

"An Old Man's Last Words"

2 Timothy 4:7-18

2 March Anno Domini 1987

Sermon for the Funeral of

George Halder

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Near the very end of his life the Apostle and Missionary Paul wrote at least two letters to one of his understudies -- a man named Timothy. The bases of my sermon this afternoon as we remember the life of George is the 2nd letter of Paul to Timothy, chapter 4, beginning with verse 7, which reads as follows as we consider:

An Old Man's Last Words

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will award on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense no one took part; all deserted me. May it not charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the Word fully, that the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for His heavenly Kingdom. To Him be the Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Thus far the Words of the Holy Spirit.

There he was: an old man whose life's journeys were now drawing to a close. His travels were now measured in terms of feet and yards, as opposed to the miles that he had once been able to journey. The years had taken their toll and he was tired clear down to his bones. Indeed, his movements were restricted by his physical condition. In fact, he knew that the end of his life was at hand and he looked forward to the time when the Lord would call him home to the glory that awaited him. His desire was to depart and to be with Christ which would be far greater.

At this point in his life, his needs were few and they were very simple. In his present condition, only the basics of physical and spiritual life were important to him. One of his blessings was to have the medical care that was required. Luxuries, accumulation of material possessions, prestige and past

accomplishment were unimportant at this stage of his life.

His restrictions in movement also came from his surroundings. He could only move about when others allowed it. He was not free to go wherever he wanted, in fact, he was confined. Indeed, when he wrote to Timothy, Paul was a prisoner in Rome awaiting his execution for being a Christian.

As we think about what Paul's needs were, we can readily see that George's were similar. In his letter, he included the request that Timothy bring his cloak. The combination of age, the winter and the chill of his dungeon left Paul desiring to be kept warm. So also with George there was the need for the immediate physical necessities -- warmth, food, shelter, clothing, and care.

But there was also the self-recognition that he needed spiritual care as well. One of the marks of faith is to recognize the need to take care of one's soul. Unlike so many today who are willing to render only lip service to the Almighty, faithful men like Paul and George confessed their sin and looked to God for forgiveness and salvation and eternal life.

Whenever they were able, they worshiped their Lord. They were not like those who were once members of the church, but who, like the man named Demas in our reading, "was in love with this present world," and who deserted the faith and had no place for God any longer. No indeed they acknowledged that they were sinful in thought, word and deed. They knew that Christ died for their sins, taking the penalty of their guilt upon His cross.

Their hope was in the Lord Jesus who rose again from the dead to ensure victory over death; and that they had it only because of God's grace. Christ was their confession of faith, the only One in Whom there is hope for life in the face of death -- the only one of us will face. For each one of us will come to the end of this life here on earth.

Paul knew that his death would come at any moment at the hands of the Romans. George did not know when the good and gracious will of the Lord would be done -- when the Almighty would call him into eternal glory. But both were ready. Both could say: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Are you ready? Could you say the same thing? Just as surely as the mortal remains of George are before us today, so also will it be for each of us here. When will your end come -- will it be today on the way home, suddenly and unexpected, or will you live to be 99 years old like George did?

Perhaps the most important question is "will you be ready?" What are you going to do with this Jesus? For those of you who have neglected your spiritual welfare or that of your family, let both the words of Paul and the reality of George's passing demonstrate your need for a faithful relationship with the Lord.

Paul stated the truth that those who have no such trust in and worship of the Lord will not partake in the joys and blessings of heaven, when he wrote: "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."

When Paul was no longer able to go about freely and be with the congregation for worship, his desire was still to have the Word of God brought to him. He asked Timothy to bring the books and

the parchments to him -- to have the Word of God brought to him in his prison cell.

When George was no longer able to come to church, his desire was to have the Word of the Lord brought to him. From the monthly times when he received the Lord's Supper and heard Bible readings to the times when the Sunday School and Junior Choir would sing to him and other residents of the nursing home, he was kept close to his Lord.

I might add at this point that all of us, but especially you children, need to take a lesson from George with respect to memorizing the Bible passages and hymn verses. When his eyes became such that he could no longer read and when no one was there to read to him, he had the Scriptures because he knew many verses from memory.

Paul wrote that he wanted Timothy and Mark to come to be with him. He needed to have people around him. The same was true with George. All of the visits by family, friends, and members of the congregation were appreciated. Many of you who did visit him, will recall that when you left, his parting words were often spoken in German.

Therefore, I am confident that his parting words for you who have come here today to remember his life and to pay your last respects, he would say: "Danke schoen." And for those of you who are Christians and who will be with him in heaven one day, he would probably say what he usually told me when I left from visiting him -- the last words of an old man:

"Alvedersein mach friede." Amen.