

How To Finish Well

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Date: 05 January 2025

[0 : 00] In our worship singing to God's praise in Psalm 89. Psalm 89. This is from the Scottish Psalter. And we're going to sing verses 13 to 18.

Justice and judgment of thy throne are made the dwelling place.
Mercy accompanied with truth shall go before thy face. O greatly blessed the people are, the joyful sound that know. In brightness of thy face, O Lord, they ever on shall go.
They in thy name shall all the day rejoice exceedingly. And in thy righteousness shall they exalted be on high. Because the glory of their strength doth only stand in thee.
And in thy favour shall our horn and power exalted be. For God is our defence, and he to us doth safety bring. The Holy One of Israel is our almighty King.

[1 : 13] The tune is Newington, Psalm 89, 13 to 18. Thou hast an arm that's full of power. The hand is fitted in high.

At thy right hand exceedingly exalted is in high.
Justice and judgment of thy throne, the brave and well in place.
Mercy accompanied with truth shall go before thy face.
O great blessed people are, the joyful sound of no.
[2 : 34] And brightness of thy face, O Lord, may heaven all shall go.

Then thy name shall all the day rejoice exceedingly, and in thy righteousness shall they exalted be on high.
Because the glory of their strength the holy stand in me, and in thy favor shall the born and of the blessed all to be.
For God is our defence, and he to us the taking way.
The holy one of Israel is the almighty name.

[4 : 10] Let's bow in prayer. O Lord, our God, as we gather before you this evening, we give thanks that we come to our God who has an arm that's full of power and whose hand is great in might.

And we give thanks, O Lord, that that hand is a hand that holds your people, and that there is no force or power anywhere, not only in this world, but even amongst the principalities and powers that are able to prize open the grip that you have upon your people.

And we give thanks for that safety and that assurance that your word gives us. We don't come to that conclusion ourselves. It would be impossible for us to do so.

But we give thanks that your word has revealed it to us. And we give thanks for all that your word reveals to us, of you and your purposes to us, of your covenant relationship to us.

We give thanks, O Lord, for the greatness of who you are and of how you have shown us in so many different ways through your word. That you are worthy of all praise and honour and glory and majesty.

[5 : 29] We ask, O Lord, that you will give us spirits of true worship. Help us, Lord, in that worship to recognise you tonight and to be able to see by faith.

We give thanks for the gift of faith. By grace you are saved through faith. And we give thanks, O Lord, that you work in our hearts and you open our minds.

You enlighten our minds and the knowledge of the truth. And sometimes as we go along, we feel that we know so little. Sometimes we feel we grope in the darkness.

And yet we look back and we are thankful that our light went on in our lives where we are able to trace back and to see that the things that we could not understand and make sense of, now they are the most sensible things in the world.

And the things that we found so much difficulty with, that your spirit opens our minds to understand these things. And so we give thanks, Lord, for the way that you teach us.

[6 : 33] And that assurance that the enlightened mind is that which is given to your people. And so we pray that we might grow more and more in the knowledge of your will, that we might be filled

with the knowledge of your will and spiritual understanding.

We pray for wisdom and guidance. And as we heard today, there is so much information, but so little wisdom. And so we pray, Lord, for that wisdom that is from above so that we will live our lives in the right way and so that we will speak in a right manner and that we will live out our days in a way that reflects the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have to confess, Lord, how often we let you down. And we have done things that we're ashamed of. We've said things that we're ashamed of. And as for our thoughts, Lord, we're utterly ashamed of them.

And we have to confess, Lord, that this is who we are. And yet we're able, this is a wonder of your grace, that sinners like us are able to come into the presence of a holy God.

And that is only because of what your Son has done. And so we pray, Lord, that you will forgive us our sins and that you will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[7 : 54] We pray, Lord, that we might know the freedom and the liberty that comes through knowing you, because your word assures us that the truth shall set you free. And we pray, Lord, that all of us here tonight might know that freedom, that liberty.

And the closer that we live to you, and the more we depend upon your word, the more that we will know that liberty and freedom as we live out our days. Because sin is a burden.

Sin produces fear. Sin produces uncertainty. And we know, Lord, that sin causes weariness. Your word talks about how they weary themselves to commit iniquity.

And there is a weariness in sin. And so we pray that we might be delivered from that into an ever greater sense of freedom and liberty as we seek to follow you and to live for you in this world.

We pray to bless us all here tonight according to our own particular needs. We're all individual. We all have our own issues and problems, our own difficulties in life.

[9 : 00] Sometimes they're minimal. Sometimes they are great. But we pray, Lord, your blessing and that your grace will prove sufficient. You have promised that my grace is sufficient for you.

May we discover the sufficiency of your grace in the dealing with temptation, in the supplying of our needs, in the seeking of your kingdom, in all these things, Lord, that we might discover more and more that in our weakness that your strength is made great.

Oh, Lord, then we pray that you will bless us, bless our homes, bless our families, bless all whom we love. And we pray that you will answer the prayers of those who have prayed long for loved ones who are still strangers to grace and to God and that you will hear and answer these prayers beyond their asking.

We pray, Lord, that you will indeed deal graciously and deal kindly with us. We give thanks for all the benefits that we receive from you and help us always to remember that every good and perfect gift is from above.

Pray to bless this congregation and its witness and testimony. Bless all the various age groups and all that is done for the different age groups.

[10 : 18] Bless those who commit themselves in so many different ways. We give thanks for all the commitment that goes on in this congregation to make things run well and to run smoothly.

We pray your protection and we pray for fruit from all the labors that go on. And we pray particularly for our young people as they grow up in a day where there are so many temptations, so many things to entrap them, so much to pull them away from the gospel.

We pray that they will be grounded in the truth from a very early age on. We pray then that you will bless the children as they will be heading back to school tomorrow.

Bless teachers alike. We give thanks for holiday times and pray that you will help them as they go back, keep them safe, protect them day and night.

We pray, Lord, to bless this congregation in the vacancy. We ask, Lord, for your leading, for your guiding. You have always, in the past, guided us and we pray that in the present and into the future you will do so.

[11 : 27] And so we pray your blessing upon our intermoderator, Colin, and the assistant here, Callum Murdo, and we pray your blessing upon them both. We pray to help Callum Murdo with all the extra responsibilities on him just now and we give thanks for him.

We pray your blessing on him and Joanne and the family. We pray that you will bless all who are involved in so many different things. We pray for Roddy, our church officer, just now, whose sister is so low.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up 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 love disappearing.

[19 : 20] Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with his present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas. Also the books, and above all, the parchments.

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

At my first defence, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it.

[20 : 30] So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us this reading of his own holy word. Going to sing again.

This is from Sing Psalms, Psalm 34. Psalm 34, from Sing Psalms. And that's on page 41 in the Psalm books.

It's from verse 12. In the tune of St. David. Does anyone delight in life and long to see good days? Then keep your tongue from evil speech, your lips from lying ways. Depart and turn from evil paths, and practice what is right. Desire to know the way of peace.

[21 : 28] Pursue it with your might. The Lord's eyes are upon the just. He listens to their plea. The wicked he rejects and blots from earth their memory.

The righteous cry. The Lord responds and frees them when distressed. The Lord draws near the broken heart and rescues the depressed.

Psalm 34, from Sing Psalms, verse 12 to the end. Does anyone delight in life? Does anyone delight in life?

And long to see good days? Then keep your tongue from evil streets, pure lips from lying ways. Keep your tongue from evil paths, Keep your tongue from evil paths, And practice what is right.

[22 : 47] Decide to know the way of peace, First to live with pure light.

The Lord's eyes stand upon the just. He listens to their plea.

The wicked he rejects and blots from earth their memory.

The righteous cry. The righteous cry. The Lord responds and feeds him when distressed.

The Lord goes near the broken heart and rescues the depressed. The Lord goes near the broken heart and rescues the depressed.

[23 : 57] From the troubles of the just. The Lord protects his deathly hold and broken and will be.

The wicked are upon him to hear, All those who hate the just.

The wicked are upon him to hear, All those who hate the just. The wicked are upon him to hear, All those who hate the just.

The wicked are upon him to hear, The wicked are upon him to hear, All those who hate the just. The wicked are upon him to hear, All those who hate the just. The wicked are upon him to hear, All those who hate the just.

The wicked are upon him to hear the just. The wicked are upon him to hear, All those who hate the just. The wicked are upon him to hear, All those who hate the just. Which the Lord, The righteous judge will award to me on that day.

[25 : 23] And not only to me, But also to all who have loved his appearing. As we know, We're into another year, And we have no idea what this year will bring.

But one thing is for sure, That this year is bringing us ever closer, To the time when we will leave this world. And the question that we always have to ask is, Am I ready to leave this world?

Am I ready? Am I ready? If death calls. Well, the apostle Paul was more than ready. And here he is, He's languishing in prison. And he doesn't know exactly When the end is going to come.

But he knows that he's going to be executed. He would, as a Roman citizen, He would face an execution of beheading. It would be the sword rather than crucifixion. Because the Roman citizen

wouldn't be crucified.

But he knew that one day, He would be summoned out. And under Nero's command, He was going to be put to death. And Paul is quite amazing in the face of death.

[26 : 32] Because there is a total absence of fear or panic Or anything like that at all. In fact, it's very obvious that his concerns Aren't about himself, But about the church.

When you read through the chapter, And read through the letter to Timothy, His great concern is about the spread of the gospel. And about the church. Not about himself. But about the future of the church.

So he's not asking for help. And there's no sense of bitterness or resentment. Because, you know, at a human level, It would be, you could say to yourself, Paul, I could understand a wee bit If you're feeling a wee bit resentful.

Because here you are, You have given your life into service. Every day and every night, You are worked for the Lord. You've given your health.

You've given your strength. You've given your time. You've given every effort that you humanly are capable of giving. And here you are, Languishing in a prison.

[27 : 41] Waiting for the executioner's sword. But we don't find any of that thinking with the apostle Paul. There's none of that. Paul isn't thinking like that.

Because Paul knows that, Even in the dark, The Lord is working. Because in the previous imprisonment, Paul tells us in that imprisonment, That some of the guards, Some of the prison officers, Some of the soldiers, Had actually come to faith.

So you see, in prison, Paul was witnessing. Paul was sharing the gospel. We believe also that some of the prisoners, Might have come to faith. But certainly some of the guards, In the prison had come to faith.

And we've also got to remember, That God is a far bigger picture than you and me. Because when things happen in our lives, We tend to think, Well this is just in my life.

This is all about me. This is, No. It's much bigger than just you and me. And me. Because God, We've said it before, God will sometimes touch you, In order to touch somebody else.

[28 : 51] Our lives aren't so individualistic, In the hand of God. God is a big picture. And God is at work. And God is at work through all his people.

So we've always got to remember that, When dark things and difficult things, Come into your life. That it's not always just about you. God always has a bigger picture.

And that's why we've got to trust him. In the sore times, The difficult times, The dark times. So Paul is looking at his present situation. And he describes his death here in two ways.

First of all, He says he is being poured out. Now of course, Paul was steeped in the Levitical ways. In the Old Testament, As a Jew, He would have been very familiar with all the Levitical practices. And part in the sacrificial system, Was the pouring out of wine. It was, As it were, The last part of the sacrifice. Whether it was a lamb, Or a ram, Or a bullock.

[29 : 54] That was being sacrificed. The wine would be poured out at the end. And that's in a sense, What Paul is seeing of his life here. That, That, Yes, Nero is going to execute him.

But really, He's giving his life, As it were, A sacrifice to Christ. Because Paul wouldn't be in this situation. Were it not for the fact, That he was following the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul's life had been a living sacrifice, To Christ from the very day, That Christ came into his life. Because Paul was no longer living to himself, Or for himself.

Paul makes it very clear, That he was living to Christ. And living for Christ. And that's, That's what happens, When Jesus comes into our heart, And into our life.

Now, I know that none of us here have lived, With the same, In the same sort of, Complete passion and zeal, As the apostle Paul has lived.

[30 : 58] But the same principles, Apply in your life and mine. That we live to Christ, And we live for Christ. The day that Jesus came into your heart, Jesus takes priority.

It's his way. Things change. The Lord's word becomes so important to you. You try and base your life upon the truth.

We don't read the Bible, And then close it, And forget what it says. We read God's word daily, In order that that word, May indeed be a rule.

It might be a light to our path, A lamp to our feet. That it might give us wisdom, And direction in the way that we should go. And yet we know at the same time, As God's spirit is inclining us in one way,

There is still a force and a power, Within ourselves that is at war, That's pulling us in another direction.

We all know the conflict that goes on. And we know how difficult it often is. Remember what Jesus said to be a follower of him, A disciple. What are we to do?

[32 : 13] Deny ourselves, Take up the cross, And follow me. That's what Jesus said. And you and I know it's not easy. The way to glory is not, It's not the broad road.

Broad road is the road to destruction. It's a narrow road. And following the Lord Jesus Christ, Is just that denying self, And taking up the cross, And following him.

Jesus never said it was going to be easy. We don't sort of idly walk along. We don't drift to heaven. We don't as it were slouch, With our hands in our pockets walking along.

As we'll see it's a conflict. It's a war. It's a struggle. And no Christian will say, It's an easy path. Yes it's full of blessings.

Many, many blessings. But remember we live in enemy territory. This world is an enemy to our souls. And we're being delivered from, We're told, This present evil world.

[33 : 16] So as Christians it's difficult. But you know one of the greatest dangers that we face. As we face up to, What God's word requires of us. And the conflict that goes on, Of sin within our own heart.

That we become tomorrow Christians. What do I mean by that? By tomorrow Christians. Very simply, That we say to the Lord on a particular day.

You know these days, You know them. I know them. These days where we kind of, Lose sight of the Lord a bit. And we're very conscious of, The flesh within us.

Just the power of it. And it's dragging us in a particular direction. And it's very easy to say on these days, Lord tomorrow, Tomorrow. I will really take up my cross and follow you.

Tomorrow I will deny myself. Tomorrow Lord, Your word will be my rule and my guide. Today I don't have the energy for it. Today I'm going to do my own thing.

[34 : 19] Forgive me Lord for this, But that's what I'm going to do. These are dangerous days. Because the Christian can do that.

It's just the very same as, People who haven't yet come to faith. And they're challenged by the gospel. And there's often that tomorrow decision. Lord, Yes I'd like to be a Christian.

I know I need to be a Christian. Not tonight. Not next week. Lord if you'll spare me till next year. Definitely.

We know that. That's the way it so often works. There's tomorrow. But you know the thing is, If we operate on that principle. That tomorrow is tomorrow.

Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. Tomorrow never becomes today. So Paul is here. And he's facing up to the realities. And he's seeing himself as we say, As an offering being poured out.

[35 : 16] And he is ready. Completely ready for death. I read of a human philosopher. And he was dying. And this is what he said. The philosophies I lived for.

Are fine for life. But they are of absolutely no use in death. Not one ray of hope do they afford me. Not one scrap of comfort do they give me. Forgive me. That's a humanist philosopher. Listen to Paul. For me to live is Christ.

To die is gain. Or more Christ. And how different. And that is a great difference. And then again, Paul. We see he looks at his death.

As a departure. That's what he says. I am being poured out. And the time of my departure has come. Now, this word departure is often used in different ways.

[36 : 18] But probably the two main ways it is used. Is the first is the lifting up of an anchor. And setting sail. And that's what Paul is looking at. That it's the anchor is being lifted up.

And he's going to be sailing off. As it were to glory. That's the haven that he has desired to see. And we've got to remember that. When the anchor of our lives is lifted up.

And we sail off. That there are only two destinies. There aren't a variety of destinies. A variety of ports that we can go to. There are only two. Heaven and hell. There's no other.

So our departure will be to one or to other. Well, the apostle was perfectly persuaded where he was going. And the other is. The other picture of the departure is the taking down of a tent.

And we know a tent is not a forever home. A tent is always a temporary thing. And Paul elsewhere looks at our bodies as a tent.

[37 : 21] As a tent. And that the tent is going to be taken down. And that's what's going to happen one day. Our bodily tent is going to dissolve. Our soul will go.

Our body will remain here for a while. In the grave till the resurrection. And then Paul looks back over his life. Which is coming to an end. And he sees three things.

And the first thing is that there's a fight to be fought. Now, sometimes as Christians we say, oh, I wish it was easier.

Have you ever said as a Christian? Do you know since I became a Christian, I've had nothing but struggles and trials. Before I became a Christian, life was so straightforward.

Life was easy. But you know, since I became a Christian, it's a struggle. Well, it is. It's a fight. That's exactly what Paul is saying. He has fought the good fight.

[38 : 21] And a fight is never easy. A fight involves struggling. A fight is difficult. But it's a good fight. Some fights are not good. But the Christian faith is a good fight.

And this is a fight that is to be fought all the way to heaven. Paul tells us it's warfare. And there are very many, there are a lot of different descriptions.

We strive. We struggle. We fight. We wrestle. Can you remember when you were young? Maybe we used to fight a wee bit and wrestle. Can you still remember what it was like?

It's one of the most energy sapping things where there's all the momentum and all the strength and all the power and all the force of the other person trying to pull you and push you. And you're exerting the same force.

It's exhausting. Well, that's the nature of this struggle. It's exhausting. That's what Paul is telling us. And so we wrestle. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers.

[39 : 27] But there, of course, there are three main things that we fight and wrestle against. First is the world. And the world is an incredibly suffocating and dangerous enemy.

Sometimes the world meets us in open hostility. And the world can come in ways of persecution and hatred where you suffer for being a Christian.

Other times the world comes very attractively. It allures. It entices. It sucks you in. It draws you in. But you know the world deadens the soul.

The world chokes the life. Remember the parable of the sower? Where the seed fell on good ground. But remember what happened. The weeds grew up and the thorns and they choked the good seed.

And Jesus is showing us that that's exactly the case of this world. That's what they do. You know, as Christians, we can't mix and match.

[40 : 34] Sometimes we think we can. We can have one foot in the world and one foot in the church. But it doesn't work that way. Now, of course, don't get me wrong. We live in this world.

We're in the world, but not of the world. We live in this world and we enjoy many blessings in this world. In fact, every good and perfect gift is from above. And we accept these gifts and we accept God's goodness.

And we enjoy all these things. But when we talk of the world, we're talking of its aims, its philosophies, its standards, its attitudes, everything, which is opposed to the Christian faith.

And if we get drawn in and sucked in with that, it will deaden us. It will lull us to sleep. So we have to be alert against the force and the power of the world.

And then there's the power of the flesh. We war against this. And what an enemy that is. It's within ourselves. There's no escaping it. And your battle and my battle might be quite different.

[41 : 38] Because there are areas in our lives where we're more prone to sin. And Satan knows them. He knows how to target us. He knows what our weak points are.

And the Bible is full of examples of good people. Men and women of faith who fell in these very areas. And so it's a war.

It's a conflict. And then, of course, there's the devil. People who were told Satan, we're told he's his accuser. He's the disturber of our peace.

He's a roaring lion. He's an enemy. And he goes about seeking to devour. He's raging. I remember reading in the wee book about Makar Amor.

He was describing Satan coming with the hounds of hell, with all the forces of darkness, out in the world. And he sees the world like a flock of sheep.

[42 : 39] But they're all asleep. And then he's saying to the hounds of hell, this is what Makar Amor is saying, the demonic spirits that are with him.

Ah, forget the ones that are asleep. Look at that little flock on that hillside there. They're awake. They're alive. Get in there and kill them. And if you can't kill them, cause as much damage as you can.

And that little flock that was on the hillside was the church. And that's what Satan, that's his great target in this world. It's not so much targeting those who are already blinded.

They're already in his grip. But it's a followers of Christ. And he's there to unleash as much damage. He wants to ruin your witness. He wants to bring you out into open sin.

So that your profession will be weakened. And he wants to bring you so that you're not enjoying being a Christian. You know, it's a struggle.

[43 : 45] But Paul says here that he has fought the good fight. And then he says there's a race to be finished. And Paul is likening this simply to an athlete. And as you know, every running track is different.

Every cross country course is different. And every race that is run is different. So it is in the Christian life. We are, while we're all running the race, we begin the race the same way.

But the actual course is different for each one. We're told in Hebrews, let us run the race that is set before us.

Remember that. Let us run the race that is set before us. There has been a particular course set out for you. And you alone are running on it.

Yes, we all come to start the race the moment we come to faith in Jesus Christ. And we all finish the course the moment we cross the finishing line into glory.

[44 : 49] But the race for you will be different to the race for somebody else. There might be many similarities. And there's no point looking at somebody else's course that they have saying, Oh, they've got a much easier course to run than I have.

Because you don't know all that goes on in a person's life. We see the obvious. We see what is there. But there are many things hidden to us that we've got no idea about.

Maybe somebody you're envying and you're saying, Oh, I wish I had his life. I wish I had her life.

Their life as a Christian is so much easier than mine. You don't know. From the outside it might be. But you don't know what inward temptations, you don't know what particular difficulties and trials that they might have that you have no idea about. So let us always be slow to judge.

But this is the course that you've been given. This is the course that has been set out for you. And so we've got to keep running. How do we keep running? Let us run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.

[45 : 57] That's the way we run. The author and finisher of our faith. Now as you know when you're running, if you can cut, maybe there's some still running. But if you put your minds back to when you were running, sometimes you wanted to give up.

Sometimes, particularly if you're doing cross country, you're going through marshes and bogs and it's wet and you're struggling and you've got stitch and you think, Oh, I want to give up.

Well, sometimes spiritually it's like that as well. And there are voices in your head saying, Oh, give up. Remember the easy road. Just stop. But you know we can't.

Because the wonderful thing is that it's in our weakness that we discover his strength. That's where Paul, remember Paul was, Paul was praying and praying for the Lord to deliver them from the thorn in the flesh.

And the Lord said, No, no. He said, Do you know what I'm going to do? My grace is sufficient for you. My strength will be made perfect in your weakness.

[47 : 00] And that's what we've got to discover as well. Because, you know, the worst thing we can do is to try and stoically run on our own. And, you know, sometimes we do that. We're trying to, I'll see this out myself.

That is absolutely exhausting. That is the way where you're just not going to make any headway. It is crying out to the Lord. It is leaning upon.

It is depending upon him. It is saying, Lord, you have to help me. I can't do this myself. I'm at the end of my resources. Lord, I can't keep going. And it's when we come to this place that his strength is made known to us.

His grace proves sufficient. That's the wonder of it. And Paul had discovered that over and over and over again. So, if Paul was going to say one thing, he would say, you know, the Christian life is not for quitters.

And then, as you know, no athlete has ever been successful without much blood, sweat and tears. [48 : 08] Without much self-denial and self-sacrifice to attain. It costs a lot to be a winner. And so it is in the Christian life.

It costs. And then finally, he says, a faith to be kept. And the wonderful thing is that this faith that has to be kept is a faith that has been actually given to us by the Lord.

Because how are we saved? By grace. By grace you are saved through faith. It's the Lord who has given this to us. And it's the Lord who keeps us.

We've often spoken about it. This being kept by the Lord. And if the Lord doesn't keep us, not a chance that we can keep ourselves. Kept by the power of God, as the scripture tells us.

And the idea of this keeping is like a boss giving his employee a deposit of, say, a deposit of gold or something to look after.

[49 : 10] And you look after that faithfully and carefully until the boss comes to claim it again. And that's kind of what Paul is saying.

I've been given this faith. And I have to keep this faith. And it's by this faith that I run. But again, that faith is given to me by the Lord.

And the enabling is given by the Lord. And you know, when we look back over our lives, you know, there are times like Peter. I'm sure that we've wept bitterly over our denials of the Lord by the things we've said and the things that we've done.

There are times when we walked, we wobbled and struggled. But you know what? You're still going. We're still going. We're still following. Why?

Because of that faith. That faith that won't give up. That faith that won't let go. And that is an evidence of the faith. That's part of what it is.

[50 : 11] It's this perseverance. This keeping going, keeping on. Irrespective of what has come. You know, along the way there are things that have come into your life.

And you've been tempted to give in and to give up. But no, you don't. You're still going. You're still following. Because you've been kept. And then Paul realizes the best is to come.

Yes, there's going to become a, there's a verdict coming from the emperor. That's it, Paul. You're going to be executed. But Paul knows there's another verdict coming.

From the judge, the righteous judge from the Lord. And he's going to get the well done. And when he arrives in glory, he's going to be given the crown of righteousness.

What a beautiful picture. Beautiful thought. Very often back in Paul's time. And I think keeping in mind the athlete and the soldier.

[51 : 09] In Paul's time, often the winner was given this kind of garland, floral garland, put over their head like a crown. That was in the world of athletics.

The winner would receive this. And Paul is seeing this as his crowning as he finishes the race.

Often victorious generals were crowned again with his garland coming back from war.

And Paul is seeing himself as a victorious general. Think of our bride on the day of our wedding.

Again, the wee floral garland. And again, Paul is seeing that he and all believers are the church of Christ.

The bride of Christ. Isn't that wonderful going to be invited in by the bridegroom into the royal palace? Not just to have a look around, but to become part of.

To, in fact, not only be the bride, but to become the lamb's wife. We will enjoy the marriage supper of the lamb. And Paul, no wonder Paul is able to look at death and look way beyond the death of what is to be.

[52 : 26] Where this righteous judge is going to crown him. And it tells us there that henceforth there is laid up for me. It's there. It's laid up.

Do you know what? It's laid up for you as well. There's a crown waiting for you. And it will be bequeathed by the righteous judge who will award it to me on that day.

And not only to me, but also to all who have love disappearing. But if you're a Christian tonight, you love the appearing of Jesus first time he came into this world.

Because you've come to trust him, to believe in him, to follow him. And if you're a Christian tonight, you're looking forward to his reappearance.

It would be amazing. We might see it. We might still, some of us here might be living. When the Lord returns, we don't know. We have no idea. Because there's going to be a degree of normality about life, Jesus tells us, when he returns.

[53 : 28] Just like as he says in the days of the flood and in the days of Sodom. When people ate and drank and were given in marriage. Speaking of the normality of the moment.

He says, I'm going to return. We've been thinking about that and others have been thinking of that recently. There's going to be two responses. Those who love his reappearance or the thought of it. And tonight, you'll know a lot of where you are. About what the thought of the reappearance of Jesus means to you. Is it something you relish? Something you look forward to?

You say, Lord, I would love to be here when you come. Or is it possible tonight you're saying, oh man, I'm not ready if the Lord returns.

Because for those who have rejected Jesus, there will be nothing but shame and confusion and dismay. When they see the returning Jesus.

[54 : 26] Well, if you're still outside, it's time to come in. Don't leave it any longer. We're starting another year. Don't give another year away.

Because you know, if you come to faith, it'll be a regret. At how much of your life you gave away and squandered. Come asking the Lord tonight.

Lord, come into my heart. Help me, Lord, to believe. Help me to trust you. Let's pray. Lord our God, we pray to bless us. And we give thanks for the inspiration and encouragement that the Apostle Paul was to us.

And yet, even though this was written a long time ago, it is so relevant and so necessary for us to see it's exactly where we are just now.

That's the beautiful timelessness of your word. That it meets us exactly where we are. Although the situations and circumstances might be quite different. Yet it is relevant to our own situation, to our own circumstances.

[55 : 30] So we pray that you will bless us and take each one of us to our home safely. Grant us your grace and do us good throughout this coming week. And forgive us our every sin in Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen. We are going to conclude singing in Psalm number 71. The 71st Psalm. This is from the Scottish Psalter.

Verses 14 to 17. Psalm 71 verses 14 to 17. And the tune is Strakathro.

Psalm 71 from verse 14. But I with expectation will hope continually.

And yet with praises more and more I will thee magnify. Thy justice and salvation my mouth abroad shall show. Even all the day for either of the numbers do not know.

[56 : 32] And I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord. And thine own righteousness even thine alone I will record. Verses 14 through to 17.

To the tune Strakathro. But I with expectation. Will hope continually. And yet with patience more and more I will be. And yet with patience more and more I will be. voy. voy. voy.

voy. voy. voy. voy. voy. voy. voy.

voy voy voy I know that God shall show, In all the days of her I get off, The number should not know.

And I will constantly go on, And stand for God the Lord, And I will constantly go on, Adore my memory, Lord.

[58 : 31] For even from my youth, O Lord, By Thee I have enjoyed, And ever to my love declare, The wonders of the soul.

I'll go to the main door. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore.

Amen. Please,