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2 Timothy 4:6-8 “Will Your Life Count for God?”

Intro. Everyone of us are living a life. Most of us will live at least 70 years. Some among us will live less. Then, at the end of our life, we will look back on how we have lived. What will we see? Will we see a life that had meaning, purpose, and accomplishment? Or will we see a life that had no meaning, no purpose, and very little accomplishment? Furthermore, the day will come when we will look death in the face. Will we face death with fear and dread, or will we face death with peace and calm assurance? Then after death, the Bible teaches that you will wake up in eternity. Will you be in heaven or hell? Most of you have trusted in Jesus as your Savior, and you rightly believe you are going to heaven. But will there be a reward awaiting you in heaven?

I have just described for you vastly different lives. Surely, you want to live a life of meaning, purpose, accomplishment, and victory. Surely, you want to face death with peace and calm assurance, knowing that you will wake up in heaven. And surely you want to enjoy for all eternity the reward of a life well lived.

Well our text of Scripture tells us of a man who lived that kind of a life. By his example, and by his words, the apostle Paul challenges young Timothy to live the kind of life I have just described. Paul knew that his task on earth was not complete until he had a replacement ready to continue the work. And I want to challenge our hearts by these wonderful words of Scripture.

So let's see how to live a meaningful, victorious, and rewarding life. First of all:

I. FAITHFULLY ACCOMPLISH THE WORK GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO

In v.7 Paul reflects back on his life, and he can gladly say that he had faithfully done what God had called him to do. He says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” I want to pull from that verse a few statements of what God is calling us to do:

A. Stay True to the Word of God – Look at the last phrase, “I have kept the faith.” “The faith” here has the definite article, and it probably refers to the object of our faith, the truth of the Word of God, which has given to us. It is the Christian faith. Of course, “the faith” is to be translated into personal faith in God, and in His Word, His promises. Indeed, all that Paul learned about God and the Christian faith had been proven true in his own life. “The faith” had not failed him. And as he faces death, he knows that “the faith” will see him through his last painful adventure, and prepare him to meet his Master.

Notice also that Paul had *kept* the faith. The word “kept” (*tereo*) means “to keep as in guarding or watching over.” He had never veered from the great truths and doctrines in the Word of God. He had faithfully proclaimed the truth of the Gospel. He has defended it against the attacks of false teachers, such as the Gnostics, the Judaizers, and the philosophers of Athens.

I believe that God has called you to “keep the faith.” Learn the Word of God. Hold on to it. Psa. 119:16 says, “I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.”

B. Fight for the Truth of the Word of God - This is reflected in one of the athletic illustrations that Paul uses here. He also said in v.7, “I have fought the good fight.” The underlying

figure (*agonizomai*) is probably a wrestling-match, boxing-bout, or similar contest. Indeed, Paul had fought many a fight in his ministry. As I had already indicated, he fought against false teachers. And he knew that the fight for the truth would become even more intense in the future. He said in vv.3-4, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers. And they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." That describes Islam and Mormonism. And behind these false teachers would be Satan and the powers of darkness (1 Tim. 4:1). So we must fight against the old devil. Stand against his lies. Resist his temptations. Finally, we must be prepared to fight against sin in our own lives, and in the lives of others. That is why Paul said in the last of v.2, "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching."

Now who likes to fight and struggle? It is difficult, unpleasant, and painful. In fact, Paul's struggle was about to cost him his life. He refused to compromise or deny the Word of God. That is why Paul added that he had "fought the *good (kalos)* fight." It is a noble fight, a just cause. Someone has said, "All that it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

Friend, God has called you to join in on the fight for truth, for righteousness, and for justice. Will you live your life for such a noble cause, or will you live a life of ease, a life lived only for self? To preachers like myself, Paul told Timothy in v.2, "Preach the word!" In v.5 he said, "...do the work of an evangelist." God may not have called you to preach, but He has called you to fight for the truth. Parents, God has called you to pass on your faith and the Word of God to your children. And when they are attacked by the lies of the world, you need to stand for the truth. S.S. Teachers, you need to stand for the truth, teach the truth, and fight for the truth. Christian, when you hear someone telling something that isn't true to the Word of God, you need to speak up, and proclaim the truth.

C. Keep at It Faithfully Your Whole Life – What an example we have here. Paul could look back on his life and say, "I have finished the race." He stresses the fact that he has fully accomplished that ministry to which the Lord had called him to do. The Greek word translated "course" (*dromos*) refers to the course or track of a race. Like a Greek runner, he has stayed on the track of God's will. He has kept his eye on the finish line, and crossed it, and is now resting at the goal. He had accomplished what he had set out to do (Acts 20:24). It is significant that Paul makes no claim to have won the race, but is content to have stayed the course. This metaphor is particularly suited to express the idea of endurance in Christian life and service. He had completed all that God had planned for Him.

That is why Paul told Timothy in the last of v.5, "...fulfill your ministry." Fully and faithfully accomplish the work that God has called you to do.

Christian, will you stay the course? Will you remain faithful to God and to His Word? Will you stay in the fight for the truth, and keep serving God until the end of your life? Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "...let us run with patient endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...." Oh, it's easy to start a distance race, but it's not as easy to complete the race. I want to finish. I want to go all the way. Christian, will you make it your goal in life to remain faithful, and finish what God has called you to do? Remain faithful to your marriage. Remain faithful to your children. Even when parenting is tough, keep at it until your children are raised and on their own. Remain faithful to your church, and continue in the ministry that God has called you to fulfill.

We have seen that you should faithfully accomplish the work God has called you to do. Now let's see what will motivate you to do that:

II. ANTICIPATE THE REWARD GOD HAS FOR YOU

In v.8 Paul says, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness....” Paul's use of illustrations from Greek athletics is not finished. He likens himself to the Greek athlete, who, having finished his race, is looking up at the judge's stand, and awaiting the *stephanos*, the laurel wreath of victory. The noble fight successfully waged, and the race satisfactorily run, both call for a proper reward. Paul had kept the faith. He had preached the truth. He had fought against false doctrine. He had been faithful to complete the work that God had called him to do. So he rightly expected a reward, and this promised reward is what kept him going through the years of pain and struggle. I want to hold before you the promised of God that He will reward you for serving Him faithfully until you reach the finish line.

What is this promised reward? Paul was not anticipating the crown of an athlete, but the “crown of righteousness.” There are two ways of understanding this phrase. It could mean that righteousness itself is the crown (genitive of apposition, as in “crown of life” - Jas. 2:12; Rev. 2:10). If that is the case, Paul was looking forward to possessing complete and total righteousness. All sin would be gone forever. But that would be a crown that is awaiting every believer, regardless of how they have lived their life. It seems more likely that righteous living is the source or cause of this victor's crown. So the victor's crown of righteousness is the crown which belongs to or is the due reward of living a righteous life.

Will you receive such a reward? Are you living according to God's righteous standards, according to the truth of God's Word? Truth produces righteousness, and error produces sin. Right belief produces good conduct, and wrong belief produces bad conduct. But our text gives another indication of whether or not you will receive this reward. Paul has that this crown will be given, “not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” Jesus is coming again some day. And when the Lord says, “I am coming quickly,” do you say, “Amen, come, Lord Jesus.”

I can think of 2 reasons why you would love His appearing. First, if you are living right. 1 John 2:28 says, “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” John gives the contrast of one who is not living right, and who would be ashamed at His coming.

We have not been to the beach in over a year, so we went down to the Angone's beach house Thursday. Our 19 year-old son could not go with us. I thought about not telling him when we would return, to motivate him to resist temptation to do anything wrong at the house while we were gone. Suppose I did that, and we suddenly returned unexpectedly, and found him doing something wrong. In that case, he would still love us, but certainly would not love our appearing!

A second reason why you would love His appearing is if you truly love Him. If you love Him, you will long for His return, not just for your own benefit, but also for His, that He may be glorified before the whole world.

When we arrived at the Angone's beach house, George and Helen had also just arrived back at the house. I was glad to see them put on a big smile at our appearing. They were glad to see us! They loved our appearing because they love us. Do you love Jesus? I can give you a test. In John 14:15 Jesus said, “If you love Me, (you will) keep my commandments.” If you love Jesus, you will obey Him and live a righteous life. And if you stay faithful to the end, a crown of righteousness is laid up for you as well.

Will you be one of those wearing a crown of righteousness some day? I challenge you to learn the truth of God's Word. Retain it in your heart. Live by its righteous standards. Stay faithful to obey God, and serve God. And you, too, will receive that crown some day!

Now after your life has run its course, and you reach the finish line, how will you face death? Well the apostle Paul once again gives a fine example for us all. And so based on v.6 I want to challenge you to:

III. FACE DEATH AS A TESTIMONY TO THE LORD

Here Paul turns his attention to the subject of death. He is aware that just any day now he is going to die. The world sees merely the end of life. But Paul writes, "the time of my departure is at hand." The words, "is at hand," are from a word (*ephistemi*) which means "to stand by, to be on hand." It was as if death already stood nearby. He doesn't know what day it will be when the jailor will come, turn the key in the lock, and open the jail door. At that moment he knew that he would be escorted from prison to face death.

You do not know when death will arrive for you. It may come unexpectedly. It may come after a long illness. But we do know that Heb. 9:27 says that "...it is appointed for men to die once...."

Now as Paul reflects upon his impending death, notice what he compares it to. Notice his attitude concerning death. Let's adopt the same attitude toward death that Paul had. Let's look at the last of v.6 first.

A. Death Is a Departure to Another Destination – He says in v.6, "...the time of my departure is at hand." The word translated "departure" (*analuō*) is interesting. It was a common expression for death. In nautical language, the word was used of the hoisting of an anchor and the sailing of a ship. Soon the blast of the wind will be in the sails, and then, almost immediately, the haven of everlasting bliss will have been reached.

I know of only one writer from the past who has caught this meaning of Paul's. Tennyson wrote as the first verse of his poem, "Crossing the Bar":

Sunset and evening star
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar;
When I put out to sea.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark.

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place,
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face,
When I have crossed the bar.

That's what death is for the child of God. It is a release for us. Paul says, "Don't let my execution bother you too much. I'm like a ship that has been tied up at the harbor. When death comes, I'm really taking off to go and be with Christ, which will be far better." Paul is saying that I am getting ready to cut loose from the shores of time, cross over on the waters of eternity and land on the banks of glory. Boy, what a picture of going home for the child of God!

On the other hand, the word was used military circles of the taking down of a tent and the departure of an army. Since Paul was a tentmaker by trade, and he spoke of the human body as a tent, I believe he probably had in mind this figure. Comparing this life in a human body to a tent reinforces the temporary nature of earthly life. Paul says, "I'm getting ready to pull up the stakes of time and move on to a new campground." Likewise, in other passages the apostle speaks of the believer's death as a departure to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23), and to be at home with the Lord (II Cor. 5:8). It is going to the Father's house with many mansions (John 14:2). It is going to paradise (Luke 23:43). What might seem the end will be a departure to a glorious new era, free from all present restrictions. No wonder Paul called it a gain (Phil. 1:21), and far better (Phil. 1:23).

Do you have this attitude toward death? Boy, it sure makes facing death less painful, and less fearful. And because he had this attitude toward death, he could not be intimidated by treats of a death sentence. He could keep the faith, and never deny or compromise God's truth. Friend, you can only have this attitude toward death if you know the One who conquered death, Jesus Christ. You must know the One who promised that He is in heaven, preparing a place for us.

B. Death Should Be a Final Act of Worship – This is indicated in v.6. As Paul faces death, he says, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering...." He knew his sentence of death would not be crucifixion, for a citizen of the Roman Empire was not crucified. Instead, he knew he would be beheaded. It would have been an unpleasant sight to watch that big, burly Roman soldier lift that tremendous blade over his head, then with one fell swoop sever the head from the body and see the head drop into a basket on one side and the body fall limp on the other side. But Paul says if that's all you saw, you really didn't see very much. He says you should see beyond that to the spiritual significance of it. "poured out as a drink offering" comes from a single Greek word (*spendomai*) which referred in this case to the Old Testament drink offering (cf. Ex. 29:40; Num. 28:7). The wine was taken and poured over the burnt offering, which, of course, was really hot from the fire. It was a sacrifice, an act of worship. You know exactly what would happen. The drink offering would go up in steam. It would just evaporate and disappear. Paul is saying, "I am pouring out my life as a drink offering on the sacrifice of Christ. I have not lived my life for myself but for Him." Paul's life would soon disappear, and he would rise to the heavens. So that execution block is compared to an altar, where Paul would give up his life as a martyr, and the blood that would flow would be like a drink offering to the Lord.

I want to tell you an important truth. As you live, so shall you most likely die. All the way through Paul's life he had been pouring himself out. He took his wealth and put it on the altar for the Lord. He took his academic credentials and put them on the altar for the Lord. He took his own personal desires and interests and put them on the altar for the Lord. And as he had lived, so he died, pouring out his blood as a martyr because he refused to compromise the truth. He died in an act of worship to the Lord.

That's the way every believer ought to die. Every child of God ought to look upon his death as one more opportunity to be a witness for Jesus and to die as an act of worship unto the Lord. How you face death should be a witness to your family. It ought to be a witness to your friends. It

ought to be a witness to the nurses who care for you. Heb. 11:21 says, “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.”

Conclusion: Today I have called upon you to live a higher, more noble kind of life. Find out what God has called you to do. That includes knowing the truth, believing the truth, and fighting for the truth. He has called you to serve Him in some form of Christian ministry. And then, after such a life, you will be able to face death without fear and dread. You will face death knowing that it is only a departure to a better place. And if you have been faithful to your calling, lived a righteous life, and stayed on course until the end, you will be rewarded by God Himself with the victor’s crown of righteousness!

Can you see yourself living this kind of a life? You can by God’s grace. Make sure you have trusted in Jesus as your Savior in repentance of sin. Learn the Word of God. Believe it. Find out what else God has called you to do for Him and for others. He has gifted you to be able to lead or help in some ministry. Trust Him to help you serve Him effectively.

Sources: 2 Timothy commentaries by Guthrie, Hendriksen, McGee, Ward, & Wuest; Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).