

MBC – 4/25/2021 Pastor Doug Thompson preaching
 2 TIMOTHY – THE LAST WORDS OF PAUL
“Living Well, Dying Well”
 2 Timothy 4:6-8

So where was I? . . .

- 2 Timothy 4:1–8 ¹I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (And then Paul gives Timothy another incentive for remaining faithful to preach the Word. These are some of the most beautiful words in our Bibles): ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Henceforth 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.

Intro: The way you face death has everything to do with the way you live life.

2 Timothy is the last words of Paul before his execution by Nero, somewhere between 64 and 66 A.D. He was in the Mamertine prison in Rome, literally a hole in the ground, and his last known correspondence was this letter to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy. Everything in this letter builds up to what he says in vv.6-8: This is how he saw his life and how he saw his imminent death—

- ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Henceforth 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.

I thought a lot about these words during my time in the hospital: I wondered if “the time of my own departure had come,” and could I say what Paul said about my life – and the way I saw my death? I thought a lot about that. I want all of you to think about it too this morning.

These 3 verses really are Paul’s own epitaph: it’s what he would put on his tombstone to sum up his life.

When Janice and I were in Scotland, we wandered through some cemeteries that were hundreds of years old reading the inscriptions on the tombstones. Fascinating stuff. Back in my home state of Indiana, there is tombstone in a cemetery with this epitaph—

“Pause, stranger, when you pass me by: As you are now, so once was I.
 As I am now, so you will be. So prepare for death and follow me.”

A few years ago, someone left this note on the tombstone:

“To follow you I’m not content – until I know which way you went!”

I've already decided what my inscription will say: "I told you I was sick!"

But to quote the old commercial: "What do you want on your tombstone?" Wouldn't you like to be able to say what Paul said here? It's because Paul lived well, that he could die well. And it's because he constantly had death and the next life on his mind, that he lived the way he did. **The way you will face death has everything to do with the way you live your life. And the way you live your life has everything to do with the way you see death.**

- Years ago I was at a Pastor's conference and one of the speakers said that his goal as a shepherd was to teach his flock, "*Principles for successful living*," and I thought, "Better to teach them principles for successful *dying*." My job as a shepherd is to prepare you for the *next* life. This life is a vapor, but the next life is *forever*. And Scripture teaches that we can actually live during this brief time on earth, in these bodies, in such a way as to exponentially *increase* our joys in the next life. If that's the way you see death, won't it change the way you will live your life?

John Newton, wrote Amazing Grace, but was also a faithful pastor. He tells a story of visiting a young woman who was about to die from tuberculosis – what they called in those days, "*consumption*." She was a simple, uneducated girl. She could read her Bible, but had read little else. Newton supposed she never traveled more than twelve miles from home. A few days before her death, Newton prayed with her and "thanked the Lord that He gave her now to see that she had not followed cunningly-devised fables." At this last remark the woman repeated Newton's words and said, "No, not cunningly-devised fables; these are realities indeed." Then she fixed her eyes steadfastly upon her pastor and reminded him of his weighty vocation:

- "Sir, you are highly favoured in being called to preach the gospel. I have often heard you with pleasure; but give me leave to tell you, that I now see all you have said, or can say, is comparatively but little. Nor, till you come into my situation, and have death and eternity in full view, will it be possible for you to conceive the vast weight and importance of the truths you declare. Oh! Sir, it is a serious thing to die; no words can express what is needful to support the soul in the solemnity of a dying hour."

Why does Timothy need to preach the Word, in season, and out of season? This is why. And beloved, it's the reason I so desired to get back in this pulpit and declare this Word to you this morning. I want you to be ready to die. Because when you're ready to die, you're ready to live.

Three things made Paul ready—

I. Present – Paul's view of death.

- 2 Timothy 4:6 ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

Paul uses 2 metaphors to describe his death. The first is the language of temple sacrifice—

1.) A drink offering.

In the OT, sometimes when an animal was offered up as a burnt offering for sin, wine would be poured out at the base of the altar. You didn't drink it, you poured it out as an expression of joy over the forgiveness of your sins.

So Paul thinks of that red wine splashing down the altar, and it reminds him of his own blood that was about to be shed. The last 30+ years of his life had been a thanksgiving sacrifice of worship to Christ for saving him, and his death would just be the culmination of that sacrifice. He used the same metaphor about 5 years earlier when he was under house arrest in Rome—

- Philippians 2:17 ¹⁷Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

You notice he says “*if*,” but by the time he writes 2 Timothy, it's just a matter of *when*. And he's not complaining! He's rejoicing. His whole life had been a sacrifice of worship to God. Paul was speaking about himself when he wrote—

- Romans 12:1 ¹I 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.

That was Paul: It was never about him, it was always about Christ. He never viewed his life as his own, but he was a man who had been raised from the dead for *one* purpose, and that was to serve Christ. So whatever he possessed, his intellect, his time, health, everything, including his own life – was a temporary stewardship entrusted to him by God for the sake of the Gospel. I love the way he put it in—

- Philippians 1:20–25 ²⁰. . . it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always *Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death*. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means *fruitful labor* for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.

We usually focus on the “dying is gain” part, but Paul also said, “If I live, it's all service to Christ,” his life and his death were all offered up as a sacrifice of worship to God—

- Romans 14:8 ⁸For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

If that's the way you see your death, then that's the way you will see your life. An old Scottish saying goes: “*Would ye die well? then, through Christ, live well. The right way to die well is to live well.*”

In just a few days or weeks, his blood would be poured like the red wine of the drink offering, as a final joyful sacrifice to God. What a great way to leave this world.

But then Paul uses another metaphor to describe his death—

2.) A departing ship.

- 2 Timothy 4:6 ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my *departure* has come.

The Gk. word for *departure* was used of a ship lifting its anchor, tossing off the ropes and setting out to sea – isn't that a beautiful way to think about the death of a Christian? It's not the end of a life, it's the continuation of life in another, far better place! What does Scripture say about death for the Christian?

- 2 Pet.1:14, Peter said that Jesus had shown him that the "putting off of his body" was near. For the Christian, death is just a temporary separation of body and soul, but we live on.
- 1Cor 15:18 says that when Christians die they "*fall asleep in the Lord.*"

And then they awaken in the arms of Jesus They are never separated from Him for a moment.

- Revelation 14:13 ¹³And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die *in the Lord* from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may *rest* from their labors." Death for the believer means rest – Hallelujah!

So *this* is where we get that saying: "You can rest when you're dead . . .!"

- 2 Corinthians 5:8 . . . to be away from the body (absent from the body at death) and *at home with the Lord*. Think about that: "At home, with the Lord, Jesus" And *forever* separated from all sin, evil, conflict, pain and suffering - doubt and discouragement – forever. That is what death means for the Christian.

And Jesus said something in a story He told that I believe describes how we get to the other side—

- Luke 16:22 ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried,

When unbelievers die, their body is just put into the ground, and their soul immediately goes to a place of torment. But when a child of God dies, they leave their body here also, but I believe angels come and carry them to the other side – to be home with the Lord forever. In His presence – and—

- Psalm 16:11 . . . in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Now think again about that ship getting ready to sail – the destination is glorious beyond our imaginations. The dying part might be a struggle. But the death part is nothing to fear if you know Jesus. We've sung this song before—

It is not death to die, To leave this weary road,
And join the saints who dwell on high, Who've found their home with God.
It is not death to close, The eyes long dimmed by tears
And wake in joy before Your throne, Delivered from our fears

It is not death to fling, Aside this earthly dust,
And rise with strong and noble wing, To live among the just.

It is not death to hear, The key unlock the door,
That sets us free from mortal years, To praise You evermore!

Book me on that cruise!

II. Past – Paul’s view of his life.

In v. 7, Paul’s mind takes him back to his years of ministry. And he had a clear conscience, about three things—

A. He had fought the good fight.

- 2 Timothy 4:7 ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

What could be better than to be able to say this on your deathbed? Paul is using the language of athletics—The words for fought and fight come from the Gk. word *agonizomai* – to agonize – he had fought against physical enemies and spiritual enemies – men and demons. He had practically worn out his armor of God!

Paul’s ministry had been non-stop opposition and danger: he battled Jewish legalism in Galatia, paganism and the occult in Ephesus, worldliness and immorality in Corinth, mysticism and Gnosticism in Colossae, people who challenged his Apostleship, impugned his motives, and slandered his name—

- 2 Corinthians 11:26–28 ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

But we never read of him backing off or backing down. Or even losing his cool, right? He fought the good fight – but how did he do it? He was a sinful, flawed man – just like us. He did it by being “*strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.*” He leaned hard on God, through prayer. He pleaded with others to pray for him. He knew he was weak in himself, so he continually relied on the sufficiency of Christ’s grace.

- When you have enemies staring you in the face – maybe it’s situations, or people, or decisions – adversaries who are threatening your faith and your peace – don’t get tough! Don’t puff out your chest and say, “I can handle this!” Get *weak*, so that “*the power of Christ may rest upon you*” (2Cor12.9). I’m serious, get humble, get small. Fight on your knees, crying out, “God be merciful to me, the sinner!” That is when you at your strongest.

This is how Paul could say, at the end of a long, hard life, “*I have fought the good fight.*” And he could also say, “*I’ve finished his course.*”

B. He had finished his course.

His saw his Christian life like a race – more like an obstacle course! – but he stayed in his lane, he followed the rules, he kept his eyes on the finish line, and now it was within sight – so all the training and

discipline had been worth it. It was his *obsession* to finish well that moved him to be so disciplined for the entire race—

- 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 ²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (eternal life!). ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (That word is *adokimos* = unapproved, failed the test = condemned and lost.)

Whoa. Look at what he is saying: He doesn't believe that his salvation is in doubt. But he says that he lived *as if* it could be! This is mind-blowing: Paul didn't presume on God's grace. He didn't take it for granted. He did what the writer of Hebrews said, "*Strive – "chase after" holiness, without which, no one will see God.*" Paul ran the race *as though* only one person would win, and it was going to be him.

And beloved, that's the kind of discipline, and commitment that it takes to stay in this race.

Yes, we cling to Christ for His righteousness – and His works alone to get us into heaven – That's why we come to the Table again and again. But we work out our salvation with the discipline of someone who says, "only one person is going to be saved, and I'm going to make sure it's me!"

- *We really need to ponder this in our own hearts: "Are you stripped down for the race? Lean and mean? The spiritual disciplines of a follower of Jesus Christ should rival the physical disciplines of an Olympic athlete. Am I right? And Paul said it, not me.

Paul was the Apostle of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, but he would be the last one to presume on that grace and coast to the finish line! He was like those crazy marathon runners who run 26 miles and then *sprint* the final quarter mile! Finally he says that—

C. He had kept the faith.

He doesn't mean here that he preserved sound doctrine – that was true – but here he means that he *kept trusting* in God through all his suffering and trials. You could translate it: "*I have remained faithful.*" Through all the battles, and the long race, he kept trusting Christ. He kept clinging to His promises.

- So how do you do that? How do you reach the end of your life and say, "*I have remained faithful to Jesus Christ?*"

You do it by constantly asking this question: "What does faith look like in this situation? This decision? This opportunity? This conflict? What does it look like to trust Jesus, right now?"

- That's how you do it: decision by decision, situation by situation, day in and day out: "*What does faith look like, right here, right now?*"
- And then God pulls the rug out from under you and you re-calculate and ask, "So now what does faith look like?"

Beloved, this is the way Paul lived and this is why he could reach the end and make this amazing, confident statement: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Well that’s all well and good for Paul. The elephant in the room is what’s on most of our minds when we hear this: “But what if I can’t say that when I reach the end?” I get that. But get ready for some tough love. . .

- Your deathbed is not the time to think about these things! Maybe it’s just me, but I used to picture my final hours, surrounded by my family and loved ones, and they are all writing down my profound last words of wisdom about life. . . Well I had an epiphany in the hospital, when I thought I might be on my own deathbed, and it was this: “I’m not thinking any deep, profound thoughts! I’m foggy-brained from dilaudid, distracted by pain, drifting in and out of sleep. And you and I might not even get a “deathbed.” We might die suddenly from a stroke, or a car crash, or a bullet – pleasant thoughts, huh? But the truth is, either way, it’s too late to do anything about the way we have lived then – right?

Now is the time to ask yourself: “Am I living, *right now*, in such a way that I can say, at the end: ‘*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith?*’”

And here’s the deal: if you’re not, then change course! Repent. You’re not dead yet. So do something about it now, while you can! Let me read you a bit of advice Solomon gave to his son at the end of Ecclesiastes., from the NLT—

- Ecclesiastes 11:9–10 Young people, it’s wonderful to be young! Enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you want to do; take it all in. But remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do.
- Ecclesiastes 12:1 Don’t let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old . . . 12:5–6 ⁵Remember him . . . before you near the grave, your everlasting home, when the mourners will weep at your funeral. ⁶Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps and the golden bowl is broken.
- Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 ¹³That’s the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone’s duty. ¹⁴God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.

“Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. . . “

Well, back to our passage. Paul had a clear conscience when he looked back over his life – because he kept his own death and the next life ever before him. But his own life, godly as it was, was not where his blessed assurance lie—

III. Future – Paul’s view of Christ’s return.

- 2 Timothy 4:8 ⁸ 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.

He isn't talking about his death here: He is talking about Christ's second coming. You understand that when we die, we are with Christ in our spirit, but we are still awaiting His return, and the resurrection of our bodies to live on a new heaven and new earth. At Christ's return, Paul will receive the crown of righteousness.

- So what is it? And who gets it? Well, it's not a literal crown, but it's something that is "laid up," reserved, *guaranteed* by God Himself, and it's for "all who have loved His appearing" – I believe that is every true Christian – not just a few who are really interested in prophecy! Every child of God longs for Christ's return. So if this is something that is guaranteed, already waiting for every believer, then it can't be something we have earned – it's something that was earned for us by Christ—

And that is "*righteousness*," exactly the word Paul uses so often for *justification* – Justification is God's declaration on all who trust in His Son, that their sins are all punished and forgiven, and they now have the very righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself – even though they are still sinners. How can God still be righteous and say that? Because Jesus died for the sins of His people, and perfectly obeyed God on behalf of His people – and when you trust in Christ, all of that is yours!—

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 ²⁴For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus earned this 2,000 years ago for every believer – we have it now, and it's laid up for us. Peter said it this way, what is waiting for us is—

- 1 Peter 1:4–5 . . . an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Beloved, this is what Paul longed for: that day when he would grasp fully, in his sinless glorified body, his salvation in Christ. *But* you could read this passage and completely misunderstand what Paul is saying: Please, please notice what he does *not* say: He does *not* say, "*because* I have fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith, *therefore, on account of my godly life*, there awaits for me the crown of righteousness." No! I.e., Paul's hope did not lie in his own godly life and clear conscience – it lie in the perfect and finished work of Jesus Christ on behalf of every believer.

We sang a song a couple weeks ago before coming to the Lord's Table. Listen—

You are the perfect and righteous God, whose presence bears no sin.
You bid me come to Your holy place, how can I enter in,
When Your presence bears no sin? (This is how)

Through Him who poured out His life for me, the atoning Lamb of God,
Through Him and His work alone I boldly come--

(Chorus--)

I come by the blood, I come by the cross,
Where Your mercy flows, from hands pierced for me,
For I dare not stand, on my righteousness,

My every hope rests on what Christ has done,
And I come—by the blood.

Beloved, if God does give you time on a deathbed to think about your life, I hope that you don't go over a checklist of the good things you have done as a Christian; how you have loved and served people – because you know what? Isaiah says that even deeds we have done in righteousness are like filthy rags before God. I hope that all of your hope and confidence on that day will be set on what Jesus did for you, not what you have done for Him!

* * *

- This pandemic has separated the sheep from the goats in many ways. Unbelievers have panicked and lived in dread fear for months on end because this life is all they've got. Death is their ultimate enemy, because death is the end of them – they think. They need to read our sign: "You don't only live once." After they die, they will face the condemnation of God for rejecting His salvation.

But the same virus has reminded Christians that glory is just around the corner for us! Our righteousness is in Christ – laid up for us like a crown that we will receive on that day.

If you are a Christian this morning, death is your passage to life eternal with Jesus Christ! Bring it on! "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living, just because He lives!"

So what do we learn this morning from a man facing his own imminent death? **Let death and what it means for you as a Christian, shape the way you live each day, until that day.**

Let me close with something that Spurgeon said about the death of believers—

- "I have seen believers die, and if anything can convince a man of the reality of religion, of the truth of the Scriptures, and of the power of the Spirit, it is the death of saints. I have seen many persons who seemed to be as much dying of their joy as of their disease, they were so happy. Their eyes, their face, their whole bearing were those of persons in whom the utmost pain was forgotten in an excess of joy, while weakness was swallowed up in the delights of the heaven which was dawning upon them . . . for Christ has come to them, and they have seen the King in his beauty, even in the borderland before they have crossed the river and entered into Canaan. 'Is this to die?' said one. 'Well then,' said he, 'it is worth while to live even to enjoy the bliss of dying.' . . . Only mind you do not miss the way, one of you. Mind you: do not miss the way!"