

“Passing On The Torch”

A Study of 2 Timothy

Sermon # 7

“A Terminal Perspective”

2 Tim 4: 6-8

A retirement home resident asked some children who were touring the home if they had any questions. “Yes,” one girl said. “How old are you?” “I’m 98,” she replied proudly. Clearly impressed, the child’s eyes grew wide with wonder. “Did you start at one?”

It is amazing how age changes our perspective even on age. Paul with the benefit of age and maturity looks back over his life with a unique perspective, that not all of us have, he knew he was to die soon. The Apostle Paul is nearing the end of his life and he knows it. He has been arrested and is sitting in a prison cell awaiting execution. Yet his life held no regrets. Wouldn't it be great to be able to live a life of no regrets. Paul writes about from his unique “Terminal Perspective” to Timothy in verse six through eight of Chapter four.

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. (7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (8) Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

After an exhaustive study of the men and women of the Bible, Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary concluded that there are approximately 100 detailed biographies in the Bible. He notes that approximately two-thirds of those men and women ended poorly. Either they turned to immorality or they drifted away from the faith or they ended their life in a backslidden condition. The Apostle Paul was not among them. He finished well.

The concern for finishing well is not limited to the elderly. It is the passion of the wise long before they say their goodbyes. No clear-headed person wants to leave this world on a bad note. No one wants to be remembered as a fool who gambled on a long life with no thought for the future.

Concern for finishing well is relevant to the young and the old alike. The end of life may come unexpectedly. From childhood on we have a desire to be remembered as a good person. And the only way to make sure we will be remembered that way is to live that way....continuously.

Paul Reflects On His Present – He is Ready. (v. 6) “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.”

In verse six Paul says, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering...” (v. 6a) When Paul says he is being poured out like a drink offering, he is referring to an Old Testament ritual that accompanied certain sacrifices. The Law mandated that when a worshiper brought an offering, part of it was consumed upon the altar and part was given to the priest for his own use. When the offering was consumed by fire, the worshiper would sometimes pour a “drink offering” of wine upon the burning sacrifice. All the wine was to be poured out. None was to be given to the priest. As the wine hit the burning coals, it evaporated and a sweet smell rose from the altar. Keep in mind that wine was a symbol of joy in the Old Testament. The drink offering was a symbolic way of saying, “*I gladly give all that I have to the Lord. Nothing is held back. All that I have, I gladly give to my God.*” Paul did not see himself as about to be executed but rather as offering himself to God.

Paul knew that his death was close at hand. He was on death row in Rome and he would never be set free. Paul had already given everything to Jesus. The only thing left to give was his life—and that he gladly gave.

Paul continues in the second part of verse six with, “... and the time of my departure is at hand.” Paul says that the time of his “departure” (*anulusis*) is at hand. Within the New Testament, there are 26 different Greek words translated as “depart,” “departing,” or “departure.” But the one chosen by Paul is found only in this verse. The word “departure” in verse six has three word pictures behind it. It refers to a ship hoisting the anchor, raising the sails, leaving the harbor, and setting sail for a distant port.

The time has come to cast off the lines and set sail for parts unknown. If Paul were writing this today instead of ships he would probably use airplanes to illustrate his meaning. It is as if Paul were saying “*the time has come to catch my plane.*” He uses the same word in Philippians 1:23 but lets back up to Phil 1:21 to get the context of what he was saying. There he said, “For to me, living is for Christ and dying is even better. (22) Yet if I live, that means fruitful service for Christ. I really don’t know which is better! (23) I’m torn between two desires: Sometimes I want to live, and sometimes I want to go and be with Christ. That would be far better for me...” (NLT). Paul says that death for the Christian is like a departure. We are cutting loose from this life and setting sail for the next.

It also refers to an army that has made camp near a battlefield. To “depart” means to break camp, leave the battlefield, and head for home.

The root of this word (*lulusis*) was also used extensively as a legal term to designate a release from a binding contract, because the obligations of that contract were fulfilled. Paul was viewing his death as a release from his contract. The contract was the work that he was called to do and he was entitled to this release because he had fulfilled the obligations of the contract.

George Sweeting puts it this way, “So like a prisoner awaiting his release, like a schoolboy when the end of term is near, like a migratory bird ready to fly south, like a patient in

the hospital anxiously scanning the doctor's face to see whether a discharge may be expected, I long to be gone – extricating myself from the flesh I have too long inhabited, seeing the great doors of eternity swing open ..." - such is the prospect of death for Paul and for any Christian. [George Sweeting. "Can I Die Well." (Moody Jan/Feb 2003) p.70.]

Paul faced his "departure" with no feelings of despair but with the divine assurance that the best part of life – his real life was only about to begin. It was a move from his demanding and painful life on Earth to the infinitely glorious life of peace and rest when he would be forever with the Lord.

Paul Reflects On His Past – He was Faithful (v. 7) "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Before Paul departs on his final voyage, he looks back over thirty years of ministry and describes in three brief expressions with an emphasis on completion. Paul had no regret, no sense of unfulfillment or incompleteness since he has given Christ control of his life.

Paul begins by saying in verse seven, "I have fought the good fight." Notice Paul is not bragging on himself and the good job he has done, he did not say "*I have fought a good fight.*" But rather he says, "I have fought *the* good fight." The language Paul uses means "*to contend for a prize or to struggle.*" Paul is saying that life has been a real struggle at times. And I think that each of us understands what that means. Paul reminds each of us that although life can be a real struggle at times, it is worth the struggle.

Next, he says "...I have finished the race..." It is significant that Paul made no boast of having won the race but simply stated he had finished it. Each year thousands of individuals participate in the running of the Boston Marathon only one person will win the race but there is great honor in just being able to say that you have run in the Boston Marathon and finished the race.

"One of the most grueling of all bicycle races is the Tour De France. A contestant in that event, Gilbert Duclos-Lassalle, describes it in a National Geographic article titled, "An Annual Madness." The race covers about 2000 miles, including some of France's most difficult, mountainous terrain. Eating and drinking is done on the run. And there are extremes of heat and cold. To train for the event, Lassalle rides his bicycle 22,000 miles a year. What kind of prize makes people endure so much hardship and pain! \$10,000? \$100,000? No. It's just a special winner's jersey. What then motivates the contestants? Lassalle sums it up: "Why, to sweep through the Arc de Triomphe on the last day. To be able to say you finished the Tour de France." [Our Daily Bread, October 5, 1990]

Lastly he says, "... I have kept the faith." ? Paul saw his life as a trust from God, and he had been a good steward. He had kept the faith. He had never veered from the great truths and doctrines in the Word of God.

Paul had lived his life in such a fashion that he had no regrets. “In 1904 William Borden, heir to the Borden Dairy Estate, graduated from a Chicago high school a millionaire. His parents gave him a trip around the world. Traveling through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe gave Borden a burden for the world’s hurting people. Writing home, he said, “I’m going to give my life to prepare for the mission field.” When he made this decision, he wrote in the back of his Bible two words: No Reserves. Turning down high paying job offers after graduation from Yale University, he entered two more words in his Bible: No Retreats. Completing studies at Princeton Seminary, Borden sailed for China to work with Muslims, stopping first at Egypt for some preparation. While there he was stricken with cerebral meningitis and died within a month. A waste, you say! Not in God’s plan. In his Bible underneath the words No Reserves and No Retreats, he had written the words No Regrets.” [Our Daily Bread, December 31, 1988 - www.bible.org/illus/regret]

What yet remained for Paul, after reflection on the present and the past; would be by far the most glorious part of his life in Christ.

Paul Reflects On His Future – He Will Be Rewarded (v. 8) “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

The word that Paul used and is translated “crown” is (*stephanos*) which was a victor’s crown. It was the type of crown typically placed on the head of the winner of an athletic event.

The greatest prize in the ancient Olympics was not a gold medal as it is today, but a laurel leaf crown. To stand in the stadium wearing the crown of laurel leaves was the greatest honor an athlete could be given. But in a few days, the crown of laurel leaves would wither. But Paul knew that he would receive a crown that would last forever.

1 Corinthians 9:24–25 tells us about the

imperishable nature of our crown. “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. (25) And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” That is the athlete’s crown for being a winner on the racetrack of life.

There are other crowns mentioned in the New Testament such as the Soul Winner’s crown, mentioned in Philippians 4:1: “...my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown...” A crown is given for having a part in leading people to the Lord. Paul will have many crowns—there is no doubt about that.

The “crown of righteousness” in verse eight is the reward for a righteous life, and that is a crown that we can all receive.

As Paul heads into the final stretch of his race, he has no doubts about the outcome of the race, because even if his run has been less than perfect, his confidence is not himself but in the just judge who hands out the rewards.

When we head off on a trip by plane; we make sure we get on the plane, we endure the flight, and at the end of the flight, there is an arrival. Often the reason for the excitement associated with the trip is not the trip itself, but because of who is waiting for us there. The same thing is true of the Christian... we face departure from this life with excitement... not because the departure is exciting...but because of what is waiting for us there.

I don't mind plane rides... although they are not always the most enjoyable things in the world. I am willing to endure all the inconveniences associated with flying; the lines at the airport, those little seats all crammed together on the plane, divided by those tiny little aisles where the stewards are always bumping your elbows, and all those little compartments designed to be slightly smaller than your smallest piece of luggage. I will not even start on the bathrooms in the planes. What I am trying to say is that flying is not always that pleasant, but we don't mind because it gets us to our destination. When the time comes for our departure it may not be a delightful experience, it may include a hospital or a nursing home and illness and incapacitation, but the goal will be worth it all.

There is a hymn that I think summarizes what I am trying to say entitled "It Will Be Worth It All."

"It will be worth it all;

when we see Jesus,

Life's trials will seem so small,

when we see Him,

One glimpse of His dear face,

all sorrow will erase.

So bravely run the race,

till we see Christ."

Conclusion

Dr. Anthony Campolo tells about a sociological study in which fifty people over the age of ninety-five were asked one question: *"If you could live your life over again, what would you*

do differently?" It was an open-ended question, and a multiplicity of answers came from these eldest of senior citizens. However, three answers constantly reemerged and dominated the results of the study. These three answers were: If I had it to do over again, I would reflect more, risk more, and do more things that would live on after I am gone.