

11/3/24 - 2 Tim. 4:6-8 - "Finishing the Fight by Faith"

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[0 : 00] Our scripture reading today is found in the letter of Paul, a second letter to Timothy, chapter 4. The text is verses 6 to 8, but I'll begin at verse 1.

Please find 2 Timothy, chapter 4. Hear the word of God.

Through Paul. I 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, preach the word.

Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. For 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, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

As for you, always be sober-minded. Endure suffering. Do the work of an evangelist, fulfilling your ministry.

[1 : 23] For I 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. This is the word of God.

Amen. Well, good morning, everyone. If you haven't met me, I'm Pastor Rick, one of the pastors here, and I get to preach on occasion.

Today is one of those occasions, so it is a blessing. And I appreciate Duffy reading, starting in verse 1, reminding me of the charge that we have been called to when we proclaim the word of God.

[2 : 36] And so, as we continue in 2 Timothy, chapter 4, we're going to be looking at verses 6 through 8 today, specifically. Last week, Carmen talked about verses 3 through 5, and we'll be continuing as Paul offers up his own life as an example to Timothy of what his ministry is to look like.

And Paul is kind of a hero of mine, if you don't know that, and hopefully the same is true of everyone here. And so, I think these words have a real weight to them as we think about the depth of what he's really saying here, as far as this being the end of his ministry.

But I want to start out today with a little bit of a contrast between two men of the faith from many years ago.

One of them, he was a zealous follower of the Christian teaching who, he devoted himself to righteousness. And so, every day, we learn from his diaries and from others that he would spend up to five hours confessing his every sin.

He would write down every sin he could think of, and he would confess it to the Lord. And even then, he wouldn't go to bed with a clear conscience. Having followed every teaching and every commandment, he was a tortured man with a tortured soul with guilt that overwhelmed him.

[4 : 20] He constantly doubted his salvation and whether he had missed a single sin that would disqualify him from eternity. The other man, he began his life as a zealous follower of God.

He believed in the scriptures and the teachings. And he viciously sought out any who contradicted his understanding of God's word, going so far as to kill some of them.

However, upon his conversion to the Christian faith, he became a zealous teacher and defender of the gospel, spreading the word into all the world.

Towards the end of his ministry, despite having persecuted and killed Christians early on in his ministry, he boldly proclaimed, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience.

You can probably guess who the second man is, and maybe you've heard the tale of the first. The first is Martin Luther, before his conversion, when he was a monk, a man who sought righteousness in every way he could think.

[5 : 30] And the second man, of course, is Paul, who, as a zealous follower of the Jewish traditions, persecuted Christians, and upon his conversion, defended the faith and brought the Christian tradition into all the world.

And so the main difference between these two men is that the first, the monk Martin Luther, desperately tried to find peace with God through his own works of righteousness, and the second found peace through faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ.

We've heard a lot about the Protestant Reformation over the past week. It was the 507th anniversary on Thursday, October 31st, and we celebrate this in remembrance of Martin Luther's 95 theses that he nailed to the door in Wittenberg.

And if you're not aware, a key tenant of the Reformation is the doctrine that salvation is by faith alone. This really wasn't a new idea.

Luther came to his conclusion after many nights of meditating on Romans 117, meditating upon Paul's teachings. He realized that his righteousness was never something he could accomplish.

[6 : 51] It was something accomplished by Christ through his death and resurrection. His righteousness was and is a gift from God. So I want to remind us to set the foundation that Jesus died for our sins.

The penalty for our sin was paid in full by Jesus Christ when he died on the cross for our justification. And he accomplished this justification through his resurrection.

When we have faith in Jesus, our sins are covered by his death, and his righteousness is accounted to us by faith.

And so through this, we have peace with God, and we are able to rejoice in hope of eternity. Those who believe in Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, we too have eternal life in him.

And so we, like Martin Luther, have been freed from a guilty conscience and now hope in the promises of God. But what does this mean for works of righteousness?

[8 : 05] Do they become unnecessary? Are works excluded? Well, I want to paraphrase a thought from Luther's own writing.

It was in German, so it's translated and now paraphrased. But he essentially said, Let me try again. Hard to talk this week.

The sort of faith that justifies is a living faith, which inevitably, necessarily, and immediately yields fruit of righteousness.

He made it a little complicated, so let's see how R.C. Sproul put it. I kind of prefer the way he wrote it. He said, Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.

A faith without any yield of righteousness is not true faith. To make it easy to remember, Some have said, Faith plus works does not equal justification.

[9 : 09] Although that is what the Roman Catholic tradition teaches. Instead, we believe that faith equals justification, which overflows in good works.

That is Protestant reformer tradition. And so, as we're reminded in Ephesians 2, specifically in verse 10, We are the Lord's workmanship. We're created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We see that these works were graciously provided by God. Although they do not earn our righteousness, they instead demonstrate the righteousness of God that is at work in the hearts of those who believe in him.

James reminds us that faith is completed or is made perfect by our works. So you might ask, What does this have to do with 2 Timothy 4, 6-8?

Right? Well, I think as Paul is waiting in prison, writing his final letter, and recognizing that the time of his departure has come, he reflects on his life and ministry, and he's able to find great confidence that he has kept the faith.

[10 : 28] He boldly proclaims, I have kept the faith. But I don't think he found confidence in his work. Rather, he looks upon his works and sees what God has accomplished through him.

He sees it as evidence that he has kept the faith and that the Lord is faithful to keep him until he receives the crown of righteousness. And so his life, as he offers it in these three verses, is a summary and an encouragement to Timothy, who will soon walk the same path he did.

And he offers what he's learned from his life to encourage Timothy as he continues this ministry and this mission. And I think his life also serves as an example to us.

He told us to follow him as he follows Christ, and so he set the example. We are to follow him as he followed Christ. And so my aim today, as we reflect on these verses, is to see how we can have this same boldness, this same confidence, as we live this life with a good conscience before God and before man.

And so I've broken this passage into three parts. I want to reflect on each of the three verses, verse 6, 7, and 8. And I've titled the first point, Facing Finality, the second point, Fighting the Good Fight, and the third point, The Finish Line.

[11 : 56] But I want to pray for the Lord's guidance as we look deeper into this summary of Paul's life. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word.

We thank you for the example that you set for us, the example that Paul sets for us. And I pray as we reflect on his life, as we reflect on his ministry, that we would be encouraged to have confidence to live this life with a good and clear conscience before you.

And Lord, that we would have faith and know that you are faithful and that you will bring us to eternity as you have promised. Thank you and praise you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So in the first point, I want to look at 2 Timothy 4, 6. And as I said, I've titled this point, Facing Finality. As a reminder, Paul says, For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

We see that the life of an apostle is a living sacrifice that is poured out for the faith of those who receive the word of God.

[13 : 10] We know Paul was well acquainted with sacrifice and that he had devoted his life to the faith. He never shrank back at suffering for the gospel or suffering for the name of Jesus Christ.

Rather, he rejoiced, as he said in Philippians 2, 17. In the ESV, it says, Even 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.

Paul knew the cost. On his conversion, the Lord told him how much he would suffer. For the sake of the gospel. But even knowing what lied ahead, he continued.

He did not shrink back. We know, no matter how many shipwrecks, no matter how many beatings, even being stoned and somehow surviving, being stoned, no matter the danger, the toil, or the hardship, no matter how many sleepless nights, no matter what hunger he faced, no matter the cold or the exposure, he continued.

He continued as a faithful servant and steward of the word of God. As he said in 1 Corinthians 4, 9, the life of an apostle is to be a spectacle to the world.

[14 : 35] And indeed, his life was. But he was willing to suffer in order that in his weakness the power of God may be displayed as perfect. and he was willing to suffer in order that the world may know Christ Jesus has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

So the question is, is this same for us today? Should we expect to suffer for the work of the gospel?

Should we expect to sacrifice for the work that we've been called to? And I think Carmen reminded us last week that yes, indeed, we should. Paul says in Romans 12, 1, our life is to be a living sacrifice, which is our acceptable spiritual worship.

As Jesus told us, we are to count the cost, and he reminds us in Matthew 16, 25, whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

At times, this does mean we will endure suffering and persecution. We've heard this throughout the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy. However, we've been called to endure suffering, to continue the work of an evangelist, and so to fulfill our ministry.

[15 : 58] As we move into the second part of verse 6, Paul said, the time of my departure has come. I think we know what he is referring to here, but the question is, why do you think Paul is at peace even as he faces his departure?

Why is he so okay with the reality that he is soon to die in prison? Many years before, when he wrote to the Philippians, in the letter to the Philippians, chapter 1, verse 21, he said, and I'm paraphrasing here, to live means fruitful labor, the continued work of the gospel, but to depart is to be with Christ, which is far better.

And he remained for many years that he may continue the fruitful work of the gospel, but he looked forward to eternity. He continued to build up the joy and faith of the church with every day that God granted to him, but now he knew that the work was to continue with Timothy.

As he began this letter, he says that he thanks God with a clear conscience that Timothy is equipped and prepared to continue the gospel mission, and so Paul is able to depart with a clear conscience knowing not only that Timothy is faithful, but that the Lord is faithful and will guard the work that he has started.

Paul rejoiced at being counted worthy to have suffered for Christ, and now he is prepared to meet him in his heavenly kingdom.

[17 : 43] What about you? Do you fear death, the inevitable? I think few people are excited to face death.

I think it's natural to fear death. death. That's why the topic is often avoided. Some even call it taboo, right? It's something that we don't speak much about, and it's why, like many taboo topics, we have all these euphemisms for death, right?

Some of them a little bit macabre or funny, some of them just to avoid the reality. I think of passed away. How often do we say someone has passed away?

How often do we say they've gone to a better place? Even when perhaps it's not true. We often say they're resting in peace, they've kicked the bucket, they've gave up the ghost, they've been discharged to Jesus Christ.

We use these phrases because death is the great unknown. Few people want to dwell on it for long. Paul also uses a euphemism.

[18 : 57] He says, depart, but I don't think he's using it for the same reason. He's not afraid to talk about death, but he also doesn't want us to think about death in the human context of the end.

He wants to separate what he's talking about from what that word brings to mind, and so he chooses a different word. Although the culture might see death as an uncomfortable topic, Paul and the biblical authors use words like depart and sleep to remind us that death of this body is different from spiritual death and shouldn't be connected in our minds.

We, as Christians, we believe in the resurrection of the dead for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Resurrection to eternal life for those with faith and resurrection to judgment for those who deny him.

And so the biblical authors constantly remind us that we do not face death. As Paul says here, we are prepared for our departure, a word that could mean our being loosed from this world so that we may be freed to join Jesus in eternity.

For all who trust in Jesus, this life is merely a moment and a vapor when compared to eternity. Looking at 1 Thessalonians 4, 13 through 14, although many of the Christians believed that Christ would return before their death, this wasn't the case and many had fallen asleep.

[20 : 41] But Paul writes to encourage them, but we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Death is not the end.

I want to be clear, this doesn't mean that Christians seek death. We don't seek death. Instead, we know that death no longer has power over us because it is not the end.

It is only the beginning of eternity. As Paul's famous off-quoted words say, O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

Death has been removed. The power of death has been removed by the Lord. But I think this leads to another question that many ask.

[21 : 40] if eternity is purchased and promised through faith in Christ, why does God leave us here? If this life means suffering, if continuing in this life is sure to bring trials and difficulties, why doesn't he just take us home now?

As Paul said, that would be much better, but he doesn't, so why? Paul reminds us again in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 1, verse 21 and 22, that to live is Christ, but to die is gain.

And he says we remain here, he remains here to accomplish fruitful labor, right? Through this life, we are to bear fruit of righteousness.

And I think this fruit is twofold. It is first the fruit of our sanctification, our growing in holiness, the trials we face in this life make us holy, and second, it is the fruit of the kingdom of God.

we're here to proclaim the good news of the gospel that many may join us in eternity. Knowing the truth, knowing that we all face eternity, either eternity in heaven or eternity in hell separated from God, we should be motivated to live every day with an eternal perspective, to live every day and make every decision thinking on eternity eternity, and not on the present moment or whatever suffering it may involve.

[23 : 11] We are to live each day as a soldier who's fighting the good fight, as a runner who's running the race, for the prize that lies ahead, and as a child of God who is keeping the faith.

And so as we move into point two and look at verse seven, I want to look now at what it means to fight the good fight. Paul uses these three phrases, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith in parallel.

He's really talking about the same thing and expressing it three different ways. But as he surveys his life and his ministry, he's confident in these truths.

He has indeed fought the good fight, he has indeed run the race, and he has indeed kept the faith. I want to look at these three things and what truths we find in them.

First of all, we see that Paul viewed his life in ministry as a battle. He viewed his life as a battle. He was a soldier who was fighting against the schemes of the enemy.

[24 : 29] enemy. He saw that the gospel message was frequently under attack by false teachers and those who aim to turn people away from the truth and into myths. And so he fought to bring the gospel unstained to the Gentiles and to the end of the earth.

He saw this as a battle. Second, Paul viewed his life and ministry as a race, as a runner in a race.

he was an athlete that was running the race in hope of a crown, as he says. He used this same metaphor in 1 Corinthians 9, specifically verses 25 to 27.

And he told the Corinthians that he must run to obtain the prize. He must exercise self-control in all things that he may receive the imperishable crown. And he reminds us that he didn't run aimlessly.

He wasn't just running around Mill Creek Park for fun, like a shadow boxer fighting the air, but instead he disciplined his body and his mind so that he would not be disqualified from proclaiming the gospel.

[25 : 44] We note from these words that failure for Paul, being disqualified, would call into question everything that he had preached. A single act of hypocrisy or moral failure would cause those who listened to him to question everything that he preached and everything that he believed.

And so he held himself to the highest standard of righteousness and indeed tried to live and model a life above reproach so that there would be no question as to the validity of his message.

I believe it was the Holy Spirit that empowered him to live a life that even to this day we have no reason to question. Third, Paul viewed the faith as something to be kept, as something to be guarded.

I want you to notice here that Paul often uses this phrase, the faith, in reference to the Christian faith, the gospel message, and not to his personal faith.

And so I believe here he's talking about the gospel, which he defended. He kept the faith. He guarded the faith. He vigorously denounced any who claimed that our works could earn our justification, but he also zealously refuted anyone who claimed that we could practice and live in sin and inherit eternal life.

[27 : 13] He battled both and guarded the gospel from such false teachings. moreover, Paul was convinced that the Lord is able to guard the gospel not only for his lifetime, but for all time.

He said so in 2 Timothy 1.12 that the Lord is able to keep what's been entrusted to him, not only now, but until that day that the Lord returns.

So he didn't trust in himself his ability to guard the faith, but in the Lord's promise to guard it for all time. That being said, I think this also applies to Paul's own faith.

It is true that his individual faith in Jesus kept him through every battle, through every mile of the race, and now to the time of his departure. This leads to the question, for us, how do we fight the good faith?

The good fight, rather. How do we run the race? How do we keep the faith? What does this look like for us, being that we're not apostles?

[28 : 28] apostles? I like how Paul puts it back at the very end of his previous letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 6, 12. He says, I think it's going to be on the screen, fight the good fight of the faith, take hold of eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

I like that. Take hold of eternal life. As a reminder, salvation is a gift from God to be received by faith.

We can never earn favor in God's eyes through our righteous deeds. I always think of God when he's talking to Job in Job 41, 11.

And I'm going to paraphrase. But he tells Job that everything we have was already given to us by God. How can we offer it back to him that he should be in our debt?

We have nothing to offer to God that was not already given to us by him. But I think that being said, it doesn't make our good works any less important to God's purposes.

[29 : 50] We can look to Ephesians 2.10 which I read back in the introduction. Looking at it again, Paul says, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

That we should walk in them. Therefore, we must walk. Right? As the saying goes, you can lead a horse to water, water, but you can't make it drink.

Right? We have been equipped to fight, but we must fight. We've been trained to run. Maybe not literally, but figuratively.

We've been trained to run, and therefore we must run. We've been given life, and therefore we must take hold of eternal life. So important to be reminded that God's plan for our salvation, it does not exclude our responsibility or our participation in the work of the gospel and the ministry.

We've been called to submit to his word, the power of his spirit. We've been called to take hold of eternal life. We are to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, trustworthiness, and gentleness.

[31 : 11] We do this knowing that there will be suffering, there will be setbacks, but despite them, we are to press on towards the goal, towards the crown of righteousness that lies ahead.

And so as we move into the third point and look at verse eight, I want to look at the prize that Paul kept his eye on as he continued his race and as he now waits in prison.

And I've titled the third point the finish line. As a reminder, 2 Timothy 4.8 says, 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.

Through all the difficulty that Paul faced, I believe he grew more convicted each day that the Lord was indeed faithful. He was convinced of what comes next, that he will soon be in eternity with Christ Jesus, the one who he faithfully loved and served for most of his life.

He has faith that his inheritance, the promised inheritance, is being kept for him. although these are Peter's words, I think 1 Peter 1, 3 through 5 really puts it clearly for us of what this inheritance looks like and how it is being kept for us.

- [32 : 53] Peter says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

We have faith not only in God's promises to keep and guard us, but that this inheritance, this crown of righteousness, is imperishable, it is undefiled, and it is unfading.

we will receive it. As Paul said earlier in his letter to Timothy, I know who I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what I entrusted to him.

And so he presses on with great confidence and hope in the promises of God, remaining faithful, trusting that the Lord will award him this crown of righteousness, that he will award him eternal.

eternal rest. And so he reminds Timothy at the end of this verse that the crown of righteousness belongs not only to apostles, but to all who love the appearing of Jesus Christ.

- [34 : 14] Christ. As we continue fighting the good fight, what do you most look forward to in heaven? I remember being asked this question as a child and thinking about streets of gold, lambs playing with lions, playing with snakes and not getting bitten.

I don't know if anyone looks forward to that, but maybe as an adult what comes to your mind is seeing your loved ones again. I think we all look forward to that.

Having a new body that's free from the pain of this life and any disability. Meeting the apostles and saints of old. I can't help but think like an engineer, well, if there's a hundred million other people that want to meet Paul, how long am I going to have to stand in line?

It's a good thing we have an eternity, right? To wait patiently. Maybe we look forward to heaven to receive the inheritance that is being prepared for us.

Truly, there'll be more than enough time in eternity for all of these things. But I think the thing we all... thing we look forward to most is meeting Jesus Christ.

- [35 : 41] Therefore, we keep our eyes on the prize, not running aimlessly, but exercising self-control in all things. And so we rejoice even in our suffering because we know it produces endurance, it produces character, and it produces hope in the promises of God.

Each day that we continue this good fight, each day that we run the race, each day that we guard the faith, we cultivate this assurance of things hoped for. With conviction of things unseen and confidence that Jesus will indeed appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who eagerly wait for him.

I encourage you, as you wait, continue in the fruitful works that God has prepared for you. Continue in sanctification, pursue faith, pursue love, pursue peace and holiness, without which no one will see the kingdom of God.

continue reading and listening to the truth of God's word, that you may be trained in righteousness and equipped for every good work.

Continue in evangelism, sharing the good news of the gospel with your family and friends and neighbors and colleagues, that they may come to know Jesus and have life in him.

- [37 : 12] And continue in ministry, continue meeting the needs of the saints, teaching them to obey his every command, equipping them and so building up the body of Christ.

As we close, I want to read, if I can, these verses from a classic hymn that I'm sure you all know, but I think captures these verses very well.

And I can't sing, so I'll read. The hymn goes, when we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be.

When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory. Let us then be true and faithful, trusting, serving every day.

Just one glimpse of him in glory will the toils of life repay. Onward to the prize before us. Soon his beauty will behold.

[38 : 16] Soon the pearly gates will open. We shall tread the streets of gold. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.