

For What Are We Living?

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[0 : 00] 2 Timothy is the text this morning. I'm going to look at the first bit of chapter 1 and the last part of chapter 4. As the years fly by, I find myself reflecting more and asking more questions that tend to start with why.

The questions are not so much about the providential workings of God and His sovereignty as He directs my steps and opens and closes opportunities. I get that. And I'm grateful for that, at least as I look back on those situations. My why questions are probably more regret for unwise behaviors or missed opportunities wondering why I was so blind or foolish not to see or appropriately act.

That, I've noticed, can easily morph into what if or if only. And that kind of moping, frankly, is pathetic.

But it happens sometimes. We need to reflect, but sometimes the reflection, rather than resulting in mid-course corrections, turns into full-blown shutdowns.

[1 : 16] Not good. I suppose a very natural time to reflect is at the end of the year, looking forward to the beginning of the next. I have the need to know that my life matters.

I want it to have meaning. I want to make sure that I'm living for something of value, something that will outlive me. I would hate to think that I lived my whole life and it counted for little or nothing. I think that's why I'm drawn to this last correspondence from the Apostle Paul. Paul was in prison, probably better defined as a dungeon.

This would have been late. I think a second imprisonment, at least, for Paul after the one where he wrote the prison epistles. Apparently, the verdict, though perhaps not officially known, was a foregone conclusion.

Paul would soon die as a martyr. Knowing that his earthly life was all but over, he poured out his heart to his son in the faith, young Timothy.

[2 : 22] Actually, Paul had some last minute instructions. Actually, most of those are in the second half of chapter 1 and chapters 2 and chapter 3 and the first part of chapter 4.

And those would be a worthy text to consider this morning, but we'll leave that for another time. I just want to focus in on the very beginning of the letter and the very end of the letter for us today. Here, I think we see Paul's heart and his mind in relation to how he saw his life and his reason for living. He not only answers the question, for what am I living?

But he also provides some insight for us in our quest to try to answer that question. And so I think Paul begins in verse 1 with perspective.

Just listen to this. That's where Paul started.

[3 : 21] That's his perspective regarding his life. He saw his life first as driven by the will of God. Paul's life was not self-determined.

He was an apostle by the will of God. You remember how that happened. He was on his way to destroy Christianity. And God made him his chief spokesman or his son.

It was the will of God that Paul be called out of darkness in order that he might preach the glorious light of the gospel to those who were still in darkness. And that's exactly what the apostle Paul did. The recognition and the high position that surely would have come to this young Pharisee was forever lost. But in Paul's perspective, we see this in Philippians 3 and other places in his writings, he appropriately and gladly counted all those things as loss for the sake of Christ.

He was driven by the will of God. And in the process, he found Jesus Christ to be his greatest treasure. That was his perspective on his life.

[4 : 29] It was the will of God for Paul, as he says, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. So are we willing to acknowledge and accept the will of God for our lives?

Sometimes it won't be comfortable. Sometimes it will be painful. For Paul, it started with perspective. His life was driven by the will of God. But he was also saying that his life was driven by the promise of life.

The last phrase of verse 1 caught my attention. According to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus. So what kind of life do we have in Christ Jesus? What kind of life would we have without Christ Jesus?

Paul was facing imminent martyrdom. But he clung to the promise of life that in Christ Jesus, that's a life that nobody can take away. As believers, our entire earthly existence rests on the promise of life that we have in Christ.

That is, it is our eternal hope. Our hope is eternal life. And that keeps us going through the trials and the hardships and the challenges and the inevitable difficulties that cross our paths.

[5 : 44] Our life here and in eternity is found in the promise of Christ. It is, in Paul's words, in him that we live and move and have our being. Or in another spot in the Bible where Paul says he is our life.

Or this one I love in Philippians chapter 1. For to me to live is Christ. For to me to live is Christ. That was Paul's perspective.

That was the foundation on which he built his life. That must also be ours if we are to successfully navigate the challenges we face in our quest to reach the desired goal.

So our journey toward answering the question for what am I living begins with a perspective. Right perspective also includes some remembrance.

And that's really what he says in the next few verses of chapter 1. We can't really answer the question for what are we living without some evaluation.

[6 : 44] And we can't really evaluate without some reflection. So as Paul begins his letter to his dear friend, he took some time to reflect. Look at verses 3 and 4 and 5 for just a moment.

So what was Paul remembering?

He was remembering God's presence and God's power. We tend to remember what we practice. Paul prayed for Timothy all the time. That's what he says in verse 3. And when he thought about Timothy, you know what immediately pops into his mind? He's thinking about God. He's thinking about the way God was working in that young man's life.

In that young man's heart. To think about Timothy caused Paul to think about God. When we pray for one another, it will change our perspective of them. It does matter for what we pray and how we pray.

[8 : 00] We can nurse our anger and our frustrations under the illusion of prayer. Or we can pray focusing our attention on the truth that God is able to work in people and change them even as he changes us.

Paul could have been frustrated with Timothy. Think about it. Paul, this apostle. This apostle to the Gentiles. This incredible man who was given the responsibility and opportunity and joy of being able to produce 13 books of the New Testament.

He could have complained to God as to why God would have placed this young, inexperienced, timid, second fiddle kind of a person to take over for the great apostle.

But instead, Paul's focus was on a God who was able to equip and empower and embolden this young Timothy for this worthy divine work. That was his perspective.

So he was remembering God's presence and God's power as he prayed for Timothy. But he's also remembering Timothy's tenderness and Timothy's tenacity.

[9 : 08] Whatever Timothy may have lacked in maturity and skill, he made up with a soft heart and a genuine faith. People who are tender and teachable and are learning how to trust are frankly wonderful raw material for leaders.

Paul remembered that. What he saw in Timothy was a great encouragement to him to continue investing in this young man. See, Paul would soon be with the Lord.

Timothy and others whom Timothy would teach and train would be shouldered with the responsibility to carry out the work of the ministry. And as Paul contemplated his soon departure, he was encouraged with what he saw.

So how are we building the next generation? As I look back after a number of years of ministering God's word to people, I sometimes wonder who is serving faithfully with a teachable spirit and a tender heart and a tenacious faith, at least in some part due to my influence and involvement in

their lives.

Part of what helped Paul remain confident and faithful to the end was his own anticipation of the faithfulness of Timothy. So to answer the question, for what am I living?

[10:33] I need perspective. I need to remember some things in the past. But I also need to anticipate some things. I need anticipation.

So we're going to move from the first chapter now to the last chapter of 2 Timothy. Chapter 4. And we're going to look at this.

At what Paul is anticipating. Let's start with verse 6. For I'm ready. I'm sorry. I'm already being poured out as a drink offering.

And the time of my departure has come. I've fought the good fight. I've finished the race. I've kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day.

And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. So as Paul looked ahead, here is what he concluded. He's essentially saying, I'm ready now for this.

[11:33] So are we living in such a way as to be ready to meet the Lord? I don't know that I thought about that that much when I was younger, but I'm starting to think about that a lot more now.

Paul said he was. But how did he know? How do we know if we're ready to meet him? For Paul, it was a matter of recognizing the time. The time of my departure has come.

He did not have any real control over that, but he did have control over the way he would finish his earthly life. He saw his life as having accomplished God's will. That's what he said in chapter 1.

He was not overly confident or proud. In fact, he saw his life as a drink offering. That's an interesting image. And sacrifices were made in the Old Testament, as you know, and elaborate things happened.

Lots of blood was spelt. And burning of animal flesh and all that was going on. But then, I think it's in Numbers 15, somewhere in there.

[12:35] There was something called a drink offering. It was a liquid, perfume kind of thing that was put on the sacrifice.

So the sacrifice is burning. You would have this little bit of a thing at the end. What happens when you throw liquid on a fire?

You hear the tsss, you know, and it's gone. Paul's looking at his life. It's just like a drink offering.

Just a little bit. But in that little bit, whatever it was, there was this, maybe not a big deal, but there was this fragrant, fragrant aroma of one who gave his life and sacrificed for God.

And it was pleasing to the Lord. That's how Paul saw his life. He had fought the good fight. He had finished the race. He had kept the faith. Faithfulness matters, by the way.

It matters now, and it will matter at the end of our lives. It was not about being particularly skilled or amassing great accomplishments. Faithfulness is about being faithful with what we have.

[13:45] Paul had been faithful with many things, not the least of which was he was faithful with faith. And by that, I mean the faith. Sometimes we think of faith, we think of all of it as about believing, but faith is also the gospel.

We are entrusted with the faith, with what we have been given, the Word of God. Paul reminded us in other places, it was like a treasure that was in these clay jars.

It was the faith that he was faithful with. So, are we faithful with the content of the gospel? Are we faithful with the way we live?

When we're faithful, God is pleased and glorified, whether in life or in death. So, what has God given you? Are you using that for Him? Are you faithful with the gospel?

Are you faithful with the gifts He's given you? Are you faithful living your life daily? For the Lord Jesus? That's what Paul was talking about.

[14:46] But he also talks about something else. He said, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. Frankly, it bothers me when people tell me how good they are.

I'm skeptical. But more importantly, usually, that says more about arrogance than it does about greatness. And arrogance is not greatness.

Paul doesn't spend time talking about his greatness. He talks about himself being a drink offering.

But also, when he says there's laid up for me a crown of righteousness, it's not he's thinking because I was so good and so righteous and so faithful and so wonderful and so God-honoring that

he's going to give me rewards for that.

It wasn't so much that, really, at all. It was just another issue, really, when we think about this was already promised to Paul.

If we're faithful, God recognizes that faithfulness. The issue is not based on what was accomplished so much, but on the motives involved and the quality of that accomplishment.

[16:03] That's the idea. And to love is appearing, I think, means that we live our lives with the anticipation of seeing him. People who do that are faithful.

Faithful people will be recognized. And that recognition will be used not to point to us, but rather it will be used to glorify the Lord because we're faithful to him.

That brings glory to him. If we're faithful to him, it says we do that because it's saying that we treasured him. That's why he is glorified even when we're being recognized.

It's not about us. It's about him. Our faithful lives says he is our greatest treasure. That's the whole idea of this reward kind of thing.

It's not saying, oh, this is my very special person here and you get a reward. No, it's that this person treasured me more than anything else and he gave me glory. That's the point.

[17:04] It's pointing back to Jesus. An unfaithful life devalues the Lord Jesus. It says he's not important to us. What will you anticipate when the time of your departure comes?

Now, what we talked about mostly to this point has been positive, but life is filled with lots of discouragements, lots of disappointments, lots of failures and hurts and misunderstandings, and frankly, a whole boatload of troubles.

We will fail and others will fail us. There will be times when we will be lonely and defeated and empty. Paul deals with that too in his quest to answer the question, for what are we living?

When we try to answer that question, we need to be realistic. There are disappointments in life. To answer that question, we're going to deal with disappointments.

So here's Paul in chapter 4, verses 9 to 16, and he deals with some of these disappointments and discouragements. What happens, answering that question, what happens when our circumstances are cold and lonely?

[18:20] What happens? Listen to Paul. Do your best to come to me soon, he says to Timothy. Remember, Paul's in a dungeon. Do your best to come before winter.

Puts a time frame on it. Bring the cloak. Also the books, especially the parchments. Those phrases show us the hard reality of life.

Paul in prison, he would be executed soon. He longed for some companionship. He longed to find warmth and comfort in an old garment that he'd left with someone else earlier in his ministry.

He longed for some books and the parchments, probably referring to Old Testament manuscripts as well as other reading material. He desperately wanted to read about the glory of God that God had revealed in his word.

Those words from God and about God would bring encouragement and help and blessing. There are disappointments when we are no longer surrounded with people and things that bring us warmth and comfort.

[19:27] It's hard when we're cold and lonely. And then Paul goes on to talk about some of his friends. What happens when our friends and companions have gone away? Paul mentions Demas and Crescens and Titus and Mark and Tychicus.

Some have been sent to minister elsewhere. Others were just gone. One is singled out as having deserted Paul. Demas' problem was that he loved this present world more than he loved the work of God.

We're not really told anything else. It doesn't mean Demas was not a believer, but it does mean that he abandoned Paul. When family has gone away, regardless of the reasons, when friends have gone away, when some have turned from us or even against us, it hurts.

Disappointments are real. That's why we must return to the biblical perspective. We are to live our lives according to the will of God and driven by the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. Our friends and companions have gone away.

Our circumstances are cold and lonely. Paul also talked about being dogged by enemies who desired to do him harm. Alexander the coppersmith didn't care for Paul's message.

[20:47] He didn't want to hear what Paul was preaching. His response was to do much harm to Paul. Apparently he had been successful, though Paul is not specific. There may be some in your

family or circle of acquaintances who really can't stand you because of your relationship with Jesus. They make every effort to undermine you in what you say. We need to stay clear of them as much as possible and appropriate. We also know that the Lord will ultimately deal with them for their deeds.

Is that enough to keep us going? Is that an answer to our question? I think Paul offers one more thing, and that is in verse 18, resolve.

Listen to this verse. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. So Paul concludes his letter with this resolution. He resolved to believe that God would do two things.

[21 : 54] One, the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed. Do you find comfort in that statement? No matter what comes my way, no matter what my enemies or the enemy might unleash against me, God will take care of me.

Sometimes my rescue may mean defeat of my enemies. Sometimes it just may be a temporary lull. God is never unfaithful to his promises. Nor is he unfaithful to his people.

Have I resolved that issue in my mind and heart? Do I really believe that the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed? Got to think about that one, don't we? But he will.

He's promised. And then the Lord will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. That's where Paul anchored his hope and his confidence.

Every word of that promise is important. It is the Lord himself who will bring us home. And he brings me. He doesn't send for me or direct me or tell me he will see me later.

[23 : 02] He brings me. I love that. And if he's bringing me, I know I'll arrive there safely. That's a big deal. I won't arrive beaten and battered and bewildered.

I will arrive safely. And the place where he is taking me is his heavenly kingdom. It belongs to him and it's heavenly which suggests perfection and glory and beauty and splendor.

It's a kingdom where he is the king and I get to be with him as part of his kingdom. A kingdom that will last forever. And he did all of this for his glory.

And I have the grand privilege of fulfilling my destiny and bringing him glory forever and ever. Our being present there magnifies his glory.

Think about that. Sinners condemned to death and judgment forever. He rescued by the blood of his son in order that we might be brought as a gift to God of this rescued bunch of battered, broken people whom he has made perfect in him.

[24 : 09] That is amazing. And that all, again, doesn't look good on us. It looks wonderful on him. It's glory to him of what he's done for this bunch of people.

So for what are we living? Are we living with the promise that if we belong to the Lord Jesus, he guides our lives according to his perfect will? Through the good and the bad, the sweet memories and the horrible nightmares?

He will take note of our faithfulness and reward us accordingly when he personally brings us safely into his heavenly kingdom. There, we will enjoy life forever with him and forever fulfill our intended purpose of bringing him glory throughout the ages.

That, my friend, that, my friend, should be what we are living for. Is that what we are living for?

In just a few hours, 2023 will be past. For some of us, we are not sad. Whether or not we responded to God this past year in faithful living, there's not much that we can do about the past.

[25 : 27] Like water poured out on the ground, we can't get it back. But we can set our hearts to live faithfully from this moment on. And may God grant us his grace and insight to understand how we ought to live.

And may he grant to us the strength and the courage to do so. That will be good for us. And that will be glory for him. I want to share one final passage with you.

The passage of Scripture, just the very end of that passage. The whole passage, frankly, would be a good commentary on what the Apostle Paul said. But here it is, the final three verses of Psalm 91. God is speaking. First, the psalmist was speaking to God. And he's speaking to others. And now God is speaking to the psalmist. And here's what he says.

Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him.

[26 : 32] I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and honor him. With long life, I will satisfy him and show him my salvation. What a promise.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed. And bring me safely into his kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever.

And Paul ends with, Amen. May it be. It is. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for being our God. And for most of us in this room, thank you that Jesus is our Savior. For some here that may not be true.

Oh, dear God. May you open up their hearts and minds to see the wonder, the glory, the treasure, the grace, the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 43] Who gave himself for us. May you open their hearts to see and believe. May the end of this year be glorious. They might enter into your salvation.

For the rest of us, Lord, we've had times of great victory. And we've had difficulties and setbacks and problems. For some, even this past week has been very, very hard.

But you are a great God. You are a faithful God. You are a God who holds us up. Who strengthens us. Who gives us courage and hope.

Who provides for us everything that we need. Who walks with us through the valleys of dark shadow. Who leads us and directs us in those narrow paths of righteousness.

Who provides for us in every way that we need. And so, dear Father, may that be true for us as a congregation. May we be a people who live with the right perspective.

[28 : 49] And who ultimately understand that we want to finish well. And so we're going to treasure Jesus until we see him face to face. May it be so.

Thank you in your name. Amen.