

January 1, 2023 -

II Timothy 4:5-8 - "Paul Finished well; will you?"

Introduction:

A New Year has dawned and each day that comes presents new opportunities and each day is a gift from God. A few years ago People Magazine published an article entitled "Dead Ahead" telling about a new clock that keeps track of how much time you have left to live. It calculates an average life span of 75 years for men & 80 years for women. So you program your gender & age into the clock, & from then on it will tell you how much time you have left. It sold for about \$99.95. It is an intriguing idea. In fact, that's what the Psalmist told us to do - to number our days.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Psalms 90:12

Life's plans are always tentative. Things happen that we don't plan on sometimes even the weather doesn't cooperate. This Christmas for instance thousands never got their flights to go home. It is with a new year that we reflect on what was and what can be in our lives as we approach a new year. I learned a long time ago it is not how well you start in a race but how well you finish. Paul is a perfect example of this, he did not start well but he finished the course and finished it well...what about you? What if 2023 was the last year God gave you. Would you finish well? Will God say to you, "well done, thou good and faithful servant? So many people have great intentions as they begin a new year but by February they fizzle out. I remember well a sermon I heard preached; it was titled "Finishing well". I still have the CD of that sermon and listen to it on occasion.

Back in 2004 a group of our men went to a "Word of Life Men's Retreat" we heard this godly and dynamite preacher. Pastor Tom Joyce. He was once Commander of the USS aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk, "Tom had a very distinguish military career. He graduated from the US Navy academy, later Harvard University and became an F-14 fighter pilot with the Navy's Top-Gun program. In those days that program was top secret. Tom flew a number of combat missions and was given a various special awards. Later the program was revealed to the public when Tom became the Top Gun instructor. If you saw the new movie Top Gun Maverick that was the role Top Cruise played. But unlike Tom Cruise it was Tom Joyce and a few other navy pilots who actually flew those stunts in the original film....

Pastor Tom told us how he went from commanding a Navy aircraft carrier to the Pentagon in Washington, DC. He struggled with the promotion because he became a glorified coffee gopher for the high ranking Admirals and pushed paperwork. It was there at the Pentagon that God got a hold of Pastor Tom's heart about finishing well. That day was 9/11 when he believed he was going to die. He was on the fifth floor when the airliner crashed just below his floor. He saw cinder blocks become missiles and kill his comrades and injury others. The whole section was on fire from the jet fuel and

continued to burn for 5 days afterward. However, Tom made it out alive after recusing some of his naval shipmates.

He told how time in a sense slowed down and he was thrown across the room and his life passed before his eyes. The thought invaded his mind, “I am about to die and what did I do for the Lord? Will my God say, “Well done thou good and faithful servant? That night before he went to bed his son hugged him and said, “dad I am so glad you are alive we though we lost you today. Dad, I love you. He then started up the stairs and turned and said,” now Dad what will you do with the rest of your life? That question (out of the mouth of babes) overwhelmed him into submitting to serving God to finish well.

No one that day got up and dressed for work and knew that day would be their last. So how well will you finish the race or rather will you think about that next year? We cannot know; we cannot even control the next minute. Therefore, our life is entirely in God’s hands. Behold now is the time. Paul addressed the elephant in the room the hour of his impending death and his service to the Lord lay heavy upon his heart. His final testimony is a tribute to this subject and it is my single point in this message and I hope it helps your preparation for communion and your perspective for this new year.

I. Paul’s Final Testimony (4:5-8)

1. People today want to know how to be healthy and wealthy as they encroach on the new year but not about sacrifice and service to others and to Christ. Paul writes great advice for believers that can be applied to starting a new year; watch thou in all things (4:5a). This word “watch” from the Greek means: circumspect which implies looking before you leap, stay calm and collected in spirit. Good advice for the new Year. We are to endure afflictions by responding in love and do the work of an evangelist (4:5b).

2. Paul had known plenty of discouragements during his ministry and had every reason to be discouraged as he writes this letter he states: For I am now ready to be offered (4:6). The word *offered* translates a Greek word (*spendoe*), referring to the Jewish custom of pouring wine at the base of the brazen altar where animals were offered (Exodus 29:40). He describes it as being poured out as a drink offering. That’s Jewish language taken from the Old Testament. When you think of something being poured out, you think of it at times being wasted, but Paul’s life was being invested as an offering in the cause of Christ.

3. Paul continues, and the time of my departure is at hand (4:6b). He knew he would not leave prison alive but he states it as a time of Departure.” The use of the word departure simply means you’re leaving here and going somewhere. Well, that’s exactly the way he meant the word. In fact, that word *analysis* in the Greek is used for unyoking an animal from the shafts of the plow. Paul is ready to die because he writes: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course I have kept the faith:--- (II Timothy 4:7).

Like an Olympic marathon runner, Paul has finished his lifelong race. Marathon runners know the elation of finishing the grueling miles of their race and are thankful when finally they see the finish line. Pastor Tom spoke of running the Marine Corp Marathon of 266 miles....

Paul finished the course set out for him by God at the beginning of his Christian life (Acts 9:15-16). Everything God set before him has been completed. Therefore, Paul can honestly say: I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7c). He kept it, preached it, lived it, and died by it. He was attacked he endured hunger and thirst (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

4. Paul looked at the present and the past, and now he looks to the future by writing: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness (4:8a). It means it is safely stored and carefully guarded awaiting him from God. Jesus depicts this truth in Matthew 6:20-21. Paul's crown of righteousness was in safe storage, awaiting his arrival in heaven.

The word translated "crown" (*stef-an-os*) refers to a victor's crown. It is the crown placed upon winners of Greek athletic events, like the Olympic gold medal is given today, as a sign of great accomplishment and honor. Paul soon would be beheaded by Nero but he knew he would be vindicated and rewarded by the righteous judge, God Himself. Paul writes that this crown will be given not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (4:8c).

All Christians who truly love Jesus long for His appearing, or Second Coming, live righteously and will receive this crown. There are 4 other crowns mentioned in scriptures that a Christian can receive: the crown of rejoicing, crown of life, crown of glory, and the incorruptible crown. Which crowns will you receive? Regardless of the adversity you are experiencing, don't be discouraged hang in there. We all must battle to the finish...Galatian 6:9.

Conclusion:

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it's called the present! The Bible tells us not to count on tomorrow because tomorrow may not come for you or for me. Nothing takes God by surprise. He knows the future and can therefore guide us through its trackless ways." — W. T. Purkiser

All we have is right now. So our time on this earth is valuable because it is very limited. In the year that lies ahead your answer to just one question will have more effect on your life than any other decision you will make. How well will I finish?

Communion:

The apostle Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for their poor behavior and their disgrace at the Lord's Supper. They thought they were real spiritual but the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians they needed to undergo spiritual examination.

**I have at times had corrupt files in different software programs on my computer. We know a computer won't function properly with this corruption. Anthony would uninstall and reinstall the program removing the corrupt files cleaning out the systems imperfections and resolving the issue so the computer functions properly. We each have to take responsibility to do this spiritually. This passage shows us that we have an obligation to come to the Lord's Table. We have an obligation for self-examination. -
-And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. -- John 6:35**