

The Face of the Race

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[0 : 0 0] own lives feel a little bit like that and what's the purpose anyway and there are others who have started well and have jumped completely off the rails and the New Testament knows this reality and this letter from the Apostle Paul which is the last letter we have from him he writes as an old man he's in prison and he knows his time for dying is very soon he writes to a young pastor whose name is Timothy and as he comes into the last chapter he wants to lay before him a couple of things but one of the most important is this he says I want to finish well and I want you to finish well just look down at the verses read verse 6 of 2 Timothy 4 I am already on the point of being sacrificed the time of my departure has come I have fought the good fight which is more athletic and wrestling than it's the sword and shield I have finished the race I have kept the faith henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness so the Apostle Paul has this profound sense that what God the reason God has placed him on this planet is to have a kind of a ministry that he will fulfill to the very day that he dies he's passionate and he knows that he needs to finish well and I wonder if we can just step back from this passage for a moment and learn what it is that helps us finish well and I think there are two there are two things that we need to have in our minds the first is that we all live in two contexts we all live in two contexts if you have your Bible open turn back to chapter 3 for just a moment chapter 3 verses 1 to 5 describe a growing context that Paul warns about this is our first context he says but understand this that in the last days there will come times of stress do you know about stress for men and women will be lovers of self and I think that stands as a bit of a rubric over the list here they're lovers of self lovers of money proud arrogant abusive disobedient to their parents ungrateful unholy inhuman inhuman just means not loving implacable they won't forgive slanderers profligate fierce instead of loving what's good they hate what is good treacherous reckless swollen with conceit lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of god and here's this astounding phrase holding the form of religion but denying the power of it avoid such people now Paul is not saying that all people all the time everywhere will be like this there are many people who don't belong to Christ that live upright moral and good lives nor is he really saying that this is what the culture is like he's speaking about the church these are people who have a form of religion but deny its power these are people who claim to be

Christian but instead of loving God they love themselves and if you track through the list I think there's a very profound contrast between the love of the world and the love of God Augustine wrote a wonderful book called the city of God where he likens love to a kind of a gravity a gravity it's like a physical force within us and if we love this world our hearts are drawn to it like gravity but if we love the city of God our hearts are drawn to it like gravity so the first context in which we live is a context of people gradually falling in love with the world even people in the church but there's another context if you turn over to chapter 4 verse 1 sorry down the bottom of the page the apostle again is writing to the young Timothy he says this it's very solemn I charge you in the presence of God in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom and then he says preach the word not dialogue the word preach the word and here is the second context in which we live we live in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and Christ Jesus because he has been raised from the dead and sits at the right hand of the father is the one who is coming as the judge of the living and the dead now this describes I think sometimes why there is stress and where there is tension in our Christian lives we live in these two contexts all the time we long for the appearing of Jesus Christ we pray for his kingdom to come we work for the kingdom and we feel the pull of being lovers of self and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God and we live in these two contexts brothers and sisters this is life before the kingdom finally comes and the two contexts make finishing well much more important and the two contexts shape two kinds of lives and the two kinds of lives one kind of life finishes well and the other kind of life doesn't finish well and I want to show you I think there's a key here for us in finishing well in chapter 4 let's contrast the two lives then so we've looked at two contexts and now that we look at two lives turn down to chapter 4 verse 10 just after the section where Paul speaks about finishing well he says in verse 10 it's just a little line but it's quite tragic he says Demas in love with this present age has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica and we know from some of the other books of the New Testament that Demas was most likely a fellow worker with Paul had travelled with Paul had proclaimed the gospel with Paul so here is a man who was committed to Christ who'd openly declared Christ who'd set out on the journey and had flared up he was preaching the gospel he was on a mission with the apostle himself and yet we read here that he fell in love with this present world and because he fell in love with this present world the apostle Paul and the teaching of the kingdom and the mission of the church became an embarrassment to him and so he deserted it and moved away from it and he didn't finish well because he loved the present world

but look at the apostle Paul verse 7 again I fought the good fight literally I've agonised the good agony I have finished the race I have kept the faith now why does he do that?

verse 8 henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness the righteous crown which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to those to all those who have loved his appearing isn't that a striking phrase?

Paul says the reason I continue the reason I agonise the agony continue the fight it's because there is a crown laid up for me and it's a metaphor for the great reward and the reward is the crown which is righteousness and it's kept up in heaven it's already there we don't have to do anything to make it it's there and Christ is the one who's going to give that crown to us the summary of all that is good and he gives it to us because we can't earn it and he gives it to us because he is the righteous judge but he doesn't just give it to the apostle who's had this big ministry but he gives the crown of righteousness to all who have loved his appearing and the tense of the verb loved means they've begun to love and they continue to love his appearing isn't that a remarkable phrase?

[9 : 32] So here is a contrast Demas who started well and fell in love with this present world and deserted the gospel and the apostle Paul who started well it was a rough start for Paul but he continued well and he continued to grow and he didn't plateau and he finished well because he loved the appearing of Jesus Christ and I think that is a great key for us for finishing well we need to search our hearts this morning are we falling in love with this present world or are we growing in love for his appearing are we looking for the things that are in this world or are we looking to the one who will give to us the crown of righteousness in the end Jesus says you cannot serve two masters you'll love one you'll hate the other in my first parish after I was ordained in Sydney

I worked with a man who's the greatest joy of my ministry really to work with him he was a great big fellow who played rugby for Australia a huge man with with an ongoing love for Jesus Christ and once or twice a week he would grab me he's bigger than me he'd grab me and he would say are you abiding in Jesus that's the key you're abiding in Jesus it was very simple and a couple of years ago he contracted bowel cancer and he died and as he died these are the things he said to his family and to his friends are you abiding with Jesus do you love Jesus above all things and he finished well and he's been a remarkable testimony to the grace of God and I want to finish well and I want you to finish well and so I commend to you the fact that we live in two contexts and those two contexts a pull a gravity and we will either increasingly love this world or we will increasingly love Christ's appearing and we need to help one another and to pray for each other that God would enable us increasingly to love the kingdom and the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ who brings the crown of righteousness to all who love him

Amen and ■■■ and to ask what of Jesus to ■■ which the answer the other that prays about he air water are theInd wenn is the one that prays and before the ■■■■■■■■ sea and