



## “Faithful to the End”

2 Timothy 4:6-22

**Idea:** Christ expects His followers to be faithful to the end.

**Intro:** In the year 156 A.D., an 86-year-old man was brought before a Roman official and asked to renounce his atheism. He was no atheist by our standards. Rather he was the devout Christian and Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp. He had served Christ since his childhood. To the Romans however he was an atheist, for he refused to worship the emperor as a god along with the other gods of Rome.

Polycarp knew denial would mean a painful death – either being thrown into the arena with a wild animal or burned alive at the stake. Three times he was questioned, three times invited to renounce his “atheism”, but no renunciation of Christ would he make. “Swear and I release; curse Christ” urged the Roman official, to which Polycarp replied, “Eighty-six years have I served him (Christ), and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

Polycarp was not spared. A fire was built. Soldiers then grabbed him to nail him to a stake, but Polycarp stopped them: "Leave me as I am. For he who grants me to endure the fire will enable me also to remain on the pyre unmoved, without the security you desire from nails." He prayed aloud, the fire was lit, and his flesh was consumed. But his words echo down through the centuries to us: “Eighty-six years have I served him (Christ), and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

Bishop Polycarp was faithful to the end. His story is reminiscent of the Apostle Paul’s story. Both men were devout followers of Jesus Christ. Both were put on trial for their faith. And both were faithful to the end in the face of death. Their stories encourage us to press on in faithful service to the Lord until the end.

**Inquiry:** Paul’s message in Second Timothy centers around a daily grind in godly training. Over the last four months, we have worked verse by verse through this pastoral epistle, which Paul wrote to Timothy his mentee in the faith. Three years ago we worked through First Timothy. Paul wrote that letter while traveling, hoping that he would soon be able to visit Timothy in Ephesus. He provided instruction on the nature and practice of the church, addressing matters such as ministerial offices, widows, and public worship. In Second Timothy, Paul focused on the personal ministry of Timothy rather than the ordering of the church. According to tradition, Paul wrote this second letter from an underground chamber in Rome’s Mamertine prison. Based on the end of the letter, it seems Paul had already received a court hearing (2 Tim 4:16-18) and expected to be executed soon (4:6-8). Even though Paul mentioned that Luke was with him (4:11), we still picture the war-torn apostle alone

and cold. He wanted his cloak, his scrolls, and to see Timothy. We find in this letter a strong passionate and personal tone, which is understandable.

Paul's purpose in writing to Timothy was to encourage him in his personal walk with Jesus. He sought to spur him on in godly training, and we have seen that he used his own life as an example. We began this series by stating, "You don't wake up one day a success story. You work toward becoming a success story." Paul was faithful to the end because he had determined to do so. He desired to both live and die well for the glory of Christ. His final words were given to encourage Timothy to likewise be faithful to the end.

Read 2 Timothy 4:6-22.

As Paul concludes his letter to Timothy, he looks back over his life in triumph. God has been good and faithful to him. He has been blessed with many godly friends, and he has had the privilege of establishing churches and discipling numerous people all across the Roman Empire. Several of these people still serve the Lord (4:19-20). Their friendship remains strong and vibrant. Others, however, have turned away. Some have walked away from Christ (1:15). Others have simply distanced themselves from Paul (4:10). Paul has exhorted Timothy throughout this letter to expect persecution and suffering in the ministry. He does not want him to be blind to it and become disillusioned when it comes (3:12). Instead, he pushes for faithfulness to the end.

The Lord Jesus desires and expects His followers to be faithful to the end. Finishing well is easier said than done. In many ways the start of a race is easier than the finish. You have probably seen runners at the beginning of a race zoom out to an early and strong lead. They are running fast and leaving their competition in the dust, but the pace is too much. They cannot sustain it. Soon others are passing them. The run slows to a jog and then to a walk. Some even choose to quit the race altogether. The goal of a race is to finish. The start is important. The run in the middle is important. But the most important part of a race is the finish. Paul models for us how to be faithful to the end and finish well.

## **1. Give each day of your life as an offering to the Lord.**

(vs. 6)

The present reality for Paul was that he was dying and departing. He borrowed the vivid image of the drink offering from the Jewish custom of pouring out wine at the base of the altar as part of the ritual sacrifice of a lamb (Ex 29:40). The image of red wine splashing down upon the altar became an operative metaphor for how Paul regarded his life. Five years earlier he had written to the Philippians about the possibility of his death, describing it as being "*poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering*" of their faith (2:17). In the letter to the Philippians, it was hypothetical, but as he writes to Timothy it is reality. He uses the present tense in its progressive sense to indicate the certainty of the event, as if it were actually taking place.

This present reality did not disillusion the apostle. He remained triumphant. We see here that he did not view this as an immanent execution but rather as offering himself to God. From the time of his conversion on the Damascus Road, everything he had was given to God – his wealth, his body, his brilliant mind, his passions, his position, his reputation, his relationships, and his dreams. For thirty years the red blood of his life had been spilling onto the altar, so that the only thing left to give was his breath, and he triumphantly offered that as well.

Paul also spoke of his departure. The Greek word translated here (ἀνάλυσις) is used to describe the loosening of a ship from its moorings or a soldier loosening the stakes of his tent. Paul paints here the picture of him lifting the anchor, tossing aside the ropes, and joyfully sailing to a better place. Here is hope. The Christ-follower never really dies; he or she just departs. Paul longed for his final, ultimate voyage (Phil 1:23). C. S. Lewis correctly described death in his book *The Last Battle*. He 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 for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.” Spurgeon said of this glorious departure in his book *Morning by Morning*:

“To come to Thee is to come home from exile, to come to land out of the raging storm, to come to rest after long labor, to come to the goal of my desires and the summit of my wishes.”

Paul firmly believed that to depart was “*far better*” (Phil 1:23). He lived each day with his eye on eternity. The reason he finished well and was faithful to the end was because he lived each day for the Lord. Each new day was an opportunity to be poured out as a drink offering to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you desire to be faithful to the end? Give each day of your life as an offering to the Lord.

Secondly, we see that Paul chose to finish strong.

## **2. Finish strong. (vs. 7)**

He looked back on his life in triumph with three word pictures. First, he uses the analogy of a fight. Paul was a warrior. Most likely he didn’t look like a fighter. His physical appearance was not impressive, but he was a spiritual warrior. He had stood before Jewish leaders, Felix, Agrippa, and the officials of Rome with courage. He endured the riots in Ephesus and the opposition in Corinth. He endured all kinds of struggles on his missionary journeys (2 Cor 11:23-28).

Paul ultimately understood his fight to be not against man but against the forces of darkness and evil present in the world (Eph 6:12). His fight was with the devil and sin. Each day of his life he went to battle against these two foes in his personal life, the church, and the community. “*I have fought the good fight.*”

Second, he uses the analogy of a race. “*I have finished the race.*” Notice Paul does not say that he won the race. He simply states that he finished it. He had told the Ephesians years earlier that his goal was to finish his course (Acts 20:24). His goal was not to beat out others and win. His goal was to finish the race God had given to him. The writer of Hebrews explains that each believer has a course marked out for him or her (Heb 12:1). The course is unique for each person. Therefore, you are not to run mine, and I am not to run yours. The courses are different. Some are relatively straight. Others are curvy. Some seem to be all uphill. Others may appear to be flat. All seem to be long, but some are longer.

Regardless of the course, the believer is to finish. How do you finish strong?

*1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:1-2*

We finish strong by living out these words. We remember the example of those who have run before us. We set aside anything and everything that would hinder our run. This includes the good and the bad. And we fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith.

This leads us to Paul’s final analogy. “*I have kept the faith.*” This statement refers to having maintained the apostolic deposit of doctrine...the gospel that he had charged Timothy to keep (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14; 2:42). Paul persevered in what he preserved. He had remained faithful to the gospel from the beginning, and now at the end of his life, he gloried in how the Lord had enabled him to preserve the gospel through his trials and sufferings. Many others could not say this of themselves (1 Tim 1:19). Hymenaeus, Alexander, Phygelus, and Hermogenes are four who could not. They let their guard down, took short cuts, and compromised. The result was a departure from “*the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3).

The charge to Timothy and to us today is to finish strong. We are to fight the good fight, to finish the race, and to keep the faith. Verse eight shows us how to do this.

### 3. Keep your eye on the prize. (vs. 8)

The key to remaining faithful to the end is keeping your eye on the prize. Paul knew what awaited him. The crown of righteousness would be awarded to him by Jesus. Emperor Nero either had or would soon declare him guilty and condemn him. Christ, the righteous judge had declared him positionally righteous and would soon declare him practically righteous as well. This crown would be awarded on “*that Day*”...upon Christ’s return and appearing. Paul was able to be faithful to the end because he kept his eye on the prize...being found faithful when Christ returns.

The award Paul anticipated was not just for him. It is for you and I too. It is for “*all who have loved his appearing.*” We can live lives of faithfulness to the very end, knowing the award that motivated Paul is ours too. Keep your eye on the prize and be faithful to the end.

**Conclusion:** For what we know of Bishop Polycarp, he started strong, ran strong, and finished strong. In many ways his life resembled that of Paul. This, however, is not true of others. It is not even true of every person mentioned by Paul in this final passage. Thankfully, we see this faithfulness in Timothy, Titus, Tychicus, Crescens, Luke, and Carpus. It is not so of Mark and Demas. Mark started strong, but then abandoned Paul on the mission field. Later, he returned in a strong way, so that Paul referred to him as being very useful to him for ministry (4:12). Demas started strong but finished poorly. He left Paul in his moment of need. The heat in the kitchen got too hot for him, so he deserted. The term does not necessarily mean he became an apostate. He went to Thessalonica, a city with a strong church. But he did abandon Paul.

Because of the grace of God, we can finish strong even if we did not start or run strong. We just have to decide today to be faithful to the end. God’s grace is available to all regardless of where you are.

This is the good news that Bible declares.

Good News – You are loved by God. He designed you. You were made by Him and for Him (Col 1:16). You were designed to perfectly relate and to be in relationship with Holy God.

Bad News - You are sinful and broken. You possess both an inherited and a self-inflicted wound. The sinful nature of Adam in the Garden has been passed down to you, and you were born into the world in rebellion against the God who created you for Himself. Your sin is under the just wrath of Holy God. Sin has produced brokenness in your lives. You choose to sin because it is your nature, further wounding yourself. Therefore, apart from Christ, you are as far away from God’s purpose and desire for your life as you can get.

Best News - The gospel declares that God the Son has paid the penalty for your sin. Romans 5:8 says, “*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” He offered His life as a substitute for you and experienced the wrath of God the Father against your sin. So that now, you can experience forgiveness for sin by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You are given a choice to make?

Through the gospel we understand that we can know God. We can be set free, made whole, and forgiven of all sin. We can grow into maturity in a new life in Jesus. And we can be faithful to the end.

Today, let us thank God for His gospel that brings us into relationship with Jesus Christ. Let us respond to it in faith and repentance of sin. Let us recommit ourselves to be faithful to the end.