

SLIDE 1 Finishing well, ECN 10th December 0915 & 11am Congregations
2 Timothy 4v3-8 Acts 20v17-31

SLIDE 2 You and I each want to **leave a legacy.....**
Something enduring, right?...

What would you like to have as your epitaph some day? Have you ever given that any thought? What will people say about you after you're gone? **It's always interesting to me to read some of the humorous inscriptions that have appeared on tombstones in days gone past.** For example, here is one that should have been edited:

Here lies Col. Brown . . . Shot in battle by an enemy soldier.

"Well Done Thou Good and Faithful Servant."

A tombstone in Pennsylvania tells of Ellen Shannon, twenty-six, "Who," according to her epitaph, "was fatally burned March 21, 1870 by the explosion of a lamp filled with 'Danforth's Non-Explosive Burning Fluid.'" Sounds ready-made for legal action.

Or you might sympathize with this etching on the tombstone of a lady named Margaret Daniels. It reads like this: **"She always said her feet were killing her . . . but nobody believed her."**

Here in Paul's letter to Timothy, though too lengthy for a normal epitaph, could have been inscribed on Paul's tombstone. They are inspiring words that challenge us to this day. Paul's words are filled with encouragement and assurance that he and we can finish the course. 2:1 **"Be Strong"** - 2. 2:3 **"Endure Hardness"** - 3. 2:5 **"Strive"** - 4. 2:10 **"Endure all things"**

What I want to leave with you is this, as part of my farewell... It's important to start right, **but it is imperative to end well**

SLIDE 3 We might as well get used to it, our WALK as a disciple is going to be a "Fight to the Finish." *You may recall that uncomfortable Ephesians 6 series...*

There are two realities about this war of which we must be aware if we are to finish well. The Greeks had a race in their Olympic games that was unique. The winner was not the runner who finished first. It was the runner who finished with his torch still lit. **I want to run all the way with the flame of my life torch still lit for Jesus! Don't you?**

Here is the scene in which Paul is writing: He is sitting in the drab dungeon of a Roman prison. He is facing the capital charge of insurrection against the Roman government. **He has had his preliminary hearing before Nero. Soon he will stand in his final trial and hear the fateful verdict: "Execution."** We don't know how soon... but these verses indicate that it will be quite soon. Paul knows that the end of his life upon earth is near. His finish line is near.... He's passing on the banner of the gospel over to Timothy to a lost and dying world. *That we take and share Jesus with all best we can... ..*

SLIDE 4 **Paul made it clear that he didn't reach the "Finish Line" without OPPOSITION.** ALL of hell OPPOSED him. DEMONS and EVIL SPIRITS came against him. The WORLD pulled at him. The FLESH tormented him., for life is a LIFE is a STRUGGLE.

We are RUNNING a RACE that requires EFFORT! We must CONTINUOUSLY advance in ONE DIRECTION. **As Eugene Peterson beautifully puts it, "it's a long obedience in the same direction..."** Paul told Timothy that he had fought a GOOD FIGHT. It will be a "Fight to the Finish!"

*** You may recall the story from a former Olympics... In 1968, Tanzania chose John Stephen Akhwari to represent them in the Mexico City Olympics. Along the way as he ran, he stumbled and fell, severely injuring both his knee and ankle. It was 7 PM and a runner from Ethiopia had won the race. Everyone else had finished and there were only a few thousand spectators left in the huge arena. All of a sudden a police siren caught every-one's attention. **Limping through the gate came 36 year old Akhwari with his leg wrapped in a bloody bandage.** The people cheered. A reporter at the gate asked him the question that was on everyone's mind: "Why continue the race after being so badly injured?" He replied, **"My country did not send me 7000 miles to begin a race; they sent me to finish a race"**

Paul was confident he had endured to the end and had finished well. *Sadly, however, just a few sentences later he had to write of one of his co-workers: "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica"* See that here in the passage – verse 10 Here were two men who had ministered together — Paul and Demas — mentor and mentoree. **One endured and finished the race and looked forward to the crown of righteousness. The other man peeled off, deserted his mentor, and was never heard from again.** We don't know what finally happened to Demas. We don't know whether he ever repented or not, but the Scripture ends with the fact that **"Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me."** Demas was a promising young man with a promising future; yet as far as we know he did not make it to the end. Demas didn't initially join Paul's team with the intention that he would later desert Paul when the going got tough. No, he undoubtedly expected to also stand firm and finish well.

This is a sobering thought as we cannot presume we will finish well. We never finish until the day we enter into the presence of Jesus! Three big ideas for all of us...

SLIDE 5 Paul begins by expressing his view of death. Life and death shapes everything! "For I am . . . being poured out like a drink offering," he writes, "and the time for my departure is near." **Paul saw his death as an offering and sacrifice which he was presenting to God.**

The Greek word for offering or sacrifice – *spendomai* - is striking: it refers to an offering called **a drink offering that was sometimes presented to God.** When a person wanted to make a sacrifice to God, he often took a cup of wine or oil and poured it out. **The drink offering symbolized the Lord Jesus pouring out his soul dying for us.**

William Barclay describes the scene like this: "Paul did not think of himself as going to be executed; **he thought of himself as going to offer his life to God.** His life was not being taken from him; he was laying it down. **Ever since his conversion Paul had offered to God his money, his scholarship, his strength, his time, the vigour of his body, the acuteness of his mind, the devotion of his passionate heart.** Only life itself was left to offer, and gladly Paul was going to lay life down."

What a wonderful statement of commitment! It's hard for us to even imagine such dedication. It's hard to find a faith like that in our contemporary age. Scripture and spirit are beckoning us onward... Jesus is worthy of our best... pour out your life, spend your best on Jesus! He's utterly worth it!

The reason that the apostle Paul made such an impression on the world, one that lasts to this day, is that he was totally committed. He offered up his life to God with nothing held back in reserve. He was all in. It was either a riot or a revival.... So don't turn it down friends, but rather turn it up... and live courageously for the cause of Christ!

The Greek words for martyr – *ieromartyras*- and witness – *martyria*- come from the same root word. **In those early days of the church the commitment to be a witness for Christ could not be separated from the possibility of becoming a martyr for Christ.** Throughout his ministry Paul understood the risk he was taking. He saw other leaders of the church offer up their lives. **A sentence to death was always a possibility when you committed your life to Jesus; now it was a reality for Paul, and he was prepared.**

“I am already being poured out like a drink offering,” he writes, “and the time for my departure is near.” Paul’s truth, my reality... For us all... be spent for the truest cause in all the world, that of Jesus!

Paul looks into death, to sharpen his focus on life... Every aspect of funeral ministry in my time here at Emmanuel did that for me, it quickened my life. Endings quicken our living...

The Greek word for “departure” is also striking in its meaning. And that work “departure” suggests different possible scenarios. The one I prefer... To depart is the picture of a ship hoisting the anchor and loosening the mooring ropes and **departing one country for another country**. *Paul had been anchored and tied to this world, but the anchor and ropes of this world were now being loosed, and Paul was about to set sail for the greatest of all ports heaven itself.*

Matthew Henry said it this way:- “Observe . . . with what pleasure Paul speaks of dying. He calls it his departure: though it is probable that he foresaw he must die a violent bloody death, yet he calls it his departure, or his release. **Death, to a godly soul, is release from the imprisonment of this world and his departure to the enjoyments of another world;** he does not cease to be, but is only removed from one world to another.” Paul begins by describing his death as an offering. Your life is a gift and your death one can be a sweet offering back to God!

Our living and our dying are a gift back to God! How about it...

SLIDE 6 2 The way Paul describes his life is also full of *meaning*. He quickly glances back over his life and uses three pictures to describe it the pictures of a *soldier, an athlete, and a steward or manager*.

Paul says. “I have fought a good fight.” In other words, he had lived life like a *faithful soldier: he had responded to the call of the Christ*. He had suffered through the threats, scrapes, and wars launched by the enemies of Christ. He had done his time, stuck to the mission of Christ to the very end. **Now he was being released from his service as a soldier for the King, released to go home to live at peace in the kingdom of his Lord forever and ever.** “I have fought a good fight.”

Then he says, “I have finished the race . . .” **Paul had completed the race of life just like the athlete runs and finishes the course of his race.** ****Barry Farber in his book, *Dive Right In*, tells about the Olympic athlete Michael Johnson. Johnson earned his reputation as the fastest human on earth at the Olympic trials in 1996. Dr. Phil Santiago, official chiropractor to US Olympic athletes, was there when Johnson pulled off this feat. **Santiago was impressed and amazed by both Johnson’s attitude and his willingness to do whatever it took to win the gold and break the world record.** During the trials, Santiago asked Johnson how he was feeling. “Fine,” the athlete replied. “*I’m going to break the world record today.*” He did break the world record but there was a technical problem with the timer and the officials would not count that race.

Afterward, Santiago commiserated with Johnson on his bad luck. “*No problem,*” *Johnson replied. “I’ll break it again tomorrow.” And he did.* **Johnson also had the opportunity to win four gold medals in the games.** He qualified to run the relays as well as the individual two-hundred-meter race. But he was so focused on destroying the Olympic and world records, he didn’t care about winning the rest of the medals. “He selected the goal he wanted,” says Santiago. “**He knew that in order to break these records, he’d probably rip his muscles and be unable to run the relays. That was okay with him.**”

And that’s what happened. Immediately after the race, his legs were packed in ice and he was out of commission for a week and a half. **He’d known that would happen, but he had the discipline and the focus, the mental strength to go even beyond his body’s limits.**

Johnson was running to win a gold medal and the recognition that goes with it. **Paul had run his race in devotion to Christ. "I have finished the race," he said.** Please run well, that's all I long for....

SLIDE 7 Our race journey with you is wrapping up and that's quite a salutary thing.... Forgive me where I have been less than I might, less than you needed or wished.... know that I've sought to honour God and serve you well..... and we've so appreciated your love, engagement and care.

My wished for legacy is.... **'used by God' rpt** // I'd settle for that kind of gravestone RIP... In these privilege and challenge of these three years, I'm so appreciative of being spent and poured out in everso many different ways....

It's the church family, that has fast-tracked my balding... !!!

These three years have been most precious, you will always remain in our hearts, our lives are unmistakably enriched by serving Jesus together, amidst the challenges along the way! Our time here is shorter than many of you wished, but that was always the script. I was meant to serve in this way, to transition from one way of being to what is next... and to exit left of stage...

I felt God impress on me very clearly in my time here, 'Love God, Love People and get out of the way...' Seeing growth and depth and new love for Christ and for his world is what's thrilled me most.... to see many weary hearts start to believe again and now for a few fun cameos....

*** Diocesan HQ // Signing in... Diocese really - love it? Don't they eat vicars out there in Emmanuel... **Rampant optimist me, no, they're really very lovely....**

*** Poorliness in my health manifests itself in a cold-sore... WF brisk feedback at the door!
Speak the truth sure, but lets lead with love...

*** go-seconds before a service is pure spiritual warfare....

Remmeber you're called to be John the Baptist, don't lose your head. I didn't lose my head, and there wasn't any blood on the carpet....

Pursue Jesus through it all

Death-life.... Meaning-calling, and... **Faith-reward**

SLIDE 8 3 Finally, Paul says that he had kept the ***faith***. **He had looked after the faith just like a good steward looks after the estate of his master. The Lord had entrusted the faith to Paul, and he had kept the faith.** He had proven faithful; he had faithfully managed the faith for his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. The idea is that of a **trust, of a management contract between Christ and Paul**. Paul is saying that he had kept the terms of the contract; he had managed and looked after the trust faithfully and well.

Now Paul could look forward to his reward. This is an aspect of our faith that we don't talk about much any more. We don't want to sound self-serving in our service to Christ. We don't want our service to appear self-serving. That's understandable. **But, at the end of life, there is a reward to those who have been faithful to Christ.** Paul writes, "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." **We don't work for the reward, but still it comes.**

Paul says let the reward of heaven motivate you here and now! **Paul was receiving what he called "the crown of righteousness."** But he didn't look at this crown as an exclusive award. It was the award that all who serve Christ will one day receive.

That's what I want for you.... That's why we contend for faith, urge a pursuit of Jesus in and through all you're facing and feeling....

The crown of righteousness is not something you earn, something you achieve by your own striving, but something that God bestows upon you. As the Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest says: “To those who have considered precious His appearing and therefore have loved it, and . . . are still holding that attitude in their hearts, to these the Lord Jesus will also give the victor’s crown of righteousness.”

What a fitting epitaph for every believer in Jesus Christ: **“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...”

What message will appear on your tombstone? It’s not too late to make a change. It’s not too late to **make your life a living sacrifice to God. Resolve to live to please Jesus... Honour God in all things..**

In finishing well, Paul commends death as the best way about handling life wisely, pursuing meaning and holding the promise of reward before us!

SLIDE 9 So some practical suggestions: **Daily Focused Communion with God** The first essential is a daily time of focused personal communion with God. Many readers are familiar with the old classic *Practicing the Presence of God*, and that is an excellent habit to cultivate. Don’t leave your feeding till weekly, or your expectation to a conference or field in Somerset. Pursue God daily... Demas didn’t just wake up one day and make a 90-degree turn. Demas drifted little by little toward the attractions of the world. **And if you and I do not practice this daily focused time of communion with God, we will find ourselves also drifting in the wrong direction. One degree shifts to Christ or away from....**

In order to not love the world we have to love God. And our time of daily focused communion with God is a time when that love of God and his love for us is refreshed in our hearts. Consider the words of the psalmist. In Psalm 63v1 he says, “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” **Notice the intensity of those words, Earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you. Increase your intensity, love and focus in Christ. This would thrill me... and this will transform your world when consistently repeated!** Do we spend time with God or do we just read a bit of the Bible? There’s a subtle and significant difference. *How is your ‘earnestly’ – occasionally, sometimes, maybe, dutifully??*

SLIDE 10 **Daily applying Jesus!** Another essential is a daily applying. Just as moisturiser may be good for the skin, so Jesus to the soul is VITAL!!!

Endlessly I find myself starting with these words, **God be merciful to me a sinner....** Every day even my best deeds are sinful and I need God’s mercy and your grace hourly and daily!

About a hundred years ago a great theologian by the name of B.B. Warfield, ... **“We must always be accepted for Christ’s sake, or we cannot ever be accepted at all.”** This is one of the great convictions of these years amidst you and serving you... IN Christ or INSECURE! Justification is not merely a past event but a present reality. Jesus can be trusted. Jesus is worthy of your love and trust! Make my joy complete and live this daily....

SLIDE 11 **A Daily Commitment to God as a Living Sacrifice is how you’ll finish well.** We never outgrow our desperate need for Christ. There’s much more of Christ and his gospel for each of us... Apply all of Jesus for all of you...

I find myself saying this in prayer... God, **“I am your servant. Because of your mercy to me and your grace at work in me, I again present my body as a living sacrifice. Down any road at any cost.... Thank-you for the privilege of being loved by you and being your service Lord Jesus!”**

SLIDE 12 An unshakeable belief in the sovereignty and love of God. This essential doesn't have the word daily in it, but it must be practiced continually. Years ago M. Scott Peck wrote a book *The Road Less Travelled* that began with a three-word sentence: “Life is difficult.” Friends don't you know it...The best of pastoral ministry is a realisation that everyone we meet is facing a challenge...**You & I will not endure if you let other people's sinful actions cause you to become bitter.** And one of the ways we can keep from becoming bitter is to realize that God is in sovereign control even over the sinful actions of other people.

There are two things that God will never take away. **God will never take away the gospel.** In the most difficult days of your life you still loved and precious in the Lord. Your sins are forgiven. And, second, **God will never take away his promises.** These two assurances will remain even if everything else is stripped away. If you were brought to the point of being like Job, you can count on this! You and I will always have his promise, “never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” *Hold onto these two....*

SLIDE 13 My desire Emmanuel, is for your persevering and flourishing, not just getting by and enduring As I shared with our Wednesday Fellowship friends, Heaven wont be heaven without you... *endure faithfully, persevere joyfully for the promise of all your reward in Jesus!*

*** I love the way Joni Eareckson Tada once described that day when she will fully be in the presence of the Almighty. *Joni, as you may know, was left quadriplegic by a diving accident, unable to use her legs or her arms, a life of seeming lack.* She writes, “I can't wait to be clothed in righteousness. Without a trace of sin. True, it will be wonderful to stand, stretch, and reach to the sky, **but it will be more wonderful to offer praise that is pure.** I won't be crippled by distractions. Disabled by insincerity. **I won't be handicapped by a ho-hum half-heartedness.** My heart will join with yours and bubble over with effervescent adoration. **We will finally be able to fellowship fully with the Father and the Son. For me, this will be the best part of heaven.”**

Finish well...and that'll be all the reward Julie and I wish for you... **And our heartfelt thanks....**