**October 23, 2022 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18**

 ***Finishing Well***

**Scripture:** *2 Timothy 4:6-18 NRSV*

*(6)As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, 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)From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. … (16)At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! (17)But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, 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 attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen*.

**Notes:**

1. The Lord’s saints will face ***trials*** and ***tests***.
	1. What is your ***goal*** in life?
	2. Walking this Christian path is a ***struggle***.
2. To finish well we must ***fight*** the good ***fight***.
	1. When ***tempted*** the devil has you on the ropes.
	2. When ***discouraged***, you are knocked down.
	3. When you ***live*** in ***sin***, you are knocked out,
	4. Every ***swing*** must count, every ***step*** must count.
3. We ***finish*** well by ***finishing*** the race.
	1. Get rid of ***burdens*** just as athletes get rid of the unnecessary weight before a race.
	2. If we intend to finish the race these ***sins*** must be put behind us,
	3. Keep your eyes on the ***prize***.
4. We finish well by ***keeping*** the ***faith***.
	1. ***Guard*** the salvation that Christ died to give you.
	2. ***Fulfill*** the calling that God has on your life?
5. God is more interested in the ***attitude*** of your ***heart***.
	1. Desire to ***finish*** well;
	2. ***Listen*** for our father’s voice.

 **Script:**

Finishing well, it is an idea that what you start you finish; you do not quit; and even if you are not able to complete what you started successfully, you still finish the task to the best of your abilities. I have had some experience with this and some struggles with it as well. My life is full of projects that I started and left by the wayside because something more important came up. But there are some things that I take very seriously and I strive to do my best in these things. For instance, my relationship with my wife, I take it very seriously and intend to be with her until the Lord takes one of us home. My relationship with my children, I intend to do my best to be the father they need, and the best role model I can be for them. But the one thing that I take more seriously than these, is the relationship I have with my Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

We all have things in our life that require our attention. We all have relationships with family and friends; some are good and some are bad. We all have a relationship with Jesus Christ, whether it be a good one or bad one. But I wonder, how many of you intentionally allow the relationship with Jesus to fall by the wayside? How many of you intentionally neglect to maintain the relationship you have with Jesus.

Well in our passage today Paul is talking about his relationship with Jesus in many ways and he is sharing with Timothy some of what he is experiencing in his walk with Christ. In these comments we may find some tidbits to help us not only nurture our relationship with Christ but also some guidelines on how we can face diversity, and how we can finish well. Stand with me as we share in the reading of 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18.

*2 Timothy 4:6-18 NRSV (6)As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, 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)From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. … (16)At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! (17)But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, 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 attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen*.

When my mother passed away in 2007, a portion of this passage came to my mind. My mother came to know Christ on Easter Sunday of 1963. Throughout her relationship with Jesus she had many trials, many struggles, and many moments when she neglected to nurture the relationship she had with Jesus. But in her later years, from the time she came back to the Lord in the 80’s, I believe she moved with God, striving to bring the children of this church into a knowledge of who Jesus is and what he should be in their lives. When my mother faced cancer; the whole family was devastated, but decided to stand beside her and help in her battle with that disease. After extensive treatment and a stem cell transplant, she was declared cancer free. She continued to take the prescribed meds and do what she could but several years later the numbers that came back from her tests were not what they should have been. I believe she knew the cancer was back, but we were not sure where it was. When she entered the hospital for the last time in June of 2007, the medical staff knew where the cancer was and that there was little they could do to help her, other than making her comfortable. When she passed that Friday morning, I could her saying, “*(7)I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*”

In many ways each of the Lord’s saints here on this earth will face trials and tests. They will need to overcome obstacles and meet with troubling situations in their lives. But if they are faithful, if they are persistent, and if they continue to strive for the Lord's likeness, they too will be poured out as an offering to the Lord, they too will know that there departure from this world is coming, and that they will be entering into the presence of the Lord, himself. They can say with confidence that they too, like so many others, have fought the good fight, that they have finished the race, that they too have kept the faith. They can leave this world with confidence, without fear of what the future holds, a confidence that a crown of righteousness will be rewarded to them by Jesus himself.

What is your goal in life, what is your desire for the future, and what do you think will happen when life on earth is through? My goal is to spend eternity in heaven, I do not need a crown of righteousness; just to be able to spend eternity in the presence of Jesus will be enough for me. I would like very much to not have any struggles in my life, but I know that is something I will not see. Life in itself is a struggle, to live life in the fulfillment of God’s will is an even greater struggle; but it is a struggle that is worth undertaking. I do not want to discourage you; but also, I do not want you to think that the Christian walk is easy.

Walking this Christian path is a struggle, we start out like those in a race, we are full of energy and want to go at it full speed, but then comes the first hill, and we can feel the pain of the task we face. We will face a second hill, then a third, and maybe even more; but we must keep going. We will get tired, we will get discouraged, we will wonder how long will this go on, and we will wonder where our help comes from at times. But this race that we are in, is not a sprint, it is a marathon and it takes planning, it takes strategy, it takes will power; Paul talks about fighting the good fight, finishing the race, and keeping the faith all of which require planning, strategy, and will power.

So how do we finish well? Paul indicates to finish well we must fight the good fight. But what does he mean by that? In Paul’s day the sport of fighting was brutal. There were no padded gloves; and when the opponent was knocked out, usually it meant the victor would continue to pommel his opponent to death. Only the victor leaves the ring alive.

Why would Paul use such an ungodly metaphor to explain a truth as godly as this? I believe Paul wants us to know that when we accept Jesus into our lives and turn our backs to Satan, we are stepping into the ring. Fighting until the devil drops is the only way we get out of the ring alive. You may get knocked down but you cannot allow the devil to knock you out. How do you know the difference? When you are tempted the devil has you on the ropes. When you are discouraged, you are knocked down. But when you return to living in sin, you are knocked out, you are no longer a threat to the devil.

What can we do to keep Satan from knocking us out? In 1 Corinthians, Paul says that he runs with purpose, he doesn’t throw his punches blindly into dead air. Every swing must count, every step must count. Paul is talking about focusing on the Lord. We cannot afford to be distracted by the gray areas of life, giving in to temptation or bending the rules. Refuse to give in; draw strength from the Lord, and when you get knocked down, get back up as quickly as possible. Where is your struggle today, what is your fight. We must fight the good fight.

We finish well by finishing the race. What does Paul mean by this? I said this earlier, this is not a sprint this is a marathon. While marathons were not bloody, they weren’t easy either. Those who ran marathons in Paul’s day had to overcome rough terrain, harsh weather, wild animals and even thieves and bandits. Paul is comparing the Christian walk to that kind of marathon; not a modern one with smooth roads, and rain delays. But Paul tells of two obstacles that we must deal with to stay the course; we must …lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely… .

What are the burdens that weigh you down? Burdens like injustice, unforgiveness, bitterness, guilt, anxiety, failure, frustrations, and envy. Get rid of these burdens just as the athlete gets rid of the unnecessary weight before the race. In the ancient days clothing was considered an unnecessary weight, so they would run the race naked. I am not suggesting running around naked but we must rid ourselves of the things that burden and slow us down.

And what is the sin that clings to us? We face many temptations and some may be avoided but are not, the little white lies, the gossip we share, the anger and resentment we hold in reserve for those who may have hurt us. We must lay aside all sin, no matter how harmless they may seem. If we intend to finish the race these sins must be put behind us, they must be acknowledged and settled. You can live in sin and keep running the race, but no matter where you go these sins follow after you, you will be looking over your shoulder instead of pressing forward; your guilt will eventually tire you out and slow you down. Rid yourself of these sins and keep your eyes on the prize.

We finish well by keeping the faith. How did Paul keep the faith? The Greek use here indicates he kept it by watching over it, guarding it. Paul guarded his trust in Jesus, even in the midst of terrible sufferings that tested his faith. We know of the thorn in Paul’s flesh; we have heard of how his friends abandoned and betrayed him; how he despaired in living. Each of these would be enough for some to quit, but not Paul, he stood firm in each of these obstacles. He defended the gospel in the presence of dignitaries, such as Felix and Agrippa. He confronted Peter when he saw Peter compromising the teachings of Christ.

Paul declared the gospel faithfully and guarded its truth, he did not water it down or make it politically correct. He even encouraged Timothy to do the same. Paul had fulfilled his divine calling to be Jesus' messenger to the gentiles; knowing that it would mean much suffering. But Paul gladly accepted the summons, never wavering and always trusting in Jesus' strength to see him through to the end. Are you keeping the faith? Are you guarding the salvation that Christ died to give you? Are you fulfilling the calling that God has on your life?

How do you finish well? You fight the good fight keeping your eyes fixed upon the one who gives you strength, Jesus. You keep running until the race is done, with your eyes fixed upon the prize; eternity with Christ. You guard your faith, devotedly, until you leave this world and its troubles behind you. But here is the tough question; “how do we know if we are finishing well?” We don’t, again this is where our faith comes in. Our God, the righteous judge, will reward you because he is much more interested in the attitude of your heart than your outward performance. What kind of reward are we talking about? Paul calls it a crown of righteousness. In those days the victor would receive a wreath made from laurel to be worn like a crown. After a few days the wreath would wither and be virtually useless. In the modern-day Olympics, victors are given medals of Gold, Silver, and Bronze; they look nice on display but are just as useless. The reward we are promised is not perishable. We do not know if it is an actual crown or not, but we know that this crown gains us access to the Lord and the benefits we are promised. We shall be clothed in garments of righteousness, our bodies shall become imperishable, and every tear will be wiped away from our eyes.

Now is the time to decide how you want to finish. Are you of the attitude that it doesn’t matter how you finish, because Jesus forgave your sins and that is all that is needed; do you think that once you are saved you will always be saved? Salvation is a choice to follow Jesus wholly and completely; to do everything he instructs and be obedient to his will and way. Perhaps you are satisfied to just squeeze across the finish line; to do just enough to get to heaven? This sounds like works salvation; if I live a good life and obey all of the rules. But what about a relationship with your Lord and Savior? Is your desire to finish well; are you determined to fight the good fight, are you planning to finish the race, are you keeping the faith?

In our movie last Saturday evening, Overcomer, a girl is running a cross country race. She has never won a race before but is given a set of headphones with her father’s voice instructing and encouraging her along the course. As she comes to the many obstacles of the course his voice tells her how to attack the course and then he proceeds to encourage her. Needless to say, not only does she finish the race well, she also wins the race. Likewise, if we are willing to run the race, to fight the good fight, we should be listening for our father’s voice. He will instruct us at each obstacle, He will encourage us when we begin to feel weak, but we must be quiet and listen for his still small voice, we must be obedient to the instruction we are given. And above all we must fight the good fight, finish the race, turn your eyes upon Jesus and keep the faith.