



FINISH THE RACE

BIG IDEA: God's strength empowers us to be faithful to the finish!

DATE: Wednesday, November 19 and Sunday, November 23, 2025

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 4:1-8; 17-18

OPENING QUESTION

Some notable people have left us with famous last words. Can you guess who said what? Share the famous last words and see if they can guess who said what. Give hints or even write possible answers to choose from on the board.

"Pardon me sir, I did not do it on purpose." Marie Antoinette, after accidentally stepping on her executioner's foot.

"I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have."

Leonardo DaVinci, reflecting his perfectionist nature, these words express his lifelong struggle with his art.

"One last drink, please." Jack Daniel

"I'm bored with it all." Sir Winston Churchill

"Oh wow. Oh wow, oh wow." Steve Jobs

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Jesus

In this final section of Paul's letter, we find his last words to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, and to the church. As he completes the letter, Paul knows his execution is only days or weeks away. For thirty years, he has labored **as an apostle, a preacher, and an evangelist. He summarizes his mission by stating he has fought the good fight, finished the course laid out before him, and kept the faith.** He is now looking forward to the reward that awaits him.

SETTING THE STAGE

Paul has a few final instructions to offer before he takes that journey. We can sense the increasing urgency in his words – a staccato-like set of imperatives to preach, convince, rebuke, exhort, teach, watch, and endure. Paul wants Timothy to know exactly what he must do if he is to be a faithful minister of the gospel.

Paul had previously emphasized to Timothy the importance of preserving the doctrine he had learned. Now Paul says, in effect, "It's not enough to just hold the truth. You must herald the truth as well." It's not enough for us to just *believe* what we believe. We must also be willing to *declare* what we believe. Paul's words remind us that we never know how close we are to our last day on earth. So, we must live each day being ready to give an account of our lives. If we have received a calling, we need to get on with it. It may be difficult and painful at times, but we can know that it will all be worth it when we see Jesus and receive our "crown of righteousness" (verse 8).

STUDY THE BIBLE

2 Timothy 4:1-8; 17-18 (NLT)

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: ²Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.

³For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will reject the truth and chase after myths. ⁵But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.

⁶As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. ⁸And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.

¹⁷But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength so that I might preach the Good News in its entirety for all the Gentiles to hear. And he rescued me from certain death. ¹⁸Yes, and the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.

DISCUSSION

PREACH THE WORD

2 Timothy 4:1-5

When Paul told Timothy to “preach the word”, the New Testament had not yet been completely written or assembled into the canon of Scripture that we recognize today. So, what might be he referring to in his instruction to preach “the word”?

What does Paul say people will do when they don't want to hear the truth of the gospel? In contrast, how should Timothy – and all believers – respond to the gospel?

How do you see verse 3 played out today – that people will “look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear?”

PAUL'S FAREWELL

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Paul's statement that he is “being poured out as a drink offering” is a reference to his impending death. What knowledge comforted him as he faced this fact?

Paul describes himself as a runner at the end of a race. It is all but over, and what remains is the rewarding of the prize. What did he see at the finish line?

Ask if anyone in your group has run in a race – anything from a 5K to a marathon. How did they keep going? What helped them stay the course and finish?

What helps you keep “running the spiritual race” when life gets hard? How can you help others keep running their race? (Sometimes we try to run other people’s races and do not “stay in the lane” of our giftedness and calling. We compete or compare ourselves to others. We burn out. We lose hope. Our purpose is to keep our eyes on Jesus and the finish line that awaits *us*. We are also to cheer others on as they run their races and notice when they need a cup of cold water – spiritual refreshment – and keep on running together. All this for the glory of God!)

THE LORD IS FAITHFUL

2 Timothy 4:17-18

Paul experienced multiple occasions where the Lord spoke to him and gave him specific instructions. What blessing did Paul enjoy throughout his ministry ...even to the very end?

Based on Paul’s countless past experiences, what is he confident the Lord will do for him?

ASK (rhetorically): Is there someone in your life who has walked away from the faith or is resistant to hearing God’s truth? Maybe today you need to remember that the Lord is faithful. He is standing with you and giving you strength.

IN SUMMARY: In Paul’s final words to Timothy, he reminds his younger protégé of his primary responsibility: **to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ**. Paul warns Timothy that his message may not always be welcomed – that people won’t always want to hear the truth. But he encourages Timothy not to let this stop him. Paul then reflects on his ministry with a sense of accomplishment and finality. He pleads for Timothy to visit him, for everyone has abandoned him, and concludes his letter with a heartfelt farewell to his son in the faith. Paul is beset by difficulties, yet he remains determined to bring every aspect of his life under the gospel and bring glory to Christ. He lives in Caesar’s world, but he is already a joyful citizen of the world that is to come.

RESPONSE

Now that we have finished our series on 1 and 2 Timothy, how have you been challenged to live your life worthy of the gospel? Remember, we are to follow godly leaders, be content in our circumstances and lead a life worthy of imitation. We are all called to follow Paul’s example and fight the good fight, keep the faith and finish the race.

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COMMENTARY

A great person’s last words are significant. They are a window that helps us to look into his heart, or a measure that helps us evaluate his life. In this chapter, we have Paul’s last words to Timothy and to the church. It is interesting that Paul expressed no regrets as he came to the end. He even forgave those who made his situation difficult. More than seventeen people are referred to in this chapter, which shows that Paul was a friend-maker as well as a soul winner. Though his own days were numbered, Paul thought of others.

The apostle gave three final admonitions to Timothy, and he backed each of them up with a reason.

PREACH THE WORD! (vv. 1-4)

This was a serious moment, and Paul wanted Timothy to sense the importance of it. It was serious, not only because Paul was facing death, but even more because both Paul and Timothy would be judged one day when Jesus Christ appeared. It would do us all good to occasionally reflect on the fact that one day we will face God and our works will be judged.

For one thing, this realization would encourage us to do our work carefully and faithfully. It would also deliver us from the fear of man; for, after all, our final Judge is God. Finally, the realization that God will one day judge our works encourages us to keep going even when we face difficulties. We are serving Him, not ourselves.

"Preach the Word!" is the main responsibility that Paul shared in this section. Everything else he said is related to this. Timothy was to herald God's Word with the authority of heaven behind him. Timothy should be diligent and alert to use every opportunity to preach the Word, when it is favorable and even when it is not favorable. It is easy to make *excuses* when we ought to be making *opportunities*. Paul himself always found an opportunity to share the word, whether it was in the temple courts, on a stormy sea, or even in prison. Stop making excuses and get to work!

Paul gave the responsibility, but he also gave the reason. The time would come (and it has been here for a long time!) when most people would not want the healthy doctrine of the Word of the God. They would have carnal desires for religious novelties. Because of their "itching ears" they would accumulate teachers would satisfy their cravings for things that disagree with God's truths. The fact that a preacher has a large congregation is not always a sign that he is preaching the truth. In fact, it may be evidence that he is tickling peoples "itching ears" and giving them what they *want* to hear instead of what they *need* to hear.

Is but a short step from itching ears to turning one's ears away from the truth. Once people have rejected the truth, they turn to fables. It is not likely that man-made fables will convict them of sin or make them want to repent! The result is a congregation of comfortable, professing Christians, listening to a comfortable, religious talk that contains no Bible doctrine. These people become the prey of every false well because their lives like a foundation in the Word of God. It is a recognized fact that most cultists were formerly members of churches.

FULFILL YOUR MINISTRY (PAUL'S FAREWELL) (vv. 5-8)

Timothy's ministry would not be exactly like Paul's, but it would be important to the cause of Christ. No God-directed ministry is small or unimportant.

Paul gave the reason behind the responsibility. He was about to move off the scene and Timothy would have to take his place. In this beautiful paragraph of personal testimony, you find Paul looking in three different directions.

He looked around – Paul realized that his time was short. He was on trial in Rome and had been through the fist hearing. But Paul knew that the end was near. However, he did not tremble at the prospect of death! Paul looked on death as a release from the world, an opportunity to "set sail" into eternity. Paul was facing release, not execution! Paul had been in hard service for many years. Now his Master would unyoke him and promote him to higher service.

He looked back – He summed up his life and ministry. Two of the images here are athletic: like a determined wrestler or boxer, he had fought a good fight; and, like a runner, he had finished his lifelong race victoriously. He had kept the rules and deserved a prize. The third image is that of a steward who had faithfully guarded his boss' deposit. It is heartening to be able to look back and have no regrets. Paul was not always popular, nor was he usually comfortable; but he remained faithful. That is what really counted.

He looked ahead – A Greek or Roman athlete who was a winner was rewarded by the crowds and usually got a laurel wreath or a garland of oak leaves. Paul, however, would not be given a fading crown of leaves; his would be a crown of righteousness that would never fade. The crown of righteousness is God's reward for a faithful and righteous life; and our incentive for faithfulness and holiness is the purpose of the Lord's appearing. Because Paul loved His appearing and looked for it, he lived righteously and served faithfully. This is why Paul used the return of Jesus Christ as a basis for his admonitions in this chapter.

THE LORD IS FAITHFUL (vv. 17-18)

For a Christian, there are things even more dangerous than suffering and death, like sin. Paul was confident that the Lord would deliver him from every evil work and take him to the heavenly kingdom. Paul's greatest fear was not of death; it was that he might deny his Lord or do something else that would disgrace God's name. Paul was certain that the time had come for his permanent departure. He wanted to end his life-race well and be free from any disobedience.

The Bible does not record the final days of Paul. Tradition tells us that he was found guilty and sentenced to die. He was probably taken outside the city and beheaded. But Timothy and the others carried on the work! As John Wesley used to say, "God buries His workmen, but His work goes on." You and I must be faithful so that (if the Lord does not return soon) future generations may hear the Gospel and have the opportunity to be saved.