

Finish Strong

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon focuses on the theme of finishing well and finishing strong, drawing insights from 2 Timothy. The speaker emphasizes the importance of starting properly to have hope of finishing well, highlighting the need for a genuine work of the Spirit of God in becoming a true Christian. The sermon underscores the concept of tenacity in the Christian journey, where divine tenacity meets personal tenacity in holding onto Christ and living faithfully. The apostle Paul's example of faithfulness, sacrificial living, and readiness to be poured out like a drink offering is highlighted as a model for believers to follow.

Scripture: Philippians 3:12, 2 Timothy 4:6, Galatians 2:20, Hebrews 12:1, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Acts 20:24, Ephesians 6:10, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Finishing Well", "Tenacity in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

And for those who are going to look in on this at a later stage, I'd just like to say that this is an early morning gathering of a group of men who are keen to deepen their understanding of scripture and their experience of the Lord. And we welcome everyone who wants to join in and be part of this, even if you live many miles away from here. We're looking into 2 Timothy, and so we'll turn there, shall we? I do believe this is the 14th session here in this epistle.

And we're in the final chapter, but we won't finish off the chapter today. We'll save some more for next time. But let me read, and you can look down with me into chapter 4, and I'm reading from verse 6. I think just two verses today.

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 cause.

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 is appearing. Amen.

So really the theme that we're going to consider for a little while this morning is that of finishing, finishing well, finishing strong. And you remember that when we were in chapter 2, we looked at several verses there where Paul was talking to Timothy and encouraging him to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. And then he speaks in the fifth verse about if a man also strive for masteries, yet he is not crowned except he strive lawfully.

And then there was the third category here, the husbandman, that laboreth must first be partaker of the fruits. But I'm looking at verse 5 there just for a moment, where it seems quite evident that having referred to the Christian life as being a soldier, and in the third category, the farmer, the hardworking farmer, in this central category, verse 5, I think the idea here is perhaps the Olympic runner, and his word there in that situation is the man is not going to finish well, he's not going to be crowned except he strive lawfully. And that verse comes to my mind as we're looking at these verses here in the fourth chapter, because we want to concern ourselves with the whole concept of finishing and finishing well.

But the only hope that we have of finishing well, or at least I can say that the primary issue is that we start properly. And I think that's where so many go wrong. And we've come to this point on a number of occasions.

But the person who's running, they've got to start the race lawfully. In other words, they've got to wait until the gun goes, or whatever the signal is to start the race. And with other factors we could think about, they have to be in order, they've got to be properly prepared, and they've got to be in the proper place and position.

And they've got to wait until the signal, it's got to be done legally. If there's something that's amiss at that stage, then they're not going to win the race. They're not going to be in the race.

And the same is true, I believe, so far as the Christian life is concerned. I think we would be missing a very vital factor if we ignore that fact, the fact and the issue of beginning right, if we have any hope of finishing right. And the Christian life is not something that we, as men and women, just make a decision to become part of.

We think today is the day we're going to join the church, we're going to become a Christian now, and so on. But we believe very strongly that the Bible presents a way, a means, a provision whereby we can become truly Christian men and women. And that is first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit of God.

And to become a genuine Christian, the experience will always commence with the Spirit of God illuminating truth, the truth of the gospel, to our hearts. And then with that illumination, there must be a response from our hearts, a response that is genuine. And so with those few comments as an introduction, I believe very strongly to be a genuine Christian, there needs to be this work of the Spirit of God, the full and wholehearted response and engagement with that which God is opening up to us.

And as the result of that, there will always be, and we expect there to be, empirical evidence that what has taken place has been absolutely genuine and real. In other words, we're trying to draw a contrast between a theoretical identification or, if you like, response to a message that we call the gospel. But if it's a

response to the work of God and it's a response that's wholehearted, there will be an awakening, there will be evidence, there will be evidence that is beyond question.

It's verifiable evidence that this man has become truly a Christian. And so much so that there's a sense in which we would imagine ourselves saying, as a blind man once said, a man who was once blind, he said, I was blind, but now I see. And I don't think I can emphasize this too strongly to us.

We need to get this for our own personal benefits, for time and for eternity. We need to get it in order to be good ministers, faithful ministers of the truth, that we're not talking about passing on theories or concepts, which may indeed be biblical, but we're talking about a dynamic work of the Spirit of God that is giving to a person an opportunity to make a response from the deepest parts of their inward being. They get hold of what God is offering, and the net result is the Spirit of God brings about a transformation in our inner life that is real.

We don't drift into becoming a Christian. It's something that is a miracle of God. Someone was talking to me just the other day, and the conversation was about miracles.

We want to see miracles. I believe that a genuine new birth is a miracle of God, because it's not just a change of mind or an identification with information, as I'm saying, but it is a work of God that changes us. It's verifiable.

It's real. Amen. That being the case, that being in place, then I think we can afford to move on and say that we understand that just as there is a beginning, there is an ending.

There is a finishing line, and there's a whole life to be lived in between, of course, and that's where we are today. But I would suggest to you that for every man and woman, I'll keep saying, that has a genuine new birth work of the Spirit of God that so transforms them, there will, from that point, be found in their hearts a desire that perhaps rises beyond a desire that becomes a passion, that at some point, somewhere down the road of this journey, we will finish strong, that we'll finish well. And that is illustrated powerfully for us and graphically, I think, here, as we look into this epistle, and we look at the Apostle Paul, because we're looking at a man who had that kind of work of the Spirit of God in the early lives, in his early life.

Sorry, I was distracted by someone just then. As you know, on the Damascus Road, and we have the evidence of the transformation in his life. We have the evidence of a life being lived to the glory of God, a minister, an apostle of the gospel.

And here, we're seeing him at that late stage in his experience. And would it be too much for me to suggest, as we read these words in this epistle, that we're looking at a man of God who has a very fixed, upward gaze. If you picture him as a runner, and he's running, and he's close to the finishing line.

And in his life, he's looking up. He's got a fixed gaze as he's still pursuing this journey. His face is glowing.

He's not tired. He's not dribbling toward an end. But there's energy.

There's purpose. There's focus. And if you like, his lungs are filled still with holy breath as he's running toward this finishing line.

He's sprinting toward the finishing line. And he's finishing strong. And the fascinating thing about this for the apostle is that we take a different kind of look at him.

And we say, well, here's a man who has every reason to be filled with anxiety, existential anxiety. He's not merely looking at the certainty of physical death, but he's looking at the method whereby he is going to die, of which he is fully aware. And it's a brutal death.

It's violent. And yet, notwithstanding this fact, there's a calmness about him that is unmistakable. And he's composed.

He's not falling apart here. He's not panicking. And as we read this epistle, he's in complete control of himself.

He's not changed into a different person. He's still the man that we found in the earlier epistles as a younger minister of the gospel, fervent in his spirit and focused in his preaching. But nothing's changed in spite of his circumstances.

And not only is he calm and composed, but there's a confidence about him. We saw that, I think, in a very real way in the eighth verse. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day.

He is confident beyond any doubt at all that he is going to move from this scene of time into the presence of the Lord. And we could say, well, here lies the secret for him, certainly, and the secret of his calm spirit at this point in time. I want to just mention, too, that there's no suggestion here of him believing in what some people call soul sleep.

But this is the man who has said already on an earlier occasion, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. He's not just merely going to go into this soul sleep stage until some future thing happens. Certainly, he taught and believed in the resurrection of the body.

But at the same time, he believed that at the moment of leaving this world, even though he's going to leave it physically in a very violent way, there was this confidence that he himself would immediately pass into the presence of the Lord. To be absent from the body is to be present with Christ. And so there's no slackening in his pace.

He has sought to live for the glory of God. And we're watching a man who is intent upon dying to the glory of God. As I've said, his focus was not lost in any way at all or diminished.

His focus is on the gospel. And the words of the truth of the gospel, as we've been seeing in the earlier sessions. And his concern is for other people.

He's not preoccupied with himself, you know, self-pity and so on. But he's a man who is still on fire for God. It was Charles Wesley, who was not at the same stage in his journey, but who said, it is worth living for this to administer bliss and salvation in Jesus' name.

And Wesley also said, anticipating that one day he would arrive at this stage, he said, happy if with my latest breath, I may but gasp his name, preach him to all and cry in death, behold, behold, the Lamb. And in referring to Wesley, who of course lived many, many years after the Apostle Paul, but we can see the same spirit, the same heart in that man there. And what a wonderful thing that is, certainly.

I suppose the question that we could ask ourselves at this point, you know, as he speaks about being ready to move on from this scene of time. He's conscious that his life is coming to an end in this world.

And he speaks in the seventh verse, I've fought a good fight, I've finished my course, I've kept the faith.

What specifically is it that he feels that he has finished? It's not merely the end of his life. He's certainly well aware of that, his life in this world that is. But he speaks about this course, I've finished my course.

You may remember that in a different set of circumstances altogether, many years earlier, recorded in Acts chapter 20, Paul says, he's just been, he's with a group of the brethren. And there's a man who is recognized as a prophet, his name was Agabus. And he's made a prophecy pertaining to Paul and to his future, which on a human level could be thought to be quite frightening.

But Paul's response to that was this, he said, I count not my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course. So that I might finish my course with joy. And the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

An earlier statement in the same passage, same context, he says, what are you trying to do to make me weep and to break my heart? He says, do you not know that I'm ready? And I don't count my life dear to myself. These are profound statements, profound statements that challenge our hearts, as we are not in identical circumstances in which he finds himself in 2 Timothy. Here we are in the midst of our life somewhere on our journey here, we're alive, we're professing to be Christian men.

But may the Lord challenge us deeply as we look at this Christian man, who is such a tremendous and powerful example for us. And to be able to say, I don't count my life dear to myself, is a very profound statement. And he goes on, as we've seen, to say, so that, in order that.

In other words, he saw that if he was preoccupied with himself, there would be no hope at all that he would be able to complete the course, the course of ministry that God had delegated and entrusted to him. And not only did he want to be intent upon finishing what God had brought him into, but he said, I want to finish it with joy. I want to finish it well.

I want to finish it completely. And he speaks about his life and the course of ministry and opportunity that God was entrusting to him and the ministry. Paul understood that this was an unspeakable privilege that God had entrusted this to him.

And he cherished that fact. Indeed, this wasn't something that he'd come up with. It wasn't some plan that he'd come up with.

It wasn't just a human desire. I want to be a preacher or something. But he knew that God had directly chosen him, specifically chosen him, intercepted him along the way of his life, and initiated him into this great ministry.

And when we read Paul saying, I want to complete this course, I don't imagine him just standing there as he was, Acts chapter 20, and I want to finish it well. But he understood that if he was going to finish it well, he had to live his life properly. And he wasn't imagining himself sort of parked in a lay-by or in some kind of waiting room for that event, for that final experience.

He understood that this was something that had to be lived out in every moment of his life. It had to be true that he was completing his divinely entrusted assignments daily. You know what I mean? It's one thing to say, well, I know that at some point I'm going to finish this race and I want to finish well.

But what we're learning, I think, from the apostle is that while he had that clearly fixed in his heart and mind that not only did he start well, he wanted to finish well, but he was seeing to it that along the journey of his life, he was listening to the direction of God and that he was fulfilling properly and completely whatever it was that God was assigning to him at that point. So we've got Acts chapter 20, we hear Paul saying, listen, I'm ready to die and I want to complete this ministry and I want to finish well that I may complete the course. And here in chapter 4 of 2nd Timothy, we're hearing the same man say, I've finished it.

And I think we can sense that at that moment, rather than fear gripping his heart, he's filled with joy. It's been a wonderful, wonderful journey. I think if in reading this section of scripture and trying to imagine what it must have been like for anyone who was still with him, clearly there were people, as we shall see, who were with him at this particular moment in his journey.

I would think there would be different questions that we would want to ask him. And you say, Paul, that you've finished the course that God has given you. Do you feel you've done it perfectly? And I think Paul would say, oh, no, no.

Which takes me back to Philippians chapter 3. He said, not that we're already perfect. What about this, Paul? You know, as you look back on this glowing record, were there ever disappointments that you experienced? I think he might smile and say, yeah, he might do. And he would say, of course, of course.

He might draw our attention to some things that are recorded in this very epistle where he would say, all those that are of Asia, that they've left me. One kind of a disappointment is that. That's where he spent so much of his life traveling and preaching.

And is he just using hyperbole here when he says this? Or did he really mean all those of Asia they've left me? And soon, and perhaps in another session, we'll think about some of these men who are named. Demas, you know, a man who traveled with him and shared ministry with him. He said, Demas has left me, having loved this present world.

And so on. Disappointments, I think his life was strewn with disappointments. Could you have done it better? Could you have lived? Could you have fulfilled your assignment better? And I think he'd say, absolutely.

Absolutely, yes, of course. But this I know, he would say, with every fiber in my being, with every desire and passion I have, I am oppressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Maybe this is a word for us in a particular way.

Do we feel that everything's been perfect this far since the day we first trusted Christ? Have there been failures? Have there been disappointments? Maybe they're current in our experience. We had hoped, I'm gathering those words from a couple of disciples on the Emmaus Road, you may remember, we had hoped, well, I had hoped, we all would probably say that we'd hope that such and such would have happened or such and such had not happened. We would have hoped that certain things would have worked out differently.

Well, that's life. And that was true in the life of this apostle. But it didn't in any way discourage him at that deepest level of his inward being where he remained focused on him.

I think one of my other questions might have been, do you have any regrets? That fits into that category as well, doesn't it? Yeah, we have regrets. Do you wish you'd done things differently? Do you wish you had obeyed more fully? Perhaps I'm asking myself that question rather than the apostle Paul. But we would be answering in the affirmative time and time again.

But it's a great thing in terms of the word regret in the broadest sense that we're asking Paul and saying, do you have any regrets that you ever started this journey? And yes, he would be very strongly responding to that. He was a man with no regrets at all. We don't get it wrong.

Sense a trace of regret in him at all. It was Warren Wearsby who said this. He said, it is heartening to be able to look back and have no regrets.

Paul was not always popular, nor was he usually comfortable, but he remained faithful. And that's what really counted. As Paul is writing or dictating this letter, there's no question he's reflecting a little bit here at this point in time.

He is looking back over his shoulder when he makes these statements that I've read to you at the beginning. He knew that in spite of things not always turning out the way he perhaps would have expected them to, he knew this, that to the very best of his ability, he'd sought to be faithful to the fight. And you know, actually, the Greek word here that's translated fight, it's the Greek word *agon*, which, I mean, it's very suggestive, even that far, the agony.

That's where that word is coming from. And another translation, translator, suggests that we should read that statement. I have struggled the good struggle.

I've fought the good fight. I've struggled the good struggle. In other words, there were many, many aspects of this journey that involved conflict.

And of course, this is true for you and for me. I mean, there's the world which is antagonistic toward us. We're seeing that in ever brighter colors in these days, aren't we? As we listen to the news and we watch what's happening politically and so on that we who still currently live in a relatively accommodating context so far as living out the Christian life in our culture here.

That's not true for our brethren in other parts of the world. And I think we'd be like ostriches with our heads in the sand if we fail to recognize that these opportunities and privileges are closing down very, very rapidly. But the world, the world is, remains an enemy to the things of God.

The Apostle John says, to love the world is to be an enemy of God. But the world, what is the world? It's, well, in a sense, it's everything that's out there. It's people.

This can be enlarged upon tremendously, but it's people, it's places, and it's things that are around us continually. It's the world. And the world is not favorable to us at all.

It's in conflict, and we're in conflict with it. And Paul knew that he was. And then, of course, the scriptures teach us, and we may know from our own experience, one way or another, that there is a real devil.

There are real evil powers. There is a dark kingdom. The unseen world is continuing to be in complete opposition to Christ and to the things of Christ, thereby to the gospel and to the people of God, to those who are truly his.

We're told, clearly by this same apostle, that were to die to the world, and the world is to be dead to us, right into the Galatians. The same apostle tells us, when it comes to the devil and these powers of darkness, we're to resist the devil. But there's conflict that's taking place.

And then there's another category that the Bible speaks about, and the apostle certainly speaks about this, and that is the flesh. And you will have seen, and I've said this many times over the years, but with the word flesh in our English language, we're just playing with the word. We're not saying that this is going to be true in other languages by any means.

But in our English language, if you drop the H from the word flesh and then read the word back, it's the word S-E-L-F. It's self. And, you know, I believe that self is the greatest enemy that we face.

Greater yes than the world. Greater yes than the devil. Paul said, I've struggled the good struggle.

I've fought the good fight. He faced this. And, you know, I think this is, for us, we're a group of men here.

One of the most widespread problems, I think, among the men who would profess to be Christians, male believers, is that very frequently it would appear that they never really, or they infrequently make it into true godly manhood. Let me put it this way. Godly men, they abandon childish things.

And I think we could pause and we could have some dialogue and what could we understand childish things to be in the lives of grown men. We won't go there this morning. I think the statement speaks for itself.

But godly men, they abandon childish things. When I was a child, you remember what Paul had to say about that. We thought as a child, and we lived like children, we behaved like children.

But when I became a man, I put away childish things. Is that true in your life? We're talking about failure to progress into godly maturity as men, godly manhood. But in so many cases, our manhood is emasculated by our inability or refusal to actually abandon the childish things that are inhibiting the development of true masculinity, spiritual masculinity, which in my mind is another word for Christlikeness for us.

Godly men resist worldly lusts, worldly desires. They resist them. Godly men are hard on themselves in matters of obedience and in matters of personal discipline.

They're hard on themselves. And I believe Paul was such a man. He, whenever childish things were in his experience, they were gone.

Worldly lusts, he had no time for them. He was so engaged in the things of Christ and his gaze was singular, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. And there's no question, he was a man who was hard on himself.

And he was not pampering himself. As is so common for men who call themselves Christians today. He was disciplined and fully and completely obedient to that which God was speaking into his heart.

He said, I've been faithful to the fight. He also goes on to say here that he had been faithful to the faith. And by that, I understand him to be referring to the whole body of truth which we have here in our scriptures and what God was revealing to him at that particular time.

And he was being faithful and he was able to look back without regret. He said, I've been faithful to that body of truth, to that which God has revealed to me and made known to me. And he clearly was not a man who merely embraced that truth.

When he speaks about being faithful to it, it was more than just protecting the words. He did that. We've made much of that in earlier sessions.

And he was concerned that it'd be protected as he talks to Timothy and so forth. But the fact is, to him, the truth was not merely information to hear, to grasp, to understand. But it was a means to actually experiencing what the truth was enunciating, what it was all about and so on.

So it was not merely to obey it, but it was to embrace it, but it was to obey it. And I believe what I'm reading here when he says that he'd been faithful to the faith is that he'd lived without hypocrisy. That is, he'd not compromised his message by the way he lived his life.

In so many ways, we can make great claims. This is a danger for preachers. And we're all called to be preachers, as Dave reminded us earlier.

Certainly, it's one thing to understand the theory and to seek to pass that theory on to other people. But in many, many cases, the power of that ministry is lost because of compromise in our lives. In other words, where there's hypocrisy because we're not living out in our lives what we're claiming to believe, he held it firmly and he lived it fully.

You are to hold it firmly and live it fully. I think also Paul understood something else about being faithful to the faith. And that was the way to truly hold on to the truth is to give it away.

He was so anxious for Timothy to have the grasp of it and to hold on to it and to protect it and guard it and so forth as we've seen. But at the same time, he says, preach it, preach it. And it's wonderfully true that there's something that is so affirming that takes place in our lives when we are in the process of giving it out.

When we're in the process of giving it away. And I think that would be something that we all can relate to very readily in those moments. Hopefully, it's not an irregular, infrequent experience.

But in the moment when we're sharing the truth of God with someone, we're being affirmed ourselves. The truth is being strengthened in our own hearts. This man was, well, he was faithful to the cause.

He stayed on course. He was faithful to the fight. He was faithful to the faith.

And yes, he was faithful to the finish, to the end. And this is really the ultimate test, isn't it? We need the right kind of beginning. We need to live right day by day.

But the real proof, the seal of it all, I'm seeing it in the apostle, is the way he's finishing. Someone said, you die the way you've lived. That's certainly true here.

As we look at this particular man, it's the enduring. He that endures to the end shall be saved, we read. It's living this life without hypocrisy, without compromise, and living it fully day by day, fulfilling all of our daily challenges and assignments, fully to the glory of God, not getting mixed up with the world, not giving any place to the devil, not pampering ourselves, but living fully for Christ day by day, and finishing well at the end.

I hope you don't think that this is some kind of bragging, but this comes to my mind. I won't tell you what the circumstances were, but many, many years ago, I received an award for bravery and tenacity in the course of duty. It's the word tenacity that comes to my mind.

It means quite literally, to grip firmly and with determination. Gripping firmly with determination and not to let go at all. Tenacity is to get hold and keep hold.

For me in my situation, that was an event that I'm referring back to these many years later. So evidently, I was being complimented for tenacity in that situation. But the challenge facing each and every one of us, and this I think is a secret to what we're really looking at here, is that we may be men of tenacity who live tenaciously in this respect here.

It's one thing to say, well, in such and such a situation, I did well there, but how are you doing today? How is it on a daily basis as you think about the way that you are expending your life, the way that you're living your life? Are we men and women of tenacity? Tenacity not only gets hold of something tightly, but it continues to hold onto it, whatever, whatever happens, whatever's happening around us. And there is the great challenge for us. And I believe that for a man and woman of God to finish strong, they are those who supremely, I think, have lived in this context of commitment to Christ and with this commitment to live out or to allow the life of Christ to be lived out through us continually in every situation, there needs to be something of tenacity about us.

I submit to you, this is a feature of true godliness in a man claiming to be a man of God. The thing about this tenacity that I'm thinking about now is it's kind of, it's double-sided. It is, first of all, it's a divine tenacity.

I'll explain what I mean in just a moment. And it's my tenacity. And there needs to be a coming together of the two.

Let me just read to you, I'm looking back to Philippians chapter 3 where I've referred to already, but let me read it to you. He says, oh dear, how do you break into this section here? This is that section where he's saying that he's counting all things loss for Christ. His commitment is to be found in him not having his own righteousness, but that which is through faith in Christ and so on.

That's verse 9. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death. If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead, not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after. If that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. I'm sorry to have read that so quickly, but time is racing ahead for me here. But do you see that in verse 12, he said, that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended.

And the word here, the whole idea that Paul has got here is that God has tenaciously got hold of him and his life and is not about to let go. He's apprehended. He's arrested him.

He's got hold of him. He's not going to let him go. And he's not going to let you go either.

But Paul talked about the other side of this, the double-sided feature of tenacity in this context is this, that Paul got hold of Christ. It reminds me, on Sunday evening, we're talking about Jacob and that moment

where he's been intercepted by the God-man, you remember. And the God-man was getting hold of him, but soon as this section unfolds, we find that Jacob has got hold of him.

There's this both sides, and that's to take place in each and every one of our lives. If we're going to live right, without compromise, and if we're going to die well, finish well at the end of this journey. And just going back to this text, as a matter of fact, there's a man, I don't know if you have any books by him, but I recommend Kenneth West, spelled W-U-E-S-T.

He was a Greek scholar and very helpful with Greek words. And he gives us a translation of the New Testament based on his understanding of the words. But he takes this phrase, that I may lay hold, that I may apprehend.

And this is what he said. He said, Paul has used strong language. The word apprehend is from the same Greek word translated attained, but with a preposition prefixed, which means in its local force, down.

He wants to catch hold of it and pull it down. Like a football player, who not only wants to catch his man, but he wants to pull him down and make him his own. It's American football, obviously, not the real kind.

But do you get that? That I may apprehend, get hold, and bring him down fully. And that's what Paul is talking about. This is a godly man living with this godly spiritual tenacity.

And he recognizes God's got hold of him. And in response, he grabs hold and grasps hold to him. As Paul reflected on this journey, I believe he saw it as a worthy race.

It was worth it all. Was it worth it, Paul? Was it worth it? And he adds this and supports this by saying, in the passage that we've been reading, verse 6, I am now ready to be offered. And the time of my departure is at hand.

When he says that I'm ready to be offered, once again, the text from which this is translated refers here to a drink offering. Do you remember of old Jacob on an earlier occasion and the one I've just referred to? Do you remember him pouring out his drink onto a rock? Do you remember? It was the rock he'd been sleeping on. And he called it Bethel.

Do you remember? It was his way at that time of making an offering. It was a liquid offering to God. That's what he was doing.

And then as we move on through the passage of Scripture which describes the various offerings that God legislated for the people of God of old, there were times these drink offerings. The idea was that it was indeed a liquid offering. It was a wine.

It was something to sweeten the offering, as it were, that they were making to God. I'm told that it wasn't unusual in Rome I suppose higher levels of society that at the end of a meal there was always a glass of wine that they poured out. And in a sense, it was to their gods.

And it was also an indication that the feast was completed, the meal was completed. And I think these ideas are all gathered together in the heart of the apostle. Was it worth it, Paul? Was it worth it? He said, right now, the next thing that's going to happen to me is going to be like as though my blood is a liquid offering to God poured on the sacrifice of my life that I've sought to live sacrificially to God.

I want my life's blood now to sweeten the offering of my life to God. And he said, I'm ready for it. I'm ready for it.

And also, at the same time, he said, that's not the end because I'm anticipating that I'm going to be ushered into the presence of Christ himself and I'm going to receive a crown. The word used is Stephanos. For the word crown, it wasn't a diadem.

It's a victor's crown. The Stephanos was a victor's crown. So he's looking back.

I've fought a good fight. I've finished the course. I've made full proof of the ministry.

I'm ready now to be poured out like a drink offering. And I believe, by the grace of God, that it's all been done in such a way that God would be pleased with my life in that important day. How contrasting to King Saul, who at the end of his life said, I have played the fool and erred exceedingly.

I played the fool. What a contrast. We quit too soon and too easily.

Someone wrote this. A finisher is not one who has no wounds and scars, but one who is faithful to the finish. And I'm going to close.

Let me ask you, are you satisfied with how things are today? Are you heading in the right direction? Are you living right? Or are you succumbing to compromise creep? And it does creep. One little compromise leads to another. One indiscipline leads to another.

We need to see what's happening. We need to allow God to speak to us. Perhaps he's highlighted something or some area to your life.

While we've been looking at this this morning, the question is, what are you going to do with it? What are you going to do? Are you just going to hear and let it pass? I suggest to you that if God has highlighted something, if God has spoken, that you find an early opportunity to get alone with God, face up to the issues, whatever they may be. Let God minister to you and wash you and impart his spirit freshly into your heart to strengthen you in your tenacious expression of the Christian life. And just one final thing.

Tell somebody. Tell somebody what's happened. Tell somebody what's happening in your life.

There's just something about doing that that, as I said earlier, it affirms you in your response to God. And in your commitment to live to his praise and to his glory. Amen.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the incredible privilege of ever being exposed to the truth of the gospel and to the sweetness and richness of your holy life. We thank you also, Lord, for your faithfulness to us, for continuing for many of us over the years to be faithful to us, to minister to us.

And at times, Lord, to take us to task and challenge us deeply, Lord, and remind us of areas where we have been compromising or we've allowed compromise to have an effect upon our lives. And we thank you for your grace, for your forgiveness, for your cleansing. For your encouragement.

Lord, we pray for one another this morning that you will continue to enable us to be focused men of God, tenaciously holding onto you, holding onto your truth, and yet paradoxically being very open about sharing that truth and giving it away to others, Lord. May we live to the praise of your glory. And may it start freshly for each one of us today.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

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