



September 28

Acts Series: Finishing Well

Acts 28:30–31 (ESV)

30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, **31** proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

2 Timothy 4:6–22 (ESV)

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

9 Do your best to come to me soon. **10** For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. **11** Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. **12** Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. **13** When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. **14** Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. **15** Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. **16** At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! **17** But the Lord stood

by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. **18** The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

19 Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. **20** Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. **21** Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.

22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

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The last chapters of Acts are all about Paul and his sufferings. They are *The Problems of Paul*.

- Luke tells about the rest of the trip to Rome. When they arrive, Paul is put under house arrest.
- He was able to continue with the job God gave him, to proclaim the gospel.
- Then Acts just ends.
- Tradition tells us (not the bible) that Paul was released. Many years later Paul is imprisoned again, tried again, and this time executed.

And as he is facing that execution that he writes the other text from 2 Timothy 4. What I want to show you today is how Paul finished his life.

- Here's the answer: Paul ended well.
- How does Paul come to the end with the ability to say, "I finished strong?"
- Between these two passages are 5 things that enabled Paul to finish well. The same things will enable you and I also to finish the race God has called us to.

Finishing well takes an extreme ownership.

- Verses 6-8 are pretty famous verses of Paul. This is the end and he knows it.
- Notice the tone: I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. The tone is one of struggle. The word for fight is **agon**, and we get our word agony from it.
- And that's the Christian life. Following Jesus is an uphill climb.
- Now how is it a struggle? It's because in this life you have two operating systems to choose from. The first is, *You serve me*. The second is, *I serve you*.
- C.S. Lewis writes that whenever you're operating out of this first system you put a little mark on your soul. The little mark makes it just a little easier to be selfish the next time.
- He says, "Hell begins with just a grumbling mood. You complain, you blame others, but you're distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop. But if you continue, there will come a day when you can't stop it. You are not distinct from the grumbling anymore. You have shrunk, and it has grown to replace you. And now it just grumbles on like a machine just doing what it's programmed to do."

- In each of us, there is something growing which will be hell unless it's nipped in the bud.
- That's the struggle. The struggle is to say, "There's a 2nd way. I serve you."
- The Christian life is a struggle against all the wrong in your life that makes the soul small.
- Take extreme ownership of implementing the 2nd operating system in every situation of your day, and your soul will not shrink down, but bulk up.
- Mark 10:45 (ESV) *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"
- Jesus said, I serve you. How big is the soul of Jesus?

Finishing well takes an unnatural rage.

- Paul also writes **6** *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.*
- A drink offering was poured on the altar to God. It immediately vaporized into nothing and evaporated away. The word is *spendo*. Paul is saying, I'm almost all spent up.
- Then he says, "The time for my departure is near." The picture of departure is of a boat being untied so that it can shove off from the dock and go on a voyage.
- On one hand it's sad because it's departure. On the other hand, untying the boat is exciting. There is a new journey about to take place.
- You have hope. You're not saying goodbye forever. You're just untying the boat. They're going to a destination they'll never want to leave because of Jesus. And it's sad, but one day you'll take that ride too and be together again.
- Is it sad? Yes. Is it cause for despair? No. You have Jesus. Grieve knowing you have hope!
- Do you know how Jesus approaches the death of Lazarus? John says it was with rage. We were never meant to die. So Jesus rages.
- Dylan Thomas had it right: *Do not go gentle into that good night, Old age should burn and rave at close of day; Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*
- We have to be angry at death.
- But we don't ever despair. We don't ever lose hope. Why? Jesus. Jesus called Lazarus out of death. And he'll call you and me out of death too.
- You are that tulip bulb. And death is going to plant you. But that's all. And you'll come up as a tulip. Look at the bulb compared to the tulip and you'll get a glimpse of what it's going to be like to be resurrected.
- And it all means that death is not despair. Death is an adventure. It's untying the boat for a departure. And a voyage awaits.
- It's the end of all the Narnia chronicles. All the main characters die (spoiler) and the last line is this: *"All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."*

Finishing well takes an historical hope.

- See verses 16-17. Paul says, “At my first defense...” So here at the end of his life, Paul did have a hearing. He’s in prison and being tried. He had to make a defense.
- And at that first hearing he got a stay. He says, “At my first defense...I was *rescued* from the lions mouth.”
- Then go to 18: He uses the same word rescued and says, “**18** *The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.*”
- Paul is saying that no matter what, God will rescue me.
- God comes in and rescues you. He wants your good, and works always for your good. Sometimes he’ll rescue you from the suffering, and other times he’ll rescue you through the suffering. But all the time, he’s rescuing.
- The idea here is that all of history is God’s. Everything that God allows and directs to happen is for the good of those who love him.
- God is in control, and he loves me. That truth helps Paul to finish well.

Finishing well takes an inevitable gospel.

- If we go back to the last lines in Acts, we see that Luke doesn’t tell us anything. Does Paul get a fair trial he was after? Did he get to preach Jesus to Caesar? Luke doesn’t say.
- His last line proclaims that the gospel is being preaching with boldness and without hinderance. Why? Because the book is to about Paul!
- Acts is about the progress of the gospel.
- And Luke is telling us at the end: look at everything the world tried to throw at the gospel! And after all that, the gospel kept right on going. It always finds a way.
- The gospel is the single most powerful and inevitable force on the face of the earth. It breaks through everything.
- To finish well...you have to know that the story of Jesus is the most vital, powerful single force on the face of the earth.

Finishing well takes an ultimate friend

- Back to 2 Timothy. Paul says, “No one stood by me...everyone deserted me” and then he says, “But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me.”
- Proverbs 18:24 talks about “a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”
- True friends have two identifying marks: They always let you in, and they never let you down.
- Those two ideas are almost exactly what Paul says of Jesus here. “The Lord stood by my side and strengthened me.”
- The strengthened me phrase was used in the sense of someone binding up someone else’s wounds. This is the EMT, this is the nurse. That’s what Jesus did.
- Paul, in the final hours of his life, needed the friendship of God to finish well.
- Is God your friend today? Do you know Jesus like this today? Could you say with Paul...he was right there with me all the way? Strengthening me at every turn?

The question is how do you get that kind of relationship with Jesus?

- On the last night they were together, Jesus looked at his disciples and said, “I don’t just call you servants, I call you my friends. Why? A: Because I’m laying down my life for you.”
- Jesus is the ultimate friend.
- Friends always let you in: Jesus open his arms to you.
- Friends never let you down: On the cross Jesus is abandoned, betrayed, forsaken, mocked, and yet he stayed there, for you.
- God abandoned Jesus so that he wouldn’t have to abandon you.
- Is he your friend today? Do you have that friendship?
- Without it, you’ll never finish well.

God, help us to see that because of what Jesus did for us, we can face life, and even death, well. We can fight the fight, finish the race, stay faithful, and receive a crown of life. It is possible because Jesus has made a way. We call him King. We also call him friend. It’s in the name of Jesus we put our trust to finish well. Amen.