

## FINISHED

*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

*2 Timothy 4:6-8*

There is just something special about finishing a big project. To drive the last mile, write the last sentence or punch out for the last time brings a great sense of accomplishment and, maybe even victory. A job well done brings satisfaction that the task was completed and the results good. But to be able to look back on an entire life and declare that one has lived well and accomplished much is to declare victory.

In the text above, Paul penned his victory statement near the end of his life. Many scholars believe that Paul was within perhaps days of his execution when he declared the success of his life. We can learn much about living and dying from this great follower of Christ Jesus.

Paul declared that he was “*ready to be offered.*” Most of us experience a certain fear or dread of death. While it is normal to fear the moment of death and to wonder about what we will experience at that moment, Paul teaches us there is no need to be concerned about what lies beyond the grave. He had earlier written to the Corinthians that our future expectations beyond death are anchored in Christ. “*But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.*” (1 Corinthians 15:20-21). Paul could say that he was ready to be offered because he enjoyed the full expectation of life everlasting with his Lord.

Paul declared that he had “*fought a good fight*” that he had “*finished my course*” and that he had “*kept the faith.*” These three statements declared his satisfaction with his life. Paul did not say he had been perfect. Nor did he suggest that he had taught and converted every person he met. But Paul could honestly declare that his efforts were true. He could also say honestly (remember, this is inspired text) that he had kept the faith. Through good and bad, through assault and imprisonment, even in the face of death, Paul never backed away from his Lord. He was true, consistent and unwavering in his faith. Nothing came between him and Jesus.

Paul declared his salvation was in view because of his faithfulness. The apostle expected a crown of victory given by Jesus himself. All of the laurels of this life, all of the accolades and achievements pale miserably in comparison to the “*crown of righteousness.*” As Paul understood, he was receiving the crown because of his life of devotion to God and because of God’s mercy and grace which had been shown to him. What difference it must be to have the confidence that Paul shows in the face of death. There was no question in his mind as to what was happening and what would soon happen.

Paul declared that salvation awaited others too. The Lord would give him a crown but would also give crowns to others. Next to finding heaven yourself, how wonderful it must be to think that those you taught will there too. After himself, a man or woman ought ensure the eternal reward of his family and then those with whom he comes in contact. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to arrive on the shores of that distant land and be greeted by friends and family gone before?

Paul declares that salvation awaits for those who “*love his appearing.*” Early Christians constantly looked for the coming of Jesus Christ. In fact some were even troubled when their loved ones passed this life before his coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13). To them, the expectation of his return was immediate, as if it could happen any day. Certainly the Bible tells us that Jesus is coming although the Bible is also clear that no one knows when (Matthew 24:36; Matthew 25:13; 2 Peter 3:10). His return is delayed by his enduring mercy for mankind (2 Peter 3:9) but his mercy will come to an end one day.

Let us be prepared and rejoice in the promises of salvation that we can lay hold of today. Let us say with John, “*Come, Lord Jesus*” (Revelation 22:20).

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