

Subject: How to Finish Well

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Paul challenged Timothy to fulfill his ministry in 4:5, in other words Timothy needs to finish well. In these verses Paul tells us how to finish life well. While it is important to start our Christian life well, it is even more important to finish well.

In Paul's first letter to Timothy he spoke of people who make shipwreck of their lives (1 Tim. 1:19). He warned about people in the latter days who would depart from the faith and embrace false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1). He wrote about some young women who turned aside to follow Satan (1 Tim. 5:15). He warned about people who are greedy and fall into sin that drowns them and destroys them (1 Tim. 6:9). He wrote of people who loved money and strayed from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:10). All these people started well, but they did not finish well.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy he reminded him of a trusted saying: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Christ. If we deny Christ, He will also deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). To finish well we must endure. He reminded Timothy to continue in the things he had learned and was assured of (2 Tim. 3:14). If we continue in the truth we will finish well. He writes about a double-minded disciple named Demas who abandoned him because he loved this world (2 Tim. 4:10). Not everyone finishes well.

Our text has been called Paul's last testimony. It is like his epitaph on a tombstone. These words were found on a tombstone:

*Remember friend, as you pass by
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so you must be.
Prepare for death and follow me.*

Someone later added this:

*To follow you, I'm not content.
Until I know which way you went.*

These were Paul's final words as he sat in a Roman prison awaiting execution. Paul looks at his life in three ways.

A PRESENT LOOK AT HIS DEATH

The word "for" (vs. 6) means "because." Paul is facing death and he charges Timothy to carry on.

- I am being poured out like a drink offering

Paul's death was so close that he described his last days as being poured out like an offering. Before his conversion Paul was a devout Jew and a Pharisee, so he was well versed in the sacrificial system. He refers to his life as a drink offering. This was the final offering that came after the burnt offering and the grain offering. Paul saw his death as the final offering in a series of sacrifices. His whole Christian life was an offering to God.

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

Philippians 2:17 *Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.*

- The time of my departure is soon

The word “departure” refers to the loosening of something. It has the double meaning of loosing (setting something free) and leaving for a destination. This was the word used to loose the moorings of a ship, to loose the ropes of a tent, to loose the chains of a prisoner, or to loose the yoke of an ox.

A LOOK BACK AT HIS LIFE

Paul reflects on the past thirty years of his ministry and describes it three ways. All three of these verbs are past tense which describes completed action with ongoing results.

- I have fought a good fight – He was a faithful soldier

In Paul’s first letter (1 Tim. 6:12), he reminded Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith.” The world fights for things that aren’t even worth fighting for, but the fight of faith is worth fighting for. **2 Timothy 2:3-4** ³ *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

- I have finished the race – He was a faithful runner

Hebrews 12:1-2 ¹ *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, ² Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The Christian life is not a sprint; it’s a marathon. There’s an interesting history to that word marathon. It comes from a pivotal battle between the Greeks and the Persians at a place called Marathon. Against the odds Greece won the victory and a Greek soldier ran all the way day and night to Athens to tell the news. As soon as he gave the report, he collapsed and died. We should all want to be like that runner.

- I have kept the faith – He was a faithful steward or guardian

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 ¹ *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.* Paul was faithful to preach and teach the truth. At the same time he guarded the Christian faith from the attacks of Satan, the Jews, the Gnostics, and the Greek philosophers.

A LOOK AHEAD AT HIS FUTURE

- The crown of righteousness

This refers to a crown given to soldiers and athletes after a great victory.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 ²⁴Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. ²⁵And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

The crown is righteousness, the very thing we can never get on our own. **Romans 3:10** As it is written, *There is none righteous, no, not one.*

In Christ we have an imputed righteousness. **2 Corinthians 5:21** For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

As believers we struggle with sin, but we are to pursue a life of practical righteousness.

Romans 6:13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

When we die and go to heaven we will have an eternal righteousness. **Galatians 5:5** For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

- The righteous Judge

2 Timothy 4:1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. See 1 Cor. 4:3-5.

Paul will soon stand before Nero, an unrighteous judge, but there is only one judge Paul is concerned about and He is the righteous Judge.

- The hope of all believers

Paul describes believers as those who love Christ's appearing. They don't just love their disappearing. Soon and very soon we are going to see the King. Paul looked forward to sharing the joy of the Lord's presence in heaven with other saints. These were people who shared his love for Christ and devotion to Him.

In the closing verses of this epistle Paul mentions several people. Some of them stood with him and encouraged him and some of them left him and even opposed him. The longer you live and the close you get to heaven, the more you appreciate faithful brothers and sisters.

Paul was able to look back and look ahead with no regrets. As he looks back over his life and ministry he is grateful. As he looks at his death approaching he is ready and has no fear. As he looks ahead to seeing Christ and being with other saints, he is eager and excited. Take a serious look at your life and make it your goal that by the grace of God you will finish well.

We don't have the same ministry as Paul had, but we do have the same Master and the same motivation. Just to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" will be worth it all.