

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Finishing Well

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (598)

March 10, 2002

2 Timothy 4:6-8 ...*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future 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.*

The other day on TV I caught the end of the movie, *Cool Runnings* - the story of the first Jamaican bobsled team to compete in the Olympics. In their pursuit these competitors experienced difficulties and overcame setbacks one after the other. Eventually they qualified to compete in the Olympic games. They were doing surprisingly well when, on one of their runs, the steering gear of their antiquated bobsled failed. The sled overturned and skidded for some distance before it came to a stop within eyesight of the finish line. There was a suspenseful silence before the men began to move. One of them said to the others, "We must finish the race." They positioned themselves at the corners of the sled, lifted it up on their shoulders and, to the admiration and enthusiastic applause of the crowd, walked it across the finish line.

In **2 Timothy 4:7** Paul says, *I have finished the course*. He had been preaching the gospel for over 30 years. Now an old man confined to a prison in Rome, he is awaiting a martyr's death. This letter is his "final message ... to his young friend Timothy and also to the Church as a whole" (Ironsides, p.241). His prayer

... his expectation ... his charge is that Timothy now take up the baton and continue running the race that Paul has finished. But Paul is not a “do as I say, not as I do” kind of guy. Indeed, he has done what he is charging Timothy to do.

In **I Timothy 1:18** and **6:12** he urges Timothy to *fight the good fight*. And here in **4:7** Paul says of himself, *I have fought the good fight*. He has just commanded Timothy in verse 5, *fulfill your ministry*. Here in **4:7** Paul says of himself, *I have finished the course*. Listen to these selected instructions to Timothy. *Keep faith and a good conscience (I Tim. 1:18-19)*. *Prescribe and teach these things (I Tim. 4:11)*. *Pay close attention to ... your teaching (I Tim. 4:16)*. *Keep the commandment (I Tim. 6:14)*. *Guard what has been entrusted to you (I Tim. 6:20)*. *Retain the standard of sound words you have heard from me (2 Tim. 1:13)*. *Continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of (2 Tim. 3:14)*. And here in **4:7** Paul says of himself, *I have kept the faith*. So not only is the apostle reflecting upon his life and work but in doing so he is supplying an example for Timothy and for us to follow. His reflections are designed to animate and anchor us as we pursue the call of God upon our lives. Beloved, here’s how you want to end this thing. You want to finish well. What, in the estimation of God, does it mean to finish well? I want to offer four suggestions which, I pray, God will confirm in you to the encouragement and comfort of your souls.

Finishing well is to face death having lived a life of genuine affection for Christ. I call your attention to the last seven words in **verse 8**. Eternal rewards are laid up

for ***all who have loved His appearing***. The NIV translates it, *to all who have longed for His appearing*. Yes, this includes all who affirm the doctrine of the second coming (2 Thess. 2:8; 2 Tim. 4:1,8; Tit. 1:13). Yes, this includes all who are looking forward to His return. But this phrase takes us far beyond these two. To have *loved His appearing* means you have cherished a longing for Christ over the entire course of your life. As Knight points out, “The perfect tense signifies that this ‘love’ has constantly characterized their lives” (p.462). In view here is a lifetime of desire for Jesus Christ. This preference for Christ is expressed by the Psalmist in **Psalm 73:25**, *Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth.*

Where does such a desire come from? Suppose I was to ask you the simple question, What is a Christian? Not a few might say that a Christian is one who maintains a certain moral lifestyle. Others might say that a Christian is one who affirms a certain set of doctrines. I hope many of you would say that a Christian is one who has received and is resting upon Christ alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel. In our explanations a dimension often missed is that upon which our faithful Puritan forebears insisted – the new birth (**John 3:3, 6:63**) ... that regeneration by the Holy Spirit which manifests itself in new affections for God and for the things of God (**2 Cor. 5:17**). A Christian is one upon whom God has set His saving affections; one whom God has granted new life in Christ. And with that new life have come new desires and preferences not the least of which is an affection for the Savior.

Consider the widow who lives without her dearly loved husband. Consider the young man who is separated for a time from the young lady who has absolutely captured his heart. In both cases there is an intense longing for the one who is absent. If you long for Christ's appearing you can relate to this widow and to this young man. You see, your affections are set on Christ. You love Him on account of His infinite love for you, His voluntary sacrifice of Himself for your redemption, and the inherent beauty of His perfections. You know a measure of incompleteness without Him. You know a genuine preference for the things of Christ over the things of the world. Look on to **verse 10**. Is it not instructive that Demas, the deserter, *loved this present world*? If you know nothing of this love - this longing for Christ, His Word, His people - you might want to consider whether in fact God has accomplished this gracious work of regeneration in your heart. But if you, like Paul, know this desire for and attraction to Christ, you can finish well. Finish well with the joyful assurance that God called you with an effectual calling and *caused you to be born again to a living hope (I Pet. 1:3)*.

Finishing well is to face death having lived a life of worship. **Verse 6. *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.*** Under the imagery of "the breaking up of camp or the loosing of a ship from its mooring" (Fee, p.289), Paul says that his death, his *departure*, is imminent. But he supplies another perspective on his life and impending death expressed under the image of a *drink offering* (see Phil. 2:17). "In the ancient world sacrifices, both pagan and Jewish were usually accompanied and

completed by [an offering] of wine poured out either on top of the sacrifice or at the foot of the altar to honor the deity. **2 Kings 16:12-13.** *And when the king came from Damascus, the king saw the altar; then the king approached the altar and went up to it, and burned his burnt offering and his meal offering, and poured his libation ... on the altar. Hosea 9:4.* *They will pour out [offerings] of wine to the Lord.* The libation completes any offering made to God ... “ (Hawthorne, p. 106). Paul’s entire life and work had been one grand expression of worship. You likewise worship as every word, every thought, every deed, every day is offered up as a glad and grateful response for what God had done for you in Jesus Christ. What a comfort and joy to reach the end of the course knowing that death is but the completion of the offering of your entire life made to God. Beloved, finish well, knowing that death is simply the final token of your worship.

Finishing well is to face death having lived a life of fidelity to the gospel. Let’s look now at **verse 7**. In every age there are those men and women who do a great disservice to the church by portraying the Christian life inaccurately. In making it out to be other than it is, they foster unrealistic and unbiblical expectations in the people of God. This, in turn, gives rise to discouragement and confusion. I think specifically of teaching which casts the Christian life in any light but that of a joyful, but hard struggle. Those who promote such views are generally dissatisfied with and have a disdain for slogging it out day by day in dependence upon the preserving power and mercy of God. But how does the inspired apostle portray the Christian life?

The Christian life is one of joyful struggle. ***I have fought the good fight.*** This fight is *good* because we engage in it for the glory of Christ and for the advancement of the gospel. Beloved, be encouraged if, in the power of the Holy Spirit, you are struggling to gladly accept the frowning providences which come your way; be encouraged if, by the grace of God, you are struggling to resist the sinful allurements and empty values of the world; if you are struggling to starve sinful passions and motives; to overcome slothfulness with godly self-discipline; to advance the gospel through a vibrant personal witness; to counter error by boldly affirming the truth. Be encouraged in these things. This is the way it's supposed to be for the man or woman of God.

The Christian life is one of patient endurance. ***I have finished the course. Acts 20:24,*** *"But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."* What does it mean to finish one's course? It means to come to the end of life having known and fervently pursued God's call upon your life. Beloved, listen to me. The emphasis in the Christian life is on day-by-day continuance in the way of holiness, not on some subjective idea of triumph.

The Christian life is one of loyalty. ***I have kept the faith.*** This can be understood in a couple of ways. Certainly it means that Paul kept on believing the gospel. But here it most likely means that he has kept - he has upheld - *the*

faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). In other words, Paul, in his life and ministry, preserved the sound doctrine of the gospel. He *preached the [same] word* until the executioner's axe silenced his lips forever. He did not deviate to the right or to the left from the truth that had been revealed to him. Beloved, the clear Biblical emphasis is on being faithful to and with the gospel. It's not about performance. It's not about success in the eyes of the world or of the contemporary Christian culture around you. Herein lies the comfort when life nears its end. Lord, by Your grace, I *embraced* the gospel with full conviction. In Your strength, I *defended* it with courage. In reliance upon Your Spirit, I *communicated* it deliberately to the lost and *taught* it accurately to the saints. Truly, it is well with my soul.

There is one more thing I want you to see in verse 7. In the Greek text the nouns come first in terms of word order. Listen to this literal translation of verse 7: *The good struggle I have struggled, the course I have finished, the faith I have kept.* Paul really doesn't say, *I have fought a good fight* as if to focus on his own ability or success. Beloved, it's not about you. It's not about me. In the end, the big question is not "How did I do," but "Did I give myself to the right thing."

Finishing well is to face death having lived in anticipation of eternity's greatest joy. **Verse 8. In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.** This is not to be understood as some reward for the way you have lived your life. Righteousness *is* the crown. Righteousness *is* the reward

(see **James 1:12**, *crown of life*; **1 Peter 5:4**, *crown of glory*). Let me ask you something. What would you say was the greatest hope cherished by Paul? What would you say was the greatest joy anticipated by the apostle to the Gentiles? I, for one, am convinced that the answer lies in the man's own words in **Philippians 3:9**. It was the prospect of *being found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of [his] own derived from the Law, but that [righteousness] which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith*. Rest assured, the main thing will forever be the main thing.

Beloved, take courage. Be comforted in the fact that it's not about you. Finish well knowing that life is about the Living God who struck your heart with His Word that you might love Him. It is about the Living God to whom you offered the glad response of worship for what He accomplished for you in Christ. It is about the Living God by whose strength you continued faithful to the gospel of His grace to sinners all the days of your life. It is about the Living God who, in unbounded mercy, imputed your sins to Christ and the perfect righteousness of Christ to you.

To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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Paul's reflections are designed to _____ and _____
us as we pursue the call of God upon our lives.

**Finishing well is to face death having lived a life of
genuine _____ for Christ.
*all who have loved His appearing (v.8)***

To have *loved His appearing* means you have cherished a longing for Christ over
the _____ of your life.

Psalm 73:25, *Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth.*

What is a Christian?

A Christian is one upon whom God has set His saving affections; one whom God has granted new life in Christ. And with that new life have come new desires and preferences not the least of which is an affection for the Savior.

Your affections are set on Christ.

You know a measure of _____ without Him.

You know a genuine _____ for the things of Christ over the
things of the world

**Finishing well is to face death having lived
a life of _____.**

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

Beloved, you worship as every word, every thought, every deed is offered up as a _____ and _____ response for what God had done for you in
Jesus Christ.

What a comfort and joy to reach the end of the course knowing that death is but
the _____ of the offering of your entire life made to God.

Finishing well is to face death having lived a life of _____ to the gospel.

How does the inspired apostle portray the Christian life?

**The Christian life is one of joyful _____ .
*I have fought the good fight.***

This fight is *good* because we engage in it for the _____ of Christ and for the advancement of the _____ .

Beloved, be encouraged if, in the power of the Holy Spirit, you are struggling ... to gladly _____ the frowning providences which come your way to _____ the sinful allurements and empty values of the world to starve sinful passions and motives to overcome slothfulness with godly self-discipline to _____ the gospel through a vibrant personal witness to counter error by boldly affirming the truth.

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Acts 20:24, "*But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.*"

The emphasis in the Christian life is on day-by-day _____ in the way of holiness, not on some subjective idea of triumph.

**The Christian life is one of _____ .
*I have kept the faith.***

The clear Biblical emphasis is on being _____ to and with the gospel.

**Finishing well is to face death having lived in _____ of eternity's greatest joy.
*In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.***

What would you say was the greatest joy anticipated by the apostle to the Gentiles?

Philippians 3:9

Beloved, rest assured, the main thing will _____ be the main thing.