

A Crown of Righteousness Awaits the Faithful

Call to Worship: Psalm 111

1st Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1-4:5

2nd Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Hymn Insert- *10,000 Reasons*

Hymn Insert- *The Power of the Cross*

Hymn #477- *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus*

Introduction

When we come to the end of our short time here on this earth, looking back, what will be the gauge, by which, we measure the success of our lives? Looking to that day now, what will we have hoped to accomplish before we take our last breath? What do you consider a fulfilling life; one that will lead you to say, “Mission accomplished?”

Will it be the number of degrees and courses you have completed throughout your educational pursuits? Will it be the amount of money you have accrued or the material possessions you have come to possess; a significant inheritance that you can pass on to your future generations? Will it be your travel log, containing a list of places that you have been able to see, throughout the whole world? Will it be any number of accomplishments that you have reached in a career, in sports, in weight training or in any other active sphere of life? Will it be your philanthropic labors, and how well you have been able to “give back” to society and others in life? Will it be simply experiencing the married life, raising children, seeing grandchildren and great grandchildren come from your loins? What end/s, are you ultimately working to achieve and accomplish, throughout the course of your very short life, which is moving toward its final destination rather quickly? To what greater purpose/s are you striving, in this life?

In 1953, a man by the name of Hugh Hefner had founded and launched a very successful magazine (by the world’s standards), which drove him to enjoy a life of luxury, wealth and sexual nirvana, that would last for nearly sixty-five years, until he died on September 27, 2017. And, by the way, he was a well known philanthropist. Most would covet the life that he lived. Would that be considered a life of success and prosperity; a “mission accomplished,” in your estimation? Well, maybe there’s a little too much immorality in that file, but how about the life of a man like David Rockefeller, son of John D Rockefeller Jr., and grandson to the infamous John D Rockefeller. David not only inherited a large fortune, but he himself also became a very

successful banker, coming to be worth approximately 3.3 billion dollars at the time of his death in March of 2017. He enjoyed 101 years of life, 56 of which, he was married to his wife Peggy (who died in 1996), and he was able to watch his six very influential children successfully grow under the umbrella of his own successes. Perhaps, that would be the ideal success, to which, people at least ought to strive? If you could find yourself, at least somewhere, realistically on the ladder, which is topped by such men, would that be worthy of a last breath “mission accomplished” from your lips?

We’ve been drawing to the close of Paul’s Second letter to Timothy, written by a man, who has come to the end of his days, and who has seemed to go in the very opposite direction of the two men that I have just mentioned, not meeting the world’s standard of success, by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, Paul, who was once a very promising Pharisee of Pharisees, among the religious elite of his people, was compelled to throw that life away, so as to embrace a life of self-denial, ongoing suffering and perpetual persecution, as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Indeed, at the time that he had written this letter, he was wrongfully imprisoned for the heinous crime of preaching the Gospel, standing on death row, waiting to be beheaded in the not too distant future.

And now, as he was seeking to exhort Timothy to be willing to endure the same, for the sake of the Gospel, we find him leaving Timothy with the very seal of this letter; the reality of Paul’s own pending death, and what he expected beyond that veil. As he would exhort Timothy to remain steadfast and faithful to the end, he follows up all that he has stated with the testimony of his own uncompromising witness, as one who is now about to break the tape at the finish line. And this is Paul’s way of saying, “I have not commanded you to do anything more than I myself have already done. Follow my footprints. Keep the big picture in mind, and come home with me, Timothy!”

I. Paul Has the Finish Line in Sight

Paul then begins his closing testimony with these words, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand” (vs. 6). In the first portion of this verse, Paul is intentionally using the language of sacrifice, alluding to a drink offering,

which often accompanied the sacrifices offered by the Israelites, at the temple. And his purpose for this is twofold: First, he recognized his imminent death as an offering to the Lord (not in an atoning sense, which would be blasphemous, but in a service sense), which would seal the faithful testimony of his labors as an Apostle. Remember, Paul is imprisoned and due to be martyred not because of any wrong he had done, but specifically because of his faithful gospel labors as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. And so, his testimony would be sealed to this end; a drink offering poured out before the Lord, at His heavenly altar, as it were.

And then, secondly, no doubt, Paul, being aware that his death would be a bloody one (ultimately, he would be beheaded), painted a picture of the upcoming reality, by alluding to the blood that was often poured out and splashed against the side of the bronze altar, when animals were sacrificed. Again, Paul is in no way indicating that his death would provide any form of atonement, but it was a sacrificial service unto the Lord, nonetheless. That being the case, again, the onus is now on Timothy, to likewise, faithfully finish his course without compromise, in accordance with all that Paul has fervently commanded in this Letter.

This is further affirmed, when Paul adds, "...and the time of my departure is at hand," indicating, both, that Paul was well aware of the fact that his death was imminent, and, that his death was not permanent, but rather, a mere gateway (a departure) into the eternal life that he so longed for, since the time of his conversion. For, as he told the Philippians, to die was much more preferable, since he would then be home, perfected, and with Christ, His blessed Lord and Savior!

Moving on then, he leaves those great and profound words of encouragement with Timothy (and with us, through Scripture), which ought to compel all of Christ's suffering and weary saints to press on in the fight of the faith. "I have fought the good fight..." (vs. 7a). It has not been an easy road, by any stretch of the imagination, for Paul. Trials and tribulations awaited him at every city that he entered, to preach the gospel. The suffering was great, the trials were difficult (and often long), the persecution was intense (to the point that he even despaired of life, at times), the waywardness of the churches he had planted, brought much sorrow...but nonetheless, Paul stayed the course. He fought the good fight. He never abandoned his post in

the battle. He bore the marks of Christ without compromise, when turning aside at any point, could have offered him a much more convenient, comfortable and painless way.

Having used the *battle* analogy, Paul then also turns to the Olympic running analogy, to provide an additional illustration that could help exemplify what he has attained in the grace of Christ. “I have finished the race...” (vs. 7b). Certainly, by this illustration, Paul would have Timothy reflect upon the persevering agony of pushing through a lengthy race, unwilling to look back, with the mind set on one thing...getting across that finish line! So much goes into preparing for and running an important race, and the one who does so, is willing to exert all of the energy necessary to win and finish that race, so that, he can enjoy the exhilarating moments found at its completion. And so, if the “war/fight” analogy, exemplifies well, the blood, sweat and anguish spent when striving to win the war, then the “race” analogy exemplifies well the perseverance and drive to get to the end. And in both cases, sacrifice, discipline, alertness, hard work, and steadfast focus are in view, with the end result being a significant motivation for enduring the path to that end. Here, so close to glory, Paul can say, “My work is done! I’ve finished the race!”

“I have kept the faith.” That is, Paul, by the grace of God has not let go of his faith in Christ, and the embodiment of truth which makes up that faith, centered upon the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel. He lived as this world’s exile, bearing his cross the whole way, denying himself, with his heart and mind fixed on his eternal home in glory. He never went back to the City of Destruction, but like Christian/Pilgrim from Pilgrim’s Progress, he made it! Many fell along the way, but he kept the faith!

And because of this, Paul could say what he says in verse 8, beginning with the word, “Finally!” Can you hear the profound expression of that word and all that went into it? Take Paul’s entire life in Christ, even what we only know in the Scriptures, and you can appreciate the power behind his war and race analogies... “Finally...I can put the sword down. I can stop looking in every direction for the next trial and source of persecution. I can stop toiling and laboring by the sweat of my brow. I can stop running! I can rest!” “Oh, what precious joy and relief! I can rest!” Do you hear the sound of Paul speaking those words, brethren?

“*Finally*, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (vs. 8).

Paul had a crown awaiting him, and now he was about to obtain it. Not a temporal crown, like the ones that are coveted by the rulers of this world, which passes from one head to another upon death. But an eternal crown, and the greatest quality of a crown...a crown *of righteousness!* The most desirable crown imaginable, which allows a once fallen, damned and condemned image bearer of God, to dwell and enter into the very presence of our eternal, all holy God, at all times! The crown of a prince, a prince who is the son/daughter of the great King of kings, our eternal, omnipotent God! There is no greater royalty to be desired! There is no greater position to be desired! All of our media sources hold out the lives of king’s and princes and presidents and governors of this world, who bear earthly crowns that rot and decay and don’t last. But, the crown to be coveted is the crown of righteousness, which Christ Himself has merited by His own cross, and which He gives to those who are His. The crown entails both salvation and sonship! The crown is for redeemed princes and princesses, who share their Father’s inheritance! The crown of righteousness is God’s way of saying, “You are not only redeemed; you are not only welcomed into My presence, but you are also welcomed into My family, as a co-heir with My Son, who gladly shares His kingdom with you!

Notice, it is not a crown of *Paul’s* righteousness. It is not a crown that has been earned or gained on the basis of Paul’s merits or even the fact that he has finished his fight and race, as exemplary as that is for us. No, it is a crown of righteousness, earned solely by the merits of Jesus Christ, who gives it to whomever He so desires. And those whom He desires to receive it, are those who come to Him with a true, genuine and sincere faith, which submits to His authority and reign! This was the crown, which Paul was soon to receive. And the Lord, the righteous Judge (indicating that He is both able to legally give it to whomever He pleases, without tarnishing the righteous justice of God one iota); He is the one who will give it to Paul! The righteous Judge of all the earth, who was given this authority to judge all living creatures at His resurrection, is the One who would give it to Paul! Paul can be certain of this, because this Lord Jesus has promised to give it not only to Paul, but to all who have loved His appearing. That is

to say, that all who have repented of their sins and turned their lives over to this Christ, in submission to His Lordship and will, and in trusting in His worthy sacrifice for salvation... they who have loved His appearing (His incarnation, life, death and resurrection; in summary, the whole of His Person, work and mission); they will receive this crown.

And though Paul would secure this crown upon his imminent death, it would ultimately be placed upon his head, at the Lord's final appearing, when the body and soul are, once again, united together, perfect and without even the possibility of decay or death. And this is the final hope; the glorious scene of the completion of the redemption of Christ's people, which is why Paul broadens the blessing, from beyond himself, to all people, who have embraced and loved Christ and His gospel to the end. And this is what the whole creation yearns for (with birth pangs), as a woman in labor, yearning for the birth of her child...the revealing of the glorious sons and daughters of God [Romans 8]!

And this is where the great relevance for Timothy comes into play, even in Paul's success, as Paul brings this reality back to fulfill the purpose and completion of this Letter, saying as it were, "Timothy, I am finished. The crown lies before me. Meet me there, Timothy! Give heed to all that I have said in this letter!"

II. Closing Thoughts

What is your "mission accomplished" ideal, for when you come to the end of your short life on this earth? Is it a Hugh Hefner or a David Rockefeller ideal? Or is it in keeping with the Apostle Paul, who suffered and lost much in this world, but, "kept the faith?" Are you a "big picture," beyond this vapor of a lifetime traveler? Or, is your entire trajectory and vision bound to temporal things, within the four walls of this dying world? Where does the path that you are on, lead to?

Brethren, are you still in the race? Are you still in the battle? Are you focused upon and driven by the crown of righteousness, which Christ will give to His people, or are you living in pursuit of short-lived, corruptible earthly crowns? Do you welcome death, not so much as an enjoyable experience in itself, but as a departure unto another, far better, location? [Ill. We recently went to Florida, and we knew that when we got on that plane at LGA airport that we

were simply departing to another location. Death is like that for the believer. It's simply a means of transportation unto eternal glory with Christ!]

You see, brethren, the compelling motivation to endure and to sacrifice this life for the sake of Christ and His church, is the anticipation of what we expect at the end of the battle, and at the end of the race. The perseverance through trial and suffering, and losing this life, is a path to an end, and that end, is to be forever in glory with Christ! We commit this life unto serving His kingdom purposes, anticipating reigning with Him forever in heaven. But, you can't have the best of both worlds. Only those who bear the cross now, will wear the crown then!

And let me close then, by asking all who are here, "Are you truly ready to die?" The gateway through the grave is a portal, through which, we all must soon pass. You do realize that, don't you? But, are you ready? Are you ready to stand before your holy God, who is your Creator? ...only if you are in Christ!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25