

Finishing Strong – 2 Timothy 4:6-8

2 Tim 4:6-8

Having told Timothy to preach the word and fulfill his ministry in the previous verses . .

And having given him several *general* reasons for doing so . . .

He now cites some very *personal* ones (read it; *Henceforth* – re what remains)

Intro

Poignant, heart-felt words, from a man who's *finished strong* and made the most of his life

Statements that I fear can't be made by a whole lot of people these days . . .

B/c they've succumbed to the status quo of *coasting* through the finish line

That's what retirement is all about, isn't it?

Put in enough time and save enough money, and you can throw it in neutral and coast the last 20 years of your life

It's the American dream, and *there's nothing biblical about it*

Provide for your family, yes

Prepare for a slower pace due to physical limitations, yes (like the OT priests)

And provide for your future as much as you *can*, so as not to be an undue burden on others, yes

But sock it away so you can sit around and play bridge all day? I don't think so

- But that's exactly what most people do; In fact, they *plan* on it
They plan to do far less than they could; They *plan* to make it all about themselves . . .
And they end up wasting away – physically, mentally, *and* spiritually

Which is the exact opposite of Paul's example, as he confesses here in 2 Tim 4

The exact opposite of God's desire for us

And the exact opposite of what it means to spend and be spent for the cause of Christ

I'm not advocating that you work for *pay* all your life, or keep the pace of a 30 year-old

But I *am* advocating that you work for *Christ* all your life, and keep in step with *him*

So whether you're 25 or 75, I want to commend these principles to you, from Paul's confession . . .

So that you too, finish strong, as you live your life for the Lord

The first of which is . . .

Come to grips with the fact that your days are numbered (v6)

Which is exactly what Paul had done as indicated by his statement in v6, saying . . .

I am already being poured out as a drink offering

This is a metaphor borrowed from the OT practice of pouring out wine on the altar of sacrifice, as a pleasing aroma to the Lord

Once poured, it was done; over

So Paul was saying that the beginning of the end had already begun for him

His work for Christ, his life of sacrifice – was almost complete

I am already being poured out as a drink offering

And the time of my departure has come – i.e. my life is drawing to a close

My days are numbered; This chapter is ending

Paul finished strong b/c he had long since come to grips with the fact that his final act of sacrifice, at the hands of Nero, was imminent – his days were numbered

And we'd do well to do the same

To accept the fact that we're not going to live forever

That death is just a matter of time, no matter how long we have to live

And that your window of opp to make a diff for Christ and his kingdom, is closing

- And notice there's no twinge of denial, or lamenting the inevitable
Just a calm, matter-of-fact acceptance, that his days are numbered

How could he do that? Better yet, how can *we* do that?

I think the answer lies in embracing those famous words he wrote earlier to the church in Philippi, found in Phil 1:21, where he said . . .

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

That is, for me to live is to bring glory to the Lord

For me to live is to bear fruit *his* kingdom and his purposes

For me to live is Christ, while *to die is gain* – gain; dying is gain for a believer

That means *better* than living in this body, on this earth, any longer – gain

If we would fully embrace that and fully believe it, it would *revolutionize* our outlook on death

We'd no longer lament its onset; We'd no longer ignore it, hoping it would go away

And we'd no longer fear it – b/c it's gain

Do you believe that? That dying is gain? I hope you do

B/c it's almost impossible to come to grips with the number of your days, if you don't

But if you do, it leads to 4 very healthy by-products; Starting with . . .

It leads to . . .

• A sense of urgency in all you do

When you stop living in denial about your death, and start accepting a limit to your life, you tend to make the most of your days while they last

You tend to have an increased sense of urgency in all you do

• A sharper focus on what's important

It's kind of like being in a car that catches on fire

Are you going to finish listening to the song on the radio before you get out?

Are you going to twitter your friends with a picture of the flames? I don't think so

You're going to drop everything to focus on what's most important – like getting yourself and your kids, out of the car . . .

B/c your *seconds* are numbered

And the same is true in life when you realize that your *days* are numbered

Peripheral things fade, and the important ones come into sharp focus very fast

• A deliberate investment in things that matter

Nobody wants to waste their life

And realizing that our “investment” window is brief in light of eternity, motivates us to make the most of it

To invest our time, talent, treasure – our whole lives, in things that produce an *eternal* reward; in things that matter

- **An honest assessment of your life**

There’s nothing like the stark realization of an end, to force an honest assessment of what comes next

It’s like waking up in the spring of your senior year, and realizing you haven’t picked a college yet

Or you don’t have a job yet; Or you don’t even know what you want to do yet

It leads to an honest assessment of things

And the same is true re the end of our lives

Facing death leads to an honest assessment of where you’re going – heaven or hell***

An honest assessment of your life; A deliberate investment in things that matter

A sharper focus on what’s important; And a sense of urgency in all you do . . .

Are the by-products of coming to grips with the fact that your days are numbered, and believing that dying is gain

All of which equals – finishing strong

That’s the first principle from this passage; The second is . . .

Fight to the finish (v7)

If you’re going to finish strong for the Lord

If you’re going to make an impact right up to the day you die, you have to *fight*

I have fought the good fight (7) Paul says

That is, he engaged the battle – the battle of good vs. evil; the battle of right vs. wrong

The battle for souls; The battle for God’s preeminence in all things

The battle for Christ to be exalted among every tribe, tongue, and nation

The battle for truth

Paul engaged the battle, and fought the good fight right up until the end

The evidence for which is right in front of you

He could have sat and done nothing in that dark, dank, dungeon – and not one of us would have blamed him for it

He could have wasted away and gone out with a flicker with his reputation still intact – b/c he burned so brightly in life

He could have sang the *blues* instead of singing *hymns* – and we’d have understood

But instead, he fought for what’s right, he fought for the gospel, and he fought to the finish – with his pen; a *piddly pen*

Never under estimate the power of trivial things, in the hands of a man or woman of God, who’s intent on fighting to the finish

- *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race* – referring to the journey of his life in Christ

Paul was all about finishing; Quitting was out of the question

How can you quit when God is so good?

Doesn’t he irresistibly attract you?

Don’t you want to be with him with every fiber of your being?

Doesn’t his greatness awe you, and overwhelm you – so that you have to get as close as you can to him, like the Israelites at Mt Sinai?

Doesn’t his presence in your soul fill your heart with joy unspeakable?

Doesn’t the thought of letting him down crush you?

How can you stop running the race when God is so good?

I want to be able to say at the end of *my* life, like Paul did at the end of his – *I’ve kept the faith*

I’ve stuck to the truth; I believe what God says; I’ve done what he’s asked

I follow him as Lord; And I’ve persevered to the end

- I want to be able to say that, don’t you? Isn’t that your desire?

I hope it is, b/c that’s the essence of finishing strong

That you fight to the finish in your faith

That you fight to the finish in your roles – your role as a husband, wife, father, mother

That you fight to the finish in your circumstances – crummy as they are sometimes

And that you fight to the finish in your death

That’s the essence of finishing strong

Which is something we’re loathe to do in such an ease-saturated culture – even when it comes to dying these days

More and more people are seeking to end their lives through physician-assisted suicide, b/c they *do not want to suffer*

Why suffer more than you want to, or already have?

Why fight to the finish if there’s no hope for recovery?

Why endure the debilitating effects of chronic disease and ill-health?

Why not just end it all? Find a doctor in a state that allows it, and commit suicide

I think there are 2 answers to those questions – 2 Reasons for why you *should* fight to the finish in your death

1. Your life is not your own

This is God’s world, and we’re living in it

He’s the author and creator of your life, and it s/b *his* decision as to when to end it

Which is especially true of believers – you are not your own, you were bought w/ a price

2. Your fight for life, inspires others

IOW your fight at the *end* of life, encourages others to fight in the middle of theirs

When we witness the valiant struggle of loved ones to die with dignity, to suffer with respect, to fight to the finish . . .

It spurs us on to do the same in our lives, now

Which leads to better people, better families, better organizations, and better community’s

If you’re going to finish strong, you have to fight to the finish; And as you do . . .

Look to your reward (v8a)

Finishing strong requires that you come to grips with the fact that your days are

numbered; it requires that you fight to the finish; and third that you look to your reward

This is one of the best parts about finishing strong – God rewards us

Not b/c we earn it or deserve it, but b/c God gives it

That's why v8 starts with *henceforth* instead of therefore

Therefore would imply an if-then, cause and effect

Whereas *henceforth* implies a now-and-later order of events

So having been paid for in full by Christ on the cross, God puts our reward on lay away, to be given to us when Christ returns

Meaning that no matter how many times we fall . . .

There is laid up for us a reward, a *crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day* (8)

IOW our reward for finishing strong, is the glorious righteousness of God himself

Referred to here as *a crown* – not an actual crown necessarily, but a metaphor for something that adorns the wearer

Just like a crown adorns a king or dignitary

One commentator put it this way – we can look forward to “perfect righteousness as the crowning blessedness of those who have striven faithfully” (Mounce, Word Biblical Commentary, 582)

Not those who have striven perfectly, but faithfully

If it was perfectly, none of us would be adorned with God's righteousness

- Nor is it only at the *end* of life that we receive God's righteousness
B/c the Bible says that when we're saved, we're *declared* righteous *now* – justified
And as we walk with the Spirit, we *grow* in righteousness – we're sanctified
But it's only when Christ returns, that we're *made* righteous – glorified
All that to say – the righteousness of God that adorns our life and ensures our salvation, is both now, and yet to come

I love how Isaiah put it in **Is 61:10**, where he says of God – *he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness*

Put that together with 2 Tim 4:8, and it's like God clothes us with righteousness now, and caps it off with a crown, later *****

- It's like looking forward to receiving your *diploma* in college
You get *some* rewards along the way, that serve to keep you going
But it's looking to that *final* reward that helps you finish strong
Especially when you're hating life during finals

And when you finally walk across that stage to receive it, you feel kind of special receiving it from the hand of the president – it's a special thing

I remember receiving my college diploma from J. Richard Chase, the president of Wheaton College at the time

As I walked across the platform, he handed me my diploma, shook my hand, and said, “Congratulations Rob”

And I almost stopped – he knew my name!

And it wasn't b/c he had just heard it, b/c he didn't say *anything* to most of the others – I watched

That meant the world to me

I took it as a kind of personal stamp of approval on my life; It was special

How much more so, to receive your diploma of *righteousness*, from the righteous One *himself*

The One who paid the price for it in the first place; Who did all the work for it

The One who made you, loved you, saved you, and delivered you from the domain of darkness, to his glorious kingdom of light

The One for whom you lived, right up to the end

That in *itself* is a reward

Look to *that* when it comes to finishing strong

Look to the completion of your righteousness . . .

Look to the release from your struggle with sin, and hardship, and illness, and disease . .

Look to the Day on which you'll receive it – ordained from the beginning of time . . .

And look to the One who gives it

Keep your eyes on that, keep your eyes on him – and you'll finish strong

And finally,

Love the Lord (v8b)

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.

The reward of which Paul speaks applies to all who have loved his appearing

Which some take to mean – “all who long for his second coming” . . .

B/c the word *appearing* is often used in the Pastoral Epistles, to refer to his future appearance

But it doesn't have to mean that, just b/c it's used that way elsewhere

And here, I don't think it does, b/c *have loved* is very clearly in the past tense – referring to something that has already happened

And since the return of Christ *hasn't* already happened . . .

And since the immediate context should always carry the most weight in interpreting a passage . . .

I think Paul is referring here, not to Christ's *second* coming, but to his *first*

- Either way though, the point is this – if you love Jesus . . .
If you embrace his incarnation, and his grace, and the purposes for which he came . . .
If you live to make him look good in your life and in this world . . .
And b/c of all that, you long for his return . . .
If that's true – his reward of righteousness, is yours; Yours
But it *starts* with *loving* him – with giving your life to him b/c he gave his for you

That's where a strong finish starts

If there's no love for the Lord, there's no righteousness – imputed or otherwise; now *or* later

Only *a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire* (Heb 10:27)

Not a strong finish by any standard

Finishing strong starts with a love for the Lord

Not a once and done love; Not a love only when it's convenient

But a consistent, *ongoing* love for the Lord, that shows itself in a consistent ongoing *life* for the Lord

That's how you finish strong – you love the Lord and live for him, start to finish, whenever your start is

- I know of no better example of this than that of Vern and Verla Wadhams, right here in our own church
If you haven't met Vern and Verla, you're missing out
They're 80 years old, and in many ways, still going strong
While in others, age is starting to take its toll
And yet they *love* the Lord – you can't be around them more than 30 seconds without noticing it
It shows in their countenance, in shows in their words, and they're finishing strong b/c of it
- How about you? Do *you* love him? I mean, do you *love* him?
Enough to present your body to him as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God?
Enough to pour out *your* life as a drink offering for the cause of Christ, like Paul did his?
Enough to fight to the finish?
Enough to trust him for the number of your days?

I hope you do, b/c that's where finishing strong, starts – love the Lord