

Good morning and thank you for joining us! Would you please turn in your bibles to 2 Tim 4? We're closing in on the finish line of this incredible book, as we see the apostle Paul's final words written to young Timothy.

I was thinking this week, the most common 3 word phrase we utter is I love you. We hopefully say that all the time-I love you. But it got me thinking, what's the 2nd most used 3 word phrase in our vocabulary?

So I rewound my interactions with my family this week and you know what I found is the 2nd most used 3 word phrase? It's the 3 words-Are you ready?

Think about how often we use those 3 words-are you ready.

SHOW PIC We say it to the small child getting ready to go down the slide-'are you ready?'

SHOW PIC We say it to the teens who are spending way more time getting ready than they should. 'C'mon-are you ready?'

SHOW PIC When we're close to embarking on an exciting new adventure-'are you ready'? **CLOSE PIC**

But there's an entirely different way to use these 3 words that should have even more force and joy attached to it. Are you ready-to meet the Lord?

We left off in our study last week in v 5, and this morning we're covering a whopping 3 verses, 6-8 as we look toward our future.

Let's start by reading v 1-8 and then we'll pray

1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at[fn] His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

The title of this morning's message is Are You Ready?
Let's pray

Paul knows his death is imminent. And it wasn't going to be death by crucifixion, because Roman citizens were not allowed to be crucified due to the brutality of the cross. Instead, a Roman citizen sentenced to death was to be beheaded, which compared to the cross was a much quicker and humane way of execution.

Now there's an old tradition that says after being beheaded, Paul's head bounced 3 times. And each place where his head bounced, they claim a spring came out of the ground **SHOW PIC**

and then they built a Chapel there. The Chapel of three springs-1 supposedly was hot, 1 was lukewarm, one was cold. Don't spend money to go there, I'm sure it's a rip off. **CLOSE PIC**

That's just free information-some money saving for ya.

But Paul is saying in these words he's ready, he's ready to go. And here's the challenge for us. Can we say that this morning? If we knew that the Lord was coming tomorrow or this week, could we say we're ready to meet God?

You know there's probably two main reasons why people might say I'm ready to go. And there's probably 2 main reasons why people would say I'm NOT ready to go.

The first reason why people would say I'm ready is sometimes they're just so worn out, so beat up and so tired, the tank is empty, they're ready to meet the Lord.

And the other reason someone might say I'm ready to go meet the Lord is because we realize what Jesus has done on the cross. We're ready to stand before a holy God because we are forgiven and cleansed through the blood of Jesus Christ.

2 good reasons to say-ok Lord, I'm ready to go.

Now there's 2 reasons people would say no, I'm not ready to go yet. The first reason is they might say, my work isn't finished yet Lord. I'm not done yet. God you can still use me, there's some things for me to do, and I want to finish.

But the other reason somebody might not say they're not ready, and this is what you don't want to do, you don't want to say I'm not ready to go because my relationship with God isn't right. You don't want to say that.

See these verses are so much more than an ancient man on his way to death. As we read these verses they should cause us to ponder, and take inventory of our lives. If we knew the Lord was coming tomorrow, or we knew He was coming Friday this week, what would change?

Are there things we want to get straightened out or cleaned up before we see Jesus face to face? Would we be making some phone calls real fast because there are some people in our lives that we need to straighten things out with, or maybe to ask forgiveness of?

Of course as we read these verses none of our heads are on the literal chopping block, and we don't know when the Jesus is returning-it could be any day. But we should take inventory of our lives as we study these verses.

Let's begin

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

Now we see in Genesis 35 and Exodus 29 that a drink offering was wine poured out on the altar as a sacrifice to God.

And this is important because this is how Paul viewed his life-as an offering, completely emptying himself, pouring himself out before God.

Paul had used the same description in **Philippians 2:17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.**

Now that word departure in v 6 is an important one. In the greek it means to be loosened. It's taking up the anchor, cutting a ship loose from its moorings.

SHOW PIC Have you ever seen a video of when a ship is christened? It's a giant celebration, because a ship never realizes its potential or its purpose until it's loosed from the dock. **CLOSE PIC**

Paul is saying here in v6, I'm not going to die, I'm going to depart. I'm ready to take up anchor. I'm ready to cut the moorings. I'm ready to be loosed, literally, he says my departure, my heading out into the open sea, my realizing what my life has really been all about-it's here.

Now in v7 Paul looks to the past and he gives us reasons why he knows that it's OK to depart. We're gonna dissect v7

7 I have fought the good fight, Pause here. This is the reason that Paul is ready. He fought the good fight.

It's heartbreaking to see the persecution of Christians around the world isn't it? You look at the hatred, you look at the prejudice. You look at this world, Christians are being decapitated in Mozambique a few days ago.

It's happening all over the world, yet so many people are more concerned with fighting to save the spotted owl or the Amazon rainforest.

Paul says you know what? I've fought the good fight, I fought the right fight.

We need to pick our battles wisely because sometimes we get sidetracked and we get into wrong fights don't we? Things we shouldn't be fighting.

But in the final analysis, Paul fought the good fight for the cause of Christ. Paul knew who his commanding officer was. Paul knew who he wanted to please, so he could confidently say, I've fought the good fight.

This reminds us the christian life is a fight. But we're not fighting other people. **Ephesians 6:12 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age,[fn] against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.**

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, Pause here.

I have finished the race, its finishing my course, and there's really no other way to live.

Finishing your course means you had something to do. It means your life had purpose.

If you can say at the end I finished, it means you were about your Father's business. You weren't living purposely without purpose. No you finished the race set before you. Of course Jesus is our example in this too.

John 19 28 After this, Jesus, knowing^[fn] that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"
29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.
30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

Jesus had come for a purpose, and He accomplished it. He had done his Father's will. He had paid the price and had purchased redemption for sinners. The work was done, so Jesus could say 'It is finished.'

Paul would say earlier in Acts chapter 20:24 "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself,^[fn] so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Look what he said the

Philippians. 1 19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For^[fn] I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

See, Paul lived his life with a loose grip on it, so when it was time to depart, he was ready.

Can we say the same? Are we ready?

Having fought the good fight doesn't mean Paul won every round. He got knocked down a few times, but he fought the good fight. He picked the right battles.

Notice too he doesn't say I won. He doesn't say I beat the rest of the competitors. That's not what he's talking about at all. He says I've finished my race, literally meaning finished my course.

Course is only used three times in the New Testament. It says in acts chapter 13 of John the Baptist that he had finished his course what God had sent him to do

Paul again in acts 20 but that I might finish my course.

Here's the third time he says I have finished my course-it's no one else's course.

Your race, your course is nobody else's but yours. He doesn't say I won. He's not bragging. This is just about finishing. You may not look like much when you cross the finish line, but that's the goal. Finishing.

Not about beating somebody else, its finishing your course.

Yet our tendency is to look at what others get to do, look at the race that others run and we get judgmental, or we get envious. That's their course, that's not my course and that's not your course.

Because each individual in this room has a race, has a course. Some may be seen by others, some may be very quiet in the background. Some may never get a pat on the back till they step into heaven and they hear from their Savior. Well done.

Everybody here has a course. There's a course for your life.

Psalm 139 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.

Paul would say to this Ephesian church in **Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

There's a course for you!

And here's the hard part. We don't know all the twists and turns on our course do we. **SHOW PIC** Sometimes our course may feel like a roller coaster with the rapid speed, twists turns and loops. **CLOSE PIC**

But we're to live our lives in such a way when our time is near, when the anchor rope is about to be cut and we're set free, we can say I finished what God has called me to do.
Let's finish verse 7

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Kept is a military word. It means I've guarded the faith. Think how Paul defended the faith against the Judaizers and the false teachers and the Gnostics and the Romans. He refused to back down.

Letter after letter, epistle after epistle. He kept the faith, he defended it, he guarded it. He did not water it down at all.

We do the same thing of keeping the faith by declaring the truth of God. The fact that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, rose again and He's coming back. Look you're

here this morning and I bet it's because the vast majority if not all of you have kept the faith.

8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, Pause here. **SHOW PIC** This refers to the crown given to the victor. It was a crown that was essentially a trophy, recognizing that you had competed according to the rules and had gained the victory. **CLOSE PIC**

8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. Here's the beauty-we're not excluded from this crown. This crown is given to everyone who loves Jesus' appearing.

Because if you're fighting the good fight and you're pushing to finish your course, you're gonna look forward to Christ's appearing, His return!

Think about what Jesus' appearance brings. We see people who lose their children to cancer or leukemia, or their spouse passes away. You see the tears in their eyes, and when Jesus returns there's going to be a reunion.

There's people who struggle with divorce, or prodigals, or lonely or broken hearts. And the day is coming when all that's going to be gone.

The day's coming. No prejudice, no bigotry, no murder. No beheading people.

How could we not love His appearing? Are you ready for the return of Christ? Because some people are so invested in this world and the things of this world that they can't really say, Jesus , I'm ready.

Until that day I see Him face to face, I want to finish what it is He's given me to do. I'm not gonna worry about everybody else, cuz I just need to focus on my course. I need to stay on course so I continue to guard the faith.

People all around us live in constant fear of death, but for the Christian it's different, because we depart. We get set free. We step into glory because we've trusted in what Christ has done on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

Brothers and sisters, what we need to do is finish the race. We may not look like much when we get across the finish line, but that's all our Lord requires of us. Be faithful, finish our course, not anybody else's, just our own.

SHOW PIC In 1968 the Summer olympics were held in Mexico City. One of the events was the marathon. There were 75 runners who started the marathon of 26.2 miles. Of the 75, only 57 actually completed the race.

SHOW PIC But one name stands out of that entire group. His name was John Stephen Akwari from Tanzania.

He had started the race, but back in Africa he trained at almost sea level and wasn't prepared for the high altitude of Mexico City. About halfway through the marathon, he started to cramp up.

CLOSE PIC

And in a crowd of runners, as he cramped up, he stumbled and a bunch of the guys hit each other and tripped. John Stephen Akwari crashed to ground, injuring his shoulder and dislocating his knee.

SHOW PIC After a few moments, despite the injuries, he stood up and hobbled to the sidelines, where they bandaged up his leg to try to help him with the pain from the dislocated knee. And he went back out on the course.

The crowd, all witnessing the drama unfold, couldn't believe their eyes. **CLOSE PIC**

An hour and 3 minutes after the guy who won the gold finished, half the crowd had left. Night had come. It was dark. The stadium was still lit up.

And here John Stephen Akwari comes. He walks a few steps, limping. Then he tried to run a little bit. He walks a few steps in just sheer agony. People are weeping. People start to stand and start to applaud as he crossed the finish line, finishing in 57th place-last by a long shot.

SHOW PIC John Stephen Akwari was interviewed shortly after the race ended, and the reporter asked him, why did you do this?

Your knee is dislocated, you're hobbling, you're in agony, why didn't you just stop.

And his response, he said. 'My country, Tanzania did not send me 5000 miles to start a race. They sent me 5000 miles to finish the race. **CLOSE PIC**

Every Christian in this room needs to finish our race.

My question to you today is if you're here, maybe a friend brought you, you've come, and you don't know Christ, how are you going to face death?

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, It doesn't say you're coming back as a cow. No without the forgiveness of Christ, you are guilty before God of your sins.

And if you just wanna speak about logic, the person I would listen to if I was you is Jesus Christ. Because Muhammad's in his tomb. Confucius is in his tomb. Sorry, Elvis is in his tomb.

There is an empty tomb in Jerusalem.

I've been to that empty tomb a few different times. **SHOW PIC**
And people from all around the world are there singing the hymns we know in every language. It's incredible, it sounds like a symphony. It's unbelievable. And they're's joy, and tears. You're looking in the eyes of somebody with African garb or Indian garb

or from Asia. You can't speak the same language, but you know each other. **CLOSE PIC**

And you just nod your head as tears fill your eyes, because you know, Jesus Christ is risen, His tomb is empty. That's the one who you want to listen to tell you about life and death, because He's the only one who's beat it.

If you're here today and you don't know Christ, listen you're not ready!

And you may be saying but you don't know what I've done, and you're probably right. **John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."**

Jesus didn't cast out Saul of Tarsus who murdered the church. Our apostle Paul here. The only reason a person will not come to Jesus Christ is because of pride.