

Aug. 11, 2019

Remain Faithful - Finish Well

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Christians are helped when they observe the lives of faithful men and follow their example to the very end.

LTS: 1 Cor. 9:16-27

Introduction:

As we near the end of the final letter of his life we find Paul reflecting on his 30 years of ministry as a servant of Jesus Christ. Ever since the Damascus road experience where he was suddenly arrested by the Christ he persecuted, Paul was absolutely devoted to serving this, his knew Master and Lord. He was never lazy or nonchalant about the work King Jesus assigned to him. Every day of his life he pushed himself in gospel ministry like an Olympic athlete relentlessly pushes himself toward the gold medal.

As he pens these final words to his young protégé, Timothy, he begins to reflect on the reality that his long race is finally over. By God's grace, he managed to stay on the track, clear every hurdle, followed the rules, and defeated his opponents. Now, as he sits on the bench, as it were, on the other side of the finish line it occurs to him that his race is finally over.

Historically speaking, we know that the other side of the finish line for him was actually a dark, cold prison cell. He knows his time is short – days, weeks, a month maybe? By the first day of Spring he will surely be in heaven enjoying his reward. Honestly, now that he has reached the end, there is nothing left for Paul to do but wait for that moment when he will receive the victor's crown. But for now, he has his pen in hand and he is talking to Timothy about these things.

He's not boasting about his career, though he certainly had good reason to. He isn't depressed. He's not licking his wounds or pleading for deliverance and rescue. No, Paul is writing a letter. His mission may be over, but he knows Timothy is soon to begin his ministry in a new and demanding way.

Young Timothy is slated to take over where the great apostle to the Gentiles leaves off. So, Paul takes a minute to scratch onto the parchment a few words about a subject he rarely spoke much of; namely, himself.

Now, before I tell you anymore, let's take a minute to look over Paul's shoulder, as it were, and see exactly what it is he is writing. If you have a bible, please stand with me and follow along as I read

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-8

Verses 5-8 offer a very short but marvelous testimony of a life that was genuinely pleasing to the Lord. Why did Paul write it? The answer is obvious, isn't it? He wanted his own testimony to inspire Timothy to live before the Lord as faithfully as Paul had. And what better way to inspire such devotion than through the testimony of one who had faithfully achieved it ahead of him.

Now, someone may ask: What specifically does this text teach that will help us remain faithful and finish well like Paul? In the text before us I see two personal disciplines that are essential to remaining faithful and finishing well.

I. Regularly Evaluate your Race:

II. Frequently Anticipate your Reward:

I. Regularly Evaluate your Race:

1. Verse six tells us what we already know. Paul is at the end of his life and he knows it. This is an important statement in the argument Paul's making. The question is: Why should Timothy "Preach the Word" in season and out of season. Why should he reprove, rebuke, and exhort? Why should he be willing to suffer for the gospel. After all, isn't that Paul's role as an apostle?

2. The word "For" (the first word of v. 6) points to the answer. "For" indicates purpose, cause, or the reason behind what Paul has been saying. Why should Timothy commit to serving at this level? Answer: "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand." The reason Timothy must be faithful in all the ways Paul has been faithful is that Timothy was about to take Paul's place.

3. Paul says, "I'm already being poured out as a drink offering."

- A. This sounds unfamiliar to us because we don't live in a culture of animal sacrifices. In Paul's day the Jewish temple service was in full swing.
 - B. Also, the pagan cults of the day had their own system of sacrifices.
 - C. And whenever a burnt sacrifice was offered, the custom was to lay the dead animal on the flames and then pour "an offering of strong drink" over the fire that would produce a sweet smell, a soothing aroma to the Lord.
4. So Paul is saying, the sacrifice has already been laid on the fire. It's for the Drink Offering to be poured over it. Paul is about to be executed by Nero.
5. He says, "The time of my departure is at hand."
- A. "My departure" comes from a term that means to loosen, or to undo (as with a rope).
 - B. Paul, like all of us, had been bound to this present world like a ship to its moorings. Death would be his release.
 - C. Albert Barnes comments that, "The true idea of death is that of loosening the bands that confine us to the present world; of setting us free, and permitting the soul to go forth, as with expanded sails, on its eternal voyage. With such a view of death, why should a Christian fear to die?"¹
6. Paul is NOT saying that he is some kind of sacrifice, but simply that there is nothing for him to do now but die. He would be sacrificed only in the sense that, as with all sacrifices, his life would be taken from him by another.
7. The apostle's life work had reached its completion. As Joshua had followed Moses, and Solomon followed David, and Elisha followed Elijah, so now Timothy must follow Paul.²
8. The time was at hand. As John R. W. Stott describes it,
Already the anchor is weighed, the ropes are slipped, and the boat is about to set sail for another shore. Now, before the great adventure of his new

¹ Albert Barnes, www.StudyLight.org 2 Tim. 4:6 (p. 5/13)

² John R. W. Stott, 113

voyage begins, he looks back over his ministry of about 30 years. He describes it – factually not boastfully – in three terse expressions.³

9. Here now, is where we find Paul’s own evaluation of his life of ministry. He says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith. These are the three summary statements.

A. First: I have fought a good fight. The word for “fight” means to agonize in a contest. Paul is using the vocabulary of an athlete. He may be thinking about the wrestling match at the Isthmian Games as a metaphor for his approach to remaining faithful to the Lord. He’s saying: When it was my time to wrestle and fight the world, the flesh, and the devil, I made every effort and did everything possible to win. Back in 1 Tim. 6:12 he commands Timothy to “Fight the good fight of faith. Here he uses the same language to describe his own approach to faithfulness. Literally, his words are, “I have agonized with a good agony.”

B. If you are going to remain faithful and finish well, there will be days when you really need to fight.

C. This is especially true when you are young, or after you have experienced tragedy or significant disappointment. In those moments if your approach to the Christian life is more like floating down the lazy river on an innertube, you’re in serious trouble. You’ll be no match for your opponent.

10. Second, he says, I have finished my race. His first analogy of how he pursued faithfulness to the Lord was a wrestling match. Here the analogy is the footrace. The word for “race” means “to run.”

11. Paul seemed to be a real sports-fan. In his letter to the church in Corinth he was clearly concerned about the possibility that they might veer off the track and disqualify themselves. So he writes (1 Cor. 9:24–27)

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not

³ Stott, 113-114

beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

12. Do you want to know how Paul remained faithful and finished well? This is the secret: He exerted an enormous amount of grace-empowered effort. He exercised self-control. He set his eye on the goal. He refused to be a slave to the impulses of his body. Does this describe your approach to the Christian life?

13. Paul was determined to finish well. In acts 20 he said to the elders of Ephesus (20:24): “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course...”

14. Apparently, Paul often thought about how he was progressing in the race set before him. Do we? Do you regularly evaluate the quality of your race?

15. Third, Paul declares, “I have kept the faith.”

A. I’m not sure I have ever thought very seriously about this statement before reading how Josh Harris abandoned the faith a couple weeks ago. Who would have dared to think that such a young Christian leader such as he could turn his back in Christ?

B. Perhaps after living as a Christian for a few decades people assume that the spiritual clay is sufficiently hardened so that the possibility of such a person abandoning his faith is non-existent. But that’s just not true.

C. Why did Paul say “I have kept the faith”? Wasn’t that a given? Paul apparently didn’t think so. He had seen a number of other Christian leaders make shipwreck of their faith. In fact, just two verses later he will declare that (10) “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.” Back in Colossians 4 Paul mentions Demas in a list of faithful brothers along with Dr. Luke. In Philemon Paul mentions Demas with John Mark, and Aristarchus whom Paul calls “my fellow workers.” What happened?

D. The answer is simple. Instead of wrestling with his impulse to love the things of the world, instead of running from it, Demas fell in love with the world and the pleasures it offers those who will embrace her.

16. It is no small thing for Paul to announce, “I have kept the faith.”

A. Psa. 119:50, This is my comfort in my affliction, That Your word has revived me. In the ESV footnotes it reads, “your word has kept me alive.”

B. Psa. 119:93, “I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have

revived me. (For by them you have kept me alive)

C. Psa. 119:107, I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have revived me. (You have kept me alive.)

17. You want to know how David remained faithful and finished well? God's word kept him alive. Do you want to know how Paul lived through all the hardships and disappointments of life and successfully finished his race? God's word kept him alive. "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

18. This is part of what it means to evaluate your "Race." God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. If we fail to walk in the light of God's word, we will veer off course and be disqualified.

19. Do you love the word of God? Do you read it for the purpose of being nourished, strengthened, and healed? Do you read it to cultivate love for God in Christ? Paul loved God's word. It was for him the source of life because it instructed him, rebuked him, encouraged him, and kept him from veering off the track of the race Christ had set him on.

20. Beloved, it is almost guaranteed that if you neglect the word of God, you will NOT remain faithful, and you will NOT finish well.

21. Paul, on the other hand, fought the good fight, he finished his race, and died with his faith and love for Christ fully intact. He was able to say I have remained faithful and true. I have rendered fidelity to my Lord/Master. To be sure, NOT even Paul did that perfectly. He too, was a flawed follower of Christ. Nevertheless, he finished well. Is it your ambition to do the same? Then I suggest you take some time periodically, to evaluate your race.

- A. Have you begun to coast a little?
- B. Has your love for Christ begun to cool?
- C. Does the word of God seem less nourishing and instructive?
- D. Has it been a long time since you shared the gospel with someone?
- E. Is prayer no longer the delight of your soul?
- F. Have you pulled back from service in the church?
- G. Perhaps it's time to evaluate your race. The finish line may be closer than you think.

So, if you want to live faithfully and finish well, evaluate your race.

II. Frequently Anticipate your Reward:

Read. 8

1. Notice, at the end of his life Paul isn't filled with doubts. He didn't say, "I wonder if there really is an afterlife? I wonder if I really be welcomed home by my Lord. No. He is emphatic and unwavering in his confidence that Lord who called Him will also deliver on his promised reward. He says, "Henceforth, there IS laid up for me..."

2. "Laid up" means "laid away" or "reserved." The word appeared not only in an athletic context but was also used of the award made to loyal subjects by ancient kings.⁴ There is No Such Thing as a PERFECT subject. But all of us can be Loyal Subjects who did the kings bidding in his world.

3. As Paul sat in that old, cold jail cell I suspect he thought with a smile: Finally, my fight is finished. My race is done. The faith (i.e. the gospel) remains intact. I've got nothing left to do but wait for my reward.

4. Paul frequently anticipated his reward.

A. Sometimes he referred to as as the Inheritance. In Gal. 3:18 he calls it the inheritance that is based on a promise of grace rather than a reward for keeping the law. In Ephesians he teaches that we already have the down-payment of that inheritance through the H.S. In fact, he says in that same passage that he wants us ALL to know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance. Also, he exhorted the brother in Colossae to work hard as unto the Lord know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance. On the other hand, he frequently warns people that their persistent sinful behavior is often a clear indicator that one will NOT receive the promised inheritance.

B. Sometimes Paul calls God's promise the PRIZE. To the Corinthians he said, "Do you not know that those who run the race all run, but only one received the PRIZE. So run is such a way that enables you to win!" He warned the church in Colossae NOT to allow anyone to defraud you of your PRIZE but turning your hearts religious things

⁴ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek N.T.*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1980), 469

that are not consistent with the gospel. And most famously, Paul said in his letter to the Philippians that, “Forgetting what lies behind and reaching for what lies ahead, I press on toward the PRIZE of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- C. Finally, Paul sometimes referred to God’s promise as a Reward. When he wrote to the Corinthians, he repeatedly reminded them of the promised reward. No doubt, he got that terminology from Jesus Himself who said to those who are persecuted for His sake, “Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great!” And the author of Hebrews speaks of the reward as basic to the Christian life. He wrote, “He who comes to God MUST believe that he is, AND that he is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek him.” I take that to mean that if you don’t believe that God reward his faithful followers that you don’t really know God!

5. Beloved, this is Paul’s secret to faithfulness. This is what kept Paul motivated to press on and finish well! God has promised us an incomparable reward in heaven for faithfulness on earth. That is NOT to say that is can be earned. No! 10,000 times, No! The God who gives us the grace to persevere is the God who gives us the grace of final reward. The Inheritance, the Prize, the Reward consist of the eternal grace and graces of God toward those who love him.

- A. To those who are persecuted for Christ’s sake, Jesus says “Rejoice, for your reward in heaven is great (Matt. 5:12).
- B. To those who suffer, there is promised an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor. 4:17)
- C. To those who love strangers, Jesus promises reward (Matt. 5:46).
- D. To those who give generously, your Father sees what you do in secret and will reward you (Matt. 6:3-4).
- E. Those who love their enemies, their reward will be great (Luke. 6:35)

6. Perhaps our lack motivation to take risks, to show radical love to strangers, to share the gospel with the lost, to give generously, and stand for what’s right, to pray earnestly and lay our lives out for the kingdom of God is due to the fact that we have lost sight of the inheritance, the reward, the prize God has promised.

7. But Paul never forgot. He was absolutely motivated by the promised reward. In fact, in 1 Cor. 15 he declared, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." But his hope was not at all in this life. It was in the promise that in the end Christ's people will be duly rewarded for their faithfulness. After all, it was Jesus Himself who said, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me to render to each man according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12).

8. What exactly is this reward? Well, it is called many things in the bible. But for Paul it is "The crown of righteousness." It is the crown for those who lived righteous lives (as God defines it), and it is the reward of final righteousness that is granted on the basis of grace and received by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus will make us finally and perfectly righteous! In the book of Revelation, it is described as "Robes of Righteousness." We will be dressed in perfect righteousness just as Jesus Christ is righteous.

9. In the end, the Lord, the Righteous Judge (as opposed to Nero, the unrighteous Judge who judge Paul worthy of death) the Righteous Judge will grant him a Crown of righteousness.

10. But here is the an even more glorious truth. That righteousness (whether seen as a crown or as a robe) will be, Paul says, not only to me, but to all who have loved his appearing.

11. Now, notice that Paul does NOT say that the crown of righteousness will also be given to those who believe, or fight the fight of faith, or run the race. No, he says it will be given to all those who Love his appearing.

12. I think John Piper is right when he explains that, "while it's true that Paul IS being rewarded for his faithfulness, he wants to remind us that the very core of our faith is wanting Jesus, desiring Jesus, craving deep fellowship with Jesus. Faith is NOT merely accepting certain facts about Jesus. It is loving Him, longing to be in his presence. Such people Love the prospect His appearing. He is Our Ultimate Reward.

Conclusion:

1. Do you want to live faithfully and finish well? Then do this:

I. Regularly Evaluate your Race:

II. Frequently Anticipate your Reward: Jesus is your reward.

Christians are helped when they observe the lives of faithful men and follow their example to the very end.