

Finishing Well

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[0 : 00] Welcome to this week's message from Faith Bible Church of Lake Charles. We're excited to share a practical Bible-based teaching that we hope will encourage you and strengthen your faith.

Thanks for listening. Now, here's today's message. William Wilberforce was a devout Christian and a British politician who became a leading figure in the movement to abolish slavery in the British Empire.

His journey began in the late 18th century where he experienced a profound awakening that transformed his life and transformed his priorities.

And his newfound faith compelled him to use his position in the British Parliament to fight against slavery. Wilberforce's campaign against the slave trade wasn't an easy one.

He was going against so many who didn't want to see it go away. He faced immense opposition from powerful economic and political interests that benefited from the slave trade.

[1 : 13] Despite numerous setbacks and other things that was going on, other failures, Wilberforce remained undeterred. He continued and he persevered in his fight.

He introduced anti-slavery motions in Parliament every single year. But they kept being voted down.

His singular focus to abolish slavery was driven by his deep conviction that all creatures, every single human being, are created in the image of God and deserve dignity and deserve freedom. He wasn't swayed by personal gain or political favor. But as he said, he was bound in the spirit to pursue this injustice. And at the heart of his mission was the gospel of Jesus and redemption. He believed that true social reform could only come from a personal transformation of their heart by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 20] His efforts were not simply about changing laws, but it was about changing society's moral compass that was based on the Word of God and to reflect the values of the Kingdom of God.

And I believe this aligns with the Apostle Paul's commitment to testify to the gospel of the grace of God that we're going to see in our text this morning. After decades of trials and after decades of advocacy, Wilberforce's efforts ended in the passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which abolished the slave trade in the entire British Empire.

It was like as it continued to inspire future generations to fight for justice and to fight for equality. So as we consider Wilberforce's unswerving and his unwavering commitment and his focus, I believe we're encouraged to live a life that at the end of our life, just like the Apostle Paul, that we can finish well in our life.

Let's start with Acts chapter 20 this morning, beginning with verses 13 through verse number 16. In verse 13 we read, Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board.

And we see the pronoun we. We've seen in the book of Acts where we've seen the word we, and then the word we was left out. It's obvious that Luke the author used the word we when he rejoined the group, and he is including himself.

[4 : 04] So obviously it would seem to us that Luke rejoined the group, and he says, We went along, we went ahead to the ship, sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board.

For so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. Verse 14, And when he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and came to Mytilene.

We sailed from there, and the next day came opposite Caios. The following day we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogiium. The next day we came to Miletus.

For Paul, or because Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. So what Luke does is he gives us some geographical content to get the group from Troas, which we've seen in our last section, to get us to Miletus, where what we're going to see in the next few verses takes place.

[5 : 10] But we encounter a minor problem here. If Paul had immediately gone to Ephesus and immediately come back, he could have made the journey in less time than it would have taken a messenger to go to Ephesus, gather the elders, and then bring them back to Miletus.

So the question is, why didn't Paul just go to Ephesus and talk to the elders there? Why did he send emissaries to go get them, come back? We're not really sure.

And then Paul sends the group on ahead of him, and then he walks. For whatever reason, Paul chose to walk from Troas to Assos, where he takes the ship again.

It was a distance of about 20 miles, and we might wonder why Paul did that. Why did Paul choose to walk rather than take ship? Maybe he was able to stay a little bit longer with the saints in Troas, and he sent Luke and the party on ahead.

We see in verse 13, it would have taken at least a day to sail from Troas to Assos, and Paul could have walked it in about 10 hours. Paul probably wanted some time alone.

[6 : 25] Maybe he was thinking about what he would say to the elders when they came back. Maybe he was thinking about his trip to Jerusalem. The apostle Paul always, already knew that he was going to have some difficult days ahead, that he was going to be meeting with some opposition, and maybe thinking about what he would say to the elders.

Now let's move on. So verses 13 through 16, we simply have some geographical information. Now let's move on to verse 17. From Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church, and when they had come to him, he said to them, You know from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner?

I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews, how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you and taught you publicly from house to house, testifying to Jews and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now what these verses do, I believe, is give us an example from the apostle Paul's life for us to walk in integrity. We see in what Paul shared with the elders, the integrity that he showed.

And here we see in verse number 17, the elders refers to the church leaders rather than just simply a group of older believers. These were the shepherds, the overseers, the spiritual leaders of the church.

[8 : 09] They held the office of elder, the word presbyteros here. And when they arrived, Paul talks about his model, the model of his life before them.

As a matter of fact, if you want to read a little more about what the apostle Paul referred to as the manner in which he lived among them, you can look at 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 1-5, and he shares there a little bit about what he experienced during his time there.

Now this testament to integrity that Paul talks about in Thessalonians, and I believe what he's referring to here has more to refer to not necessarily his ministry, but his life, the life that Paul led, the way that he lived his life.

Now we can assume that the Jews in Ephesus continued to poison the minds of the people about the apostle Paul. I believe that's one of the reasons why the apostle Paul refers back to the way that he lived among them, that he lived among them in humility, and he cared about them.

He shared tears for them because of who they were. And I believe that he establishes his credibility and his farewell address to these Ephesian elders.

[9 : 26] So whatever we do, we should, I think according to verse number 19, serve with humility. In everything that we do, serve with humility. He talks about serving the Lord with humility and tears.

And the Greek word for humility here means lowliness of mind. In other words, it's about putting others above yourself, just like Jesus did.

Putting the interest of others ahead of yourself. See, Paul wasn't in it for personal gain. He wasn't doing what he was doing for recognition.

See, he genuinely cared for the people that he served. Now imagine how different our world would be if we cared about other people. Imagine how different life would be if other people cared for us and we cared for them.

If we approach that life with that kind of humility that the apostle Paul talks about. Philippians chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, tells us to let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind.

[10 : 34] That similar concept that Paul is referring to here in verse number 19. But in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than himself. We don't see that often.

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. So in a world that promotes self-promotion, humility stands out and reflects the character of Jesus Christ as we walk among others around us.

So next, what we see as well is that Paul continued and he endured with perseverance.

Perseverance in verse number 19. He says, and not only with many tears and trials, he said, because of the plotting of the Jews.

We know that Paul was stoned. We know that Paul was run out of town. We know that Paul suffered a whole lot of persecution, but he stayed faithful.

Perseverance is simply about pushing through the difficult times. It's about pushing through when times get difficult. It's like running a marathon.

[11 : 46] If anybody has ever run a marathon, the longest I've ever run was a 5K. The thing about running a marathon is you don't stop when you get tired. You just keep pushing through.

And they talk about that, the wall, if any of you have ever been runners, you eventually, at some point during your run, you hit the wall. Meaning, you feel like your body can't go on any further. And everything in you, every fiber of your being says, I can't do it. I can't make it. I can't make it past this, whatever it is, 5 miles, 6 miles, whatever it is for you.

But if you can make it through the wall, and I have experienced that, where all of a sudden it feels like you've got a second wind, and it's much easier when you can make it through that wall.

Perseverance in the Christian life is kind of like that. We meet some opposition, or we get tired, or we become disillusioned. And if we can make it through that, make it past that, if we can stay faithful, and we can persevere.

[12 : 54] Here's what the Apostle Paul is talking about. He said persecution. He's been through many hardships, been through many trials. But he persevered. You don't quit when you get tired.

You keep going until you cross the finish line. James 1, verse 12 tells us, Blessed is the man, or woman, or boy, or girl, who endures temptation. For when he has been approved or tested, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who serve him.

Do you know that life's problems, life's challenges are inevitable? It's not something that it might happen. They will happen. But I believe endurance and our faithfulness will lead to spiritual growth. And maturity. Finally, Paul talks about what he does next in verse number 20. He says, How I kept back nothing that was helpful.

But he says, I proclaimed it to you and taught you publicly and from house to house. Paul taught with boldness. Now, I know you may not teach a class, but you can teach someone.

[14 : 02] You may not have a speaking ministry. You may not even have the gift of teaching. Or the gift of preaching. But we can teach others. So I believe what this tells us is that we should teach or we should speak with boldness.

Paul said he didn't hesitate to proclaim everything or anything that was helpful to them. Paul committed to sharing the whole truth of the gospel, whether in public, as he says here, or whether in private.

He didn't sugarcoat the message either to make it more palatable. Paul spoke the truth whether he believed that the crowd would agree with him or not.

He spoke with courage and he spoke with conviction. Because he knew that the gospel had the power to change lives. 2 Timothy 1.7, For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The Holy Spirit will give us that ability, that encouragement, that power to speak the word with boldness. So let's not be afraid of sharing the gospel. Let's not be afraid of sharing Jesus with others.

[15:18] We all probably have that experience where maybe we feel that we should have said something to someone. Maybe we had an opportunity, but maybe we shied back because we didn't know how they would receive it, didn't know how they would respond.

And maybe we were a little afraid to share. Paul says he wasn't afraid. He says, I was willing to share with you publicly from house to house.

So what does this mean for us? Paul had integrity. Paul served with humility. He persevered. And he taught with boldness.

You know, we live in a culture that often opposes the gospel. But people still need to hear the word of God. So what does it mean for us? I believe in today's world, authenticity matters more than anything else.

Because people aren't listening just to what you say. They're watching how we live. So the question is, are we walking in integrity? Are we the same at home and at church?

[16:22] Are we the same at church as we are in the community? Because people are watching. They're looking for continuity. They're looking to see if you are the same person that you claim to be when others, we don't think others are watching.

They're looking for integrity. So let's live lives that reflect Christ in every way. Just like the Apostle Paul said. He said, just look back at my life.

He said, I served you with humility. I didn't come for anything other than to focus on the mission that God had given me and to share the gospel. So he showed integrity.

So now let's turn our attention to the next aspect of Paul being able to finish his life well. Verses 22 through 24. Verse 22 says, So what did Paul expect?

Paul expected more persecution. But he knew the Holy Spirit was leading him. He felt bound by the Spirit that he had to go. He had to obey. But look what he says in verse number 24.

[17:41] Here we see Paul stayed focused on the mission.

We see Paul's unwavering commitment to sharing the gospel everywhere he went, despite knowing the challenges, despite knowing how people would respond, and the trouble and the persecution that he would experience.

And I believe that Paul's laser focus and his determination to stay focused on the mission is something that we could all learn from.

Stay focused on the mission that God has given us. Whatever that mission is. Wherever that mission takes us. Paul starts by saying, he's in verse 22, that he was bound in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem.

Not by his own desires, but he was wanting to accomplish what the Holy Spirit had called him to do. It teaches us, number one, that we should be obedient to the Holy Spirit.

[18:59] Paul wasn't led by what was easy or by what was safe. He was led by his convictions. Imagine having that kind of clarity and purpose in our life, that we have a laser focus.

Knowing exactly what God's calling you to do. Knowing who God's calling you to reach, and no matter the cost. In our world that's full of choices, there's only one way to ensure that we're on the path that God has for us.

And that's simply to obey the Holy Spirit. Just simply do what God calls you to do. You ever had that little inkling? That little something inside of you that says, you know, I need to do this.

Maybe someone has a need, and sometimes, know this by experience, you're down maybe to your last \$20 or your last \$5 in your pocket, and something inside of you says, you know, that person needs it more than you.

And when you're obedient, there's a blessing that comes from that. I believe that's God's Holy Spirit that's working with our spirit to show us what we need to do.

[20:13] Paul says he was bound in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, not because he wanted to necessarily, but because the Holy Spirit was leading him to. And he says, it doesn't move me, because even though I know that persecution is going to follow, even though I know that difficulty is going to come, he says, I feel compelled to do it, because he wanted to obey the Holy Spirit.

It also shows us Paul's willingness to suffer, because he says, I know that this is going to await me. So he's willing to endure hardship, I believe, was a testament to his faith.

And it's a reminder that following Jesus isn't always easy. As a matter of fact, in 2 Timothy 3, verse 12, it tells us, Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ will suffer persecution.

So we know that even Jesus said, Don't think it odd if people hate you. Why? He said, because they hated me. And are we any different?

Are we any better than Jesus to expect that people will lavish praises upon us because we talk about Jesus when they chose to kill him because of what he had to say?

[21 : 26] So understanding that suffering is part of the Christian life will help prepare us to stay faithful when that time does come. And then verse 24, we see, But none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may...

What was Paul's goal? He wanted to finish well. He said he wanted to finish my race with joy. And that makes us think about the end of life.

Think about people near the end of their life. And I've heard some who, at the end of their life, had regrets and said, I wish I would have...

And then fill in the blank. I wish I would have done more whatever. Or I wish I had not done whatever. But Paul said, I want to finish my race.

What was he talking about? Not a foot race necessarily, although he was using that analogy. He was using that analogy to talk about his life. And he looked at his life like a race, like a marathon.

[22 : 41] He says, I want to finish when I come to the end of my life. I want to end it with joy. I don't want to end it with sorrow. I don't want to end it with regret that I wish I would have done or I wish I had not done.

He says, I want to finish my race with joy. And he says, I want to complete. In other words, he's saying, I want to complete the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus Christ.

His eyes were fixed on the mission that God had given him and nothing else mattered. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2 says, Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, the writer of Hebrews says, Let us lay aside every weight.

Again, referring back to a race. What happens when people run a race? They get the lightest shoes they can wear. They wear the lightest clothing that they can wear because they want to lay aside anything that would keep them from winning that race.

Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

[24 : 09] Just like blinders on a horse, we stay focused in our Christian life to the mission that God has given us and to what we can expect when we come to the end of this life, that we be ushered into eternity and we see our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We look ahead to the finish line. You realize that, and young people take note of this, the decisions that you have to make when you come to crossroads in your life, don't think in the moment.

Think about the end of your life. How will this next decision affect the end of my life? How will this next decision affect the next five years, the next year, five years, the next ten years of my life?

You realize that if you carry that way of thinking throughout your life, that you'll get to the end of your life and hopefully you will have made choices that will give you joy rather than heartache when you get to the end of your life.

So Paul says, I'm making my decisions today because I have my eyes on the finish line. I make my decisions today that will help me finish my race with joy and complete the mission that God has given me.

[25 : 22] You realize that distractions are everywhere? There are distractions all around us, but a singular focus on Jesus Christ keeps us aligned with the mission. So what about us? Life is, as we say, so full of distractions.

Fear. Fear. The distraction of fear. The distraction of comfort. Personal success even. But what are we living for? Are we more concerned with safety?

Are we more concerned with status? Are we more concerned with approval that we would get from other people? So let's take a page from Paul's playbook and stay focused on the mission that God's given us.

Whatever that mission is. Whether it's working with the elderly, whether it's working with youth, whether it's whatever it is. Whatever God's, whatever the mission that God has given to you.

Stay focused on that. Finally, let's take a look at verse 24 and Paul's, this final thing that we see from the Apostle Paul. He says he wants to complete the ministry which he received from the Lord

Jesus Christ.

[26 : 26] And what was that? To testify to the gospel of the grace of God. That was Paul's all-consuming force.

Paul wanted to share the gospel with everyone that would hear it. He wanted to share the gospel. He wanted to share the good news of Jesus Christ. And he wanted to go where others hadn't proclaimed the gospel yet.

He wanted to go where, as the movie says, where no man has gone before. He wanted to chart new waters. He wanted to go and share the gospel where people hadn't heard about Jesus before. So Paul teaches us, I believe, to keep the gospel central in everything that we do. Whether we are bringing food to the community, whether we are having a Valentine banquet, whether we're teaching a Sunday school class, whether we're giving backpacks for school to the needy, whatever it is, I believe we should keep the gospel central just like the Apostle Paul did.

You know, there's a purpose in what we do. We're not doing something just simply for doing it.

There's an end goal, and that is hopefully that we can reach people with the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[27 : 47] So in verse 24, Paul emphasizes that his goal was to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. For Paul, everything revolved around the gospel. That was his whole reason for being.

That was the heartbeat of his mission. It was the foundation of his life. If the word gospel, you know, we throw the word gospel around, and some people, you know, think, well, that's a religious word. Well, the word gospel just simply means good news. Just good news. But what's the good news?

The good news is Jesus, and the good news is what he did for us.

It's about the grace and the love that God showed us through Jesus Christ. And what is the gospel?

Probably the single verse that is the most profound and the most simple explanation of what the gospel is is 1 Corinthians 15, verses 3 and 4, where Paul says, For I delivered to you, first of all, he says, that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scripture.

That's the first part of the gospel. That's the first part of the good news. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

[29 : 11] The gospel is God loved you so much that he sent his only, his unique son to come to earth, be born of a virgin, to live a sinless life, so that one day he could die on the cross and pay the full penalty for your sins.

But Paul goes on. And that he was buried, it was a proof that Jesus Christ had died on the cross, and then what made it sure that God was satisfied with the payment that Jesus Christ had paid, he said he rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures.

So what's the gospel? The gospel is Jesus died on the cross for our sin, and he was raised again the third day to prove that God was satisfied with the penalty that was paid.

So what's the gospel? Jesus died for us, and he rose again, and he lives today, and he is in heaven, he is interceding for us, and he is pleading our case, and he's saying, God, I died for that person, I died for him, I died for her.

And it's by grace that you and I have a relationship with God. For by grace you're saved through faith, and that not of works, lest any man should boast.

[30 : 35] But it's a gift. It's a gift of God. Salvation is a gift. You can't work for it. You can't be religious enough to earn your way to heaven. It doesn't matter what church you belong to, whether you belong to a church or not.

It doesn't matter whether you attend church or not. Being right with God, having your sin forgiven, having your slate completely wiped clean, is all about trusting what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary and nothing else.

That's salvation. That's what it takes to be right with God, and as the Apostle Paul, to be able to come to the end of your life. Not be afraid of death, but actually look forward to it.

To be like the Apostle Paul. He said, and because Paul believed to be absent from the body, the moment you and I breathe our last breath, we're going to be ushered into an eternity in one of two places.

Either total separation from God, in torment forever, or we'll be ushered into the very presence of God because of our faith in Jesus Christ, well, because of what Jesus did on the cross, and we've accepted the gift, the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

