Finishing Well

Final in the series, “A Life of Christian Influence” from 2 Timothy

# Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

# Key thought: Paul’s example shows us how to leave a legacy.

# Intro:

## One who did not finish well

In the area where I grew up, there was an on-fire layperson. He was a leader in his local church. He felt called to become a pastor, took all the required courses, and was approved to become a pastor. His church leadership was exemplary, and his church grew. JoAnne and I frequently attended his church when we were in that area. Soon he was chosen to be district superintendent. After serving in that post for several years, he returned to serve in his local church and the church continued to prosper. But somehow in this good-looking scenario, things went wrong. There came the shocking report that this one whom we had all admired, had given in to sexual temptation, left his wife, and deserted his ministry. All his fellow pastors, myself included, were in shock that this one, of all pastors, had finished in disgrace.

## One who is finishing well

In contrast, in that same area there was a young energetic Youth for Christ leader, about the same age as the other man. He founded Christian clubs in local high schools and began a Christian family ministry which later came to be known as Family Life Ministries. His ministry grew immensely. It included Saturday night rallies and a quizzing program. A young lady named JoAnne was one of the leading quizzers on one of the winning teams. I first met her at the local root beer stand after one of those Saturday night rallies. Dick Snavely’s ministry started a Christian radio ministry called Family Life Network. If you travel anywhere in central and Western New York region today, you can listen to that network. Dick led that ministry for over 40 years and when he retired, he passed the leadership on to one of his sons whom he had raised up to succeed him and who still leads the ministry today. A few years before Dick retired, I read a devotional that he had written. He was reflecting on his position in life at that time, a few years left before retirement. His thesis for the devotional was simple, “I want to finish well!” So far, it is clear, as far as earthly eyes can see, that he has. His testimony has been consistent, his example has been worthy of emulation. And the ministry that is his legacy continues to grow in its influence.

## The case of the Apostle Paul

In our text for today, the Apostle knows that he is near the end of his life and he believes that he also is finishing well. He wants to encourage Timothy along the same path so that the same can be said of Timothy when he reaches the end of his earthly journey.

## What about us?

My prayer for myself and for you today is that the Holy Spirit can use this message to light a fire beneath us all to emulate Paul and finish our earthly race well. But in order to do so we will need the perspectives that Paul provides for us in this final chapter of Second Timothy. I would like to look at three such perspectives this morning.

# Be prepared for sacrifice.

## Being poured out

The passage that we read today opens with a somewhat cryptic phrase which Paul then explains.

I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.2 Tim 4:6 NIV

A drink offering was a gift to God that was literally poured out rather than used by humans. Usually it consisted of wine and usually it was poured out on the altar. The idea predated the Mosaic covenant as Jacob is the first one recorded as pouring out a drink offering to God (Gen. 35:14). Paul explains that he uses the metaphor because he believes that he will soon give his life as a sacrifice on behalf of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As I explained once before, according to the traditions that come down to us, Paul was imprisoned in Rome twice. The first time his conditions of imprisonment were relatively pleasant. These are the ones described by Luke in Acts 28. During this timeframe Paul wrote some of his epistles such as Philippians, Ephesians and Colossians.

 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!Acts 28:30-31 NIV

Apparently sometime during these years or maybe at the end of them, Luke and Paul parted ways because Luke’s record of Paul’s ministry which comes down to us in the book of Acts ceases. Tradition tells us that Paul was released from that imprisonment as he anticipated (Phil. 1:25) and went on to minister in Spain. Later he was rearrested and imprisoned again in Rome under much harsher conditions. This later imprisonment ended with his martyrdom under emperor Nero. We believe that it was during this later imprisonment that Paul wrote 2 Timothy.

In today’s passage, Paul is anticipating his martyrdom.

The point for us to see is that Paul did not minimize the fact that his Christian life had involved many difficulties. And Paul wanted to prepare others who followed Jesus with the perspective that being a disciple of Jesus would require sacrifice.

As Paul has already written in chapter three;

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,
2 Tim 3:12 NIV

## Our tendency to anemic Christianity

These who want to identify with Jesus yet prefer to live always on easy street have dialed a wrong number. Lazy Christianity is not what Jesus envisioned. What are some results of this anemic version of being a Christ-follower? When we do not follow Jesus whole-heartedly and will not suffer for him, there are spiritual consequences. Here are some I would suggest:

* Low spiritual power
* Vulnerable to fads
* Vulnerable to temptation
* Weakened testimony
* Children get the message that Christian faith is not important
* Unprepared for Jesus’ return
* Greatly weakened influence

There is a disturbing passage in the Gospels where Jesus addresses our tendency to allow our own concerns and projects to usurp the priority of his plans for us.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:57-62 NIV

## God’s Call

Jesus is not trying to be harsh. He is just bluntly pointing out that being his disciple is costly and requires prioritizing God’s ways. We will ultimately not be able to leave a legacy for Jesus unless we are willing to give up our own plans for his whenever he asks us to do so. Sometimes, what Jesus asks is a very small thing like attending a service at church rather than watching a sports event on TV. Other times, it might be something very big like changing your life’s vocation to become a full-time minister of the Gospel. Most of the time it’s probably something in between those two like visiting an elderly neighbor, or fasting in prayer for a day, or attending a Bible study series, or tithing your income, or serving in an office at your church, or taking the first step to reconcile with a personal enemy, etc. But whether what God is calling you to do is big or small, if it is God’s direction, then it is the very best way for you!

And we will not be able leave a legacy for Jesus unless we understand that it will not always be easy. That is a perspective we really need from this chapter.

# Look toward the crown.

## Our culture has its focus on this world’s benefits

For an additional motivational perspective, Paul encourages Timothy to keep his eye on the reward that awaits him.

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.2 Tim 4:8 NIV

One of the difficult things about our current culture, is that we are pretty much consumed with day-to-day living, with the pursuit of pleasures, business, sports, hobbies, social media, good food, etc. We have our minds firmly focused on this present world. Due to the success of modern-day medicine, our increasingly isolated nuclear families, and the fall off in funeral observances generally, our pursuits of such present goals are seldom interrupted by dismal thoughts of death with its associated implied questions about a possible hereafter.

## The Bible urges us to focus on our heavenly future

So, we need all the more to pay full attention to the healthy counter balancing perspective given to us in Holy Scripture. I think of Paul’s thoughts in 2 Corinthians,

We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.2 Cor 4:18 NIV

This is hard for us today. But the more you read the New Testament you will realize that it was the perspective of the Apostles. What about the thoughts of the Apostle John?

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.1 John 2:15-17 NIV

So, the apostle Paul uses his own perspective as an example for Timothy. Paul finds himself at this time near the end of his life looking past the coming suffering toward the crown that he will receive. This perspective is not new for Paul. During his first imprisonment, many years before, he had written to the Philippian church on a similar subject.

I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.Phil 3:12-14 NIV

## The crown of righteousness

There is that perspective on the prize again. Let’s take a moment and think about the “crown of righteousness” that Paul talks about in our text today.

The most common meaning of the Greek word for crown was in reference to the victor’s wreath of leaves that was given at various Greek athletic games. In our culture, we give trophies, but in Greek culture, it was a wreath of leaves. But wreaths were also given for other things. “A wreath, often worked in gold, was awarded by Greek states as a high mark of honor” (DNTT p. 405). So, the Greek “crown” stood symbolically for both victory and honor. It was a word picture especially suited for Paul to use for his heavenly reward. The crown he looked forward to receiving was to be both a prize for successfully running the race of life, and an honor bestowed upon him by the Judge of all the earth, our Lord Jesus.

The Greek construction here means that in some sense righteousness is the source of the crown. It is especially important to note the fact that Paul describes the Lord who gives this crown as “the Righteous Judge,” using a form of the same word. Consider the stark contrast in circumstances. In this present world, Paul is appearing before a very unjust Roman court where the results have little or nothing to do with whether or not he has lived a just and righteous life. I think the version of the Bible called “God’s Word” has this verse translated very well.

The prize that shows I have God's approval is now waiting for me. The Lord, who is a fair judge, will give me that prize on that day. 2 Tim 4:8 (God’s Word)

The reward that God will give will be based upon the eternal value of Paul’s ministry and the same will be true for us. In another place Paul suggests that our good works will be tested as if by fire. Some of our good deeds will come through the fire like gold. Others will be burned off like wood hay and stubble.

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Cor 3:12-15 NIV

So, the reward we receive will be based upon the content of our character. It will be based upon our response to Jesus. It will be based upon our submission to God’s ways in our own lives. It will be based upon our faithfulness to the work of God. It will be based upon our good deeds of service, the good works prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10).

But the important thing for us to remember is to keep our eye on the prize. There is a heavenly reward waiting. And the only way for us to be ready to receive it, is to keep it in our minds. Even as we go about the necessary business of our day-to-day lives, we must always be conscious that we live for a higher calling. That was Paul’s encouragement for Timothy; and it is his encouragement for us too. Paul specifically reaches beyond Timothy in this passage and tells us that the crown awaits all those who look for Jesus to appear the second time. That’s you and I as well.

Leaving a legacy of Christian influence depends upon our keeping this perspective.

# Trust in the Lord to bring you safely to the heavenly kingdom.

## Paul’s trust in God

I find the third perspective that we need in verses 16 through 18. It is obvious in these verses that even though, from an earthly perspective, Paul’s outlook is not good; he is trusting in the Lord to bring him safely to the heavenly kingdom. First of all, he says bluntly that in his hour of trial, Jesus stood with him.

The Lord stood at my side and gave me strength. 2 Tim 4:17 NIV

Paul testifies that he has been delivered from the lion’s mouth. The statement could be metaphorical. But it also could be a literal statement meaning that he had avoided being sentenced to go into the Coliseum as food for the lions. This was the period in history when the Emperor Nero was feeding Christians to the lions in the Coliseum to entertain the crowds.

But Paul is still very aware that this time his trial is not going as well as before, and he does not anticipate a good result. Nevertheless, he is trusting in God.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 2 Tim 4:18 NIV

Paul is saying that whatever is the outcome of his earthly trials, he knows that Jesus will bring him safely through to the heavenly kingdom. Paul’s faith in God’s ability to keep him transcends the barrier of physical death. What a comfort to know that the trials of this earth, no matter how severe they may be, cannot separate us from the love and care of Jesus our Savior. Paul wrote,

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:37-39 NIV

## Our trust in God

If we are looking to Jesus, the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2 KJV) we to will be delivered safely through our trials into the heavenly kingdom which God has prepared for those who love him. Remember that the Bible says;

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. Jude 24-25 KJV

That is the way we will have a great Christian legacy.

# Conclusion

D. L Moody was the Billy Graham of the late 19th century. He was born in Northfield Mass. And returned there after the Chicago fire destroyed all he owned. By that time, he was famous and traveling as an evangelist. Just before Moody died, he had an unusual experience. Awakening from sleep, he said, “earth recedes, heaven opens before me. If this is death, it is sweet! There is no valley here. God is calling me, and I must go!” His son who was standing by his bedside said, “No, no, father, you are dreaming.” “No,” said Moody, “I am not dreaming. I have been within the gates: I have seen the children’s faces.” A short time elapsed and then, following what seemed to the family to be the death struggle, he spoke again, “This is my triumph; this is my coronation day. It is glorious!”

Very few people are granted a glimpse like that. But perhaps a few are to help all of us remember what Paul said. There is a crown of righteousness waiting, not just for Paul, but for all those who long for Christ’s appearing.