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**“Finishing Well”**  
**2 Timothy 4:6-8**  
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**August 16, 2020**

(2 Timothy 4:6-8)

<sup>6</sup>For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.

We are drawing near to the final words of the great Apostle, perhaps the greatest Christian who has ever lived. If you remember, at the beginning of this sermon series we had said that Paul was imprisoned for a period of time, during which he wrote, what is known as the prison letters—Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Then he was likely released from this imprisonment, after which he continued in the ministry of Christ. But when we come to the pastoral letters—1 Timothy, Titus and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, Paul is in prison once again. This final imprisonment led to his beheading under the Roman emperor Nero, around the year 67AD. The three verses we read can be seen as his final testimony about his life. The remainder of chapter 4 are more like miscellaneous thoughts, that include greetings and warning and requests, but verse 6-8 can be seen as his final words. And they are weighty.

We all think about, from time to time, the circumstances that will surround our final days on earth. For me, I think about these things, whenever I go to a funeral, especially the funeral of a godly saint, who lived a beautiful life of devotion to Jesus Christ. The truth of the matter, that we all know very well, is that we do not know the circumstances of our death. We all know that all of us, without exception, will eventually die, but how we will die—whether from cancer or Corona, or in an accident, or as a victim of a violent crime, we don't know. Those things we cannot know, but there is one thing we can know, to a certain degree. We can decide and know the kind of life we live. And we can know who and what awaits us when we cross over to the other side. From these final words of the great Apostle, we too can live life now, in such a way that we would finish well. These words are not here just so we can look at Paul's life and admire him. Remember, these words are written to Timothy, his spiritual son, his close friend. They are meant to be an encouragement, an exhortation. We can say, it's Paul's final example of the words he spoke in 1 Corinthians when he said, “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.” If there is ever a time to follow the example of Christ and to follow the example of Paul and to follow the example of other great Christians, who have lived before us, it is during the months, weeks, days, and hours, before we die; before we exit this world and enter the next. So these words are for us, as much as they were for Paul, as much as they were for Timothy. Let's take a closer look.

Paul begins by saying, “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.” That's an uncommon phrase to use to describe your impending death, isn't it? What does it mean? Paul used it in one other place, in his letter to the Philippians. He wrote,

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But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. **(Philippians 2:17)**

Here too Paul uses the same phrase, “drink offering” and here too it is used to speak about his potential death. But there is a level of uncertainty in Philippians. He says, “**even if** I am being poured out like a drink offering.” He was in prison. There was the possibility that he would be executed, but also a good chance he would be released. But as he considers the possibility that he might die, he speaks about their living (the Philippians) and his dying, coming together as a beautiful sacrifice to God. The thought of Paul dying in this way makes him glad and rejoice. But in the passage in 2 Timothy, there is no “if”. He is quite certain that the end is near.

The word for ‘drink offering’ or libation comes from the Old Testament. The drink used in a drink offering was wine, and these drink offerings were part of the burnt offerings and peace offerings that are mentioned in the Old Testament. Imagine with me the imagery. The wine would have been held in some kind of flask or pitcher. And as the animal offering was smoldering on the altar, the pitcher full of wine was raised and poured out onto the altar. As the wine hit the coals, a plume of steam would rise up. The stream of wine continued to pour out. The pitcher would be tilted down more and more, until the final drops fell from the lip of the container. This is how Paul sees his life, and in particular, the final moments before his death. The pitcher has been tilted. The pouring has begun, until the last drop comes out. This image we can see in the word, “already”—“I am already being poured out...”. Then he says that the time of my departure is near. Perhaps the trial has already taken place. It’s possible that his sentence has already been issued and now he is just waiting for the jailer to call his name, so he can take his final walk to the gallows.

As well, in the imagery of a drink offering, Paul could be alluding to his own blood being poured out at his execution.

Thus, in this image, he sees his life as an offering, as a sacrifice to God and his Saviour Jesus Christ. Wasn’t it Paul who said to the Christians at Rome.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.  
**(Romans 12:1)**

In living and in dying, we are to be sacrifices presented upon the altar of God. Our lives are to be poured out for God.

Also, he says that his death is a departure. Death is not a dead end. Death is not the end of something and the beginning of nothing. Death is a departure. Again, Paul uses the word departure in Philippians 1:23. In comparing the prospects between living and dying he says,

I am torn between the two: I desire to **depart** and be with Christ, which is better by far;  
**(Philippians 1:23)**

What does departure mean for Paul and for us? It means death is not the end. It’s to be with Christ. Isn’t that wonderful? Isn’t that encouraging? Don’t you also echo Paul’s conclusion, that departure is better by far, because that means I get to be with Jesus?

There is another thing to notice in the phrase. Paul doesn't say, "I am pouring myself out." The verb is actually in the passive tense, implying that someone else is doing the pouring. Paul is merely the liquid in the container. There is someone else who is holding the pitcher. It's not the Roman court. It's not the executioner. It's not even the emperor Nero. It is God. Think about that for a moment. Does Paul believe in God's sovereignty? Does he believe that there are no accidents with God, but only divinely ordained occurrences? Does Paul believe what Jesus said that all his followers would suffer and be persecuted? Does Paul believe that much suffering is required to advance the kingdom of Christ? Yes, he believed all these things. This is how he lived his entire life. And so he believes that even his final moments are under the sovereign plan of God.

We Christians, and even more so, we Calvinists, love talking about the sovereignty of God. And we should. We should love this doctrine. We should love God because he is sovereign. But we all know that it is one thing to love a doctrine and it's another thing to live the doctrine. It's one thing to believe a truth, it's another thing to live the truth. Friends, all of us, one day will begin the journey of death. It is inevitable. It is for certain. But what kind of death will yours be? A death of regret and remorse of wasting our lives on trivial and earthly things? Or will it be a death that's like an act of worship to God, a sacrifice to God, a pouring out of a drink offering? And will we gladly accept it, when God calls us home? Or will we be filled with anger that we died not having married, or not having children, or not being able to travel, or not doing this or doing that? No, it should be none of these things. There is no greater way to die, than dying for the Lord, in the Lord's work, for the Lord's cause, for the gospel, and for his church. Each of our lives should be a beautiful drink offering to God.

What else does Paul say? Knowing that his death is at hand, he looks back at his life and says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." We can see that the first two phrases come from the world of sports and athletics. And the last phrase ties it into the sphere of Christian life.

The first phrase, "I have fought the good fight," speaks of the work and labor, the straining and training that's required of an athlete, in order to compete, finish, and win. The fight we are fighting is the good fight. It's to labor for the Lord, to build the church, to grow in faith, to share Jesus with others, to be involved in mission work, to raise a godly family, to work with integrity. That's the good fight. And to fight it will require strenuous effort on our part. It was Paul who said in the book of Acts 14:22,

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,

Can you guess when Paul first said these words? It was during the tail end of his first missionary journey, which took him through the city of Lystra and which city was Timothy from? From Lystra. This message wasn't new to Timothy. He had heard it from the day he was converted. He heard it and saw it and experienced it himself as Paul's ministry companion. Even when he was away from Paul, pastoring the church in Ephesus, he faced his fair share of hardships but still, Paul says again to Timothy, "I have fought the good fight," implying what? "You too, Timothy, fight the good fight." Which implies what for us? "You too Christian, fight the good fight."

What about the next phrase? “I have finished the race.” We assume that, don’t we? Don’t we all assume that we will finish the Christian race? Don’t we all assume that we will cross the finish line, but the reality is that many do not. We at times hear about a prominent pastor who committed a grievous sin and had to be removed from ministry. Or we might hear of a Christian leader, who from what we can ascertain, lived an exemplary Christian life, but then stumbles at the finish line. Accusations against him come out, or he says something heretical or controversial. When we hear of such things, our hearts are filled with disappointment and sorrow. Bringing this closer to home, all of us know people, that used to sit next to us in church, who left the faith and if they persist in their departure, then they will be judged, even more harshly, and God will send them to hell, but if they repent, even at the last hour, they will be forgiven and go to heaven, but it grieves us when those that we love so much abandon our beautiful Saviour.

Let’s bring it even closer to home, to our own lives. How do you know you will cross the finish line? How do you know, when you are on your death bed, that you’ll say, “I have finished the race”? It’s the doctrine of perseverance. Those God saves, he will carry to the end. Those that are called by God will persevere to the end. God will ensure it. But at the same time, only those who are truly saved, live out each day with perseverance. This means that true Christians labor in their faith. True Christians keep running the race. True Christians throw off the sin that so easily entangles. True Christians labor and run so they will cross the finish line. This is our responsibility. Let me give you a couple verses to show you this is true.

By this gospel you are saved, **if** you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. **(1 Corinthians 15:2)**

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. <sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— <sup>23</sup> **if** you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. **(Colossians 1:21)**

How about for each of us? What are you banking on, that you will finish the race? Is it the finished work of Christ on the cross for your sins? Is it in his victorious resurrection from the dead? Is it in your faith-confession, that Jesus is your Saviour and Lord? And is it also in your daily continuing in the faith; in your daily holding firm to the gospel? God will persevere us and we must persevere.

The final phrase is, “I have kept the faith.” One commentator says that this final phrase is Paul’s confession that he has kept the pledge, the oath that he has made to God. “I have kept the faith. I have kept my promise. I was loyal to Christ. I was faithful to Christ.” What does that mean? Well, it must mean that we lived our lives according to the way God intended, meaning according to God’s commands. When Paul uses the race metaphor in 2 Timothy chapter 2, he says, “Anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules.”

What are those rules? They are the revealed words of God. They are all Scripture, which is God-breathed, and useful for TRCTR, for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

For us too, when we became Christians, when Christ called us, it wasn't just, "Come and have your sins forgiven..." though it was that. It wasn't just, "Join Me in heaven..." though it was that. It was also, "Follow me!" It was, "Be my disciple." It was, "Obey my commands." It was, "Go and make disciples." It was, "Leave everything behind and serve me." It was, "Don't serve money, serve me." It was, "Join with me in suffering for the Gospel." It was, "Take up your cross daily and follow me." It was, "Die to yourself, and live for me."

Just a couple weeks ago we had baptism and confirmation, and during the ceremony we asked some weighty questions and in answering those questions we were taking a solemn pledge:

- i. Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world? **I do!**
- ii. Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Saviour, trusting in his grace and love? **I do!**
- iii. Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love to your life's end? **I will!**
- iv. Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, share in its worship and ministry through your prayers and gifts, your study and service, and so fulfill your calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? **I will!**
- v. Will you devote yourself to the church's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer? **I will!**

What a beautiful testimony it will be when we reach our final days, and we look back at this pledge, and by God's grace, we can say, "I have kept the faith." Friends, think about the words you want to say when the end of your life comes. All of us must be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Finally, what awaits those who live such a life? Let's look at verse 8.

<sup>8</sup> Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.

What is it that we are to be looking forward to when our life on this earth comes to an end? What awaits us on the other side? It's the crown of righteousness, that Jesus himself will award me. What is this crown of righteousness? This phrase is only found here, though the word 'crown' is used in several other places, especially as it relates to a reward.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a **crown** that will last forever. **(1 Corinthians 9:25)**

This verse sees the crown as a reward for our labors here on earth. It's an eternal crown, a crown that will last forever. So, it must mean eternal life, and all the other blessings that will be ours forever, in Christ Jesus.

In a couple of other places, Paul speaks of the people he has served, fellow Christians which he loves, as his crown.

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In the book of James (1:12) he speaks of the “crown of life” that is given to all who perseveres in the faith, which will be given to them by the Lord.

Peter refers to the crown as a “crown of glory” that will never fade away (1Peter 5:4), which will be given to us when the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ returns.

In Revelation 2, Jesus says to the church in Smyrna,

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.

Eternal life is the crown.

What’s amazing is that in a place where only one person deserves a crown, where only one person should be wearing a crown, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, we, his people, will be given crowns to wear. Now, whether these crowns are actual physical crowns or a metaphor of some sort, we can’t know with absolute certainty, but it is possible that it may be an actual crown and not just a symbolic crown. In John’s vision of heaven, he saw the twenty-four elders, and on their heads were golden crowns, which they eventually took off and laid them before the throne of Christ.

So, what is this crown of righteousness that awaits all of God’s faithful children? It is not a crown of merit, by which we are justified or declared righteous. It couldn’t be that because that would go against everything Paul has taught in every letter he has written. Justification is by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone. Here’s how John Calvin interprets this verse. “A man is justified freely through the grace of Christ, and yet God will render to him the reward of works; for as soon as God has received us into favor, he likewise accepts our works, so as even to deign to give them a reward, though it is not due to them.” Here’s a summary of what Calvin is saying. We are saved by grace. We are declared righteous by grace. And immediately upon becoming Christians, and only upon becoming Christians, our works of obedience, our works of service, are recorded by God, and will be rewarded by God, even though we do not deserve it.

I believe this crown of righteousness will represent both. It will celebrate that this we were saved by sovereign grace. The righteousness we have is because of the perfect righteousness of Christ, but it will also be the reward of the life of faithfulness of the person to Jesus Christ and his cause. The crown will declare, “Look at what God has done, in and through Christ, in saving this person.” and at the same time, the crown will declare, “Look at what this Christian has done, in Christ, for God.”

People of God, can there be a greater reward that brings glory to God, that magnifies the name of Christ, than this crown? So, what are we to do to ensure we receive this crown? First, trust in Christ. Receive Him by faith, receive his perfect obedience and by faith receive it into your account. And then live for Him. Live for Christ. Worship Him, love Him, serve Him, share Him, sacrifice for Him, and we too will receive the never-fading crown of righteousness.

Let’s pray.