

I Have Finished the Race

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[0 : 00] As we come to God's Word this morning, for those of you who are visiting or new, we are continuing on in our series through 2 Timothy, Paul's second letter to Timothy.

So if you have your Bible, you can open it up. And we are now in chapter 4. Last Sunday, we heard Paul's final charge to Timothy to preach the Word.

To correct, to rebuke, to encourage, and to discharge all the duties of his ministry. We heard the encouragement to Timothy, not to be discouraged when people don't seem to be listening, but to press on and to keep going.

And with that charge given, Paul now comes to reflect a little bit on his own situation here in verse 6.

Let me read these verses for us this morning. He says, For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.

[1 : 13] I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing. These are our verses for this morning.

Just three verses, but there's a lot in them. And so we're just going to focus on them today. The first thing we notice is Paul's emphasis.

He has just given this final charge to you, Timothy. You preach the word. You discharge all the duties of your ministry. Correct, rebuke, encourage.

And now we see this shift. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. And so we can hear in these words, this has the feeling of passing of the torch from Paul on to Timothy.

[2 : 25] Passing the baton to him. The next thing that we notice here in Paul's words is this phrase. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering.

What does Paul mean by that? This metaphor is difficult for us to relate to today. In our modern culture, we do not have the offering of sacrifices on altars anymore.

At least not in North America. But this metaphor would have been very meaningful and familiar to Timothy and to the churches of his day. A drink offering or libation is the ritual or ceremonial pouring out of liquid as an act of worship to a deity.

This was actually practiced all over the ancient world and in many different religions. Liquids that were offered included wine, olive oil, water, milk, and even honey.

And in the Greek culture of Timothy's day, this was very common. Basically, anytime someone drank wine, it was customary to first pour some of it into a shallow bowl that was specially designed for this purpose.

[3 : 49] And then they would routinely pour out these bowls on the ground to honor the gods while offering a prayer to one of the many deities. So this metaphor would have been well understood by the Greek Christians of Timothy's day.

But drink offerings or libations were also part of the worship of the Israelites long before this. Back in the book of Genesis, we read about how Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God met with him and poured out a drink offering on it.

This was also something that God commanded the Israelites to do in the days of Moses. He commanded them to offer daily sacrifices to him at the tabernacle.

And these sacrifices included two lambs, one in the morning and one at twilight each day. And along with those lambs, they were to make a grain offering and pour out a libation, a drink offering

of wine before the Lord.

And so Paul, being a Jew and a worshiper of the one true God, no doubt had this Old Testament context in his mind as he writes this.

[5 : 00] So with that understanding, let's translate this metaphor. What is Paul saying here? First of all, drink offerings are about worship. They were used to worship, to honor God.

For the Christians in the churches where Timothy is serving, they might have at one time offered libations to the Greek gods like Zeus and Hermes or the Roman god Liber.

But now they have come to believe in the Lord, in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. And so this metaphor of Paul has to do with worshipping the Lord.

It has to do with worshipping Jesus. And notice what Paul says is being offered in worship to the Lord. What is being poured out as the libation to honor the Lord?

Paul says, I am. I am being poured out. Like I'm in the bowl that is being poured out on the ground or is about to be poured out on the ground as an offering to the Lord.

[6 : 18] In other words, my life is the offering being given to God for his honor. So not only is this about worship, but this is probably also a metaphor pointing to Paul's imminent death.

When you poured out the wine in the bowl as a libation to God, that was it. That wine that you had brought was now gone. It was offered up. It was poured out as part of the sacrifice.

And it's probably also intended by Paul as a bit of a word picture, a vivid picture of what's about to happen to him. Wine is what was poured out before the Lord in the daily sacrifices.

The blood of the grape. And now Paul seems to be using this metaphorically to refer to his death and how his blood will soon be poured out as an offering of worship to God.

And we can kind of see this pointing to his death because of what Paul says next. He says, I'm already being poured out like a drink offering and the time of my departure is near.

[7 : 29] Paul is basically saying, I'm at the end.

My death is going to happen soon. These are the words of a man who sees that this is it. He's at the end.

And so I think we're right to understand this metaphor about the drink offering is pointing to Paul's death. I'm already being poured out like a drink offering. This is Paul saying metaphorically, I'm about to die.

My life, my blood is about to be poured into the ground as an offering of worship to my Lord. And there is some wondering about the time here.

We see the word already. And the time for my departure is near. How much longer does Paul have? Well, if we glance down the page just a little bit to verse nine, Paul says to Timothy there, do your best to come to me quickly.

[8 : 36] As in travel from where you are in Ephesus to where I am in Rome, which would have taken a little while. So this probably doesn't mean that he's dying as he writes this or that tomorrow is going to be his last day, but that Paul knows that the end is very near.

Things are coming to a head and it's not going to be much longer now. God is about to receive my life as an offering of worship. And it's at this point that we hear Paul reflect back over how his life is going, has gone.

We hear Paul share his thoughts with us as he considers that his time is up. These words have often been referred to as the last will and testament of Paul.

The last words of Paul. And so what does Paul have to say as he glances back over the life that he has lived from the day that he first came to believe in Jesus until now?

He says, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

[9 : 50] Three brief yet powerful statements. Let's consider each of them. First, he says, I have fought the good fight.

Do you remember what Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy? Those of you who are with us when we made our way through that letter. Back in his first letter to Timothy, sometime before this, he was warning Timothy about the temptation and trap of greed.

And he said this to Timothy back there. He said, But you, man of God, flee from all this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

Fight the good fight of the faith. And we talked about those words last December and how living the Christian life is about pursuing righteousness.

It's about pursuing godliness, a deeper devotion to God. It's about pursuing a deeper faith in Jesus and a greater love for people.

[11:03] It's about enduring hardship and trouble when it comes. And it's about striving to live a life of gentleness and self-control. And Paul sort of summed up all of this with this charge to Timothy back then.

This charge to fight the good fight of the faith. This is the metaphor Paul uses to describe the Christian life. It's a fight.

It's a battle. But it's the good fight. It's the fight. It's the fight. It's the fight. It's the fight for what's right. And noble. And true.

It's the fight to be and to do these things. To live righteously. Devoted to God. Full of faith in Him. Full of love. Pressing on even when it's hard. And living with gentleness and self-control. That's a struggle. It's a battle.

[12:04] It's not easy. But it's worth fighting for. It's the good fight. And so now here in Paul's second letter to Timothy. As Paul is looking back over his life.

Since he became a follower of Jesus. He says this to Timothy. He says, I have fought the good fight. These words speak to my heart.

This is what I want to be able to say. When I come to the end of my life. And look back over it. I want to be able to say with Paul. I have fought the good fight.

Living for Jesus day after day. And week after week. Is a noble war. It's not a lazy boy recliner. It's not a tempur-pedic mattress.

Paul is saying to us here. It hasn't felt easy. All along the way. It's been a fight. For me to follow Christ. But I have fought this fight.

[13:09] From then. Until now. Look at the second statement that Paul makes here. He says, I have finished the race. Another powerful picture.

The Christian life is not a life of relaxation. Things do not become easy. Just because we come to believe in Jesus. And are saved by him.

Living for Jesus is like running a race. It's got its moments. Of strain. And struggle. And fatigue. It's not a life of chillaxing.

On the Jesus Express. It's a race. It's a race. To be run. And since this race starts. When we become a Christian. And doesn't end until the day.

That we die. Or until the day Jesus returns. We're probably wise. To think of it as a marathon. Rather than a 60 meter dash. Has anyone here ever run a marathon?

[14:14] Down? Good for you. I haven't. But I've got a friend in Kelowna. Who just started running last November.

And I've been talking to him about this. And he's already now completed a few different lengths of races. 6k. And then a 10k race. And now a 13 kilometer race.

And when you start getting to those lengths of races. If you're an average guy like me. You're not too worried about beating everybody else.

Or getting first place. It's an accomplishment. It's something to celebrate. Just to get across the finish line. Just to run that distance.

And make it across at all. And that's why we cheer and clap for people. Who come and last at a marathon. Because they're still accomplishing something amazing. Something really challenging for everybody.

[15:14] That's what I think of as I read Paul's statement here. Notice he doesn't say I have won the race. But I have finished the race. This is not a competition.

It's about staying in it. And following Jesus. Right to the end. That's what matters most. Not how fast our time was.

Or whether we followed Jesus better than others. But that we followed him all the way to the end. That we didn't give up. That's what I think of as I read these words of Paul.

I have fought the good fight. Not that he fought it perfectly. Not that he overwhelmingly crushed it at every moment of every day. But that he didn't stop fighting.

Even when it was hard. Even after moments of falling or failing. Even in moments of weakness. Sickness. Pain. Or temptation.

[16:13] I have finished the race. Not that he won the race. And ran it better and faster than everyone else. But that he finished the course laid out for him. Rather than giving up.

When it felt like he was desperate and weak. And couldn't take another step. In other words. I don't think Paul is boasting here. Saying I've been utterly victorious.

I have conquered. Because I am awesome. No. I think he's simply saying. I have persevered. To the end. Up till now.

I haven't given up. I've kept. The faith. That in itself. Is an accomplishment. Worth celebrating. When you consider the things. That the apostle Paul. Endured. From the day that he first believed. Until now. Let's remember some of those things. Which he lists off to the Corinthians.

[17:12] In his letter to the Corinthians. From 2 Corinthians chapter 11. He says. Five times I received from the Jews. The 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods.

Once I was pelted with stones. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night. And a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move.

I've been in danger from rivers. In danger from bandits. In danger from my fellow Jews. In danger from Gentiles. In danger in the city.

In danger in the country. In danger at sea. And in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled. And have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger.

And thirst. And have often gone without food. I have been cold. And naked. Besides everything else. I face daily the pressure of my concern.

[18:12] For all the churches. Who is weak. And I do not feel weak. Who is led into sin. And I do not inwardly burn. If I must boast.

I will boast of the things. That show my weakness. So when Paul simply states. I have kept the faith. We know it's not a triumphant boast.

As in look at me. I'm awesome. No. It's a grateful sigh. That through all these things. That he endured. By the grace of God.

I kept the faith. I did not renounce. Jesus my Lord. I did not turn away. From Christ. Even when everything inside me.

Was screaming. Like Job's wife. Just curse God. And die. Even when everyone. Had abandoned him. And the doubts began to rise.

[19:08] Is following Jesus. Really worth all this? Paul is saying. I didn't throw in the towel. With Jesus. I have kept. The faith. I wonder how these words.

Hit you this morning. Are they encouraging? Could it be that. Some of you are feeling the strain. And the struggle.

Weakness. Sorrow. Pain. Temptation. Don't give up.

Don't stop. Fighting. The good fight. Keep running the race. That Jesus has laid out before us.

Don't surrender. Yourself. To the desires of the flesh. Or to the desires of the devil. And go off. And live as you please. No. Hold on to that faith.

[20:19] Because. There is. A good. End. To this fight. To this race. For all who belong.

To Jesus. After reflecting briefly. On how. He has lived. Paul now tells us. About what he is looking forward to. In the days ahead.

It's as if Paul is standing. On the edge. Of life. And death. Finally. Made it to the finish line. And this is what he sees.

This is what he anticipates. Now there is in store for me. The crown. Of righteousness. Which the Lord. The righteous judge.

The righteous judge. Will award to me. On that day. And not only to me. But also to all. Who have longed. For his appearing.

[21:19] Is death the end. For a Christian. Not at all. At the end of. Life's race. When we run for Jesus. There is the crown.

Of righteousness. Which he gives us. At the end. Let's notice here. That Paul is continuing. The metaphor. A little bit. The word for crown here.

Is the Greek word. That was used to describe. A wreath made of foliage. That they would. Often give. To. People who competed. In the games. As an award.

And so Paul is continuing. The metaphor. A little bit here. I've run the race. He says. And at the end. Of life's race. There is a prize. There is a reward.

God gives the crown. The victor's crown. Of righteousness. To those who fight. This good fight. Till the end. And finish this race. And to those who keep.

[22:17] The faith. What is. This crown. Of righteousness. Most. Good Bible scholars.

And interpreters. Humbly admit. That it's difficult. To pin down. Precisely. What Paul means. By this. He just kind of. Sort of throws it out there. He doesn't. Explain.

What it is. Or unpack it here. And so. Good Bible scholars. Interpreters. Kind of make their best guess here. Based on similar uses. Of crown. As a metaphor.

In the New Testament. And based on what the Bible. Teaches about righteousness. In other places. Here are some of the possibilities. One idea is that the crown of righteousness.

Is a crown that it is. Awarded for righteousness. That it is the prize of victory. Awarded for a righteous life. And the Bible speaks elsewhere.

[23 : 16] About how God's people. Will be rewarded. For the good works. That they have done. In faith. A second idea. Is that the crown of righteousness.

Means. That. Righteousness. Actually is. The crown. The prize of victory. That. Is righteousness itself. And some of the other.

Metaphorical uses of crown. In the New Testament. May lead us to think. Along these lines.

Elsewhere. We hear about believers. Receiving the crown. Of life. James chapter 1 verse 12.

Or the crown of glory. 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 4. And in those cases. We kind of know. That life is what is received. Glory is what is received.

And so perhaps here. That's what it means. That righteousness. Is what is received. Some see this righteousness. As being what we call. Our theologians call.

[24 : 14] Imputed righteousness. The imputed righteousness of Christ. Christ. Meaning that a right standing with God. Is given to us. Not by works. But by faith in Jesus.

And then others quickly point out. Based on. On the. The writings of Paul. Elsewhere. That all believers. Have this righteousness already. We have a right standing with God. Already. By faith. But that at the end. Perhaps. This refers to us. Entering into the fullest experience. Of that. As we come to stand before the judge. And.

Our verdict is not. Guilty. Or condemned. Others see this righteousness. A little bit differently. As scholar.

George Knight. Puts it. Rather than being the crown. Which will bring final justification. It is much more likely. That it refers to that permanent. And perfect. State.

[25 : 13] Of righteousness. Into which the Christian. Is brought. By God. Referring to our being made. Perfect.

Incorruptible. Several scholars suggest. That we not be too dogmatic. About which one it is. And that we leave room. Even for the possibility. That Paul intends.

Some combination. Of these truths. By this phrase. We don't want to minimize. The idea of reward. For the race run here. Because it's.

Pretty clear. That that's here. Nor should we be too quick. To limit. What Paul has in his mind.

When he refers to us. Receiving righteousness. On that final day.

But one thing. That seems really clear. Is who this crown of righteousness. Is for. It is not. Just for Paul. It is not as though.

[26 : 10] The Christian life. Is a competition. And only one person. In each generation. Or one person. In each church. Wins. Comes in first place. And receives the prize. Look at what Paul says.

Here in verse 8. He says. There is in store 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 longed. For his appearing. The crown of righteousness. Is for all. Who fight.

The good fight. It's for all. Who finish. The race. Marked out for us. It's for all. Who. By perseverance. Keep.

The faith. And there's one thing. That all. Who. Who do these things. Have in common. We fight. And we run. And we keep.

[27 : 06] Keep the faith. Because we long. For the appearing. Of Jesus. In fact. A more literal translation.

Of that word. Longed. Is loved. To all. Who have loved. His appearing. appearing. The crown.

Of righteousness. Is given. To all. Who have loved. Christ Jesus. Appearing. This is. Perhaps. A deeper way.

Of saying. That the crown. Is given. To all. Who truly believe. In Christ Jesus. Jesus. How can you. Long for. How can you.

Love. The appearing. Of Jesus. The second. Coming. Of Jesus. Unless. You believe. In Jesus. That he came. That he.

[27 : 59] Died for us. That he. Rose again. That he. Ascended. To heaven. And that yes. He is. The coming. Christ. He is. The coming.

King. Of the kingdom. Of God. That he. Proclaimed. A true believer. Not only believes. All this. About Jesus. But we believe it. So sincerely. That we actually.

Long. For Jesus. To return. We love. The truth. That he. Is coming. Back. Because we love him. And so.

I want to ask you. This morning. Do you long. For the return. Of Jesus. Do you love. The sure reality. That he is coming back.

If we belong to Jesus. This is no cause. For dread. We can actually. Long. For the appearance. Of Jesus. The righteous judge.

[28 : 59] Because we have faith. We have confidence. That when we stand before him. Our verdict. Will not be. Ultimately. Guilty.

Or condemned. We have confidence. That he took the punishment. That we deserve. For our sins. When he offered himself.

As a sacrifice. On the cross. We have confidence. That he has made us. To be right. With God. By that. Gracious.

Gift. Finally. How should we live today. In light of these words.

I think that Paul. Has put himself forward here. As an example. For us to follow. Do you see. Your own.

[29 : 55] Life. As being poured out. In the service of God. In the worship. Of Jesus. Do you see.

Your own life. As being an offering. To him. Paul said it this way. To the church in Rome. He said. I urge you. Brothers and sisters.

By the mercy of God. Offer. Your bodies. As a living sacrifice. Holy. And pleasing to God. This is your true.

And proper worship. Some have the privilege. Of dying. For the Lord Jesus. But we all. Have the privilege.

And calling. Of living. For the Lord Jesus. With every breath. Paul. Shows us. In his own life.

[30 : 51] How we should live. How we should live. For Christ. No matter what. Right. To the end. Of our lives. He shows us.

In his own life. That yes. It will be a fight. But it is the good fight. Keep fighting. Don't give up. Run the marathon.

Keep your eyes. On the prize. Let the return of Jesus. Be. What gets you. Out of bed. In the morning. And what motivates.

That motivates. Your doings. Your efforts. Your conversations. Each day. Let the kingdom. Of Christ. Our king. Which is coming. Be what delights you. And what drives you forward.

In obedience. To all that our king. Has commanded us. We see in these words. Paul lived in light. Of the coming. Of his Lord.

[31 : 50] And he is by these words. Urging us to follow in his footsteps. Timothy and us. Follow in my footsteps. The crown of righteousness. The crown of life.

Awaits us. Not just Paul. But us too. Who have longed. And love. His appearing.

Let's pray. Father I pray that you would encourage us this morning. So deeply with these words. Give us perspective on our lives today. Give us perspective on the lives of those we love. As we gather around the dinner table. Or celebrate with family.

A life of faith in you. Is what matters most. Help us not to even consider trading that.

[32 : 55] For the empty and hollow promises. Of this world. Strengthen us. Give us what we need to press on.

For your glory Jesus. Amen.