, you can't leave the ABCs behind. We sometimes try, don't we? That's what emoji are all about. What does it really mean when you get a text with the yellow face that has eyes but no mouth? Or, what's the difference between the frowny face with a tear and the frowny face with the tear but the top half of the head is shaded blue?

In reality, if you want to communicate effectively, with clarity and detail, you have to use the building blocks of language that you learned back before kindergarten: The ABCs. And Paul says that this fundamental, simple truth is worthy of all our acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Don't forget it. Don't pass it by. Don't consider it as obsolete.

Some of the people around Timothy were doing just that. They were leaving the key truths of Christianity behind and Paul explained in chapter 1 verses 3 and 7 that these folks needed in some cases to be corrected and in others to be avoided. But for Timothy, Paul was explaining that *this* is the basis and the bearing for the Christian life. Because Christ came to the world to save. And now we go throughout the world *continuing* that work.

What kind of sinners did the Lord come to save? Well, Paul uses himself as the best example. Earlier in the chapter he has already recounted some of who he was and what he did as an unbelieving sinner, but now in verse 15 he summarizes all of that by saying, "I am the *chief* of sinners." By that he means that he was the worst of all, captain of the sin team.

Was he just being self-deprecating? Was this a case of over-humility? Well, he would say, "No. I *really am* the chief of sinners." He *hated* Jesus and hated anyone who wanted to follow Jesus. He savagely persecuted the fledgling Church and indicates in the language of First Timothy that he even took a sort of sadistic pleasure in the violence he was perpetrating.

But using himself as an example he shows here how *powerful* the Gospel of Jesus Christ is. A man like Paul is not only *loved* by God, but is *savable*. But even then the Lord doesn't quit. Paul wasn't just *saved*, he was *transformed*. He was a murderer and a terrorist, a *blasphemer*, full of vicious arrogance but through God's redemption he became a planter of churches, a writer of Scriptures, a victorious martyr. Because of Jesus Christ's work, the greatest example of *sin* has become the greatest example of Christianity for the last 2,000 years of history.

And none of it had to do with what Paul accomplished. Notice his careful wording. He doesn't say, "of whom I was chief." He says, "oh whom I *am* chief." Paul recognized he was still unworthy, still a sinner, but he accepted that he had been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and therefore God was able to transform his life and change him through and through. He talks a little more about it in verse 16:

**1 Timothy 1:16 - <sup>16</sup> However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.**

Just as Paul had been *first* among sinners, now he says he is *first* among those saved. Of course, he doesn't mean no one else had been born again before he was. Rather, he says here that he is the model prototype of what it means for God's grace to save and transform a person - even the worst person in all the world. Christ, who came to save sinners, was going to prove that truth and put it on display through Paul, who would become a living, breathing example of God's love, mercy and longsuffering.

Today, Paul has long gone to heaven to receive his reward. So, who are the Paul's now? Well, that's you and me if you're a Christian. The Apostle wrote this in First Corinthians 11:

**1 Corinthians 11:1 - Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.**

He is made the model example for us that we are to follow after. Remember the backdrop of his statements in 1 Timothy 1:15-16: He's telling Timothy (and us by extension) that this is a saying and a principle we are to anchor onto and build from. Christ came into the world to save sinners. It was a personal work, a costly work. But it's the most important work ever done. And Paul's example shows

us not only that *any* person can be saved (praise the Lord!), but that salvation is *not* just something that happens the moment after we take our last breath. Salvation is for every day of our lives as we are put on display by God so that others might also be redeemed.

Christ came to show us mercy and to *show mercy in us*. To demonstrate that *anyone* can be saved and *everyone* who *is* saved should be used by God to continue the work.

Most of you have probably never heard the name Lynsi Snyder. In 2017 she became the youngest billionaire in the nation, not because of any contest she won or any product she invented. There were just 2 simple reasons: Someone died and gave her an incredible inheritance and she accepted it.<sup>3</sup> In 2010 she became the owner and president of In-N-Out Burger. Now, because of the work of her father and grandfather (and many other men and women in her family), she is part of a wonderful enterprise that, day-in and day-out proclaims the Gospel through their packaging. Perhaps you've never noticed, but In-N-Out milkshakes each have Proverbs 3:5 referenced on the bottom. Soda cups bear John 3:16. The water cups used by employees say John 14:6. The hamburger and cheeseburger wrappers reference Revelation 3:20, the double-double paper lists Nahum 1:7 and the french fry trays are labeled with Proverbs 24:16.<sup>4</sup> Lynsi Snyder is open about the ruin she made of her life before she surrendered to Jesus, but that when she felt more alone and more worthless than ever, God was there to intervene and to save and now she's been transformed and is a display of grace.<sup>5</sup> A substance abuser who went through 3 divorces now transformed into a woman who publicly proclaims the transformative power of the Gospel.

This is a faithful saying: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If you're not a Christian here tonight, you need to become a Christian. God wants to save you from your sin and from an eternity in hell. He gave Himself as a ransom for you. And for you to be born again all you must do is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, call on His name, trust Him to save you and you will be saved.

If you *are* a Christian here tonight, be confident in this faithful saying. God loves you personally. Remember what Jesus said when the Apostle was converted on the Damascus road: "Saul, Saul!" He called him by name. He loved him personally. God loves you the same. You are a sinner *saved* by grace and are now filled by the Holy Spirit to be demonstrating the power of God. As you live out that Christianity, build from this foundation revealed in the Scripture. Continue the work that Christ began when He first came. He came to save. He's not done yet. How does He continue the work now? By using us as living, breathing examples of everlasting life, who can proclaim the truth of the Gospel even past our last dying day. Like Paul. Like Billy Graham. Every Spirit-filled Christian can have a testimony like that. Maybe not as prominent, but just as profound, thanks to the glorious, redeeming work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://time.com/money/4770527/in-n-out-lynsi-snyder-fortune-ownership/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/in-n-out/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iamsecond.com/seconds/lynsi-snyder/>