

Finishing Well

Lesson #20 Don't Quit! Finish Well! June 2, 2021

The Christian life is a marathon filled with its mountains and valleys.

- On the mountains, I will bow my life to the One who set me there,
- In the valley, I will lift mine eyes to the One who sees me there,
- When I'm standing on the mountain, I didn't get there on my own,
- When I'm walking through the valley, I know I am not alone.

Many become discouraged and do not end well. Finishing well does not happen by accident.

Question: Do you ever waffle in your obedience to God? Does it depend on the circumstance?

II Tim. 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

- We are challenged to resolutely obey God and His Word.
- Leave no room for negotiation when flaming trials draw near.

Pastor in Romania - Joseph Ton- There was a call for churches to refuse to resist the communist government for control over their sermons. Joseph Ton said, "NO."

They said they would use force against him. He told the communist officials:

"Your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying.

You can kill me, but my tapes are all over. If you kill me, they will now be sprinkled with blood."

All will say, 'That preacher meant it. He sealed it with his blood.'" Police released him.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego who stood for God when facing Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, emerged from heavy trials with hope. [Promise: Rom. 5:3-5]

Rom. 5:3-5 we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

- We need courage to face enemies. We need encouragement and strength.

These 3 young men were taken with Daniel to Babylon during the first exile from Jerusalem.

Daniel 3:1 King Nebuchadnezzar - mega maniac - made a huge image [90' high x 9' wide] of gold in plain of Dura. Worshipped by all - attend dedication ceremony of image.

He sought to unify his vast empire around the worship of this image which promoted deification of himself amid a polytheistic culture.

Dan. 3:4-6 Herald cried aloud - sound of horn, flute, lyre - fall down & worship the image.

- Failure to comply: Cast into fiery furnace.

Music played & they bowed except 3. Leaders couldn't wait to report on these 3. He was furious.

Dan. 3:13-14 [in rage & fury] He demanded they be brought before the king. Is it true?

- They knew this act was in complete disobedience to the Word of God and in direct violation of their God. Nebuchadnezzar seems willing to give them a pass.

Dan. 3:15 Now if you are ready... you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! If you don't this time, you will be cast into the fiery furnace. Who will deliver you then?

Key Point: They already knew their strategy.

Dan. 3:16-18 O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

- No hesitation, no hatred - just stated the facts

We will continue to trust our God. We are okay whatever happens.

We will not bring shame to His name. They stood tall against the threats of Nebuchadnezzar.

Record of deliverance - Dan. 3:19-25 King's anger - expression of his face changed toward them. Heat furnace 7x more. His pride was wounded and he takes his wrath out on them.

On the basis of his anger, he said to bind them & cast them into the midst of the fire.

- It killed the men who threw them in.

Dan. 3:24-25 The king was astonished.

- Did we not cast 3 men? I see 4 - LOOSE - form of 4th is like son of God.

Dan. 3:26-28 He went near the mouth of the fire and called them - servants of the most High God - come out & come here. They came out - fire had no power - not even smell of fire.

Reasons They Had This Kind Of Courage

- Absolute Commitment to God Dan. 3:18 - We will NOT worship the gold image. They didn't have to discuss it or think about it. That issue was already settled in their minds. - Absolute obedience to God's Word - No bending of His rules

Question: If there are so many Christians in our world, why are we failing and doing so badly?

- Evangelical movement is 40 miles wide & 1/8" deep.

Unbelief is at the heart of our lack of commitment; will not take us through the fire.

- Absolute Confidence in God Daniel 3:16-17 Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace & from your hand. Obedience wasn't contingent on the outcome.
- Absolute Courage for God Dan. 3:18 - We will not! They weren't ignorant of the situation. Nebuchadnezzar had a reputation for being very cruel. We will defy you! They knew they would be in great danger. With God on your side, you are not alone.

Jerome of Prague - being burned at the stake - "Come here and kindle the fire before my eyes." So they began to kindle the fire in front of him.

He began to sing a hymn that would soon be finished by the flames that consumed him.

Prov. 29:25 The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.

- Absolute Consciousness of God Dan. 3:24-25 Nebuchadnezzar was astonished.

Didn't we cast 3? - LOOSE - Son of God himself was there!

Isa. 43:2 When you pass thru the waters, I will be with you;

And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.

When we are in fire, God draws near to us. Feel God's presence next to you.

Result of Deliverance:

- Enemies were executed. God saved them, killed enemies > 1 swoop. When we walk thru the fire, the things we are so worried about; God settles the issues himself.
- Bonds were eliminated. - LOOSED - The only casualty of the fire was the rope (property of Babylonian empire). God puts us in the fire so He can loose (purge) us from the things that are holding us back; holding us down from walking in the Spirit and serving Him.
- Hearts were encouraged. - One like the Son of God was there with them. In the trial, God wants you to know He is with you and He understands. He will be faithful and carry you through. He may increase the fire to get your attention to keep you in the way He wants you. He did not rescue them from the fire. He rescued them in the fire.
- God hasn't promised there won't be any "firey" trials.

Pastor Frank Graeffs > Sunshine Minister who wrote +200 hymn texts > Does Jesus Care

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;

the flame shall not harm thee; I only design, thy dross to consume & thy gold to refine.

o From "How Firm A Foundation"

- Their God was exalted. Dan. 3:29 Nebuchadnezzar met the God he raged about. Nebuchadnezzar declares that any who speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this."
- Their influence was enlarged. Dan.3:30 Can you imagine the emotional charge of that day? Shackled on the way to the 7x furnace - end up getting a Promotion In The Kingdom.

The spread of Christianity was a threat to Rome who feared that Christians would disrupt public order by refusing to worship the gods and the emperors.

Nero's persecution of Christians was in full swing.

The Church in History, by B.K. Kuiper, p.8

"In the year 64 A.D. [ruled from 54 AD - 68 AD] during the reign of Nero, fire that lasted six days and nights broke out in Rome. The greater part of the city was laid in ashes.

The rumor was that Nero himself had caused the city to be set on fire. This aroused great hatred in the people of Rome against the emperor. To turn this hatred away from himself, Nero accused the Christians of having set fire to Rome. The accusation certainly was not true, but large numbers of Christians were arrested and a terrible persecution followed.

Many Christians were even crucified.

Some were sewn up in the skins of wild beasts; then big dogs were let loose upon them, and they were torn to pieces. Women were tied to mad bulls and dragged to death.

After nightfall Christians were burned at the stake in Nero's garden. [human lampstands!]

The Roman people who hated the Christians were free to come into the garden, and Nero drove around in his chariot wickedly enjoying the horrible scene."

Nero who set the fire blamed it on the Christians many of whom were Paul's friends.

"Paul died inwardly daily as he received word of the horrific death of many friends at the hand of Nero. Human torches - danger and terror were in the air. There was total moral decay; growing disregard for human life and a high rate of suicide."

Scripture makes it clear that Paul was looking death in the face when he spoke His final words of exhortation to Timothy to keep running well. Paul's words are not those of a discouraged, broken old man. There is no despair, no defeat, no cynicism, and no fear as he faces imminent execution. His calm assurance is all the more startling when you consider his circumstances. He was in the Mamertine Prison in Rome.

Paul's cell was a dark, damp dungeon, reached only by a rope or ladder from a hole in the floor above. He had no windows, no lights, no toilet, no furniture, and no running water.

As Paul sat on the hard floor in the cold darkness, enduring the stench of his own urine and excrement, the circumstances outside were not encouraging.

His only escape would be his execution for promoting the teachings of Jesus.

Paul had labored for the past thirty years or more to preach the gospel around the Roman Empire, but at this point, it was at best a tiny sect, scattered here and there.

Paul had planted many churches encouraging believers even in the face of persecution.

Many, fearing for their own lives, seemed to be turning away from the aged apostle, and even from the faith, following false teachers.

One faithful man, Onesiphorus, [means "bringing profit," bring refreshing] didn't abandon Paul. He was grateful for what he had learned from Paul, and he would not succumb to fear.

He searched for his friend Paul throughout the city of Rome, risking his own life and reputation.

[II Tim. 1:16-18] When he finally learned where Paul was imprisoned, he didn't hesitate to visit him. Onesiphorus was lowered into the dark, filthy dungeon to fellowship with his brother in Christ. He was not embarrassed by Paul's imprisonment or surroundings. He remembered his friend in bonds and willingly joined him for their mutual encouragement.

II Tim. 4:13b...when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.

Use his isolated hours redemptively. The greatest challenge is when you feel lonely.

Remedy: Get into the Word. Do this out of obedience. As you get in the Word, your feelings change. Your heart is encouraged because of God's Word.

William Tyndale, in prison in Belgium 1535, wrote a letter to the governor.

"Wherefore I beg of your lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here through the winter you will request the commissary to have the kindness to send me from the goods of mine which he has a warmer cap, for I suffer greatly from the cold in the head and am afflicted by a perpetual catarrh, which is much increased in this cell.

A warmer coat also, for this which I have is very thin. A piece of cloth, too, to patch my leggings. My overcoat is worn out. My shirts are also worn out. He has a woolen shirt, if he will be good enough to send it. I have with him also leggings of thicker cloth to put on above. He also has warmer night caps. And I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evening. It is indeed a wearisome to sit alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to be with the commissary that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study. In return may you obtain that which you most desire so only that it be for the salvation of your soul. But if any other decision has been taken concerning me to be carried out before winter, I will be patient. Abiding the will of God to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, whose Spirit I pray may ever direct your heart. Amen."

Tyndale was a confident, bold, and fearless theologian and scholar who translated the Bible into an early form of Modern English. Tyndale was arrested and imprisoned for 500 days in a kangaroo court, and ultimately convicted. He was sentenced to be strangled and burn at the stake in the prison yard on October 6, 1536.

His last words were, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

Writing from a Roman jail, with the certain knowledge that he would soon be dead, Paul looked back at his journey with Christ. Then he looked forward to what would happen after he died.

Then he wrote his own epitaph:

II Tim. 4:6-8 For I am [present tense] now ready to be offered [poured out as a drink offering], and the time of my departure is at hand.

⁷ I have [past] fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

⁸ Henceforth [in the future] 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.

Phil. 2:17 "But even if I [Paul] am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all."

Refers to OT ritual that accompanied certain sacrifices.

Law mandated that when a worshiper brought an offering, part of it was consumed upon the altar and part was given to the priest for his use.

When the offering was consumed by fire, the worshiper would pour a "drink offering" of wine upon the burning sacrifice. ALL the wine was poured out.

As the wine hit the burning coals, it evaporated, and a sweet smell rose from the altar.

Symbolic: "I gladly give all that I have to the Lord. This sacrifice I Offer is given as a symbol of my wholehearted commitment to God. Nothing is held back."

Consider: Paul said his death was as a drink offering. "When you hear of my death, don't think Nero has executed me against my will. I gladly lay down my life for my Lord. Nero cannot take my life. I gladly offer it to Christ." Paul had already given everything to Jesus.

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul saw himself as expendable in God's service, a drink offering.

Rom. 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Dan. 3:28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

Paul Viewed His Impending Death As A Departure. [II Tim. 4:6b]

In the Bible, death is never cessation of existence, but rather, a separation of the soul and spirit from the body. It is departure. The Greek word that Paul used was a vivid one.

- Describes the unyoking of an animal from a plow or cart
 - A man carrying a staggering burden
 - "Lay your burden down. It's time to come home."
- Describes the breaking the bonds of a prisoner.
 - Release from the bonds of our corruptible body.
- Describes the loosening the ropes of a soldier's tent.
 - The battle is over, victory is won and we are headed home.
- Describes loosening the mooring ropes of a ship.
 - At death our earthly ship leaves the shores of this stormy earth and puts in at the always-calm port of heaven.

For Paul, death was like setting sail, breaking camp, laying down his heavy burden and finally going home to be with the Lord. NO REGRETS! (Examples are in William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Westminster Press], revised edition, p. 209.)

If you have Paul's view of death as departure, you will be able to finish without fear and even with anticipation, knowing that to depart and be with Christ is much better. [Phil. 1:23]

Phil. 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Paul lived a Disciplined Life. I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT. [past tense]

Continual struggle he faced: trouble, distress, tribulation, trials, hardships

- Normal Christian life includes these elements.

II Cor. 6:4-5 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, ⁵ In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings;

Spiritual opposition he faced: Satan, forces of darkness, indwelling power of the flesh, spiritual darkness of paganism

What a fulfilling thing when it comes time to die, to look back on your past and be able to say,

- "I've been involved in that great struggle for the cause of Christ!"

Paul lived a Directional Life. I HAVE FINISHED MY COURSE [II Tim. 4:7b]

The course or race the Lord Jesus set out for him on the road to Damascus.

"It wasn't easy, it was often hard, and sometimes I wondered if I would make it, but now I can see that Jesus led me all the way." He had reached the finish line at last.

A professor at a Christian college, along with his son, went on a 1,000-mile backpacking trip from British Columbia to southern California. They faced every sort of discouragement—lack of food and water, danger from wild animals, danger from robbers they might meet, days of rain and mud, incredible physical exhaustion, the very real possibility of physical injury, not to speak of loneliness, blisters, mosquitoes, and the extremes of heat and cold.

Before leaving on the trip, the professor discovered that:

- over 90% of those who set out to hike more than 500 miles never make it.
- Fifty percent never get started and 40% quit after they start.
- Only 10% ever finish a long-distance hike.
- He discovered those who succeeded versus those who failed understood that the biggest block was mental. They knew that their real enemy lay within, not without.

Those who succeeded make two important decisions:

- They decided they would finish the trip no matter what happened.
- They expected bad things to happen. They decided they would not be surprised or dismayed. So when the rains turned the trail into a quagmire, they didn't quit because they weren't surprised. When black clouds of mosquitoes descended like some Old Testament plague, they didn't quit because they weren't surprised.

They didn't quit because they knew it would be like this.

- Our problem is that we're surprised by trouble.

The Christian life is not all glory and effortless bliss.

There is joy, but there also are many trials that require endurance [Acts 14:22].

Make up your mind to hang in with the Lord through the tough times, so that you can look back at the end and say with Paul, "I have finished the course."

Paul lived a Doctrinal Life I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH [II Tim. 4:7c]

He refused to compromise the Truth of God's Word.

When other people fell away, Paul preached the Word.

When the world was against him, Paul paid no attention and preached the Word.

➤ Athanasius - Fought for deity of Jesus Christ in the church.

➤ The church, bishop and whole world is against you. Then I'm against the whole world.

When it would have been easy to "trim his message" to save his own life, Paul proclaimed the Whole Counsel Of God's Word.

Paul told Timothy the guard "the deposit." [I Tim. 6:20]

II Tim. 1:13-14 Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

¹⁴ That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. Know what you believe so you are not tossed about by all the winds of false doctrine.

Eph. 14a That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, [Be rooted, grounded: KNOW what you believe.]

Paul Looked To His Secure Hope For The Future: He Lived In View Of THAT DAY

➤ Finish the race of faith well! Begin your race with the end in mind!

II Tim. 4:8 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.

Paul's faith shines so brightly that the darkness of the Roman prison cell seems to disappear. By faith he sees beyond his own beheading.

The pain of that moment is now past and the suffering of this life is left far behind.

By faith he sees "that day" when he will receive his reward from the Lord.

Heb. 6:10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Consider: The Bible teaches: Salvation is a free gift to all.

God will reward us according to our obedience and our works.

II Cor. 5:9-10 Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Perhaps your circumstances seem pretty dismal today. Maybe you're considering dropping out of the Christian race. From his dungeon, the aged apostle calls out to you:

"Don't quit! Keep going! You can finish well!

God is purging, cleaning, melting away from us those things that keep us from being dependent upon Him.

Joseph Ton says we "are formed, shaped and tested for reliability, and based on our degree of trust-worthiness we are given a position of responsibility in the kingdom."

II Tim. 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

⁴ No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.