

Jesus Is Worth It

Part #13 -“Finishing the Race”

Text | 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on August 11, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Eric Liddell was the famous Olympic Champion in the 400m whose life was depicted in the movie Chariots of Fire.
 - Liddell is famous for saying, ***“It’s not how you begin the race but how you finish that is important.”***
- I’m going to learn this lesson the hard way over the next few days. After church today I’m driving up to Port Hardy with five other guys: Georden Rendle, Michael Sigmond, Rick Stark, Eric Stark, and a friend of mine from the mainland named Dave Heinrichs.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** We are going to attempt to ride our bikes from Port Hardy (which is the northern most point for a road bike) to William Head in Metchosin (which is the southern most point we can get to).
 - The total distance is about 510km and we are going to attempt to do this in two days.
- As part of my training I completed the longest bike ride of my life a few weeks ago when our family was in California. **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** In one day, I rode from Santa Barbara to San Diego, which is 400km. I left at 3:30am and got there at almost 11:00pm.
 - Now much of the ride was enjoyable with endless beaches and pounding waves, like in this picture. **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** But there were many difficulties as well. For instance, I had three flat tires, one of which happened when I ran over a safety pin **(SHOW SLIDE 5).**
- Everything got really difficult when the sun set at 8pm. I was at 325km, well past anything I had done before, but still had 75km and 3hrs to go. I was tired. My pace slowed way down. I began to mentally fall apart.
 - And then near the end at I had to climb a 3km long hill. Normally that is no big deal but I stopped twice to rest. Heather and the kids were waiting for me at the finish and I thought about just calling them to pick me up. But two things kept me persevering: first, the sheer satisfaction I knew I would feel if I didn’t give up but completed the 400km and second, the idea of eating a supreme pizza from Dominoes.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** I will never forget the cheers of my family as I finished and the deep sense of satisfaction. And I will never forget the pizza. It was the best I’ve eaten in all my life.
- ***“It’s not how you begin the race but how you finish that is important.”*** In our passage today, Paul compares the Christian life to a race. In fact, Hebrews 12 says that God has marked out a particular racecourse for each Christian. He has specific purposes for your life and things he wants to accomplish through you.
 - But this race is not an easy 1km bike ride around the inner harbor. It is a long race. Eighty years is a long time to love Jesus, serve him, and be faithful to him. How do you

do that when there are so many difficulties along the way? Life gets really dark at times. The finish line seems so far away. It can all be very discouraging.

- Oh how we need to learn how to persevere. My heart was deeply grieved this past week to hear of yet another famous pastor fall away. Joshua Harris, the author of many popular books, announced he is getting divorced and is no longer a Christian. ***“It’s not how you begin the race but how you finish that is important.”***
- That is what this passage is about. Paul is writing to a middle age pastor named Timothy who is struggling to persevere. He is under great pressure. Powerful people within the church are against him. He lives in a city that is not receptive to Jesus. He feels like quitting.
 - I wonder how many of you are feeling the same way. The long race is getting exhausting and you are discouraged.
 - By the grace of God, I am praying that today’s message will get you going again because ***“It’s not how you begin the race but how you finish that is important.”***
- Paul writes this entire letter to encourage Timothy and us to finish well. There are many things that can be said on the subject but today the theme is learning to persevere by looking to faithful Christians who have gone before us.
 - Paul says we should do three things with older and faithful Christians that we might be strengthened to finish the race. First, receive their handoff. Second, remember their race. Third, rejoice in their reward.

RECEIVE THE HANDOFF

- The first thing Paul says then is to **(SHOW SLIDE 7) receive their handoff.**
 - Look at verse 6. ***READ 6 - For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.*** Paul is an old man. He is in prison for speaking about Jesus and knows that he is about to be put to death. 2 Timothy 4 is the very last chapter we have of Paul’s writing.
 - Shortly after he wrote this last letter, the early church historian Eusibieus tells us that Paul was beheaded with a sword.¹
- Paul describes his impending death with two images. The first image is a drink offering. The drink offering was the final part of the animal sacrifice. In Numbers 15 we read that the animal was to be roasted along with fine flour mixed with oil. As the delicious smell of bbq’d meat and bread was rising up the priest was to pour out a litre of wine. The constant refrain in Numbers 15 is that this sacrifice is a ‘pleasing aroma for the LORD.’
 - Paul had offered his whole life as a living sacrifice to Christ. And now his impending death is the final part of this sacrifice. He is being poured out. Do we have that heart? Jesus, take all my life and use it for your glory. May it be pleasing to you.
- The second image of Paul’s impending death is a powerful one. He calls his death a departure. ***READ 6 - For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.***
 - This word is used of a ship being loosed from its moorings in order to set sail. The Christian does not fear death because Christ has conquered death. This is the finish line. For all those who know Jesus, death means finally setting sail for the land we have

¹ Eusibeus, *Church History*, 2.25; 3.1.

always dreamed of. I cannot help but think of one of the final moments in *The Lord of the Rings* when Frodo, after fulfilling his calling through many difficulties, gets to sail west in the ship. In the West is the Blessed Realm, the Undying Lands, where immortals live. It is a heavenly place. We read these words:

- **(SHOW SLIDE 8) “Then Frodo kissed Merry and Pippin, and last of all Sam, and went aboard; and the sails were drawn up, and the wind blew, and slowly the ship slipped away down the long grey firth . . . and the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that . . . the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise.”**² Oh I yearn for that day when my ship will be loosed and I will sail to the land where I will see Him whom I have so long desired.

- But now we must ask why Paul has brought up his impending death. Aren't we a little off our theme of finishing well? Not at all. This is why Paul brought it up. How do I know that? What is the first word in verse 6? “For.” Whenever you see the word ‘for’ you must ask what it is there for.
 - The word ‘for’ connects verses 6-8 with what Paul has just said in verse 1-5. In verses 1-5 Paul has given pastor Timothy a charge to fulfill all that God has called him to do. You remember from last week that Paul had charged Timothy to preach the word, to do it whether it was popular or not, and to endure suffering in his role.
 - So do you see what Paul is saying? He is saying, **“Timothy, do what God has called you to do. Fulfill your calling. I am the older generation but I am about to die. It is all in your hands now.”**
- So this passage is a call to the younger generation to receive the handoff from the older generation. You may not be called to be a pastor like Timothy but God has unique purposes for your life that only you can do.
 - So what kind of generation will we be? Will it be said of us that we lived for ourselves pampering our lives with ease, comfort, television, and pleasure or will it be said of that we took the baton and ran hard with it? Oh let it be said of us that were not ashamed of the gospel. Let it be said that we sacrificed time, effort, and money to see Jesus exalted.
 - Here at Central, will the older ones pass the baton to the young generation? Younger generation, will you step up and take it?
- So, if you feel like quitting today then hear the call of those who went before you. It is a call to receive the baton and to keep running.

REMEMBER THEIR PERSEVERANCE

- In the second place if you want to receive courage to finish well for Jesus then look to older Christians and **(SHOW SLIDE 9) remember their perseverance.**
 - Look at verse 7. **READ 7 - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.** The common thread in all three of these metaphors is perseverance through hardship and struggle right to the end.

² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 1007.

- First, Paul says he has fought the good fight. This is an athletic metaphor referring to the wrestling and boxing competitions in the Olympic Games. Paul has engaged himself in the one good thing worth struggling for and that is living for Jesus – knowing Jesus, serving Jesus, and making Jesus known.
 - Paul is not saying this out of pride. He is like a boxer who has given every ounce of energy and now sits exhausted but satisfied at the end of the fight. Now he turns to Timothy and says, **“You’ve seen me finish. Now you need to get up off the mat and keep going.”** In 1 Timothy 1:3 he had called Timothy not to quit but to stay in Ephesus and keep serving Jesus and then said, **“Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction...so that by following them you may fight the good fight.”**
 - You are in the same fight. A fight to love, trust, and serve Jesus. A fight to keep serving other people even when it means suffering and hardship. When I am 80 I don’t want to be feeling fresh because I sat in the corner my whole life. I want flop down in the corner exhausted but deeply satisfied because I fought a good fight. I want to smile but through a bruised face that did not quit when the fight was fierce. To get this strength we must remember the fight of those who went before us.
- Paul also says **“I have run the race.”**
 - Paul’s particular racecourse was clear. He defined it in Acts 20:24 when he said, **“I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.”** What task was that? **“the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”** Paul is saying, **“Timothy by God’s grace I have done it. You can to.”**
 - The fact that the Christian life is called a fight and a race should tell you that it can be hard. Boxers get punched in the face. Runners must push through great pain for hours on end. Is it worth it? Why not just take the easy way? Listen to Jesus: **“The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”** When you feel like quitting remember the perseverance of those who have completed the race.
- Finally, Paul says he has kept the faith. That is, he has not forsaken God and all the truths of the gospel but has to the very end believed and defended them.
 - The Christian life is a marathon. It is no good to run 5km of a marathon and then quit. You must finish the race. And we draw great strength to get up and keep running as remember the perseverance of those who went before us.
- For me, this means considering my heritage. I remember visiting my grandpa and grandma Priebe’s grave and thinking about how faithfully they served God and finished well. Standing over those graves I drew great strength and through tears said, **“By God’s grace I will serve as you did. Your God is my God and I will use my life for Him.”**
 - When I find being a pastor hard I remember my heritage. I am a fourth generation preacher on my dad’s side. When I feel like quitting I remember my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather and their perseverance over decades of preaching and pastoral ministry.

- When I think of marriage I look to my grandparents on my mom's side. Just before they passed away we celebrated their 60th anniversary. I receive strength for I want to hold my wife's hand when I am 80 years old and say, ***"I have always been faithful to you."***
 - When I think of being intentional to raise my children to love God I remember my grandfather on my mom's side. He was a shy man and the furthest thing from a teacher or public speaker. Yet I remember how he, and my own father also, after supper each night would get out the Bible, read a portion of it, and lead the family in prayer. Their example spurs me on.
- Do you see it then? When you start to feel like the race is getting to hard, remember the perseverance of those went before you. You will need different heroes than me for your race but make sure you find them.
 - Like Timothy you may not have a father who loved Jesus. Timothy found a spiritual father in Paul. You need to find that. Find heroes in the Bible. Find heroes in biographies.
 - Find heroes in the church. Ask some of these older saints if you can take them out for coffee. Listen to their life. Ask them how they persevered.

REJOICE IN THEIR REWARD

- So in order that we might finish well we must look to older Christians. First, receive their handoff. Second, remember their perseverance. Finally, **(SHOW SLIDE 10) rejoice in their reward.**
 - ***READ 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.***
 - Again, Paul is using an athletic metaphor from the Olympic Games. When the race was done the victor was brought before the people. Today we give the winner a gold medal. **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** In those days the gold medal was a crown made of leaves woven together that was placed on the head of the victor.
- Paul says there is a great day coming when Jesus, the impartial and righteous judge, will reward his faithful people. It is the day when ***"the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God."*** On that day ***"when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne."***
 - On that day Paul says Jesus will award to him the crown of righteousness. That is to say he will give him the crown, namely righteousness. The crown therefore is righteousness. You see in this life we are called to pursue righteousness. We are commanded to read the Bible because it will train us in righteousness. But this world is not in a state of righteousness.
 - And so Galatians 5:5 says ***"by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope."*** Or as Peter says, ***"But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."***
- To make it plain: the crown then that we will receive is that final home of the new heavens and new earth where God ***"will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*** The crown is that final perfect state where all the enemies of God, death, the devil, and Hades will be destroyed.

The crown is a resurrection body that will never die and never struggles with sin. The crown is when it will be said, **“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”**

- Now again, why is Paul talking about his final reward? To motivate a young man who feels like quitting to get up and keep running to the finish. Paul is inviting Timothy to rejoice in his reward because Timothy will get the same thing. **READ 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.**
 - This word “appearing” pictures the people waiting to greet their king. They love their king and cannot wait for him to return. If you are a Christian here today, Jesus has won your reward for you. He is coming back one day to give it to you.
 - When like on my bike ride, you are facing a big hill in the dark and you don’t feel like you can go on, keep thinking of the finish line. When you can hardly go any further think of the pizza you will eat. One day we will all gather at the wedding supper of the Lamb. It will be the biggest party you’ve ever seen. The food will make the best pizza on earth seem like moldy breadcrumb. Jesus says many will come from the east and from the west, from all over the world. We will celebrate with all those who have died and loved Christ. And best of all, we will eat with he who loved us and gave himself for us. We will look upon his glory and be brought into his eternal kingdom.
- On our drive down to California we listened to a couple of audio books from C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Do you remember how it all ends? After all the struggles and trials, the children have died and are about to enter the new Narnia which represents the new heavens and new earth. We read in the last paragraph of the last book these words:
 - **“Now at last 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.”**

CONCLUSION

- Are you weary in serving Jesus? Has your love for him grown cold? Are you fearful to speak for him? Are you tired and sitting on the side of the racecourse? Look to the example of older Christians. Receive their handoff. Remember their perseverance. Rejoice in their reward because the same reward is promised to all who long for the return of Jesus.
 - Let athletics teach you of higher truths. When you watch athletes race learn of the greater race. When you watch athletes persevere think of the greater perseverance. When you watch athletes cry with joy on the podium think of that greater day of rewards when Jesus will reward his people.
 - Watch the athletes closely for they strive with all their might **“to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”**