

Entrusted with the Gospel:
Studies in 2 Timothy, #8

"A Triumphant Testimony"

2 Tim. 4:6-22

--CEFC 12/31/17; 4/11/91

I want you to join me in an exercise of the imagination for a moment—

In your mind's eye, picture yourself going to the funeral of a loved one.

Visualize yourself driving to the funeral home,
parking the car, and getting out.

As you walk inside the building, you notice the flowers, the soft organ music.

You see the faces of friends and family you pass along the way.

You feel the shared sorrow of loss,
and the joy of having known and loved.

It radiates from the hearts of the people there.

As you walk down to the front of the room and look inside the casket,
you suddenly come face-to-face with yourself.

This is **your** funeral.

All these people have come to honor you,
to express feelings of love and appreciation for your life.

As you take a seat and wait for the service to begin,
you look at the program in your hand.

There are to be four speakers.

The first is from your family, immediate and also extended--
children, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles, cousins
and grandparents who have come from all over the country, or the world, to attend.

The second speaker is one of your friends,
someone who can give a sense of who you were as a person.

The third speaker is someone who worked with you or was at school with you.

The fourth is from your church.

Now think deeply.

What would you like each of these speakers to say about you and your life?

What kind of husband or wife, father, or mother

would you like their words to reflect about you?

What kind of son or daughter or cousin were you?

What kind of friend?

What kind of work associate or fellow student?

What character qualities would you like them to have seen in you?
 What contributions,
 what achievements,
 would you want them to remember about your life?
 Look carefully at the people around you.

What difference would you like to have made in their lives?¹

This little exercise is a little reminiscent of Jimmy Stewart's *It's a Wonderful Life*,
 but it is actually taken from a national bestseller a few years back by Stephen Covey,
 entitled *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*,
 and it illustrates the importance of living life with the end in view,
 having a purpose, a direction, a goal--
 what Covey calls a life mission or a personal vision.

This is one of the common characteristics of highly effective people, he says--
 they know what they're aiming at in life.
 They consider what is really important to them;
 what is to take priority.
 what matters,
 and they order their lives accordingly.

I think we all have some vision in our heads of what constitutes a good life—
 often it is very vague and undefined, but it's there.
 It's there, somewhere in our hearts, and it's what guides our everyday choices.
 But have you every spelled it out?—
 Have you ever looked at it intentionally and deliberately?
 What is it that is going to make your life worth living?/

Now I don't know what the Apostle Paul would think
 of being described as a "highly effective person."
 I imagine he would look with some curiosity, if not disdain,
 at our obsession with self-help books like the one by Covey.

But there is no doubt that Paul possessed what Covey was talking about--
 a life mission, a personal vision,
 though Paul would never consider his vision
 one that he devised for himself,
 No, his life mission came from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord had appeared to him and claimed him as his own.
 The risen Jesus made himself known to Paul as the Lord of all,
 and Paul gave his life to this Lord.
 And in that encounter, Jesus commissioned him—
 he gave Paul a task, a mission, for his life--
 Paul was to be a witness to the truth of the gospel--to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

¹Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, pp. 96,97.

And Paul was not disobedient to that vision from heaven (Acts 26:19).

To the Elders of the church of Ephesus he said,

**"I consider my life worth nothing to me,
if only I may finish the race and complete the task
the Lord Jesus has given me—
the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace"** (Acts 20:24).

In his letter to the Philippians he expresses his life vision in another way,

"whatever was to my profit I now consider loss of the sake of Christ.

What is more, I consider everything a loss

**compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,
for whose sake I have lost all things.**

I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, . . .

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection

and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,

becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow,

to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:7-11).

Looking back, Paul knew that this is what his life had been about for the last thirty years--

to know Christ and to make him know.

His one aim was to proclaim Christ . . .

so that he may present every person complete in him.

His vision of a good life, a fulfilling life,

was to be a servant, a slave, of Christ,

as an adopted son of the Father,

and as a citizen in his kingdom.

This was Paul's life mission, his personal vision.

Now as he writes this second letter to Timothy,

Paul sees his life drawing to a close.

And more than anything else,

Paul desires to impart this vision to his young protégé.

1:13f—**"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, '**

with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—

guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us."

Paul knows he has completed his leg in the relay race.

The baton must be passed,

and he wants to know that the one who takes it up

will continue the race with the same determination

and single-mindedness that he has had.

Paul urges Timothy to stay the course

and to remain faithful to the task--

As he says in 4:5—**"But you, Timothy, keep your head in all situations,**

**endure hardship,
do the work of an evangelist,
discharge all the duties of your ministry."**

But someone in Timothy's shoes may well be wondering if it was worth it.

Is this vision of life really good?

It is worthy of investment of his time and talents?--
Should one pour out one's life for the sake of Christ and his kingdom
as Paul had done
only to end up in the pitiable circumstances which are now his?

Why would anyone want to follow in Paul's footsteps?

Just look at him--

As he writes these words to Timothy,
he's in a Roman jail, condemned to die as a traitor to the ideals of the state.
He's a subversive citizen who must be done away with.

He is hated by his Jewish compatriots,
and he is now approaching a shameful death by execution
at the hands of the power of Rome.

And by the evidence of what Paul has written in our passage this morning,
Paul is approaching that death with certain pressing needs.

1. First, he seems to be desperate for companionship--
Paul is almost begging Timothy to come alongside him--
"Do your best to come to me quickly," he writes in v. 9.
and then again in v. 21--"Do your best to get here before the winter."

Paul appears heartsick,
in need of the emotional support of his friends.

He feels abandoned and deserted--

His friend Demas didn't have the stomach for the fight--
"because he loved this world [this present age--τὸν νῦν αἰῶνα],
he deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.
Crescens has gone to Galatia,
and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me."

v. 16--"At my first defense

[probably referring to the Roman equivalent of his grand jury hearings]
no one came to my support"--
no one was willing to testify on his behalf.
Again he says it--"everyone deserted me."

Commentators have described this as Paul's "Gethsemane"--

as he faces the prospect of death all alone.
Is that the vision of a good life?

2. And notice, too, the simple physical needs of the Apostle--
he had a need for warm clothing--

v.13-- "**When you come,
bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas**"

Winter would soon be upon him,
and should he remain alive until then,
he would need protection from the elements.

Here was Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles,
one of the most influential men in all of human history,
and he is as destitute as a homeless person on the streets of D.C.

Is that the reward that awaited Timothy
if he should follow Christ
and take the baton of Christian leadership from Paul?

And there's another interesting tidbit here in v. 13--
"**When you come bring . . . also my scrolls,
especially the parchments.**"

Paul was in need of some good books.
We can only guess what they were,
though I would be surprised if they were not
his copies of the Old Testament Scriptures
or perhaps some written form of the words and deeds of Jesus.

He had felt a need to read and study, even in his final hours.

There is nothing glorious about this picture of Paul given to us
in his closing words of this letter.

He is in need of emotional support,
he is in need of physical comfort;
he is need of intellectual stimulation.

Is this all that comes to one who follows that heavenly vision,
and who is faithful to the mission that comes from Christ?/

The writer to the Hebrews urges us to
"**Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.
Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith**" (13:7).

But if you considered the outcome of Paul's way of life,
would you really want to imitate his faith?

Timothy may well have wondered if that was the kind of life he was ready for.

In his heart, his body, and his mind, Paul is crying out for help,
but in vv. 6-8, in what is perhaps the most famous passage in the entire epistle,
the Apostle affirms that all is well with his soul.

Paul considers his imminent death,
he reflects on his expended life,
and looks to his eternal future,
and in these powerful words
he testifies to the difference that Christ makes.

He offers no complaints about his present privations,
he harbors no misgivings for a misspent and wasted life,
and he has no fears as he imagines what lies beyond the grave.

No, this is a triumphant testimony.
With these words Paul assures Timothy and us
that whatever hardships he or we
may encounter along the way as followers of Jesus,
it will have been worth it.
It is worth all that we can give.

Look at what Paul proclaims in our passage—
Beginning in v. 5—

4:5—"But you, Timothy, keep your head in all situations,
endure hardship,
do the work of an evangelist,
discharge all the duties of your ministry.
6 "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering,
and the time has come for my departure.
7 I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith.
8 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."

In the light of these words,
let's consider the outcome of Paul's way of life, and so imitate his faith.

I. Let's look first at the meaning Paul can attach to his death--
He describes it as an act of worship--²

²Much of this outline is adapted from Roy Clements, sermon on 2 Tim. 4

"I am already being poured out like a drink offering."

Here Paul is referring to the pouring of wine on the altar
that accompanied the animal sacrifices in the temple.³

Death for Paul was not a meaningless expiration,
a mere extinction,
a disappearance into oblivion.

His life was not his own;
his whole life had been an offering to God—
what he called a "**living sacrifice**" (Rom. 12:1).
Now his death would simply be a grand culmination of that consecration.
It assumed new meaning as a sacred act.

He would willingly give up his life as an act of worship—
something that would bring honor to God.

In a sense, he would offer his life
alongside the all-sufficient offering of Christ on the cross.

Paul's life was not being taken from him,
it was being given by him—given to God.

Notice, too, that Paul can view his death as a **new adventure**--
"**a departure**," he calls it.

The Greek word here was commonly used of death,⁴
but as a metaphor it may have still had some life to it.
The root meaning of the word is "loosing" or "untying"--
sometimes of a ship as it set off from the dock.

Paul had had his share of nautical adventures,
but this was to be more exciting than any of those.
He looked forward to death with anticipation
as he wrote to the Philippians
how he "**longed to depart and to be with Christ, which is better by far**" (1:23).
"**For me to live in Christ, and to die is gain**" (1:21).

Now the time has come--
his ship is about to sail for those distant shores.

But death holds no fear for Paul.
As he says in 4:18—
"**The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack
and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.**"

³ Cf. esp. Num. 29. This metaphor also appears in Phil. 2:17.

⁴ so, e.g., Phil. 1:23 and the cognate verb ἀναλύσαι.

So when the end came, he could look back with satisfaction—

**"I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith."**

But let's not misunderstand Paul here--

there's no self-righteous congratulations in his words,
no pretention that he had lived a life of moral perfection.

He knew all too well the depth of sin even in his own soul--

Remember the words of Rom. 7

in which Paul speaks of the struggle within--

how I don't do what I know I ought to do and want to do,

how often I do what I know I shouldn't.

Paul knew that he had not "**already been made perfect**" (Phil. 3:12).

No, look more closely at what Paul says

to understand rightly where Paul's satisfaction lay.

"I have fought the good fight"--

The New English Bible translates this,

"I have run the great race" and that is possible,⁵

for the word Paul uses here—ἀγων--from which we get the word "agony,"

could describe any contest involving

intense exertion and struggle.

Some see it as a metaphorical reference to a wrestling match.

But in any event, the emphasis is not on how well Paul did in this contest,

but in the worthiness of the contest itself--

it was the "**good fight**", the "**great race**."⁶

There was something excellent and glorious about it.

Paul was satisfied that he had participated

in the noblest, the grandest,

the most worthy contest of them all--

the quest to follow Jesus Christ--

to know him and to love him and to live for him.

He hadn't squandered his time on trivialities.

He hadn't invested his life in the mere acquisition of wealth--

or fought for the perks of political power

or gloried in the worldly fame that so quickly fades.

He hadn't centered his life on the fun he could have on the weekends.

The focus of his life wasn't even on his family--

at least not on his biological family.

No, Paul's vision for life was far bigger than any of these.

⁵ cf. Heb. 12:1--τρέχωμεν τὸν προκείμενον ἡμῖν ἀγῶνα

⁶ The adjective here is καλὸς.

He was a servant of the King of the universe.
His passion was the kingdom of God.
He was engaged in a cosmic struggle of good and evil
involving the principalities and powers of the heavenly realms.
This contest would have outcomes that reached into eternity.

What a privilege that was
to have fought in that good fight!

Then he says, "**I have finished the race.**"
Again, Paul says nothing about having come in first place--
there's nothing about his being better than everybody else in the race.
No, he just says he finished it.

We've got the Marine Corps Marathon here in Washington every year,
and if I was ever crazy enough to run in such a race (which is highly unlikely!),
I wouldn't care if I came in 500th or 5000th.
I would have immense satisfaction in just having completed
the 26-mile-385-yard course.

A marathon is all about endurance, perseverance--
sticking it out to the very end.

So it is with the Christian life--
you may not be the fastest,
you may not come in first place--
but the Lord simply requires that you don't quit--
you can't give up,
you can't throw in the towel.
you must keep going 'till the end.

I like the story about Charlton Heston
when he was training to drive the chariot
in the great chariot race in the movie *Ben Hur*.
He said to the director Cecil B. DeMille,
"I can barely stay on this thing. I can't win the race."
DeMille replied, "Your job is to stay on it.
It's my job to make sure you win."

You see Jesus, through his death and resurrection has already won that great race.
And as long as we keep getting back on the chariot,
the Lord Jesus will make sure we join in his victory.
As long as we keep getting up after our failures,
and keep holding on to the Lord in faith,
he'll see that we arrive safely to our heavenly destination.

That's what Paul has done—
he has come to the point of finishing the race.

And as the end is just around the corner for Paul,
he feels the satisfaction of having carried through with that commitment
a commitment he had made to his Lord some thirty years before,
for he continues--

"I have kept the faith."

Paul had been a faithful steward of what the Lord had entrusted to him.

He had held firm to "the faith"—

and by that he means the truth of the gospel.

He has not deviated to the right or left.

He has not been carried away by the cultural breezes

that would seek to blow him off course.

He has not drifted along with the tide of public opinion.

He has had an anchor for his soul.

Or to change the metaphor, he has had a true north star

a fixed point to guide him safely home.

He has kept the faith,

and so remained faithful to his Master.

I think of the marriage vow in which husband and wife pledge their love to one another
"until death us do part."

As he approaches his death,

Paul knows that he has kept his vow to his Lord—

his vow of faithful love.

Only, in this relationship,

"death" does not mean separation from the beloved,

but a new and deeper form of union.

**"I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith."**

How many people do you know who can look back on their lives
with such a sense of satisfaction?

What a joy to know that your life counted

because it was committed to the eternal kingdom of Christ.

Yes, Timothy, this vision is worth the effort.

**"Now," Paul says, "there is in store for me the crown of righteousness,
which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—."**

Paul looks at his own death with meaning;

He looks back on his life with satisfaction;

and he looks toward the future with confidence.

Paul knows what's coming, and it may be soon--
and for him it's not a funeral, but a coronation--
he is to receive "**a crown of righteousness**,"
and he looks forward to it with joyful assurance.

Caesar may condemn him for following Christ,
but the verdict that really matters is the Lord's.
Jesus is the righteous Judge, and his verdict has already been handed down--
Not guilty!
Paul is confident that he stands in the right before God.

But how can Paul be so sure?
How does he know that he will receive this crown of righteousness?
Isn't he being a bit presumptuous?

He would be, if this crown was something that he earned
on the basis of his own good works;
if it meant that he was good enough for God,
and if it was something that God therefore owed him.

But Paul never speaks in those terms.

Righteousness in his mind is always a gracious gift of God--
He had said as much in the first chapter of this letter--
1:9--"**God saved us and called us to a holy life—
not because of anything we have done
but because of his own purpose and grace.**"

Our right standing with God is a gift which we can only receive with open hands.
God accepts us as we are,
on the basis of what he has done for us in Christ.
In union with Christ by faith,
we are clothed with his righteousness—
"**the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith**" (Phil. 3:10).

When you see that it was for you sin that Christ died
and you turn to him seeking his forgiveness
and you ask him to empower you to live in a way pleasing to him;
when you seek his mercy and accept his grace--
then you, too, can be confident of that crown of righteousness.

That's why Paul says that "**the Lord will award it to me—
and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.**"

Are you among those who long for Christ's appearing?

Do you long for that day when your faith becomes sight?—
Do you long to see Jesus Christ vindicated before all the world
as the King of kings and Lord of lords?

Do you look forward to that day
when he will be seen by all as the Lamb upon the throne—
exalted above every name?

The day of his appearing—
when he will gather all those who belong to him
so that they may dwell with him forever.

I know heaven is a hard thing to get into our heads—

But I like the illustration of our beloved dog Kali—
Kali was a wonderful companion—she loved to be where you were—
she would follow you around the house
and plop herself down beside you—and then take a nap!

Occasionally (only very rarely!) I would bring Kali with me to the church,
and sometimes I would leave her in the hallway while I went into my office.
She would inevitably paw at the door trying to get in.
She had no idea what was on the other side of that door—
all she knew was that I was there—and that was enough.
She wanted to be where I was.

So it is with heaven—
We don't know what heaven will be like--
all we know is that Jesus will be there.

Is that enough for you?
Do you want to be where Jesus is?

Do you know him?
Have you come to him in faith?
Do you seek him as you read his word and speak to him in prayer?

Do you long for his appearing?

The Christian can look toward the future with absolute confidence--
For on the other side of the door of death is Christ--
the Christ who loves us;
the Christ who died for us;
the Christ who rose from the dead
and now lives forever to intercede for us. //

To the Ephesian Elders Paul said,
**"I consider my life worth nothing to me,
if only I may finish the race and complete the task
the Lord Jesus has given me—
the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."** (Acts 20:24)

Now to Timothy in his last surviving words,
he writes,

"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—"

Paul had a life mission, a personal vision,
an integrating center that gave meaning and direction to all of life.

He wanted to know Christ and to make him known.
He wanted his life to be conformed to the very image of Christ.
He wanted his life to bring honor to God.

What about you?

Do you have a mission in life, an all encompassing purpose?
Are you engaged in a fight worth fighting?
are you in a race worth running?
do you have a faith worth holding on to?

When you come to the end of your days
will you be able to look at death with the same meaning?
will you be able to look back at your life with the same satisfaction?
will you be able to look to the future with the same confidence?

"Ah, but that was the Apostle Paul," you say.
"He had a vision from heaven;
Christ appeared to him personally.
The Lord has never spoken to me in that way.
Would that I had such a vision!"

But the truth is, you do--
Jesus offers each one of us just that mission--

He says, "**Come, follow me!**"
"Hear my word and obey it;
Do as I would do,
Value what I value,
Love as I have loved.
Come, follow me, that's your mission—
I will be with you;
I will give you my Spirit to empower you;
and as the Father sent me, so I send you."

There's nothing here so very different from the words that Paul heard.
He heard them and he obeyed--
He may have had the same needs in heart, body, and mind
that are common to man;
but he had a satisfaction of soul that came from heaven.
Do you want that, too?

You and I, we won't become an apostle, that's true,
but nothing that is done for Christ will ever be in vain;
Better to have made some small contribution
to a cause that will last forever,
than be have been a hero in an enterprise
that is destined for extinction,
that in the end will be nothing but dust.
There is no higher calling than to be a slave in the kingdom of God.

So what are you aiming at?
What do you want people to say about you at your funeral?

Who knows, perhaps I'll be one of those speakers--
Will I be able to say that you fought the good fight;
that you finished the race;
that you kept the faith?

Let your life vision be that of Paul--
may it be to know Christ and to make him known.
Then when you come to the end of your days,
his triumphant testimony may be yours as well.

Prayer--

Closing Hymn: ##483 *Lead On, O King Eternal* [all 3 vv.]

Benediction:

"Therefore my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm.
Let nothing move you.
Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord,
because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Entrusted with the Gospel:
Studies in 2 Timothy, #8
Dec. 31, 2017

"A Triumphant Testimony" 2 Tim. 4:6-22

What does "a good life" look like to you? Paul languishing in prison awaiting execution hardly fits anyone's conception of a good life, but the Apostle can approach his death, and he can look back on his life, and testify that he has lived triumphantly. May his words help us determine what we will live for.

Paul Testifies that if you who follow Christ . . .

I. You can look at your death with meaning (v. 6)

*"I am already being poured out
like a drink offering,
and the time has come for my departure."*

II. You can look at your life with satisfaction (v. 7)

*"I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith."*

III. You can look at your future with confidence (v. 8)

*Now there is in store for me
the crown of righteousness,
which the Lord, the righteous Judge,
will award to me on that day*

Do you "long for Christ's appearing"?

Discussion Questions:

"A Triumphant Testimony"

2 Tim. 4:6-22

- Read 2 Tim. 4:6-8. What do you find attractive about this testimony of Paul?
- What does a "good life" look like to you? What are some of the characteristics of such a life? What are you aiming at in life? How will you know if you are successful?
- Why did Paul think of his life as a "fight" or a "race"? How do you see your life in those terms?
- What will give you the most meaning or satisfaction when you come to look back on your life?
- What do you find most challenging as you seek to "keep the faith"?
- What does it mean to "long for Christ's appearing"? Why is it something to long for? Why wouldn't we long for it? Do you have confidence as you look to the future?
- As you enter into this new year, what in this passage can encourage you? What can challenge you?