



“No other name has power to save but Jesus Christ the Lord.” That’s why we gather to worship him and go to make him known. Because “there is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved – saved from sin’s *penalty* (God’s judgment against our sin), saved from sin’s *power* (its controlling influence on our daily lives), and saved eventually from sin’s *presence*. The apostle Peter reminded his fellow Christians, “we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth [the Lord] has promised, a world filled with God’s righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13 NLT).

This is good news for every person who believes in the Lord Jesus as his or her Savior, because Jesus promised his followers victory over death. Scripture calls death the last enemy to be destroyed. In his book, *Remember Death*, my friend Matt McCullough wrote, “the best way to enjoy your life is to get honest about your death.”¹ That’s what Paul does in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. In this final chapter of the final letter he ever wrote, Paul tells Timothy,

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

This week, Americans will celebrate the Fourth of July, which marks the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Life back then was a lot different than it is now. At the end of the eighteenth century, four out of five people died before the age of seventy. The average life expectancy was in the late thirties.² Now the average life expectancy is almost eighty, which is closer to the biblical norm. In Psalm 90, Moses acknowledged to the Lord, “Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. ... Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:10, 12 NIV). Did you notice that Moses thinks of our lives in terms of days rather than years? The Lord wants us to *live each day with death and eternity in view*.

***Live each day with death
and eternity in view.***

This is the applicational principle that all of Scripture, and specifically Paul’s testimony here in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, impress upon us.

¹ Matthew McCullough, *Remember Death: The Surprising Path to Living Hope* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 26.

² Gary Laderman, *the Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 24. Cited in McCullough, *Remember Death*, 35.

In his book, *The Conviction to Lead*, Dr. Albert Mohler asserts, “Mortality is not only the great equalizer, it is the great motivator.”³ “We lead with the knowledge that our time is limited, and that some else will inevitably take over for us.”⁴ This was precisely Paul’s mindset throughout his ministry. Read his letters, and it’s obvious that he always lived with death and eternity in view. So should we, because despite all the advances of modern medicine, “death is no less universal than it’s ever been.”⁵ We all die of something, because we’re humans living in a world that’s been cursed because of our sin.

“It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Paul’s testimony in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 shows that he was ready to die and face God. This is the testimony that all of us should want to have, and by God’s grace, can have when we reach the end of our lives. In 2 Timothy 4:6, Paul talks about the present, which reveals his view of death. In verse 7 he talks about the past, which speaks of his victory in life. In verse 8, he talks about the future, when he will be vindicated by God.

As we walk through this sequence of verses, consider its significance for your own life.

**The Present:
View of Death
(v. 6)**

In verse 6, Paul tells Timothy, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.” The word “for” points to the commands of the previous verses where Paul charges Timothy to “preach the word ... be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:2, 5). Paul solemnly charges *Timothy* to do these things, because Paul’s time is up, and he won’t be around to do them.

Paul says, “I am already being poured out as a drink offering.” Paul had already been suffering, and now death was imminent. This vivid imagery of “being poured out as a drink offering” would have been familiar to both the Jewish and Gentile believers in the church at Ephesus. The Old Testament included instructions for pouring out wine on the altar with each lamb that was sacrificed.⁶ The Romans adopted a pagan version of this practice by pouring out a cup of wine to their gods at the end of every meal. Paul borrows this imagery of a drink offering to describe his own sacrificial service to Christ.

And this imagery of Paul’s death may be more graphic than we realize at first glance. Roman citizens were not allowed to be crucified, so perhaps Paul anticipated being beheaded, when his blood would pour out like a liquid offering to God. Paul speaks this way one other time, in his letter to the Philippians, which he also wrote from prison. On that occasion he wrote to his fellow believers, “But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrificial service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you” (Phil. 2:17).

³ R. Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead: 25 Principles for Leadership That Matters* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 200.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ McCullough, 38.

⁶ Numbers 15:4-5; cf. Exodus 29:40-41; Leviticus 23:13; Numbers 28:7, 24.

Paul sees his death not as an execution, but as his final offering to God. Ever since his conversion, Paul had committed everything to God – his time, his talents, his intellect, his energy, his goals, dreams, and desires, his whole person – body, soul, and spirit. Earlier he had testified, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21 CSB).

Notice how Paul speaks of his death as a *departure*: “The time of my departure has come.” The New Testament Greek word for “departure,” *analsis*, is a vivid term used in a variety of settings that adds a richness to the significance of this term in relation to Paul’s death.

- It is the term used for unyoking an animal from a cart or plow. Death to Paul was a rest from labor.
- *Analsis* was also the term for loosening bonds or fetters. Death for Paul was a release – from prison into the Lord’s presence.
- The term was also used for loosening the ropes of a tent. Paul was a tent-maker by trade, and as an apostle he had traveled all across the Roman Empire on his missionary journeys. Now Paul was setting out for his last and greatest journey – the one that would take him to God.
- Lastly, *analsis* was the word for loosening the mooring-ropes of a ship. Many times throughout his life, Paul had boarded a ship and felt it leave the harbor and make its way into the deep sea. Now Paul is “launch[ing] out into the greatest deep of all, setting sail to cross the waters of death to arrive in the haven of eternity.”⁷

The term “departure” in the Christian context conveys a sweet, triumphant continuance. C. S. Lewis conveyed this well in *The Last Battle*, the final book in The Chronicles of Narnia series, where it is explained to the deceased children that “they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”⁸ Paul’s final departure was the fulfillment of his dream that he had expressed to the Philippians. He said, “My desire is to depart [to cast off the ropes] and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil. 1:23).

Is this how you view death? As a rest from labor, a release from suffering, as the last and greatest journey, the beginning of the Greatest Story in which each chapter is better than the one before? Paul’s testimony here and his teaching in 2 Corinthians 4-5, which we read earlier, show that “resurrection faith refuses to lose heart in the face of death,” for it rightly believes that “the glory to come is greater than the pain of the present.”⁹

The Past: Victory in Life (v. 7)

⁷ William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, The Daily Study Bible Series, revised edition (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 209.

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier, 1956), 184. Cited in R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 276-277.

⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “1-2 Timothy.” *NIV Grace & Truth Study Bible*, gen. ed. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 1605.

In verse 7 Paul shifts his focus from the present to the past, saying, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” The original wording puts the direct object of each clause first, so that Paul is really saying,

*The good fight I have fought.
The race I have finished.
The faith I have kept.*

The emphasis is not on how great Paul is but how great the things are that he gave himself to and by God’s grace was able to finish. If Paul did it, then so could Timothy. Paul’s review of his past, his victory in life, is meant to encourage and motivate Timothy.

It may be that Paul is not using three different word pictures from three different spheres of life, but one picture from the athletic contests of his day. Paul does this in 1 Corinthians 9 where he says, “I run straight for the finish line; ... I am like a boxer who does not waste his punches. I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest” (1 Cor. 9:26-27 GNT).

We can see how the images of fighting and running would tie in with the public games. But what about “keeping the faith”? William Barclay points out, “On the day before the [Olympic] games,” which had originated several centuries earlier, “all the competitors met and took a solemn oath before the gods that they had done not less than ten months training and that they would not resort to any trickery to win.”¹⁰ That’s what Paul declared to the church at Corinth regarding his ministry: “We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don’t try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2 NLT, CSB).

Let’s take a closer look at each of these three related images in verse 7, which present a comprehensive picture of Paul’s service to the Lord and what that means for us today.

“The good fight I have fought”: The Greek word for “fight” is the word from which we get our English word *agony* or *agonize*. In his previous letter to Timothy, Paul exhorted him to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). The Greek word for “good” (*kalos*) that Paul uses means “excellent” or “noble.” Every believer, like Paul, is engaged in a relentless struggle both inwardly and outwardly – inwardly as we battle against our own inclinations toward sin and outwardly against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the unseen world (Eph. 6:12), which attack us in all sorts of ways. John MacArthur notes that “the faithful Christian ... even has to battle temptation to do things that are perfectly good in themselves in place of other things that are immeasurably more important. Every day there are new fronts on which the struggle continues.”¹¹ This is a grueling fight, but it’s a noble one, and it’s worth giving all we’ve got. Paul testified in Colossians 1:29, “I strenuously contend [*agonizomai*] with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.”

¹⁰ Barclay, 211.

¹¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *2 Timothy*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 193.

When I think of fighting a good fight, I think of the first Rocky movie. In fact, I took a few minutes to watch Rocky go the full 15 rounds with Apollo Creed. No matter how hard or how many times he got hit, Rocky wouldn't give up. Simply finishing the fight was a victory. "There is no satisfaction in all the world like knowing that we have done our best."¹² Paul knew such satisfaction at the end of his life, and he wanted Timothy to experience the same.

"The race I have finished": The most famous race throughout the world is the marathon. Its named for the place where one of the most decisive battles in world history was won, when the Greeks defeated the invading Persians in 490 B.C. After the battle, a Greek soldier ran as fast as he could from the coastal village of Marathon to Athens, a distance of about 26 miles. Upon arriving in Athens, he ran straight to the magistrates and gasped, "Rejoice! We have conquered!" Upon delivering the message, he fell dead. He had completed his course and accomplished his mission and had died nobly, having given his all.

Such was the nature of Paul's death. Not that many years earlier, Paul testified to the elders at Ephesus in Timothy's presence,

I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

- Acts 20:24 NIV

The writer of Hebrews exhorts believers, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..." (Heb. 12:1a, 2b). In commenting on this verse, Kent Hughes points out,

The course for each of us is unique. You do not have to run my course, and I do not have to run yours. Some courses are relatively straight, some are all turns. Some seem all uphill, some are as flat as Illinois. All seem long but some are longer.

The glory is that each of us can finish the race "set before us" because the course laid out for us by our sovereign, omniscient God is perfect for us. Those with only a few years left and those who are just beginning ... can all finish the course with distinction. There is no way you will not be able to complete yours, unless you willfully run your own race rather than God's.

On Quora someone posted the question, "How does it feel when you finish running a full marathon for the first time in your life?" One man responded,

I finished my first marathon in Chicago in 2004. It was an incredible experience. There was a flood of emotions, joy - humility- gratitude.

I was a little gaga over the whole thing. Some lady handed me a cup of beer from one of the service stands. I asked, "Is this Heaven?"

She said, "No, baby. This is Chicago."¹³

¹² Barclay, 210.

¹³ <https://www.quora.com/How-does-it-feel-when-you-finish-running-a-full-marathon-for-the-first-time-in-your-life>.

Whatever joy, humility, and gratitude is felt here on earth after finishing a marathon is incomparable to the joy, humility, and gratitude Christians will feel when we finish the course of our lives and hear our Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You ran well. Let’s celebrate together!”

Paul’s third contemplation of the past, “I have kept the faith,” refers to Paul’s ongoing belief the gospel as well as his proclamation and preservation of it. Paul persevered in that which he preserved (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-2).¹⁴ which he had also charged Timothy to do in both letters. In his previous letter, Paul implored his young protégé, saying, “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you” (1 Tim. 6:20). Paul repeated this charge earlier in this letter, saying, “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (1:14). And in his final appeal at the outset of this very chapter, Paul issued a solemn charge to Timothy, saying, “Preach the word” (4:2).

Every Christian has a fight to endure, a race to run, and a treasure to guard.¹⁵ When your life is over, will people be able to say, “He poured out his life for Jesus. He gave all that he had until he had nothing left”? More importantly, what will Jesus say?

That’s Paul’s emphasis in verse 8 as he shifts from the past to the future.

**The Future:
Vindication by God
(v. 8)**

“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 Tim. 4:8). The Greek word for “crown” is *stephanos*, which literally means “that which surrounds.” This term was used for the wreath placed on the heads of winning athletes, just as medals are placed around the necks of Olympic champions today.¹⁶ Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9, “They do it to achieve a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”

For the believer, it’s a crown of “righteousness.” The one giving this award is “the Lord, the righteous judge.” The Lord Jesus had already imputed (credited) his righteousness to Paul the moment Paul trusted in Jesus as his Savior. Paul stated in Philippians 3:9,

“I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith.”

- Paul the Apostle
(Philippians 3:9 NLT)

¹⁴ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC), edited by I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, paperback edition, 2013), 460.

¹⁵ Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 215.

¹⁶ MacArthur, 199.

How does this work? Paul tells us in multiple other passages. We'll consider just a few, so that we understand how a person goes from being guilty before God to being declared righteous by God. In Romans 3:23-24, the Holy Spirit says through Paul,

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

- Romans 3:23-24 NIV

Grace is God's undeserved kindness toward guilty sinners who look to him for salvation. Paul says in Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Paul elaborates on this point in 2 Corinthians 5:21, saying,

He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 CSB

On the cross the greatest transaction in history took place for all who trust in Christ for salvation. God credited his Son with our sin and credited his righteousness to us. That gift of imputed righteousness is granted to us the moment we call on Jesus to save us.

"The crown of righteousness" Paul refers to in 2 Timothy 4:8 is the ultimate permanent state of righteousness. Right now, believers are *positionally* righteous before God, but in our *practical* everyday experience we still struggle with sin. But when we die, that lifelong battle with sin will finally be over. We'll be absolutely perfect and permanently so. Gordon Fee wrote, "One receives the final crown of righteousness precisely because one has already received the righteousness of Christ." Have you, like Paul, received the righteousness of Christ by faith? Jesus stood condemned in our place and wore the crown (*stephanos*) of thorns so we could wear "the crown of righteousness." This reality enabled Paul to rejoice in his darkest hour. At any moment, Nero would pronounce Paul guilty and kill him. But the Lord would pronounce Paul righteous and crown him. This would be his vindication by God.

And not just Paul's vindication, not just Paul's crown, but that of everyone who has "loved his appearing." Only those who truly love Jesus Christ love and long for his appearing. Those who do not love Christ dread it or deny it. They want nothing to do with it.

How do you feel about the thought of Jesus' return? Are you ready for it? Do you love it? Truly? Do you sincerely pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

Do you live each day with death and eternity in view? A memorable line by Frederick Langbridge pictures two men who are both in prison but are worlds apart in their thoughts.

*Two men looked through the bars.
One saw the mud, the other, the stars.*

Amid the mud of his dismal circumstances, Paul sees nothing but stars, because his gaze is fixed on "the bright morning Star" (Rev. 22:16), the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷ As you consider your past, present, and future, what do you see? Who or what fills your view?

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 275, 281.