Finish Well Pt. 1 — Delivery Transcript

2 Timothy 4:5–8 (ESV) · Wes Terry · Sunday, June 5, 2016 · *Entrusted*

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I want you to take your Bible and turn to the book of 2 Timothy. We're almost done with our series in 2 Timothy. We've got about this week and next week. And as I was studying this week, I came across something interesting that I think you'll find interesting as well. There's an unengaged, unreached people group in the Eastern Asia area. I don't know exactly where in China. It's over there, in the east side of it. And this unengaged unreached people group has this very unique custom. When an individual turns 65 in that culture they're required to do something.

Of course in our culture when you turn 65 you got to start collecting money or you at least got to sign a form saying you're not going to collect it until later. I don't know all the ins and outs, I'm not 65 yet. But in that culture, the day you turn 65, you are responsible to build your own casket, your coffin for your funeral. Men have to do this, women have to do this. And then the coffin, the casket that you built for yourself, you set it out in your front yard and every day you're reminded that your days are coming to a close.

You are about to die. Which is kind of morbid in some ways, if you think about it. I mean who wants to think about their death every day when they wake up? But there's also a pretty good deal of wisdom in that as well. Moses in Psalm chapter 90, at least it's called the song of Moses, he says to teach us, Lord, teach us to number our days. There's something about the sobriety that comes when you contemplate what if today was my last day. So let's have that thought experiment this morning.

I think it'd be fruitful for us. If today was your last day, You had to give an account for your life. You had to make amends. What amends would you make? If you had to have a phone conversation, who would you call? If you had to let something go, what would it be? If you had to stand and give an account to the Lord, would you be ready? What if today was the last

day of your life? Would you finish well? And the reason I'm bringing this up is because the text that we're in this morning is the apostle Paul basically giving his last words.

The whole book of 2 Timothy is Paul giving his last words to Timothy. But now that we're at the end, he gives us a glimpse, a window into a guy who lived his life without any regrets and who is finishing his life with courage and boldness and he's finishing the Christian life well. And so I think there's something we can learn from it and we can benefit from asking ourselves would we be ready to finish well in the same way that the apostle Paul is. So 2 Timothy chapter 4, we're going to start in verse 5 and we don't normally do this, but I just want us to read the whole text.

We're not going to read all the way to chapter 4 verse 22. We're just going to read till verse 8,[1] and then we'll think about it for just a minute. So chapter 4, verse 5. This is Paul speaking to his young protege, Timothy. You remember Paul's in jail. He's about to be beheaded by Nero, who is the crazy emperor of Rome, and Timothy was a pastor at a church there in Ephesus. A difficult church, lots of troubles and bad things going on. So he tells Timothy, "As for you"— Timothy— "always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

For I"— Paul— "am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth 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." So Paul starts out telling Timothy this really powerful charge to finish well. And if I was going to summarize it, I think I put it in your notes.

Timothy, you get a look into your present situation without fear of what's going to happen next. Can't be dominated by the would-bes and the could-bes and the shoulds and the would-haves. You got to assess what's going on currently, what needs to be done, Timothy, and just do what you've got to do. And then just a moment, Paul's going to point to himself and say this is what it looks like. But before he does that, he just gives Timothy some hard words. He tells him to be sober-minded, which— yeah, the way I like to paraphrase that, even if the world gets real crazy, Timothy, you don't get crazy.

If the world starts falling apart, you don't fall apart. You have the Holy Spirit living inside of you, which means if everything else starts to crumble, you can still be put together. One of the qualifications for a pastor in the book of 1 Timothy, in his first letter to Timothy, is this idea of being sober-minded, that you don't fall apart at the first sign of trouble, that you keep it together. You have this moral alertness that you're not swept away by different passions and different kinds of sins and getting sucked into, you know, binge-watching Netflix— or not, that's the wrong thing, but that kind of idea— getting sucked into something.

Timothy, you have a greater responsibility. You need to stay alert, be sober-minded, endure suffering. This has been a theme throughout 2 Timothy. You see suffering all throughout the book. He told him in 2 Timothy 2, verse 1, to be strong in grace. So be filled with the Holy Spirit. Have that intimacy with the Lord. But right after that he says, share in suffering like a good soldier. Don't get distracted. Don't get swept away. Stay loyal to your commanding officer, the Lord. So be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, which is Paul's way of saying, remember why you're in this thing.

The platform that you've been given, the influence that you have has been given to you so that you can further the kingdom of God, so that you can leverage your influence to preach the gospel to anybody who will listen. A couple of weeks ago we saw him say, preach the word in season and out of season, whether it's convenient or inconvenient, whether people like to hear it or don't like to hear it. Utilize your platform and your influence to share with people the good news that there's salvation in Christ Jesus.

So do that. Do the work of an evangelist. And he calls it work because it is work. I don't know if you've ever tried sharing the gospel with anybody. It's sometimes a laborious task. And part of the role of a pastor, I believe, according to this text, is not only are pastors supposed to do evangelism, but they have a responsibility to equip the people in their church to do evangelism. So one of my jobs is to empower you so that you feel pretty confident in sharing the gospel with somebody, sharing not just your personal testimony, but how do you become a Christian?

That's one of the reasons in our Broadview app, we have a whole section in there. If you go to Next Steps, one of the next steps is called Multiply Your Life, and we put all kinds of different tools in there to help you share your faith. Because I believe that's one of my responsibilities as your pastor. For him to do the work of an evangelist, part of that includes empowering your people to do evangelism. One of the things that we're going to do this Wednesday, I was going to share this during the announcements period, but it ties right into the text.

We're going to go out and go door to door and invite people to VBS, which is coming up in a couple of weeks. And it's just entering into a conversation. It's not kind of the weird used-car-salesman awkward conversations, just going and meeting people saying, hey, we're from Broadview Baptist Church. We're having a VBS in a couple of weeks. We'd love for you to come out, anything we can pray for you about, just having a spiritual conversation that may lead to giving an opportunity to share the hope that is in Christ Jesus.

That's why we're left on this planet. There's one reason that when you became a Christian, God didn't just suck you up to heaven, is because the one thing people can't do in heaven is evangelize the unreached, to share with people the hope that is in Christ. So he's telling Timothy the reason that you're suffering, the reason you need to endure. The reason you

need to stay sober-minded is because there are millions and billions of people who will die separated from God, and your job is to do the work of an evangelist.

And then he concludes a little summary statement, fulfill your ministry, which is just Paul's way of saying, do what needs to be done. It includes everything he's talked about in 2 Timothy, but he's narrowing in on that idea of preaching the word of truth in a truthless culture, even though the culture probably doesn't love it, even though they probably don't love you. Be diligent to finish out what you've started, to finish the race that the Lord has set before you, the course that he's given you. Finish strong, finish well. And so before we get to Paul's example, I wonder if there's some of us who probably just need to hear this word.

Timothy's a preacher, he's a minister. Not all of you, you know, you're not ministers and stuff like that, but you don't need to think of it just in terms of ministry. Living the Christian life includes these kinds of difficulties that Timothy's facing. Some of us may need to be reminded, some of you who are moms, maybe single moms. And you've got this incredible responsibility that you feel you've been given by the Lord and you feel under resourced and overwhelmed, and you just need to be reminded to stay sober-minded, endure suffering.

Do the work of an evangelist, your primary calling as their mother is to raise them to love the Lord and to know him. And to fulfill your ministry. Your ministry isn't just church world. Ministry is not just in the walls of this church. Your ministry is anything that God has given you in your sphere of influence to expand his kingdom and to glorify him with your life. So it could be that could be a stay-at-home mom, it could be a single mom, it may be something in the workplace. It could be something in the walls of this church, a volunteer opportunity, something maybe you're a small group leader or you're volunteering in VBS and you're feeling overwhelmed and all of that.

Just to be reminded, part of finishing strong is having the wherewithal, kind of the intestinal fortitude, as one of my coaches used to tell me, to do what needs to be done. To look into the present without fear, without this shame, without this overwhelming sense of I can't, to put aside the excuses and do what needs to be done because God's with you. He's put his Spirit inside of you. You're smart, you're called. He wouldn't have given you what he's given you if he didn't think he could achieve it through you.

So just do what needs to be done. God's grace is sufficient. Don't give up. Finish strong. So that's what he tells Timothy, and then he points to himself, and here's really where we get to our text this morning. In chapter 4, verse 6, he says, as for me, you know, I'm telling you to finish strong. As for me, I'm already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. So I'm telling you, Timothy, to look into your present without fear of what's next. And here's what it looks like in my world.

I'm already being poured out like a drink offering. He's talking about his death. He's talking about his being poured out, it's present tense, which means it's an ongoing process. His death wasn't just a wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am. It was one of those drawn out, torturous processes where he knew he was going to die, but they were stretching it out and kind of playing mental mind games with him. But for Paul, he would say, you know, it's really not upsetting me. Because I view my death as a drink offering. And it was an act of worship before the Lord.

My living, my dying, everything about my life. I've surrendered it to the Lord. And then he also thinks about his death in terms of a departure. So you think about those two things for just a minute, how does thinking about your death as a drink offering and a departure, how does that empower you to face your present circumstances without fear? Well if you think about your death as a drink offering, which you probably don't, because you're not Jewish and you weren't raised with the Old Testament sacrificial system, right? Anyone raised with that?

Okay, didn't think so. So here's what that was. In the Old Testament, when they would sacrifice a lamb or any kind of animal before the Lord, they would pour wine at the base of the altar, which was like this added emphasis of thanksgiving. Knowing that the reason they even sacrificed animals is because the wages of sin is death. They knew it wasn't that they enjoyed killing animals, they didn't. It was because they knew that their wrongdoings against the Lord had separated them from God and an atonement had to be made.

And as a result, as extra thanksgiving, they would pour out drink offerings. Something they prized very valuably was wine. So pouring that out was an extra way of saying, we are thankful to you, Lord, for forgiving us and sparing us the consequences of our sin. So it's an act of worship is basically what Paul is saying. He viewed his death as an act of worship, which is pretty awe-inspiring. Not in the same ways that— not an infidel— like a suicide bomber views his death as an act of worship, because Christians were not geared with, you know, bombs on their vests trying to take out other people.

For Paul, his death was an opportunity to share the love of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ. For him even in the face of the worst thing that life has to offer, even in the face of torture, even in the face of being beheaded, I will view this as an opportunity to show Nero and to show these Roman guards and to show everyone who's watching that Christ is more of a treasure to me than anything else that this world has to offer. He saw it as an act of worship. He said in Romans chapter 12, verse 1, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

So your living is worship, your tone of voice with your spouse is worship. Your approach to handling difficult people is an act of worship. What you do with your talents and abilities

obviously is an act of worship. But worship is not simply what you sing with your lips on the screen in the Sunday morning worship experience. Worship more fundamentally is about everything that you do with your life and how you even approach your death. He saw it as a drink offering. And the reason he could see it as an act of worship is because he also saw it as a departure and that word departure is used two different ways in Greek literature.

The one way is with Roman soldiers, when they would pull up their stakes from their tent, then they would depart, meaning they were going to a different encampment. But the more common usage, the way he's using it here, is talking about how boats would depart from the dock, go out into the sea. So when Paul thought about his death, the Christian, when they think about their death, they don't think of death as a final destination, okay? It's not that, you know, you die and you're done. Death is a departure. It's a transition.

It's moving on to something better. As my mentor once— when I was, you know, first getting started, I would go to these funerals with Pastor David, and I would write down all of his illustrations, because I figured one of these days Pastor David will be gone and I can use these and no one will remember he used them. And one of my favorite illustrations of Pastor David at funerals is talking about this word, a departure. And he talks about how he was on the coast of South Africa. What's that sea there?

I should know that. Good grief. Preachers are so dumb. What's this? The Pacific Sea? Atlantic? Pacific? I'll go with Pacific.[2] A ship departs from the port of South Africa and as you watch it gets a little smaller and a little smaller and a little smaller and a little smaller. Sooner or later you can't see the boat anymore. But the boat doesn't cease to exist. It's still there. It's just departed. And as the one person on the shore of South Africa says, there she goes. Another person on the other side of the world, South Korea, since I probably can't get into North Korea— actually, that's too far north.

Let's say on this side of the world, and they're saying— I'm butchering this illustration. They're saying, here she comes. Okay, so what is death? Death is a departure. It's not a cessation of existence. It's just a transition. For Paul, he said to live is Christ and to die is gain. So kill me. I don't see my death as something I'm afraid of. I don't have to be afraid of what's next. That's why I can look fear in the face and you kick it in the stomach because I don't have to be afraid of anything.

Not living, not dying, every moment of my life is an act of worship. Even my death, you can't take away my joy because I see it as a transition from this life to a better life. Because to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's a departure. And when you believe that about your own life, when you believe that about the life of the ones who are in Christ, that they're not gone, that they're not lost, that they're with the Lord, that death is a departure, then it enables you to live in the present without fear.

You're not afraid of your death. You may be afraid of dying, but even that, you can see it as an act of worship, a way to glorify the Lord, even in pain and suffering. But also as a departure. So Paul says, I'm not afraid of Nero. I'm not afraid of what's coming. This is an opportunity for me to declare the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as my treasure over anything that this world has to offer. So look into your present without fear of what's next. Could you say that? Do you think about your own death?

Is it something that you fear? Is it something you're afraid of because you don't see departing as something more precious to you than remaining here? Where is your heart really? Is it here in the pleasures of this world or is it the treasure that you have in Christ, in your true heavenly home? So he looks fear in the face. He looks into his present without fear of what's next. And then secondly, he looks into his past without shame or regret. So look at chapter 4, verses 7 and 8. Chapter 4, verse 7, he says, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

So as Paul looks back at his life, he looks back in triumph. Wouldn't you love to be able to say what Paul says here? He was not controlled by shame and regret. I know a lot of people, even myself, I struggle with this, of having things in your past that you're ashamed of, demons that haunt you and they prevent you from living your current life like you should be living it. The joy, the freedom, the confidence that you should have, you don't have because your past has left you with some chains that you've not gotten rid of.

How many of you have ever said I know God forgives me, but I just can't seem to forgive myself. How many of you have been there? I've heard a lot of people say that. If you think about that, if you just really put that in terms of a gospel-centered vision of reality. That really cheapens the death of Christ on the cross, doesn't it? Jesus Christ dies on the cross, paying the penalty for sin, all sin, future sin, past sin, present sin. So that sin for which you cannot forgive yourself, Jesus Christ has forgiven you of that sin.

And so when you say to Jesus Christ, essentially, I know that you think your death was good enough for you to forgive me, but I don't think that your death was sufficient for me to forgive me. You're really cheapening the death of Christ on the cross. You're not letting the gospel really take root in your heart. And as a result, you're controlled by shame and regret and you're walking with it. It's a disbelief. It's a failure to believe fully in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for your sin.

And so here's what Paul's saying. Paul did not say I fought the good fight, I finished the race, I've kept the faith because he never sinned, he never made any mistakes. You think about Paul's life, he was a terrorist before he became a Christian. He was bent on wiping Christianity off the face of the earth. He did some very bad things. And even after his conversion, he becomes a Christian, he says things like, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." So Paul lived with sin.

He had an old nature. He battled it. There were things that he was not proud of. But in the same breath, he's able to say, if I look back at my life, one of the reasons I can say with confidence I fought the good fight, I finished the race, I've kept the faith, is because I'm not letting that shame and regret control the way I think about who I am in Christ. My identity is not fundamentally shaped by my activity. My activity is fundamentally shaped by my identity. Who I am in Christ controls how I think about my past, my present, and my future.

The gospel shadows the past, the present, and the future. And some of us need to hear that word this morning. For some of us, our past is dictating our present and our future because of a disbelief in the sufficiency of the death of Christ for our sin. So you want to keep the faith, you need to live in the gospel. You want to keep trusting the promises of Jesus Christ for your present and your future. Then you've got to live in the gospel and believe it to the degree that you're even willing to forgive yourself for those things that you think can't be forgiven.

And that's the one half. The other half of what Paul is saying here is I really believe Paul lived his life in such a way. He didn't waste it. Okay, he tried to take advantage of every opportunity that he was given to further the kingdom of God and do what God had called him to do. So the Lord sets a race before him, okay? He sees this course. Paul's course is different than my course, different than your course, everybody's course is different. A course is a course, of course. The important thing is that you take what you've been given and make the most of every opportunity that you have.

And I really believe Paul believed that, that he finished the race well, that he fought the good fight, that he took advantage of every opportunity. And so the other side of this is for you and I to— so don't, you know, don't be lazy, don't wake up and just twiddle your thumbs and wonder what's next, but to be proactive, to take a little bit of intentionality to your life and how you're living, so that when you do get to the end of your days, you are able to look back at it with triumph and say I fought a fight.

I finished the race. I did what God called me to do. I don't feel like I've wasted it. And to keep the faith— you think about, what is keeping the faith? When he says I fought the good fight and I finished the race, those two things, those two images of fighting and racing, those are the same thing as keeping the faith, in my opinion. What is keeping the faith? Well, faith is not faith in content. He's not talking about I kept the faith in terms of I didn't become a heretic.

When you have faith in somebody, you're trusting in their word. You trust that they'll do what they said they're going to do. And the reason I believe Paul's talking about faith in a person is because when he tells Timothy just a few verses earlier that you've been acquainted with the scriptures since childhood, which are able to make you wise for salvation in Christ Jesus. All throughout 2 Timothy, faith has been about faith in a person, not faith in stuff, not

faith in content. But faith in a person. And if you have faith in a person, it means trusting in their word.

If I have faith in Audra, for example, then when Audra says she's going to do something, and if I have faith in her, then I believe that she's going to do what she said she's going to do. If you have faith in your preacher, your preacher's going to do what he said he's going to do, so on and so forth. So when you have faith in Christ, fundamentally faith in Christ is not just believing that Jesus has forgiven me of my sin and I'll go to heaven when I die, but it's more than that.

It's believing that because it's in the Word. It's having hope in the resurrection because hope of a resurrection is in the word. It's believing that God's grace is sufficient for every situation, but believing that because that promise is in the word. And so faith fundamentally is taking Christ at his word, confidence in his promises, hope in his resurrection, the sufficiency of his grace, all of it because you have found them in his word. That's why the big emphasis on the word of God in 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, and 2 Timothy 4, verses 1 to 5, how he's talking about the Word of God.

And the sufficiency of it and the inspiration of it and the truthfulness of it and the practicality of it. One of the reasons he's emphasizing that is because when it comes to persevering in your faith in Jesus Christ the person, that comes about by trusting the promises of Jesus Christ as revealed in the word. And there's a lot of us we struggle right there. We believe— you know, hell insurance. I believe if I trust in Jesus, then I'll go to heaven when I die. But when it comes to trusting in the promises of Jesus Christ when it comes to our finances on Monday or when it comes to this relationship on Wednesday.

Or when it comes to this difficulty in the workplace on Thursday, the everyday promises of Jesus Christ we struggle with a little bit harder than the eternal promise of eternal life. For some of us, we don't even want to know what are the promises of God for my everyday life. We don't have this hunger to get into the Word and to see it and to learn it and to take it in and to apply it to our life because there's this disconnect between faith as a concept that I believe intellectually and faith in a person who I know intimately who reveals himself to me through the word of God.

And so Paul's telling Timothy this: keep the faith, faith in a person, faith in Jesus Christ. That includes believing you go to heaven when you die and hope of the resurrection and forgiveness of sin and all of that, but it also includes how you're going to respond to your suffering tomorrow morning. It also includes how you're going to spend your money and raise your kids. Trust in the everyday promises of God for your everyday challenges and your everyday life. And how do you know you're doing that? Well, he gives you a couple of warnings.

Number one. If you're going to live that kind of life, you're going to keep the faith, then it's going to be hard. That's why he uses the analogies of a race and a fight. Boxers who box get hit and it's hard. They train their bodies to the point of extremities. It's difficult to be a marathon runner. So they say. I wouldn't know. I've never tried to run further than a mile. But I hear it's challenging. It's hard work. The Christian life isn't lollipops and daisies, it's not a bed of roses, it's not easy.

Some have said the Christian life is war. You want to keep joy in your life, you're going to have to fight for your joy. You want to live a victorious Christian life? Keeping the faith in Christ is not just easy. But then again, Jesus says that come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for my burden is easy and my yoke is light.[3] So how can the Christian life be easy and not easy? Well, it's because we have some enemies.

There's nothing easier than faith, right? Just trusting, yielding control, putting faith in Christ. That's the easiest thing you can do, but it's also the hardest thing you can do because of your old nature and your pride and just this idea that God doesn't know better than I do. This won't work as well as my way. So the Christian life is hard. Endurance matters. You got to finish the race. And the reason it's difficult is because we have these enemies. We have our own proud sin nature and we have our great enemy, the devil.

And our own proud sin nature and the devil use the world, neutral forces, neutral things like money. Money's not evil, but the devil can use money to twist our heart to cause us to trust in money more than the Lord. People are not evil necessarily. They're pretty much neutral, but relationships that are neutral, the devil can use those relationships to twist our heart so that we begin to trust in people more than the Lord. Houses are not bad, they're not evil, but sometimes the devil can use houses or our own proud sin nature can use houses for twisting them to cause us to trust more in our security in our home more than we trust the Lord.

We have enemies. And if you live your Christian life unaware of the fact that there is a war at all times going on for your soul that you've got to fight for your joy, that you can't just coast, because if you're just going to coast, you're probably going to lose. If you live with this idea that endurance doesn't matter, that I can just kind of say a prayer when I'm six and I'll be fine for the rest of my days. You're deluding yourself. You're not going to finish strong. Finishing strong includes this awareness that it's a fight.

It's a race. Endurance matters. I have enemies, my own sin nature, and the great enemy who comes to kill, steal, and destroy that I need to battle against on a regular basis. You got to fight the fight. You've got to run the race. You got to keep the faith. Keep trusting the everyday promises of Christ. So look into the present without fear of what's next. Look back to the past without shame or regret, and then lastly look forward to the future with hope of a reward. Look what he says in chapter 4, verse 8.

He says, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness." I think it's interesting he chooses the crown of righteousness. He doesn't choose some other crown. Basically Paul's saying, you know what I'm looking forward to when I go to heaven being saved. But Paul, aren't you already saved? Well, yes, I was saved. I'm being saved. But what I'm looking forward to more than anything else is being saved. I'm looking forward more than anything else to the day when this old flesh and this old world that creates so much suffering and difficulties and temptations in my life, I'm looking forward to the day when all that is gone.

It's over. I'm looking for the day when I don't just not sin because I choose not to sin. I'm looking forward to the day when I'm not able to sin. When it's not even a possibility. I'm looking forward to the crown of righteousness that'll be awarded to me by the judge, the righteous judge talking about Jesus Christ. And he'll award it to me on that day, talking about the day of judgment, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. Which means Paul didn't get his crown just because he was Paul, you know, such a wonderful church planter.

That crown is available to any believer in Christ. Anyone who has as the object of their hope the person of Jesus Christ. The quality of your faith is not nearly as important as the object of your faith. Some of you may be struggling, I don't feel like I have enough faith. I don't feel like, you know, I'm really stretching my faith very much. Don't emphasize the quality of your faith as much as the object of your faith. If the object of your faith is the person and work of Jesus Christ, then that's what truly matters.

And one of the surest ways to know that your faith is real, that it's genuine, that you're truly a believer, is this confidence and this hope in the return of Jesus, this idea that someday that this brokenness that I have to deal with on a regular basis will finally be undone, that these wrongs, that these injustices that I see done by me, around me, around the world, these incredible injustices that someday Jesus will come and righteousness will reign and what's sad will become untrue and what's unjust will be made right.

That kind of confidence in the second coming of Christ is a sure way to know whether or not you're a real believer. All those who yearn for his appearing, so you look forward and in hope. And again, it's not the quality of Paul's hope that made his reward possible. It wasn't the quality of his faith. It was the object of his faith, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so look into the present without fear of what's next. Look back to the past without shame or regret. And look forward to the future with hope of a reward.

And if you are going to do that successfully, you can't just look in and back and forward. You've got to look up. Think about Paul. Why was Paul able to be fearless in the face of death and guilt-free, shame-free in the face of incredible sin in his life. And why was he able to look forward in hope of a confident future? All of that was because he really, truly let the gospel

take root in his heart. For Paul, the gospel was not the ABCs of Christianity. For Paul, the gospel was the A to Z of Christianity.

It was everything. He saw all of his life, his past, his present, and his future through the lens of "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." He looked at his future in terms of I was a sinner separated from God, but God in his love sent his one and only Son to live the life I couldn't live, a sinless perfect life, and to die the death that I should have died, a death of a sinner separated from God. And by faith, when I put my faith in Jesus Christ, his perfect life is given to me, and my sinful life is given to him, that there is this great exchange.

And when that truth, that gospel truth, takes root in your heart, it changes everything. It changes the way you look at your present, changes the way you look at your past, changes the way you look at your future. So you want to finish well, then you've got to look up. You need to have your eyes fixated on the cross. Just like that song we sang right before I came up, Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. When you really believe that the death of Christ was sufficient for you, then you know I don't have to fear death.

When you know that the death of Christ was sufficient for your past sins, and you know I don't have to be controlled by what I used to do, I don't have to be a slave to my mistakes. And when you really believe that the death of Christ was sufficient for you, then when you go to heaven and you stand before the Lord, you're confident, not because you lived a perfect, sinless life, but because Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life for you and you stand clothed in His righteousness so that when God looks at you, He doesn't see you.

He sees his one and only Son, whom he loves. So let the gospel take root in your heart. And the deeper it takes root, to the degree that it takes root in your heart, is the degree to which you will be able to look into your present without fear into your past without shame and into your future with great hope. And there's some of us here this morning that I really want to challenge you to not just let that go in one ear and out the other ear, but to really ask yourself if today was the last day of my life.

And I did have to give an account. What am I feeling here? Is the gospel shaping how I think about that day? Is the gospel really taking root in my life, or is it something I just believe because that's what Christians believe? Has it really gripped me to the degree that it has changed my perspective about my present, my past, and my future? Some of you are here this morning and you're not Christians, and you come by it honestly. You've got intellectual problems with Christianity, lot of problems, intellectual, but just put the intellectual problems aside.

Let's just talk morality for just a minute. If God did exist and he was a perfect God and you did have to stand before him someday, then what do you do with your guilt? What do you do

with your shame? How do you have atonement for your sin? And why not trust in Christ? I got intellectual problems, I know. Just take them with you. Take them with you into the faith, and instead of having a no-faith looking for understanding, then let it be faith seeking understanding. And a lot of times, if you'll just cross the barrier of faith, a lot of your questions that you had will be answered pretty quickly along the way.

Others of you are believers, but you've been living your Christian life as if your righteousness depended on your living. You've been living as if your identity was based on your activity instead of letting your activity be based in your identity in Christ. And this morning I just want to invite you to remind yourself why does God love me? Why am I precious in his sight? Not because of any good that I've done, but because of what Christ has done for me. And just renew a heart of worship and love for the Lord in light of his great love for you.

I'm going to

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "till chapter 8"; the reading stops at 2 Timothy 4:8 (verse 8; 2 Timothy has four chapters). Source: 2 Timothy 4:5–8 (ESV). ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "Pacific"; South Africa's coasts lie on the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, not the Pacific. Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, "South Africa." ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "my burden is easy and my yoke is light"; the verse reads "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Source: Matthew 11:30 (ESV). ↩