

Finishing Well

Text:

II Timothy 2:1-8

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Introduction:

The first thing to which I would call you attention in the text we have just read is the contrast between the opening lines of the two paragraphs. To Timothy, Paul says, in verse 1: "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." Then of himself he says in verse 6: "For I am being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand." These two lines sum up the contents of the entire letter. Paul charges Timothy because he knows that his time on earth is short. As we have worked our way through the book we have followed this theme. Paul is finishing his course, but the work must go on. His life may be about over and he may soon be with the Lord, but the mission is not finished so others like Timothy

must now assume responsibility for the preaching of the Gospel and the nurture of the Churches.

Most of the letter has been about what Timothy must do, but today I want us to focus on verses 6-8 which speak of what Paul has done. Even though he is still alive Paul sees his work as finished. Like Jesus who can say before his death in John 17:4 "I have finished the work you gave me to do", Paul can say here: "I have finished my course". The emphasis in this phrase must be put on "my". As we have already stated Paul's race is over, but Timothy is still in the race and he must continue to run.

It is important for us to understand that what Paul has achieved: fought the good fight, finished the course, kept the faith are the very things that he has encouraged Timothy to do throughout the two letters he has written to him. For example at the end of I Timothy he says to him: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and *before* Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom *be* honour and power everlasting. Amen" (I Timothy 6:12-16). And in II Timothy 1:13-14 he writes: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

One other thing I would point out in this regard that we have previously noted. In I Timothy 6 Paul reminds Timothy that Jesus was the first to have "witnessed a good confession", now he in his turn can say the same. Timothy must follow him as he has followed Christ. This is the Christian way. Jesus set the example and generation by generation we must keep the faith as we follow his example and the example of his followers who have gone before us. So let us look at the

example of the Apostle Paul as he finishes his race to see what we can learn about finishing well ourselves.

In the three verses (6-8) Paul speaks of his past, his present, and his future. He begins by describing his present situation in verse 6, then speaks of his past performance in verse 7, and closes by expressing his future expectation in verse 8.

I. Paul Present Situation

Paul describes his present situation with two vivid metaphors. He says first that his life is being poured out as a drink offering, and secondly, that his departure time us come. The first, a drink offering, graphically illustrates how he views his life and how we should view life. Drink offerings were common both to Jews and Romans. They were a common practice. They usually consisted in pouring out a cup of wine at the end of a religious ceremony. The Jews would sometimes pour the wine over the burnt offering which would create a pleasant odor. This is what the Bible is speaking of when it talks about an offering being a sweet smelling savor to God as in Ephesians 4 where Paul says that we should “walk in love even as Christ loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice and an offering to God for a sweet smelling savor.”

What this means for Paul is that what was begun the day he encountered Christ is now being completed. From the time he first encountered Christ his life had belonged to Christ. This is the reason he says things like: “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20), and “you are not you own you have been bought with a price” (I Corinthians 6:19-20). His life was not his own. He had offered it to God as a living sacrifice leaving God to do with it as he chose. Therefore Paul does not see his life as being taken by Caesar (Caesar cannot touch what has already been given by God), but as being poured out as a loving sacrifice to God.

He continues by saying “the time of my departure is at hand”. Literally this word means loosing or setting free. It was used for example of unyoking oxen, or of a

ship lifting anchor and setting sail. Paul uses the same word in the same way in a familiar passage in Philippians 1:21-23 where he says: “For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better”. Notice that for him departure is a desirable thing, even a preferable thing; it is the end of life’ labors and the beginning of eternity with Christ.

II. Paul’s Past Performance

What gives Paul confidence in his present situation as he faces death is his past performance. He sums it up with three brief statements: “I have fought a good fight”, “I have finished my course”, “I have kept the faith.” To fight the good fight does not mean that he has fought well, even though he had, but rather that I have been engaged in the right fight. He has not wasted the time and opportunity that God has given him on something that in the end has no lasting value and no eternal reward. It is what he alludes to in I Corinthians 15:58 when he says: Be ye steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord inasmuch as you know that you labor in the Lord is not in vain.” His work had been arduous, but it had not been for nothing. His prospects for the future were bright because his past had been wisely put to use. He had no regrets. We like Paul will all one day come to our last day on earth. Pray that we like him will arrive there without regrets.

Secondly, Paul says: “I have finished the course. This is an athletic image. It is the runner finishing his race. In Acts 20 Paul is on his way to Jerusalem following his third missionary journey which he had spent in the city of Ephesus. He had made a quick trip to Greece to visit the churches planted on the second missionary journey and on the return he makes a quick stopover in Miletus where he convokes the elders from Ephesus. This is a part of what Luke records him to have said on that occasion:

“Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: *And* how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:18-24).

The course of Paul’s life had been laid out for him by the Lord Jesus Christ. His one great concern was to finish the task that had been given him. Now in prison in Rome awaiting execution he can rejoice because the Lord has given him the assurance that he has indeed finished his course.”

Finally he says that he has kept the faith. The faith here is a reference to the truth of Jesus Christ, the Gospel that had been entrusted to him. In the address to the Ephesian elders that we referred to above he goes on to state: “I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.” As Paul has encouraged Timothy to “Hold fast that form of sound words that you have received from me”, so he can now say at the end of his career “I have kept the faith”.

III. Paul’s Future Expectation

Some of us might find Paul’s present situation depressing, but Paul is rejoicing and full of expectation. This is because of his relationship with Jesus Christ. Death does not overly disturb him for he knows that something far better awaits him. He has finished his race. He is now waiting to be crowned. The crown he awaits is not the crown of a King. Only one can wear that crown. It is the crown

of the athlete. In the 1st century athletes were not given medals, but crowns, crowns made of perishable vegetable materials like olive, laurel, or pine. This is what Paul is referring to when he writes in I Corinthians 9:25-27:

“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. “

Paul has finished his race. Now he awaits his crown; a crown of righteousness. He is about to hear the words “well done good and faithful servant.” He had not run aimlessly but with a purpose now the race is over and it is time for him to receive, not a perishable crown, but an imperishable for he has not labored for temporal rewards, but for an eternal reward.

Finally, notice in conclusion that you too can receive the same crown that Paul forever wears in the presence of Christ. He says that the Lord has not reserved it for him alone, but that it will be awarded “to all who love his appearing.” That is all who realize that the present world is not the final world; that the world and its desires will pass away but that he who does the will of the Lord will live forever; for all, who like Paul, discipline themselves and remain concentrated on the course that has been set for them, for all, who like Paul, fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith.