

Finish Well

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[0 : 00] I certainly hope my mic is on here. What a joy for me for this day to come and to be here. You heard the reading of the word. Let's pray here now. Father, take these words and use them for your glory. Father, speak to our hearts, Spirit of God, and move us to know what is your will, even now, today, and whatever future you have for us.

And we will give you thanks and praise. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. As you heard this morning, the group that sang here with us, we've known each other for a long time.

It's a long time to be in a youth group and still be in touch with one another for 60 years. Try that. Yeah. It's very unusual. And Randy told you about the church in Newark and about the Conquerors Club and people who sang in what was called the gospel team.

This gospel team traveled here. Yeah, there we are. Back when we were young. Yeah.

[1 : 22] We traveled as a gospel team to different places here. We even came to the south. We did go to Covenant College. I think somewhere down the line is a picture.

Yeah, that's me and Mrs. Wilcox standing. If you recognize Lookout Mountain here, that's us looking off from a distance all that long, long time ago.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We were called the integrated gospel team because at that particular time, people had a strange, they thought it was very strange that people of different races would go to the same church.

Oh, yeah. I wonder what they would do with us now looking around. Oh, yeah. We even went to a few places that wouldn't let us sing. Oh, yeah.

That was the way those days were. We went to Covenant College. We actually, I played a little basketball. And we played against the Covenant College team of that time. And we beat them, which is pretty good for a high school team here.

[2 : 29] Not because of me, I can assure you. We had two guys that we called them the two Rodneys, Rodney Ailes and Rodney Alexander, and they could play here.

I was just around here, moving along a little bit here. And we were grateful for them. So shout out to you guys if you happen to be watching in our midst here.

So for these past two days, we've been spending time remembering our past. You know, when you get as old as we are, you can remember things in the past. You can reflect on your lives. We're in our 60s, late 60s, and most of us are in our 70s.

And today, I want to share God's word to you briefly, thinking about the future. Do we have a future? Are you a future? If you're 70 plus? Can you do anything for God?

Or are you a used to be? A has been? Or can God still call and use you for his own purposes?

[3 : 31] I want to share God's word about that. Not only for our future, but for all of our futures. We may be old, but we ain't dead yet. All right?

As we listen to Paul's farewell discourse to Timothy, we know that you heard this here. We're going to finish. You're going to finish.

I'm going to finish. We're all going to finish somewhere. I've been in this church long enough to have sat with a family. In case you think this is a sermon for an old folk.

I've sat with a family and watched as their young child flatlined on a hospital bed. Everybody's going to finish.

Everybody's going to finish. The question is, will you finish well? Will you finish well? So we're going to ponder that a little bit.

[4 : 42] And we're going to listen here. You heard the reading of the word here. This is the conclusion of a letter that Paul wrote to one of his sons in the faith, Timothy.

A very familiar passage of one that Paul offered both as a charge to this young mentee. And he shares his own heart.

Perhaps even his own concerns. Maybe even, I don't know, maybe his own fears. I won't say that because I don't know that for sure. But he does comment about his own life and ministry.

So keep in mind, Paul is probably, this is probably his second imprisonment. Paul's been in prison before. Nero is on the loose and he is planning to persecute this new group called Christians here. We don't know exactly when Paul died. We don't know the exact date. But we know that somewhere, according to church tradition, he and others were executed there.

[5 : 42] One thing he did know is that he was going to die. He was going to finish. So one of the first things he does is he challenges this young Timothy. And that challenge is very simple and it's very clear.

He uses five imperative verbs here. Preach the word. Be ready. Reprove, reprove, rebuke, and exhort.

Second Timothy 4 verse 2. Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

Now you might think, that's good because I know God hasn't called me to be a preacher. I'm glad. And yes, this letter was sent to Timothy. Let's put it in the historical context here. It wasn't sent to you necessarily historically, but it's the word of God. And the word of God can still speak to our hearts.

[6 : 48] And maybe you're right. Maybe God hasn't called you to be a preacher. Maybe God hasn't called you to pursue a career in ordained ministry here as a pastor or as a preacher.

But you saw those young men up in them. One of them in that picture there is no longer with us. Between now and we started to plan this and to this day here, he's finished. He started in something new, I trust, in the presence of God.

But he's not here because he passed away. Maybe there is a young person here today. We were 16, 17 here.

We didn't know where we were going. But God called us out. And I'm calling you out. I don't know who you are out there. I'm not sure what God has laid upon your heart here.

But I'm calling you out. Maybe this text may be specifically directed to Timothy in the first century. But this is scripture. This is God's word. And God is still in the business of calling forth people to share his word and the gospel and his kingdom.

[7 : 57] Is it possible that you may be one of those people? Is it possible that you may be one of those people, young person? Maybe you're not qualified or called to be a preacher.

But everybody, everybody can share the word of God and the gospel. Everyone can have a gospel conversation with someone.

Everyone needs to hear about Christ. The other day my wife saw a woman had a tattoo on her arm and said, Genesis. And so she started what we call a gospel conversation. Well, why do you have that on your arm?

It's not a big thing. You're not beating somebody up. We're just trying to find out. Why? What are you thinking about? Maybe we could talk a little bit. Unfortunately, we're in a lot of McDonald's.

So the conversation wasn't going to go too far on that one. But we can do that. Why do we need to do that? Well, did you look further here? What was being shared here with Paul and Timothy in that letter?

[9 : 00] Look at 2 Timothy 4, 3, where he says, For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Wow. Aren't you glad we didn't live in that time where Paul and Timothy lived and had to deal with all those kind of funny times?

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. I'm having deja vu here a little bit here. Is he talking about then, or is he talking about now? Because somehow this first century description sounds a lot like today.

Conquerors, we have lived through a lot of decades, starting when Harry Truman, yes, there was a president named Harry Truman. We started when Harry Truman was president in the 50s, the 60s, the 70s, the 80s, the 90s, into the 21st century here.

Have you ever seen such a crazy time? We're about to go into another political spin. Maybe we're going into another COVID thing. Have we not learned anything through this experience?

[10:21] Have we not figured out what we need to be focusing on here? Are we going to fight with one another again? He got a mask. He doesn't.

He tried a vaccine. She didn't. This, back, forth. He voted for him. He voted for him. Where is our focus? What is our concern here?

Because somehow this description of this ancient world sounds very, very familiar. It's a crazy time. People are pursuing their own truth, their own passions. My truth. Their own myths.

Their own version of fake news. And social media has become one of our biggest teachers.

Certainly has with all of our children. And I'm going to sit here and say, it's happened with a few of us, too, here as well.

Some of our own children will not even attend this church anymore, even though they grew up in this church. I'm glad that some of them do. But some of them won't. And in fact, they don't attend any church anymore.

[11:25] There's part of the nuns, and we ain't doing it. Some will not endure sound teaching. So what do we do? We're going to write them off?

Not our children. We don't write them off. These are children of what I call, I'm taking from a thing that has a long time to go. These are children of a lesser God.

A God of self. A God who looks like me, thinks like me, loves all my passions, and loves all my myths. What are we going to do with that?

How are we going to address that? We have to pray. We have to love. We have to listen.

And then we have to lead. You can't stop by just listening. Oh, yeah, honey, that's your story. Oh, yeah, okay. What are we going to lead them to?

[12:29] Where else would we lead them to? Who have we been singing about? All this morning. Jesus. Jesus. That's where we're leading him.

So Paul gives Timothy some sound instructions here, and he says in the fourth chapter of the fifth verse, as for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of the evangelists, fulfill your ministry.

Now, again, I realize this is a historic context context to a specific man here, but I like these words, and I know in other places in Scripture we are called to do some of this as well.

Sober-minded, the word means to be sober, self-controlled. Is that you? Are you out here just as wild as everybody else? Ready to jump on somebody, call somebody a name, because they're not on your side, with your view, your perspective out here?

Lord knows we need some thoughtful, wise, praying Christians who will step up to the challenge of this particular culture. Is that you?

[13:41] Out there, I'm talking to you. Do you hear me? Young person, because we is old, and we will not be here forever. Our departure is near, and we need somebody else to stand up here, go to places, and be there.

Is that you? I'm calling you. I'm calling you out. So, there's a price to pay if you do this, you'd be a faithful witness. Paul knew this too.

He said, from his own experience, in the next few lines, we're going to get to that in just a minute, you will suffer. The word suffer means to, to endure hardship patiently, to, to work through here, to, to, to struggle here, because you will be misunderstood.

You will be attacked for standing for the truth. You will be lifting up the name of Jesus as the only solution to life and salvation, and people are going to say, eh. And then what are you going to do? But this is the work of evangelists. Someone has to seek to preach the gospel to the lost, even to use that term. It almost sounds archaic these days in our culture.

[14:55] The lost. We knew about the lost. We talked about the lost. We reach out to the lost. We actually think that there are people who are lost.

They're just not. I just have another life and, and a different way here. Are they lost or not without Christ? Does that, is that what the Bible teaches or not?

I think it does. Somehow, that culture has to be reborn in us anew at the kind of level that you're going to see and hear from this text here.

So, this was a special charge to Timothy, but I think it's a charge to us as well. Do we have a concern for the lost anymore? Have we given up? Have we settled?

When is the last time you started a gospel conversation with anybody who didn't know Christ? Do you know anybody who doesn't know Christ at all? Or do you just hang with your holy huddle group here?

[16:00] So, I'm so glad Ron Lowe had this day. I see that as a providential kind of a situation. I don't know how to do this. How about coming to that evangelistic meeting?

Finding out what you can do, what you can learn about here. There are ways to figure out how to do these things by God's grace. So, maybe you need to come to that. Finally, it brings us back to the fact that Paul himself in this setting, Paul himself is thinking about his own suffering and his potential demise.

He's in prison. And though he certainly has faced death before here, he has this time, I think, a little difference.

He shares with Timothy, that his death may be closer than ever before. So, in verse 6, the one that was read to you, for I am being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand.

Here, how are you going to finish well, Paul? Paul first uses this simile of a libation here. A libation is something that is given both Jews and Gentiles understood libations.

[17:19] They were fundamentally a sacrifice, an offering, and they were used to basically say to, in other places, a God here, we're taking the best of our stuff, not to be wasted, not to be consumed, but instead, to be given over to you as dedication, as an act of devotion.

Paul, of course, is talking about the only true God when he says that he is a sacrifice here. He is a libation. He's being poured out here.

He is a gift of God because, and the verb is actually in the passive. It's actually God doing this through him and for him.

And he says it's already in the making. He uses this imagery again in Philippians where he says, Philippians 2, verse 17, even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon sacrificial offering of your faith.

I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise, you should also be glad and rejoice with me. Now, did you catch that? He's talking about dying and death, but he says rejoice.

[18:32] Did that slip by you there? Here? How can that be? How can you talk about rejoicing and death? life here in this sense.

But Paul says that to these Philippians and he says even further, yes, I will rejoice for I know that through your prayers and with the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this is Philippians 1, 18b, that it will turn out for my deliverance.

It is as my great eager expectation and hope that I will not be all ashamed. But that with full courage now, as always, Christ be honored in my body whether in life or by death.

Whether in life or by death. Do you have that perspective? Jim World wrote a song. He called it So His Honor here.

And by the way, Jim Ward was part of our little group here as well, Jim and Beth. We all knew one another and went to school one another at this time here. So Timothy has been given this fantastic charge and with the reality that he might, Paul is saying, he might be facing his final time on earth.

[19:55] And so he offers three profound statements. You know them well. They were read to you and they're all in the perfect tense. It's this sense like, and people have sometimes thought Paul is bragging.

Who says, who says, I have fought the good fight? You think Paul has said, yeah man. I fought the good fight. Yeah.

I finished the race. What you do? You know. No, he's not bragging. He's not bragging. He says, here, I fought the good fight and he uses this imagery, this athletic imagery here.

He does so in Corinthians as well. The eighth, the ninth chapter. I do not run aimlessly, but I, I do not box, same word, Greek word. I do not box or fight as one beating the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified.

God. Those are good words for us as we think about his first statement, I have fought the good fight.

[21:09] I want to finish well. Do you want to finish well? You are going to finish, but do you want to finish well? I don't want to get to the end of my life and do something really, really stupid.

Oh, that's not possible for you, Dr. Trimian. Oh, yes, it is. And guess what? It's possible for you too. I don't care how old, what is their expression?

It's not in the Bible, but it's pretty good. There's no fool like an old fool. Oh, yeah. It's possible, yes, for something to happen.

May that not be so here. There's lots of things that we could fight about today. I've already mentioned some of those. Paul makes it clear that we're not a people who go around fighting with one another because we don't use the weapons of this world.

2 Corinthians says, the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but of divine power of destroying strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

[22 : 14] Christ. You're in a fight whether you know it or not. You're in a fight. You ready? Ephesians, he says to those Ephesian Christians, for we did not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers and against authorities and against cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.

We are in a fight, but it's not with one another. It's with and against the evil one. But thanks be to God, Christ is the victor here.

He's the one who finished. He's the one who went to the cross on our behalf. That is what empowers Paul to be able to make these sorts of claims here because he knows he's been guaranteed by someone else who perfectly completed, fought the good fight, who kept the faith, who finished the race.

He knows that Christ has already done that and he will lead him as well. I have finished the race was the next one. Conquerors, we're in a race.

You're in a race. Yeah? How's it going? Getting tired? Ready to give up? Here? These are powerful statements here, but I want to tell you something right off the bat.

[23 : 47] If you think Paul is saying, and I pull this off all by myself, you've missed the point here. He's not trying to say, I pull it off by myself.

It's all by grace. Grace. It's all by grace here. The race, he says, as I finish this race here, the race was started by grace.

The race is preceded in grace. The race will end in grace. It's all by grace. And I love the words of the song that Lionel Harris sings. Maybe one of these days you'll let me sing it here.

Word not for grace. I can tell you where I'd be. Wandering down some pointless road to nowhere. With my salvation up to me.

And I know how that would go. The battles I would face. Forever running. But losing the race. Were it not for grace.

[24 : 49] I've kept the faith, Paul says here. Wage a good warfare. Holding faith and good conscience is what he told Timothy to do.

He said some people, by rejecting this, have shipwrecked their faith. And Paul even drops a few names. Alexander. He names some people. You think Paul wasn't disappointed in the ministry? People who were with him and then disappeared on him. turned his back on him and on the Lord. Conkers, we can name a few names. We ain't gonna. We can name a few names too.

We're not their judges here. Fight the good fight, he tells Timothy. Take hold of the eternal life to which you made a good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Paul knew who he was talking about. And so that takes us into our last verse. Verse eight. A verse that says, where I've been said these confessions.

[25 : 59] I fought the good fight. I finished the race. I've kept the faith here. He then turns and says, henceforth. That means whatever's gonna follow thereafter is all, what I've said before is based on this.

It's based on this. It's being supported and standing by this here. Henceforth, everything I've said so far rests on this astonishing reality. And that reality is God's got my back.

In the face, he has laid up for me a place. Did you get that? He's laid up for me a place. Has God laid up a place for you to be?

Where you're going? Do you know that for sure? When it's over. And get this. He even says, Paul says, I'll wear a crown.

I know, I know, I know people get a little nervous about that here, but Jesus talked about rewards and crowns here in the Gospels.

[27 : 02] Check it out. You'll find it. Paul is not off here. He says, I'm going to, God himself is going to award me a crown of righteousness. Now, don't get it twisted here.

Paul was not saying, God owes me. You know, I've been pretty good. So he better give me my crown. Yeah. No, no, no, no, no. Do you ever just get something and you're so surprised by it? You just, but somebody just shows you some love. I hope you know that. That's what God did for you. He showed you some love. I will wear a crown.

Oh, yeah. And that's what Paul is saying here as well. We don't earn our salvation. The beauty and kindness of a merciful God who is a righteous judge.

There's a lot of judges out there. Some not so righteous, but there's a, this, this is a righteous judge. And when he gives a crown, he knows what he's talking about. James called it a crown of life.

[28 : 04] Peter called it a crown of glory, but wait, there's even more. Did you notice the term that day?

That day in this expression here, that day, he says, there's a time that's going to come because when this is going to happen, when the, when this righteous judge is going to appear and he's going to make all things new and he's going to make all things right.

And he's going to, as these people stood up here seeking to be healed, he's going to heal all of their diseases. And it may be before they pass on.

Because I know this, I know maybe this is a doctrine that's way in the back of your mind somewhere, but Jesus said he was coming back. It should not be back in your mind.

It should be up. That day, that day that's coming here, this reality with Paul, this is what fueled his urgency to preach the gospel to the lost.

[29 : 07] He knows that day is coming. And when that day comes, people who love the Lord will love his appearing. But people who don't know him will not love that appearing because they know what that means.

You love some of those people. Shouldn't you tell them about Jesus? Shouldn't you, shouldn't that urge you, move you deeply? To go after and share and spread his word to their lives.

This is what fueled Paul's urgency about preaching here, about sharing the gospel here to the folks he wanted to.

This is why that day, it influences everything that Paul is saying. That is why the urgency to reach the lost. Because of that day is coming.

It's why his desire to finish well, to fight the good fight, to finish the course, to keep the faith.

Because that day is coming. It's why rejoicing and joy in the face of death does not scare us.

[30 : 22] Because that day is coming. He's got our back for all of us. And we thank God for that. Paul says here at the end to his other son in faith, for the gospel of Jesus Christ is appearing, bringing salvation, this is in Titus 2, to all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope.

The appearing of the glory of Jesus Christ. It's everywhere in Paul's writings here. He knows this. Everything the Holy Spirit leads him to write in Scripture is with that understanding that Jesus is going to appear.

His glory is going to appear. He is going to straighten everything out. He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people of his own possession who are zealous for good works.

We got a future, conquerors. We got things to do. We've got work to do by his grace. As he fused. Look at neighbors. I come to find out that Joan, I thought Joan had a problem and she had steps on some glass and had a problem with her foot.

I come to find out she had melanoma here. And then she gets up and she gets up and goes to Africa. Who does that?

[32 : 05] You say, oh, that's Randy. Randy does that kind of crazy. No. No. No. That's God. That's God at work calling people.

He will always, no matter how old, no matter how young, he's going to call people. We need a bigger heart for the loss. We need to restore that heart for this culture.

We need to finish well. Keep the faith. Finish the course, the race. Fight the good fight.

And the Lord be with you today. Let's pray. Father God, thank you for this time of your word. Thank you that you are the one who guarantees all of our salvation.

And so now we pray that as we conclude our time here together, you would turn our hearts to those who stand outside these doors, who walk the streets of Chattanooga and Nairobi and all sorts of places around the world and do not know you.

[33 : 18] Give us a heart for the lost, Lord. Make us your, maybe small letter, evangelists here. here. For your kingdom and for your name's sake, we pray. Amen. Amen.