

***In Conclusion... FINISH WELL***  
**II Timothy 4:1-8 (AFBC 2/24/19)**

Well, we all knew this day would come. When I announced my retirement eleven months ago, I promised that I would try to be the best pastor I could be and I encouraged all of us to be the best church we could be together in the time remaining.

Hopefully, we've all done our best with the Lord's help. It's been a good year, and I've savored every minute of it!

But I don't want you to be confused by the title of today's sermon. "Finish Well" is mainly about you now, and all the others who will follow us in this dear and sacred place we call First Baptist Church of Anderson—the Lord's church; but also, our church!

We come this morning to the last chapter of what we believe to be Paul's final letter, II Timothy 4:1-8:

<sup>1</sup>In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: <sup>2</sup>Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

<sup>3</sup>For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup>They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup>But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

<sup>6</sup>For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.

Well, there it is. The Apostle Paul is saying his goodbyes. He's not retiring from ministry, though, but from this life. Paul knows that death is near. The Roman authorities will soon see to that.

So, here in this passage, Paul seems to be sharing with us how he wants to be remembered. In a sense, he's writing his own obituary. He hopes that those who read this correspondence will understand that he dedicated his life to the ministry the Lord had for him to do, and, by the grace of God, he finished well.

Friends, that's a worthy goal for us, too! Let's take a look at what Paul says here and see what we can learn about "finishing well," while asking God to grant us the grace and strength to do so.

**1.** Here's the first requirement: **Live Faithfully for Christ!** Paul begins his final chapter: (II Timothy 4:1) "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead..." Paul leaves no room for doubt: even if no one else remembers how we've lived our lives and what we've done for Him, the Lord will.

But hopefully, others will too. Paul says "I give you this charge" and then he begins a list of five imperatives—five commands!

Paul tells Timothy to "Preach the word, be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (v.2). In other words, live faithfully for Christ. This is your calling, so be faithful to the end.

Notice, please, that these instructions have both positive and negative dimensions. It involves doing some things, while not doing others. Only the Lord can give us the wisdom to know the difference, but living faithfully includes both.

Lindsay Allen, the pastor from Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland, who spent some time with us here, told me a story about two Baptist groups that met many years ago (1960s) in Europe. One group was from America, and the other from Germany.

The first night, after dinner, several of the American Baptists enjoyed an after-dinner smoke. It was reported that the German Baptists were so offended by this, they almost dropped their beers.

That's really not all that far removed from life. When it comes to living faithfully for Christ, the most important question is not whether we think an activity is appropriate for a Christian, but rather, how will it be seen by others? How will it affect our ability to influence them for Christ?

We may choose to forego some things that really weren't all that important anyway. Now, I say this, realizing that some folks feel quite proud of themselves as they list all the things they've quit: smoking, drinking, gambling, cussing, carousing, or whatever. I don't think these have been major problems for us, though.

So, a more honest confession for most of us might go like this: "I really haven't been doing much of anything, and I'm gonna' quit. I'm going to change." Do you hear what I'm saying?

Some of us may be doing something that harms our witness, so sure... we need to quit. But the really helpful thing that most of us could do would be to simply quit doing nothing and begin doing something positive that would demonstrate our faithfulness.

I've met with about 700 families over my years here to plan a loved one's funeral. Rarely have I been asked to mention something that the person didn't do (e.g., be sure to tell them that dad never cheated on mom, or his taxes). Instead, it's who they were and what they stood for and how they touched their lives.

Paul tells Timothy to preach the Word—whether to correct, rebuke, or encourage--to preach the Word patiently and carefully and even when people don't want to hear it—"in season and out of season."

Finally, Paul tells us to do the work of an evangelist. This still matters. When we neglect this, we become something other than a New Testament church—maybe a religious discussion group. Before long, there won't be anybody left to discuss anything.

Jacob Walker was a lighthouse keeper on Robbin's Reef, on the rocky shores of New England. After several years on the job, he became ill and died. His wife buried him on a hillside that was in full view of the lighthouse.

Later, Mrs. Walker applied for and received the appointment as the keeper of that lighthouse. For 20 years, she did this by herself. A New York reporter learned about her and went to get her story.

She told him, "Every evening I stand in the door of the lighthouse and look across the hillside where my husband's body is buried. I always seem to hear his voice saying, as he often said while he was alive, "Mind the light! Mind the Light!"

If we listen closely, we can hear the Apostle Paul shouting across the centuries of Christian history, urging you and me today: "Mind the light! Be faithful in your witness for Christ. Mind the light!" Dear church, live and serve and witness faithfully for Christ.

**2. Do we want to finish well? Here's a second requirement: Live hopefully in all circumstances.**

In vv.6-8, Paul turns his attention to his own situation. He says that the time for his death is near—his departure, as he puts it, will be soon. But Paul doesn't use words of grief or regret. He's not looking for pity. It sounds more like he's celebrating a victory.

Listen: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing" (vv. 7-8).

Could you face death today with that much confidence? How many of you have said something like this to me in those funeral planning sessions: "She was ready to go." "He wasn't afraid to die." "They've been looking forward to this for a long time." Your loved one could identify with what Paul was saying.

The reason Paul faced death with such confidence was his hope, what he referred to elsewhere as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). Only faith in God—the God who has made Himself known to us in Jesus Christ, our crucified, but risen Lord and Savior, can fill our lives with this resurrection hope.

Robert Ingersoll, the agnostic, once visited Henry Ward Beecher, a well-known pastor. During the visit, he noticed a beautiful globe in Beecher's office. The globe had etched into it all the visible stars and constellations in our universe.

"This is exquisite," Colonel Ingersoll said. Then he asked, "Who made it?" "Who made it?" Beecher responded, acting... surprised. "Why, nobody made it. It just happened."

Remove God from the equation of our world and it doesn't make sense. In the absence of a gracious, loving Creator-God, we have no reason for hope. But, thanks be to God, "our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

Christ offers us hope--a steadfast hope that assures us that, when we come to the end of this life, we simply begin the next. If this is our hope, friends, it transforms every circumstance of life. And wherever life takes us, in Christ, we'll meet again.

**3.** Now, one other requirement Paul mentions for finishing well: **Live Lovingly toward All.** God made us to be in relationship with each other, and these relationships are precious to us.

It's interesting how this last section of II Timothy puts us in touch with Paul's humanity. He shares his need—a very genuine need--for other people. He also shares with us the pain that comes when relationships don't go well, and we're disappointed. Paul encourages us to take care in how we relate to one another.

Paul mentions many people by name. Some have been good, dependable friends. Others, though, betrayed him. I think we learn something from the importance he assigns to this.

- 1) In v.10, Paul mentions Demas as one who had deserted him.
- 2) In v.14, he tells of a man named Alexander who had done him a great deal of harm.
- 3) In v.16, he shares the pain he felt when no one came to his defense in Rome. Paul felt betrayed; and just like any of us in similar circumstances, he had to deal with his anger.

What did Paul do? In the case of Alexander, Paul just placed him in the Lord's hands. Verse 14 says, "The Lord will repay him for what he has done"—Paul knows it's not his place to do that.

We get hurt or angry, and we think it's up to us to avenge the wrong—when the loving, Christ-like thing to do would be to turn it over to God. "Repay no one evil for evil," Paul said to the Romans.

Then he went even further: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him drink" (cf. Romans 12:17-20). Don't hear this is weakness, friends. That's incredibly strong—like Jesus!

Now, Paul was angry with this man, Alexander; but there's every reason to believe that Paul still wanted the best for him; and if he was in need, Paul would've made every effort to meet his need.

Paul wasn't out to get even with those who had harmed him. He left justice in the hands of God. That's a very healthy way to deal with anger. Just feel it... and then let it go. Put it in God's hands.

There's another aspect of living out our love here, and this is to forgive. "Get Mark and bring him with you," Paul says in verse 11. Some of you know that this reference to Mark deserves notice.

In the book of Acts, we're told that Paul refused to allow Mark to go with him on one of his missionary journeys. The reason being Mark had failed to complete a mission trip he had been on earlier, so Paul wasn't willing to risk taking him again.

But now, that's all been forgiven. The relationship between Paul and Mark is restored. Forgiveness is what made this possible, and forgiveness is vital in our expressions of Christian love.

Paul ends his letter with a grace note: "Grace be with you," he says (v. 22). In his thirty years of ministry, Paul's final words were always filled with grace. That's... "finishing well!"

How we need this attitude of grace—an undeserved favor extended to others, just as God offers His undeserved favor to us. Grace--it would be impossible for us to relate to God without it—"for it is by grace we are saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8).

Listen: no relationship can survive for long without grace. You've been gracious toward me over these years together. And I trust I've been gracious toward you as well.

We can't have loving relationships without grace. Here's why: others won't always live up to our expectations; nor will we live up to theirs. Sometimes, being gracious is the only way to fix this.

At Bob Brock's funeral back in December, I shared what his daughters told me about how their dad would conclude his visits with them. Keep in mind that one daughter lives in South Georgia and the other in Northern Virginia—not close by, in other words.

Bob would remind them that they never know when that particular time together would be their last time to see each other on this earth—so he said it was important for them to always end their visits with expressions of love and appreciation for each other.

Some people say it's important to live each day as though it were our last. But isn't it just as important to treat all the people we interact with each day as though it were their last day to live.

What a wonderful way to demonstrate the love of Christ! So, just in case, I want all of you to know how much I love you, and how much I appreciate the privilege you have given me to serve as your Pastor.

May the Lord bless you, and keep you close, and give you peace. Amen.

### **The Lord's Supper**

Included selections from John 14-17, Jesus' final teachings as he met with his disciples in the Upper Room, washed their feet, and instituted the Lord's Supper.