

As we come to the end of Paul's second letter to Timothy, we come to the end of Paul. He is dying and he knows it. So his words are as weighty as they are tender. He sums up his life in three short verses, three profound statements that explain how to live life to the fullest.

I want to invite you to give some thought to how you will be remembered. Or maybe better yet, how would you like to be remembered? As we read Paul's epitaph we discover the mindset of those who are living life to the fullest. That is what Jesus had in mind when He said, "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it abundantly (or, to the full)." Jesus wants to enlarge our hearts, to expand our capacity to love and to live life to the fullest. No one wants to die with a shriveled up, dried out, hard heart. Nothing is more unattractive than a person who is living a small life, preoccupied with petty concerns wallowing in their little ideas and unable to think beyond their tiny perspective on life. So how can we live life to the fullest?

I. Be fully aware of your present circumstances...v. 6. Paul is not the only one who knows he is dying. I'm dying...and so are you. No one gets out of this thing alive. I don't say that to depress you but to remind you. The question is, what are we doing with our one brief life? Paul's life was being "poured out as a drink offering." This refers to the Jewish custom of pouring wine on the altar to symbolize the offering of the worshiper's life to God in an act of dedication and worship. This was not a death bed decision for Paul. It was his way of life. He told the elders at Ephesus, "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." Acts 20:24. You will never know life to the fullest until you empty yourself.

I met with a man in our church this past week who has a very serious illness. In fact, the first report was that he only had a few weeks to live. With that news, he got busy. He got right with God, with his wife, with his family. This past week he said that the treatment prescribed by the doctors is working. His tumor was shrinking and it looks like his life span is increasing. Good news right? Of course it's good news but he said something profound. He said, "You know, when I thought I was dying I let go of a lot of the things I used to worry about. I felt free. Now that I'm improving I feel myself being pulled back into some of those worldly concerns."

It occurred to me that when this man accepted his condition and offered up his life to Christ as a drink offering he really began to live. I think that's what Jesus meant by, "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it." Lk. 17:33. That's why Jesus said that we were to take up our cross DAILY and follow Him. Don't wait until you're dying to die. Die every day to the things below so you can be alive to the things above.

II. Be fully satisfied with your past efforts...v. 7. As often happens at the end of life, Paul looks back over his years of service. He makes no mention of his life before Christ. Remember, this was a man responsible for the deaths of countless Christians. But he does not dwell on that. Thinking about his past does not make him regretful but thankful.

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief and the grace of our

Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. 1:12-14

His life had not been easy but it was full of purpose because:

He fought the good fight. Think like a soldier because there is a war to be won. In 2:3-4 he described the life of a soldier. It is a hard life. It is a devoted life. What is "the good fight?" It is the war against sin and evil. It is described in Titus 2. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." Titus 2:11-13

He played by the rules. Think like an athlete because there is a race to be run. In 2:5 he relies on the image of an athlete, in particular a runner, to emphasize his way of life. An athlete falls short of the prize if he fails to play by the rules. It is a simple concept that is simply ignored by many. In a relativistic culture your rules are for you and my rules are for me so keep your rules to yourself. But some rules universal. Break them and you will experience the revenge of offended absolutes.

Last week I had a treatment on my face to help eliminate pre-cancerous cells. As an old, white man of European ancestry, I have to go to the dermatologist regularly to have pre-cancerous growths on my skin sprayed with liquid nitrogen. I once asked why I was suddenly getting these things. She explained it was not "suddenly." They are the result of what I did as a child. I grew up on the desert, rarely wore sun screen, liked having a tan which required first getting burned and now, all these years later, the consequences have begun to visit my face. Suppose I said, "Well I don't know where you're getting that nonsense. You probably read it in some medical textbook or journal. Well, I don't believe your book. Why should I believe you?" And the doctor answers by saying, "Because when I was in medical school I was required to examine cadavers, some of which had melanoma, some of which had gone untreated, thus the cadaver!"

Paul was devoted to the divine rules God had revealed in the scriptures and through the sayings of Jesus. He played by the rules and...

He planted patiently. Think like a farmer because there is a job to be done. In 2:6 the hard-working farmer is rewarded for his labors.

III. Be fully confident of your future reward...v. 8. There are five heavenly crowns mentioned in scripture: The incorruptible **crown**, the **crown** of life, the **crown** of glory, the **crown** of exultation and the **crown** of righteousness. There are two words for crown in the Bible, the diadem and the stephanos. The diadem is the golden crown worn by royalty. This crown is reserved for King Jesus. The stephanos is the garland worn by the victorious athlete, the prize Paul talked about in chapter 2.

The crown of righteousness is a metaphor that conveys a reward of righteousness. In other words, some people will die and be rewarded by experiencing life to the fullest because everything will be right. We will be right with our God, right with ourselves and right with

everyone else. Who gets this reward? It is not awarded to those who depend upon their own sense of righteousness or of their own works. Such an attitude breeds arrogance and pride. Those who receive this crown display a longing, a fervent desire to be with the Lord. I'm sure you have been asked, or asked yourself, "How could a good God send anyone to Hell?" There is a simple answer. "If you have no interest in an intimate relationship with Jesus in this life why would a good God force you to have an intimate relationship with Jesus for eternity?"

How do I earn the crown of righteousness? You can't! In any healthy relationship, presence is more important than performance. The crown of righteousness will be awarded not on the basis of our work for Him but our need of Him. I think Jesus would say to us, "I don't want your good deeds. I want you to want Me. I want you to look forward to my return." I can't think of a more painful experience than a father returning home from a long journey only to be ignored by his children. Next Thursday some children will be looking out the window waiting eagerly for the arrival of their grandparents or aunts and uncles or friends to arrive for Thanksgiving. What would it be like if you traveled a long distance to be with your family and when you got there they all ignored you?

There is no greater joy than being reunited with your father after a lengthy separation. Do you know what that is like? Well, take a look at this video and pay attention to your emotions...

I just talked to a man who was married two weeks ago. He shared with me how he felt as he stood in front of the church waiting to see his bride appear. You know the moment. The music changes, the mother of the bride stands, everyone else follows her lead and every head looks to the doors at the back of the sanctuary. The doors fly open and there she is in all her glory. I have done hundreds of weddings and all the grooms looked pretty much the same. There is not much you can do to make a man pretty but I've never seen a bad looking bride (from a distance). As she is escorted by her father down the aisle all heads begin to turn toward the front of the room. Why? Because everyone wants to see the response of the groom. I've seen a lot of grown men cry when they see their bride coming down the aisle.

So we wait, not like a criminal on death row waits for the day of his execution. We wait like a groom waits to see his bride. We wait like a child who longs to see her daddy again. And we will not be disappointed. When He comes, everything will be right, right with God, right with others, right with myself. Imagine that, because one day, you won't have to.

Some of us just lost a good friend. He set an example for us of how to live and he set an example for us of how to die. As he slipped away he said, "Everything that matters is OK." Can you say that? Fight the good fight. Finish the course. Keep the faith.