

2 Timothy 4:7-8 — Finishing Well — Part 2

June 13, 2021

There are lots of exciting things happening at CrossWinds. Last week I announced that we are looking forward to purchasing a new property for the Spencer Campus. This would finally give that campus its own building. It is located in the north part of the north mall in Spencer. It is a \$300,000 purchase but thankfully we have that money in the bank. All we need is congregational approval. The vote will be next Sunday at 9:45 a.m. between services.



Immediately after this service, we will have a time of prayer for our summer ministries then at approximately 10:50 move right into a time of questions and answers about this building led by Pastor Shane.

Last week I also told you we were trying to schedule a time to let you into the building to look at it before the vote to purchase it. We have that time set. It is 5-7 p.m. Monday. This week everyone should have received an e-mail from Pastor Shane with a map to the building and answers to the most commonly asked questions people have about this building. If you didn't get that e-mail, talk to me after the service. Give me your e-mail address, and I will make sure that e-mail is sent to you today. This is certainly an exciting season at CrossWinds.

I have more exciting news. As many of you know, we were looking for a new person to head our audio, visual, and lighting team and oversee the technology on both campuses after Jeremy Pritchard, our former technology

lead, took another job. I am glad to tell you I was able to hire a young man. His name is Tyler Lowe. He is from Fresno, California. He has worked in audio, video, and lighting in larger churches and in portable churches. He will arrive in July. This is an especially important position. Anticipating the purchase of the new Spencer Campus, Tyler will have the job of making sure the technology on both campuses works together. He will have the job of recruiting and leading the technology teams in both facilities. Make sure you encourage him because it is a big job.

Not only is this an exciting season as CrossWinds grows but we have some exciting verses to look at this morning. Let's pray then dive into God's Word.

Pray

As a church, we are finishing up our study of 2 Timothy. Next week we will finish the book. Today, we are in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Take out your Bible and find that passage. I don't care if you use a phone for your Bible or a paper Bible. Either way, have your copy of God's Word in front of you. I also ask you to make sure you take out your sermon handouts. Fill in the blanks and take notes. If you are new to CrossWinds, that is the way we study God's Word together. You will get much more out of a sermon if you are able to follow along in the outline and take notes during the sermon.

Last week, we began looking at 2 Timothy 4:6-8. We focused on verse six. These verses are some of Paul's final words that he penned in our Bible before he died as a martyr when Nero chopped off his head. His only crime was being a Christian.

Last week, we noticed that Paul was facing his death in a different way than most of us. He was not facing death despondently but triumphantly. How can anyone die with triumph? If Paul could die without regrets, we want to learn from him to see how we can also die without regrets. Last week, we began looking at these verses through the lens of the question, “How can we finish well?” If Paul was able to finish well, what do these verses tell us about how we can finish our lives well? Let’s reread verses 6-8 then see what verses 7 and 8 tell us about how we can finish our lives well and how we can die with triumph instead of regret.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 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 loved his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:6–8 (ESV)

As we saw last week, these three verses break into three tenses. Verse 6 deals with the present tense of Paul’s life. He was being poured out as a drink offering. Verse 7 deals with the past tense. Paul looked back on his life, saying he fought the good fight. Verse 8 pertains to the future and the reward Paul knew Jesus laid up for him in heaven.

Last week, when we looked at verse six, we learned three lessons about how Paul was able to finish well. Let’s take a moment to briefly review what we learned.

1. **Finishing well means passing the baton to the next generation.** Even though there was trouble in many of the churches Paul planted, Paul was able to face his death without fear of his life's work falling apart. Why wasn't he worried about the future of these troubled churches when he died? He had

wisely trained a group of younger men who were now ready to take his place when he was gone. These were men he mentored. These men would be able to help the troubled churches and get them back on track. Do you remember some of the names of these young men that we talked about last week?

They were men like Timothy, Titus, Crescens, and Tychicus. Last week, we learned that to finish well those of us in the current church leadership must not insist on being the only ones who can hold the baton of leadership. We must intentionally mentor younger leaders and pass them the baton of real leadership. We must encourage them to lead for Jesus and help them succeed. If we insist on being the only ones who can hold the baton of leadership all the way to our graves, that is a recipe for the extinction of the church in the next generation, not the continuation of the church into the next generation.

2. **Finishing well means living life as a sacrifice to Jesus.** Paul finished well because he lived all of life as a sacrifice to Jesus. Paul considered his death to simply be a drink offering. As we learned from Numbers 15, the drink offering is only the last part of a much larger offering. First, an animal was burned on the altar. Next, flour mixed with oil was burned on the altar. The last part of the offering was wine that was poured on the hot coals that remained. That wine was instantly turned to steam and a sweet aroma rose like a small cloud into the air. When Paul said his death for being a Christian was a drink offering, he claimed his death was offering the last part of all of his life as a sacrificial offering to Jesus. The key to Paul finishing well was

living well. He viewed all of his life as a sacrifice for Jesus, so dying as a martyr was only a natural extension of the way he lived. What I like about Paul is he realized life was not primarily about having fun, accumulating stuff, having a bigger house, or getting a bigger boat. None of those things are the purpose of life. The purpose of life is building the kingdom of Christ, living for the kingdom of God. That is the purpose of life. The only way we can fulfill our purpose in life is understanding that our lives, and even our deaths, are to be lived as a sacrifice to Jesus. That is the way we can finish well.

3. **Finishing well means having the right view of death.** Paul could finish well because he didn't fear death. Today everyone is afraid of death. Death is the great enemy. People say, "Don't kill me!" They will do anything to keep from dying. Paul knew the truth. For a Christian, death is not the bitter end of life. It is the better end of life. As Paul wrote to the Philippians and Corinthians, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, which is better by far! This is why Paul could be so bold and courageous to speak about Jesus, even when people were threatening his life. He wasn't afraid to die. The only way we can finish well in this life is if we have the right view of death. We must know that for us death is the better end. We must remember the good news!

This morning, as we continue in verses 7 and 8, we will learn more about how to finish well by looking with Paul at his past and his future.

Finishing well means I must realize the Christian life is a spiritual struggle.

I have fought the good fight... 2 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)

The word fought and fight are from the same Greek root word. It is *agon*. We get the English word agony from it. Every time the Greek word *agonizomai* is used, it refers to excessive effort and energy being expended in a struggle or contest. It was sometimes used to describe a boxing match that went to the end without a knock-out. It described Rocky Balboa in the ring with Drago. It was sometimes used to describe a wrestling match that went a long time with two men trying their hardest to overpower one another. It was also sometimes used to describe a running race, such as a marathon. The Greek word describes an excessive amount of gut-wrenching effort used for a long period of time in a struggle.

As the apostle Paul looked back on his Christian life, he realized that agony --- that is a long, extended, sweaty, gut-wrenching struggle --- doesn't just describe some athletic events. It is a good picture of the Christian life. The Christian life is long, and sometimes very difficult, obedience in the same direction. If you think the Christian life is a walk in the park, you better get that out of your head. It is a sweaty, painful, agonizing struggle that never ends until you die. If we are going to finish well, that is the understanding of the Christian life we need to have in our heads.

In this world, many of you are successful in business. If you run a successful business you must have a large amount of drive and compulsion in your heart to succeed. I don't mean you must have drive to beat other people. Anyone who is successful in business must have an incredible amount of drive to push himself or herself to the limit. I was looking at a YouTube video this past

week about Elon Musk and he described how there were times at Tesla where he was working 20 hours a day because the success of the company hung in the balance. That is the business drive I am talking about. It is long, sustained, agonizing effort that is needed to succeed.

That kind of drive is not just essential for success in your work life but it is also essential for success in your spiritual life. The Christian life is not a jog in the park. It is a battle. It is war. It is hard. It is agonizing. That is the mindset we need to adopt. That is the kind of effort we need to expect.

Why is the Christian life such a battle? Satan and the demonic world are committed to derailing our walks with Jesus. Our own lusts and the desires of our flesh try to derail us. Our own laziness tries to ruin us. Anybody have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning for a little Bible reading? I do! Our own lack of priorities fights against us. We are constantly battling these things. That is the fight of the Christian life.

At one time, we had Pastor Chris on staff. He ran Iron Man triathlons. He told us about the long swims, the long foot races and the grueling bike rides. The entire triathlon involved long, agonizing effort. That isn't just a triathlon. That is the Christian life for every one of us. We are signed up for that kind of race and running that kind of race. If we are going to finish well, we need to get it out of our heads that following Jesus is the easy thing to do. It is not. It is the hard thing to do.

Remember that in many parts of the world people kill Christians. In many parts of the world you can lose your family and your business if you are a

Christian. Satan hates you because he hates Jesus. Our own laziness and fleshly desires are fighting against us. We are in a war.

Look what Paul said:

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.
Colossians 1:29 (ESV)

The word toil means to wear oneself out, to work yourself to the bone, to work yourself to the point of complete and utter exhaustion. If we want to finish well, we need to understand the Christian life involves work. It involves hard work. It involves exhausting work to follow Jesus and to serve others in the name of Jesus. Expect that kind of painful experience. Don't be surprised when you encounter that kind of painful experience as you walk with Jesus.

Finishing well means remembering the struggle of the Christian life is a good and noble battle.

I have fought the good fight... 2 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)

Paul said he fought the good fight. The Greek word for good is the word *kalos*. It means excellent, honorable, or noble. Paul saw the fight of faith as a noble fight, an honorable fight. He didn't say the struggle of the Christian life was a dumb fight or a foolish fight but a noble and good fight. Fighting battles against sin and for a life that is holy and pleasing to Jesus is a hard battle but it is a good battle. It is the right thing to do with our lives. It is the right way to live our lives.

What are you pursuing with your life? People give their lives to many causes. For some, it is the old car they are restoring. For others it is a pet. For others it is a boat. They love their boat. For others it is work. Those are not necessarily bad things to pour your life into. It is good to work hard. It is good to pursue loving your spouse and your children. While some of those are good

things, none of them are as noble, good, and honorable as giving your life to following Jesus, doing good works for Jesus, and sharing the good news of Jesus with people around you. My friends, there is nothing better you can do with your life than to pour yourself into the good fight of following Jesus! Look what Paul said about the fight of following Jesus.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3:8 (ESV)

Paul had impeccable credentials. He was incredibly bright. He was well respected. He had more academic degrees than Fahrenheit. He chucked all of it. He trashed all of his status, accomplishments, and notoriety to give his life to the battle of following Jesus and reaching people with Jesus. The fight to follow Jesus is that good, that noble, that honorable.

Stop for a moment and reflect on your life. Ask yourself, “Am I really giving my life for the cause of Christ? Am I fighting the good fight? Am I living with Jesus as the center of my universe or with myself as the center of my universe? How much of my time, how much of my energy, how much of my heart goes to the cause of Christ’s kingdom? As soon as following Jesus gets hard, do I crumble like a piece of paper because I thought the Christian life was an easy life, not an agonizing struggle? If we don’t realize the Christian life is a fight --- and it is a good, honorable, and noble fight --- we will never be able to finish well.

Finishing well means staying on the course.

I have finished the race. 2 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)

As Paul reflected on his Christian life, he realized the Christian life is like a race. To finish the life of the Christian race, you need the discipline to stay on

course. You can't finish the race in the time God has given you or cover the distance God has allotted for you if you are running slowly or getting distracted and running off the track.

The moment we are born again as a Christians, the race of our Christian lives begins. The moment God takes us home, the race of our Christian lives comes to an end. From the time we become a Christian until the time we go home to be with Jesus, we are running the race of the Christian life. In this race, as it says in Ephesians 2:10, there are good works God has given us to accomplish. That is why we must stay on the track and run the race and accomplish all God has given us to accomplish to grow his kingdom.

There are two things that get people off course. Hebrews 12 tells us about them.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

What slows us down and ruins our progress for Jesus are the weights and the sin in our lives.

Unnecessary weight will slow us down as we run for Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews said we must "lay aside every weight" in our Christian lives. Many of you know my daughter was involved in track this past year. She was part of a great 4x400 team. At the beginning of the year, she sent me an Amazon link for an expensive pair of track cleats. I couldn't believe the shoes were so expensive considering the few times you run in them. Trying to save money, I told her that her brother left his steel-toe work boots in the garage that he had from work. She could save money if she ran in work boots. You can

guess what she said to Dad. “Dad, if I run in the boots I will be slow. You want me to run fast.” As a dutiful father who knew I was beat, I ordered her expensive track cleats from Amazon. She was right. You can’t run fast when you are burdened down with a lot of unnecessary weight. Nobody can sprint across an airport with a heavy suitcase in his or her hands. What are spiritual weights? The weights that cling to us are not sinful things or immoral things. They are just the unnecessary things in our lives that slow us down in our race for Jesus. They are good things in our lives that keep us from doing the best things. Just as any distant cyclist knows he needs to remove any extra weight from his bicycle to win, the Christian knows she needs to remove extra weight in her life that slows down progress for Jesus and accomplishing all the good works she can do for Jesus. Spiritual weight are those things that slow us down and keep us from accomplishing all the good works God planned for us to do.

When I was a youth pastor, we had one student that enjoyed soccer. I remember her mother coming into my office to let me know that her daughter qualified for traveling soccer. She wouldn’t be at church or youth group for the next six months because traveling soccer took place on Sundays. You can guess what happened. Those six months turned into a year. While the young woman didn’t walk away from her faith, like a student stuck at home without classroom teaching, when she went to college, she found herself struggling in her faith. For almost a year she missed Bible teaching, Christian fellowship, and times in prayer with her church family.

Soccer is not a bad thing. It is not a wrong thing. In this young woman's case, soccer every weekend and no time growing in Christ slowed her down for Jesus. In that period of time, I am sure she was not able to accomplish all the good works God had for her through Jesus.

Sin will take us off course as we run for Jesus.

The other factor that slows us down in our race for Jesus is sin that takes us completely off the course. Will Jesus forgive us when we sin? Of course he will! The problem is that all the time we use dabbling in sin is time we are throwing away. We can never get that time back. We can never be doing the good works God had planned for us to accomplish in that time. We know it is never God's will for us to dabble in sin or to pursue sin. When we are choosing sin, we are choosing to not use that time to accomplish the good works God intended us to accomplish. If the Christian life is a race, when we choose sin, we veer off the course to chase rabbits in the bushes. While we are chasing rabbits on the side, we are not making progress in the race that is in front of us.

I would say for every one person who gets off course with outright sin, there are 10 who slow themselves down and never reach their potential for Christ because they are carrying too much weight, too much baggage.

So I ask you, "What are your spiritual gifts? Are you using them?" Are you someone who contents yourself with just attending church or are you committed to getting involved and using your gifts to serve and love other people in the church? Is Jesus just a Sunday thing for you or are you inviting people to join in at CrossWinds so they can hear about Jesus and be saved?

The best example of someone who stayed focused and was not hindered by excess weight and whose potential was not diminished because of sin and running off the course is Jesus. He never ran from the track. He never let weight slow down his pace. He was able to accomplish all his heavenly father had given him to do.

Finishing well means keeping the faith.

I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)

What does it mean to keep the faith? The faith means the Word of God. The words, "I have kept" mean to guard something. In other words, Paul was conscious he was given a sacred trust by God. It was to proclaim the gospel. It was to not compromise the Word of God. Nobody can finish well if he or she is not faithful to this book. The moment people start to ignore parts of the Bible or to edit out parts of the Bible because it makes them uncomfortable or because it doesn't fit with their Critical Race Theory beliefs, they are not keeping the faith. They will not finish well. Look what Jesus said about how central the Bible must be to our lives if we are to finish well.

But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

Today, most of us will eat three, and possible four, meals. We need food to survive. Just as important as daily food is daily time in God's Word. If you content yourself to have the only time you spend in God's Word be you hearing me teach it on Sundays, you will starve. We need God's Word to feed our spirits every day, just like we need food to feed our bodies every day.

This is why we have the Take Up and Read Bible reading challenge at CrossWinds. Right now, we are working through the book of Romans. Soon we will start the book of Ephesians. It is only one chapter a day five days a week. If you are new, I invite you to join us. You can learn more about the Take Up And Read Bible reading challenge in this morning's bulletin and on our website at www.crosswinds.tv. The only way to keep the faith over the long haul of life and to finish well is to constantly have the word of God flowing through our spirit like blood flows through our body.

In 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul repeatedly told Timothy to guard the deposit of the gospel message that was entrusted to him.

O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you... By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. 1 Timothy 6:20 + 2 Timothy 1:14 (ESV)

To finish well, we must be in in this book, not just on Sunday but every day. We need to be constantly feeding our spirit the Word of God like we constantly need to be feeding our bodies with food.

The Bible describes itself as the word of truth. In this world, most of what we hear are lies, spin and deception, especially in the press. You cannot trust the media. You cannot trust Facebook. Everyone is manipulating us. The only place we can find the truth is this book. This book is absolute truth. It is always right. Why would we deny ourselves the privilege of knowing the truth by avoiding God's Word? To finish well we must keep the faith, which means keeping our fingers in the text.

Finishing well means fixing my eyes on my heavenly reward.

When I was in elementary school, the school told us to sell magazine subscriptions as a school fundraiser. Did they ever do that in your school? As an elementary student, I didn't care about the school needing money. What caught my eye was the rewards they gave for selling the most magazine subscriptions. The top prize was a tabletop Pac-Man video game. To me, guiding Pac-Man to goggle dots and fruit while avoiding the ghosts sounded like heaven on earth. I was super-motivated to sell those magazine subscriptions. I walked home from school stopping at almost every house on my way home to sell those magazine subscriptions. Did I make it?. Yes, I won the Pac-Man video game! Today, it is somewhere in a landfill in New Jersey, but at the time, it was an amazing prize.

My simple point is that rewards motivate. If we want to finish well, we must keep our eyes fixed on the rewards that God wants to give us as we live for Jesus. Those rewards are incredibly motivating. God doesn't just love us so much that he sent his own son to die for us to save us from our sin, he is so good that he goes beyond saving us and longs to reward us.

We find the truth that God loves and can't wait to reward us all over Scripture.

Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. Luke 6:22–23 (ESV)

No matter what we have to endure for following Jesus --- it could be hatred, loneliness, mocking, even people considering to be evil --- none of that suffering is worth griping about. Jesus will richly reward us for our suffering if we

live faithful lives in the midst of our suffering. The rewards we will receive from Jesus will far outweigh any suffering we experience for Jesus.

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him...” 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)

Paul said we can't even begin to comprehend how good God's rewards are. We can't begin to comprehend how joyful, beautiful, and wonderful it is to be with Jesus and to be rewarded by Jesus. Trust me, God's rewards are much better than a Pac-Man game.

The Psalmist also writes about God rewarding his people in the Old Testament for how they lived.

Mankind will say, “Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.” Psalm 58:11 (ESV)

Know for sure that when we do what is right, when we obey God's Word, when it is costly socially to follow Jesus, when it is costly personally to follow Jesus, Jesus sees what we endure to be faithful to him and he will abundantly reward us for being faithful to him. The reward we will receive from Jesus is always far greater than any amount of suffering and sacrifice we make for Jesus.

This past week, I was reading about Moses in the book of Hebrews. Moses was the son of Pharaoh. His dad was essentially Jeff Bezos. Moses had all the money, pleasure, and status in the world at his disposal, but he turned his back on all of it. He chose to be associated with the people of God that were living as slaves. Why did he do this? It was not because Moses turned his back on pleasure. It was because Moses wanted more pleasure. Look what the writer of Hebrews said about him.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:26 (ESV)

Moses would rather be mistreated with God's people on earth because he was looking to the incredible reward that would be his in heaven because he was one of God's people.

Paul said it this way:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18 (ESV)

No matter what suffering we face in this life, no matter what physical torture or relational heartache we have in this life, it is nothing more than a minor inconvenience when we compare it to the joy, glory, and reward that will be given to us from Jesus when we see him face to face.

If we are going to finish well, we must fix our eyes not just on God's amazing grace to save us through Jesus but we must fix our eyes on how much God the Father desires to reward us when we faithfully live for Jesus.

This is what Paul was looking at when he got to verse 8. Let's read it.

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 loved his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)

The first word of this verse is "**Henceforth**." That simply means, "what remains" or "what is up next." After I die, I look forward to receiving my reward.

The next words of this verse are, "**there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness**." "Laid up" simply means to keep in a safe place. It is in a safety deposit box. It is in a bank. Nothing can happen to it. It is in a safe place.

What is kept safe? The crown of righteousness. Let's study this a bit. The Greek word



here is *stephanos*. It is not *diadem*. A diadem refers to a king's crown. This type of crown was an olive wreath placed on someone's head to show everyone that you were honoring him or her. For example, if a city leader retired from public service, at his retirement dinner, he would wear one of these wreath crowns. They were usually woven from the branches of an olive tree. Wearing this type of crown was a way of letting people know that you were the honored guest.

This type of wreath crown was most commonly associated with athletics. The winner of any great athletic contest in that part of the world was given a wreath crown to wear as a way of honoring him or her and his or her victory.



As anybody who has competed in athletics knows, there is a problem with this type of honor. It doesn't take long for the glory to fade. Just as the olive leaves of this type of crown grow old and die, people don't want to remember and honor the winner of an athletic contest from last year, they want the Olympic winner from this year!

The glory of a wreath crown fades over time, just as the glory of an Olympic championship faces over time.

The good news is the glory of the crown of honor we get from Jesus doesn't fade. It never gets old.

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 1 Corinthians 9:25 (ESV)

Paul was looking forward to his crown. The glory of that crown won't fade. What is this crown? It is called **the crown of righteousness**. What does that

mean? In the interest of time, I will simply give you the answer. It is a crown WHICH IS righteousness. The reward Paul looked forward to receiving was the crown which is righteousness.

There are two things every Christian longs for in life: 1. The presence of God. 2. The absence of sin. Paul said the reward he would receive and that he was longing to experience was the reward of total righteousness. He longed for the time when there would finally be no more sin, suffering, agony, depression, and evil. It would be gone. We will be rewarded by Jesus with complete righteousness and holiness from Jesus.

This may not sound like a reward, but it is truly a reward. What is it that we pray for when someone has breast cancer? We pray for her healing! We want the effects of sin removed from her body. We want her to experience righteousness. We want her to have life right again. What do we ask for when we go to court? Justice and truth. We want to take the wrongs and make them a right. Righteousness --- everything finally being right and sin being banished --- is the deep longing of the heart of every Christian. Paul looked forward to being honored with complete righteousness forever that he didn't deserve. Look what the Scriptures says about this.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Matthew 5:6 (ESV)

When we trust in Jesus and become a Christian, the Bible says righteousness is legally imputed to us. We experience legal righteousness. Not only does Jesus death pay for our sin, but the holiness and perfection of Jesus'

sinless life is credit to our lives. Legally, we are seen by God not just as free from sin but as having a life of perfect righteous credited to our account by Jesus.

There is more to our righteousness. As we live the Christian life, the Holy Spirit begins to change us from the inside out. He changes our longings and desires. Here we move from imputed legal righteousness to practical righteousness. We find ourselves starting to turn from sin to Jesus. But as we know, that is never perfect. We will always continue to struggle with sin in this life. The reward Paul looked forward to receiving was the gift of perfect righteousness. No longer would Paul struggle with temptation. No longer would he struggle to love his neighbor. No longer would Paul not love God with all of his heart. I can't think of a gift much better than the gift of perfect righteousness for all eternity. We deserve the lake of fire for our sin, instead we are given the gift of perfect righteousness in spite of our sin. Remember this is a crown whose glory will never fade. That is pretty amazing.

Will there be rewards for believers based on how they lived? Yes.

That is not what Paul was talking about in this passage, but there will be additional rewards beyond the crown of righteousness. Let me take a moment to explain those additional rewards that will be ours based on how we live as a Christian, beyond the crown of righteousness which will be for all of us.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

We will all stand before Jesus' judgment seat to be rewarded by Jesus for how we lived. This judgment seat is known as the bema seat. It is not the judgment seat of a court justice where a judge decided for how long to send

people to jail. This type of judgment seat is the kind of judgment rendered by Olympic judges who are evaluating a gymnastic performance. It is not a judgment of condemnation. It is a judgement to determine the level of the reward. As Christians, we will be judged by Jesus to be rewarded by Jesus based on how we lived for Jesus. What we did with our faith after we came to faith will determine the rewards we will experience for our faith.

One thing I should point out to you is I do not like the translation of 2 Corinthians 5:10 in our ESV. It says we will be judged by Jesus for what we have done in our lives, whether good or *evil*. I do not like the word *evil*. That is not a good translation. The Greek word is *phalous*. It means something that is valueless or worthless. The issue here is not sin. The question is what is the value or worth of what we have done with our faith in Jesus once we came to our faith in Jesus? We will be judged by Jesus for how we lived for Jesus. If we did good and valuable things with our lives, we will be rewarded beyond the crown of righteousness. If we did nothing of spiritual value with our Christian lives and we invested our and energy in worthless pursuits, we will not receive these additional rewards beyond the crown of righteousness. Look how 1 Corinthians says the same thing.

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 1 Corinthians 3:12–13 (ESV)

Notice how wood, hay, and straw is contrasted with gold, silver, and precious stones. Wood, hay, and straw are not evil. They are simply without value. Gold, silver, and precious stones are extremely valuable. We don't see

scrap piles of gold and silver laying around. We do have piles of old wood and straw laying around waiting to be burned.

Paul said there is coming a day when what we have done with our Christian lives will be evaluated by Jesus. Did we live a valueless life for Jesus or did we put our shoulder to the wheel and help reach people with Jesus. Did we introduce people to Jesus? Did we use our lives to help build the kingdom of Jesus? The issue here is not salvation. It is a question of additional rewards beyond salvation that Jesus longs to give us.

What are these rewards? Are they silver and gold chains we will wear around our necks in eternity, making some of us look like an eternal version of Mr. T? No. The additional rewards given to us by Jesus Christ are an increased capacity for us to be able to serve Jesus in the next life. If we serve Jesus well in this life, we will be rewarded with an increased capacity to serve Jesus in the next life. If you want Scriptural support for this, go to the parable of the minas. I don't have time to turn there this morning.

All Christians will be honored with the unfading crown of righteousness. Everything about us and everything done by us being completely right and loving all the time is a great reward. In addition to this, what we have done to magnify the name of Jesus in this life will result in a reward of increased capacity and authority to serve Jesus in the next life.

Let's get back to the text.

The next phrase is "**which the Lord, the righteous judge.**" Jesus is our judge. He is a righteous judge. He never makes mistakes. He is better than the

judges at the Olympics who often do not agree. Jesus is the judge who sees all, knows all, and will perfectly and fairly evaluate us and reward us. There is no court of appeals because there will not be the need for a court of appeals.

When will this happen? Paul said he would be rewarded **on that day**.

When Jesus returns is the time when Jesus will evaluate his people and when Jesus will reward his people.

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. 1 Corinthians 4:5 (ESV)

"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense (reward) with me, to repay each one for what he has done." Revelation 22:12 (ESV)

When Jesus returns we will receive our reward. What about Christians who have died now? What is happening with them? Well, they are already with Jesus, which Paul described as far better than anything we experience in this life. There is coming a day when things will get better for them.

When Jesus returns, he will resurrect their dead bodies and transform them into resurrection bodies that will last forever. Jesus will recombine their spirits with their resurrection bodies that will be like Jesus' body. They will be known for eternal power and might, as they are no longer vulnerable to sickness, weakness, and death.

In addition, at that time, Christians will be rewarded with their crowns of righteousness. They will be crowned with the honor of being completely holy and righteous like God, in all of their thoughts, actions, and attitudes.

In addition, Jesus will evaluate Christians and reward them based on how they lived for Jesus. If they faithfully served Jesus in this life, they will be

rewarded with an increased capacity to serve Jesus in the next life. By the way, increased capacity to serve Jesus simply means having more joy from Jesus.

Who is all this for? Paul ended by saying to Timothy, and to us, this is offered to all of us.

“Not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

Conclusion

So how can we finish well? These three verses have a wealth of wisdom for answering that question.

1. To finish well I must passing the baton of leadership to the next generation.
2. To finish well I must live my life, and if necessary even my death, as a sacrifice to Jesus.
3. To finish well I must have a right view of death. Death is not the worst thing than can happen to me. As a Christian, it is the best thing that can happen to me.
4. To finish well, I must not be surprised when the Christian life is a hard and agonizing struggle. That is normal.
5. To finish well I must remember that the hard work of following Jesus is a good and noble battle. It is not a foolish and worthless battle. There is nothing more valuable you can give your life to than the struggle to follow Jesus.
6. To finish well I need to stay on the course Jesus has given me to run. I must not slow myself down by carrying unnecessary weight in my life that causes me to fritter away my time and energy. I must avoid sin because I cannot be running my race for Christ and running after sin at the same time.

7. To finish well I must keep the faith. That means is it my lifelong responsibility to know and obey my Bible. This book will keep us from sin or sin will keep us from this book.
8. To finish well we must fix our eyes on the rewards that Jesus wants to give us. There is an unfading crown of righteousness that Jesus longs to give to us and rewards for how we have lived this life that Jesus wants to bestow on us.

My friends, Paul's words to us are... finish well. May we be a people who are faithful all the way to the end.



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