

A Crown • 2 Timothy 4:6-8

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Today – 10K

1. Today at 10:45 / 12:45 – The City of Oxnard is hosting a 10 K run
2. I thought it would be fun for all of us to run it together so I sign everyone up.
3. Sorry I didn't warn you before just now
4. But I hope you're ready
 - a. that you have your running shoes and socks and shorts?
 - b. oh – and I hope you're in shape because that's a little over 6 miles!
5. Ready to go? No? Why not?

6. It would be grossly wrong for me to sign you up to run in a 10 K because let's face it – most of us aren't ready.
7. Can you imagine someone getting up last Sunday morning, turning on the radio and hearing for the first time that the LA Marathon was about to start, and thinking, “Oh I want to be in that.”
 - a. but they haven't been training – they have no race experience –
 - b. they don't even have the proper shoes or equipment
 - c. they just think, “I'm going to run the LA Marathon right now!”
8. No – that doesn't happen!
 - a. people realize that a marathon is 26 miles of grueling endurance and pain
 - b. no one in their right mind just decides to run 26 miles
 - c. it takes training and preparation

B. Our Contest

1. Well, there is one contest, one event we all *are* going to have to face –
2. This contest is inevitable; there is no way around it.
3. I'm referring to death!
4. Apart from the Lord's return for the Church – we will all die!
5. And as your pastor, it's my duty to do my best to ensure you're ready for that day.
6. Back in the days of the early church, when persecution was common place, just as it is today in many places around the world,

it was said that a pastor's job was to make sure his people *lived faithfully and died well*.

7. When martyrdom was a very real possibility and Christians were offered a choice between faithfulness to Christ or recanting and saving their lives – it was the pastor's job to prepare people to face that ultimate test with courage and confidence.
8. Though we do not face the threat of such persecution here and now, that is still a worthy objective for the pastor –
 - a. to do his best that his flock lives faithfully,
 - b. and when it comes time to depart this life, they do so *victoriously*.
9. In our text today, the Apostle Paul gives a stirring example of how to both live and die.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 6-8

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

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

8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

1. This is the *last* chapter of Paul's *last* letter
2. And now as he moves to print out the last words, he tells Timothy he is fully ready to die
3. In these three verses Paul looks at the present, the past, and the future
4. And through it all, he has NO REGRETS

B. V. 6 – *The Present*

1. In v. 6, Paul looks at the present.

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

2. He's simply now awaiting the day of his execution.
 - a. he's been convicted of sedition and a peddler of an illegal and dangerous religion
 - b. all that's left is for the Roman judge who's heard his case to be satisfied that all the legal forms have been met,
 - c. then the day of his execution will be set
 - 1) he'll be led from his cell to the executioner's block and lay down his head
 - 2) the blade will rise and fall – and Paul will breath his last
 - d. but for now, he sits alone in his dark, cold prison cell
3. And as he does, he knows he's entered the last phase of his ministry and life
 - a. this is it – not more missionary journeys
 - b. no more trips to Corinth or Athens or Phillippi
 - c. he's seen his last of Jerusalem and his home town of Tarsus
 - d. he has only one journey left to make – through the gates of heaven
4. That's what he means when he says that the time of his departure is at hand.
 - a. oh the words he uses here paint such a great picture
 - b. the word *departure* was used to refer to the ropes of a ship being loosed from the cleats on the dock so the ship could launch forth
 - c. it referred to loosing the ropes that held a tent up so that you could pack it up and move to a new location – this had to have special meaning for Paul since he was a tent maker by trade
 - d. it was used of unyoking an ox and of setting a prisoner free
5. All of these meanings no doubt went through Paul's mind as he picked this word
 - a. he was getting ready to launch forth on the seas of eternity
 - b. he was getting ready to lay down the fleshly tent of his body and move to a new home
 - c. he felt like he was being unyoked from the hard labor of the last several years and turned loose into green pasture of rest
 - d. and as a prisoner, he knew that his freedom would come, not by being loosed onto the cobble-stone and sewage strewn roads of Rome, but the glorious, golden streets of heaven.
6. Even though the date of his execution might be months off, he

- already felt as though he was being poured out, just like the drink offering the Jews offered to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving
- a. they would take a cup of wine, and slowly pour out its contents at the side of the altar -
 - b. symbolic of fellowship and communion with God.
7. Since his conversion on the Road to Damascus – Paul had lived *for* the Lord as a living sacrifice. [Romans 12:1]
- a. now as he approached the end, he was ready, willing, to offer himself in the final act of sacrifice
 - b. his blood would be poured out – and Paul saw it as an offering, the last he would make
 - c. for Paul as a Jew, and really for most of the people of the ancient world, the life was in the blood
 - d. as a Roman citizen, the way Paul would be executed was by *beheading*
 - e. you and I today would attribute Paul’s death to the loss of his head
 - f. but this isn’t the way Paul would have seen it – for him, it was the loss of his life’s blood that would mean his death
 - g. in his mind, taking the head off was simply a way to spill the blood more quickly!
8. But even as he awaits the descent of the blade, he sees himself already being poured out.
9. Paul has faced the imminence of his death and resigned himself to it – not reluctantly, but gladly
10. There are some who would fault Paul for his resignation to death here.
- a. “Where’s Paul’s faith?” they ask.
 - b. “Why didn’t he believe God could rescue Him?”
11. The answer is simple – Paul knew God *could* rescue Him, but that He wouldn’t!
12. He knew the time of his departure had come and he did not count death as defeat or loss.
13. On the contrary, for years Paul had maintained that if he had had his way, he’d have checked out and gone home to heaven long before
14. He said as much in his letter to the Philippians [ch. 1]

- 21 For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.**
- 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.**
- 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better.**
- 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you.**
15. After penning Philippians, Paul lived for several more years – God had more work for him to do
16. But he knows the situation is very different now. His work is done and it's time to pass it on to other men like Timothy and Titus.
17. Now he gets what he's wanted all along – to depart and be with Christ for whose sake he has lived and worked so hard for so many years
18. He wants to take his ship out, to slip the rope off the cleats of this life and set sail
19. He's ready to lay down the yoke of earthly service
20. He's ready to trade in his earthly tent for a glorious mansion
21. And for the door of his dark cell to open onto the light of the radiance of Christ's face.
22. This is Paul's present – v. 7 is a look at his past . . .

C. V. 7 – *The Past*

- 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**
1. He looks back now and in three short, yet stirring phrases sums up his life.
2. "I have fought the good fight."
- Paul's enemies have been many
 - he's battled the world, the flesh, and the devil
 - there have been times when he's even had to face brothers & sisters in the church who opposed him and caused him heartache and pain
 - but as he looks back, he can say with all confidence – "It was a

good fight I gave, but now I am done.”

- e. I want to ask you to picture Paul
 - 1) he stands before us in this verse as a soldier clothed in the armor he so well describes in Ephesians 6
 - 2) but he’s not some young, raw recruit dressed in brand new armor, shining in the sun
 - 3) no – he’s a grizzled veteran with long gray hair
 - 4) hes seen many battles in many lands
 - 5) his armor is ancient and bears the marks of dozens of conflicts
 - 6) picture his belt, the belt of truth that girds his waist
 - a) the leather is streaked with salt from the sweat poured forth time and again
 - b) it’s so well-fitted now it looks almost like it’s a part of Paul
 - 7) see him standing there in his gospel shoes
 - a) they’re well-worn and fit him like a glove
 - b) dried mud cakes them – mud from his campaigns on three continents
 - 8) picture his helmet of salvation – once shiny and bright, now it’s a battered cap with multiple dents and gashes as the enemy time and again has tried to level him with doubts
 - 9) his breastplate of righteousness is also badly scarred and bears evidence of the many times the enemy has managed to get in close so he could take him out with condemnation and guilt
 - 10) and the shield of faith – see it; it’s been slashed again and again
 - a) there are gouges in it and small holes where the fiery darts have burned through
 - b) covering it are dozens of broken arrow shafts
 - 11) finally, see his sword – the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God
 - a) Paul has gripped it and used it so long his fingers are permanently attached to it
 - b) the sword and the arm are one
 - c) just as it was said of David’s mighty man Eleazar in 2 Samuel 23

- d) he battled so long and valiantly for the Lord that his hand stuck to the sword and he couldn't lay it down
 - e) this is Paul
 - f. see him, the veteran of many battles, and though his armor is ancient, his eyes are still bright and clear
 - g. but Paul has fought his last battle – “I have fought the good fight”
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3. “I have finished the race”

- a. notice he doesn't say, “I have *won* the race” but “I have finished the race.”
- b. Paul didn't see himself in competition with anyone else
- c. he didn't compare himself with Peter or John or Apollos
- d. in fact, he rebuked the Corinthians when *they* did this
- e. Paul wasn't concerned about *winning* – only finishing!
- f. the word *race* is literally *course*
- g. Paul had finished his *course*
 - 1) he knew that his course was not the course that others were called to run
 - 2) each has his or her own course to follow
 - 3) the only goal is to finish *our* course
- h. this is the way the writer of Hebrews puts it [12]

1 Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

- i. you have your course, and I have mine
- j. I am not in competition with you, nor you with me because we run *different* races
 - 1) maybe you're a miler and I do a 10K
 - 2) maybe you run hurdles and my course is the steeplechase
- k. the only competition we are in is the one with ourselves – to *finish* the course!
- l. Paul's course had been laid out for him just after his conversion
 - 1) through the word of prophecy he was told that he would suffer many things
 - 2) but that he would be an apostle to the Gentiles and would appear before kings and those in authority to bear witness of

Christ.

- m. here he is, years later, alone in his cell
 - 1) and as he looks back he sees the travels he's made
 - 2) and the countless Gentile converts he's made and churches he's planted
 - 3) he remembers standing before the priests in Jerusalem; before the Roman governors Felix and Agrippa in Caesarea
 - 4) and there's a good chance in his trial he even appeared before Caesar
 - n. Paul has faithfully followed every step of the course the Lord called him to run
 - o. and now the tape, the finish line is touching his chest
4. "I have kept the faith."
- a. the phrase "keeping faith" was a popular one in the Greek language
 - b. it meant to be *loyal*
 - c. loyalty was one of the virtues most prized among the Greeks and Romans
 - d. loyalty to one's family, friends, and nation were considered the mark of a truly good person
 - e. Paul takes up this phrase and sanctifies it by adding the word "the"
 - 1) he hadn't just "kept faith"
 - 2) he'd kept THE faith.
 - f. his loyalty to the Lord and the Lord's calling in his life had meant his courageous stand against error anytime and every time he found it
 - g. there were plenty times this loyalty to the Lord had made Paul *unpopular*
 - h. there were times when even his own converts grew weary of his loyalty to the Lord and went following after some false teacher who brought some new doctrine that tickled their ears.
 - i. but Paul wasn't aiming at popularity – he was loyal to the Lord, regardless of who else was
 - j. and now as he looks back, he can say with all conviction "I've kept the faith!"
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5. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

6. As Paul reviews his past, he says – “I have no regrets!”
7. A pastor called on a wealthy businessman who was on his deathbed.
 - a. the man opened his heart and shared the burden he was carrying.
 - b. he said that 10 years earlier he’d been given the opportunity to teach a Sunday school class of 9-year-old boys.
 - c. thinking he was too busy, he declined the offer.
 - d. he’d done very well in business and had made a fortune by investing his money
 - e. now, however, deeply conscious that his life would soon be over, he confessed to the pastor that his most painful regret was that he had missed such a golden opportunity to serve the Lord by investing in the lives of those 9-year-olds.
 - f. He estimated that at least 100 boys would have passed through that class. "My investments in stocks and bonds will stay behind when I leave," he declared. "What a fool I’ve been."
8. Compare that to the story of William Borden.
 - a. Borden was a member of the famous Borden *dairy* family,
 - b. he finished high school in Chicago in 1904 and was given a world cruise as a graduation present.
 - c. while traveling through Asia, he became heavily burdened for the lost.
 - d. after returning home, he spent seven years at Princeton University, the first four in undergraduate work and the last three in seminary.
 - e. while in school, he penned these words in the back of his Bible: “No reserves” meaning he would hold nothing back in serving the Lord.
 - f. although his family pleaded with him to take control of the business, which was sinking, he insisted that God’s call to the mission field had priority.
 - g. after disposing of his wealth, he added the words “No retreat” to the back of his bible, meaning that he was determined to serve the Lord as a missionary
 - h. on his way to China to witness to Muslims there, he contracted meningitis and died within a month.
 - i. after his death, someone looking through his Bible discovered

- these final words, penned while sailing to China: “No regrets.”
- j. like Paul, Borden knew that the Lord does not require success, only *faithfulness*.
9. Paul had been faithful – He had no regrets!
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10. Like Paul, each of us will come to our time to depart.
- a. will we be able to look back over our lives as he does and echo his words?
 - b. “I have fought a good fight. I’ve finished my course. I’ve kept the faith. No regrets!”
11. Apart from the Lord’s return for the church – every one of us here today will go the way of all flesh – we will die!
- a. some of us will grow weak and feeble and lie upon a sick bed
 - 1) our end will approach slowly
 - 2) and we will likely have some sense that our days are numbered and few
 - b. others of us will face death suddenly
 - 1) but if you’ve ever been in a close brush with death – say in an automobile
 - 2) you now how times gets compressed and in that moment when danger is looming at you, you feel this moment of total stillness
 - 3) and in that brief instant, you have a moment of total clarity
 - 4) you know that indeed this could be it
 - 5) and there is either peace that you are ready to go, or terror that you aren’t
 - c. by God’s good grace, may it be that none of us would look back our life filled with regret
12. There’s a powerful story from the LA Times several years back that I want to share with you.
- a. it’s a letter written by a woman whose sister died
 - b. the woman was helping her brother in law go through her sister’s things
 - c. now – to my knowledge the woman who wrote this wasn’t a Christian
 - d. but her words speak powerfully to this issue of regret . . .

My brother-in-law opened the bottom drawer of my sister's bureau and lifted out a tissue-wrapped package.

"This," he said, "is not a slip. This is lingerie." He discarded the tissue and handed me the slip. It was exquisite; silk, handmade and trimmed with a cobweb of lace. The price tag with an astronomical figure was still attached.

"Jan bought this the first time we went to New York, at least eight or nine years ago. She never wore it. She was saving it for a special occasion. Well, I guess this is the occasion."

He took the slip from me and put it on the bed with the other clothes we were taking to the mortician. His hands lingered on the soft material for a moment, then he slammed the drawer shut and turned to me.

"Don't ever save anything for a special occasion. Every day you're alive is a special occasion."

I remembered those words through the funeral and the days that followed when I helped him and my niece attend to all the sad chores that follow an unexpected death. I thought about them on the plane returning to California from the Midwestern town where my sister's family lives. I thought about all the things that she hadn't seen or heard or done. I thought about the things that she had done without realizing that they were special.

I'm still thinking about his words, and they've changed my life.

I'm not "saving" anything; we use our good china and crystal for every special event -- such as losing a pound, getting the sink unstopped, and the first camellia blossom.

"Someday" and "one of these days" are losing their grip on my vocabulary. If it's worth seeing or hearing or doing, I want to see and hear and do it now.

I'm trying very hard not to put off, hold back, or save anything that would add laughter and luster to our lives. And every morning when I open my eyes I tell myself that it is special.

13. This is the way Paul lived!
 - a. each day was special because it was part of the course God had set before him
 - b. so he ran it with loyalty and intensity
 - c. and when he came to the end it was with not an ounce of regret!

D. V. 8 – The Future

1. Paul's looked at the past and the present; in v. 8, he turns to the *future* . . .
- 8 **Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.**
2. Paul had appeared before human judges many times
 - a. in Corinth, in Philippi, in Jerusalem and Caesarea
 - b. and finally in Rome
3. For the most part, these judges had been unjust, their verdicts rendered out of greed or fear of the mob
4. But Paul didn't see himself as standing before human judges – he lived his life before the eyes of a higher court – whose presiding Judge is the Lord of glory.
5. And His judgment is altogether righteous!
6. The Roman judge Paul was before had passed the sentence of a blade to the neck
7. Paul's heavenly Judge had rewarded him with a crown on the head
8. In fact, that crown was already set aside for Paul – it just awaited the when Jesus gives out rewards to the faithful.

9. This is amazing – our entrance into heaven is all the result of Christ's work and God's grace, not one bit about our merit or works.
 - a. and yet, when we arrive in heaven, God is going to hand out rewards for our faithfulness!
 - b. a faithfulness that *He makes possible* to begin with
10. Some of you have heard of the group *Sixpence None The Richer*
 - a. they took their name from the story of a man, a father, who son asked him for six cents
 - b. the boy wanted to buy his father a present that cost that amount but he lacked the coin
 - c. the father gave him the money, the boy bought the gift and presented it to his father
 - d. the man was *delighted* in the son's thoughtfulness!
 - e. yet the coin to buy the gift came from him
11. In order to do anything genuinely good or praiseworthy for the

Lord, we must first receive the sixpence of His the strength and grace to do it –

12. But when we faithfully invest his grace and strength for His glory – then He *rewards* us

13. These rewards, as Paul says here, are being laid up for us in heaven.

14. Remember what Jesus said – do not lay up treasure on earth – instead, lay it up in heaven! [Matt 6:20]

15. In speaking to the rich, Paul said [1 Timothy 6:18-19]

18 *Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,*

19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

16. Paul had lived each and every day of his life since his conversion as an investment in the treasure of heaven.

17. Each day meant another opportunity to invest in the stock of God's glory.

18. And now that the end has come, Paul looks at the ticker and sees that his investment has earned him huge dividends – far beyond his contribution – it has resulted in a crown!

19. This crown is the crown of *righteousness*.

- a. you know why it's the crown of righteousness and not the crown of glory, or peace, or joy, or anything else?
- b. it's the crown of righteousness because righteousness is the one thing we need that we cannot do for ourselves.
- c. to be right is the basic need of humanity!
- d. only God can make us right because sin has made us wrong, it's corrupted us, marred and scarred us, bruised, battered and defiled us.
- e. only God, the One who created us, can recreate us and make us right!

20. The crown of righteousness will sit atop our heads and a royal robe of righteousness will be draped around our shoulders

21. We will trade in our battle armor; our scarred breastplate for a brand new robe, and our battered helmet for a righteous crown.

III. CONCLUSION

A. To All Those

1. Just as Paul looked forward to this, so ought we!
2. Notice what he says in v. 8 . . .

8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

3. Do you long for the Lord's return?
4. If so, then a crown of righteousness awaits you!
5. Death is not something the Christian fears because for the Christian – death has lost its sting
6. Jesus' victory over death in the resurrection ensures ours
7. This life – all of it, whether it be only 1 year long, or a hundred years – is but the vestibule, the porch of eternity
8. One day, all of us will stand at the door that leads from this life to the next
9. May God, by His infinite mercy and grace, allow us to live in such a way that like Paul we can pause, look at our present and say, "I'm ready!"
 - a. at our past and say, "No regrets!"
 - b. and at the future and say, "That is where my treasure is!"