

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/30/92  
II Timothy 4:6-8 "Who Wins in the Race of Life?"

**Intro:**

The Bible uses several images to portray the Christian life.

1. A Image from Battle--The Christian life is a battle, and we are soldiers of Christ.  
Eph 6:11 "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand..."
2. An Image from Botany--Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches.  
Jn 15:5 "I am the vine, and you are the branches. He that abides in Me..."  
Ps 1 "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel...he shall be like a tree"  
Gal 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love..."
3. An Image from Biology--The Church is a Body.  
Eph 4:15-16 "But speaking the truth in love may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies..."  
I Pt 2:2 "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word that you...grow"

So the Bible presents the Christian life from a variety of perspectives. We are like soldiers in a battle, branches in a vine, members in a body. But there's another very popular image, one of my favorites. The Christian life is like a Race.

I Cor 9:24 "Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain."

Ph 3:14 "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ"

Heb 12:1-2 "Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight...and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus..."

If you are in Christ this morning, you're in a race. That may not be new to you.

Q: What KIND of race are you running? What's your perspective of the race?

A: I'm convinced right here is where a fundamental breakdown occurs frequently today. Right here is the reason there are so many floundering, weak, discouraged, disenchanted Christians. They have the wrong perception of the race.

Q: How do you envision the Christian life? What kind of race is it?

1. Is it like an early morning 3 mile jog?

Illust: I've been jogging this summer...

Some think it is. A leisurely stroll in the park. You fit it in if you have time. It makes you feel good if you do. But if the schedule is too hectic, it's no big deal to skip a day here and there.

2. Is it like a 100 meter dash?

For some it is. It's an intense, give it all you've got affair...for awhile. Serve in every church ministry available. Until you burn out, and hit the sidelines.

Listen. If you view the Christian life like a 3 mile job or a 100 meter dash, you don't have a biblical picture of the Christian life.

Q: What's the correct way to view the race of the Christian life?

**Proposition: In II Timothy 4:6-8, Paul shares with us his perspective of the Christian life. It involves 3 components.**

- I. The Runner (6)
  - A. Must be ready.
  - B. Must be realistic.
- II. The Race (7)
  - A. Fought
  - B. Finished
  - C. Kept
- III. The Reward (8)
  - A. What is it?
  - B. Who gives it?
  - C. Who receives it?

**I. The Runner (6)**

V 6 "For I am now ready to be offered..."

These are some of the most familiar and well-known words of the apostle Paul. He of course penned them within weeks, if not days, of his execution. His recipient was Timothy, his long time friend and fellow worker in the gospel ministry. When Paul wrote this letter, he was essentially passing the baton to his assistant. Tim was relatively young, and had a somewhat cautious temperament. As we saw last week, Paul wanted to embed in Tim's mind one last, vital charge...

4:1 "I charge you...Preach the Word..."

Q: Why was Paul so insistent, so firm, when he laid this task on the table?

A: V 6 "For..."

Paul's race was just about over. Was he dismayed? Was he dispondent? No. As the runner fixed his eyes on the finish line, 2 qualities emerge. Notice them. They ought to be true of us too.

A. Must be ready.

V 6 "For I am now ready to be offered"

The "I" is emphatic. Paul bares his soul to Tim. "I" am ready Tim! I am ready to be offered. The NASB puts it this way, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering."

We miss the thrust of Paul's words because of a cultural gap. Paul was a Jew. His terminology here grows out of Jewish sacrificial procedures mapped out in the OT. He viewed his life as a drink offering. According to the Law, as stated in Num 28:4-8 (and in 15:1-10), when a Jew offered a lamb or bull as a burnt offering, he was also to offer a drink offering. The drink offering was a special concoction of the fruit of the vine. I want you to know 3 things about the Drink Offering: One, It was an Offering. Two, It was offered as the final act of the sacrificial ceremony. And three, do you know how it was offered?

Num 28:7 It was..."poured unto the LORD."

That's the way Paul saw his life. He saw himself as a drink offering. There in that horrible, foul-smelling Roman dungeon, he was gradually being poured out as a sacrifice to God. Now that's perspective!

Quote: William Barclay observed this about Paul, "He did not think of himself as going to be executed; he thought of himself as going to offer his life to God. Ever since his conversion, he had offered everything to God--his money, his scholarship, his time, the vigor of his body, the acuteness of his mind, the devotion of his heart. Only life itself was left to offer, and gladly he was going to lay it down."

He was READY.

Q: How could he be ready? How could Paul say he was ready to die?

Listen. This was no whimsical statement. He was ready 7 years earlier and said so when he wrote to the Philippians.

Ph 1:21 "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Ph 1:23 "For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.")

Was Paul an escapist? Was it because he was couldn't cope with life that he wanted to get out of it? No. Paul loved life and lived life to the fullest. He was one of the most content men who ever lived. He wasn't running from problems when he said he was ready to die.

Q: How and why then could he say he was ready to die?

Key: He knew his death would come according to God's schedule, and not one day before or after.

Do you believe God is sovereign? Do you believe He is absolutely in control of your life, and even your death? Paul did. Listen to his testimony...

4:16-17 "At my first defense...I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

4:18 "And the LORD SHALL DELIVER ME...AND PRESERVE ME..."

Paul was ready. Listen. People who love and live for Jesus Christ have a supernatural fortitude that enables them to look death in the face and say, "I am ready."

Illust: Carrie Williams, John Roschi, "I am ready to go..."

Paul was also...

### B. Must be realistic.

V 6 "and the time of my departure is at hand."

Paul was not a "pie in the sky" sort of Christian. True, he was heavenly minded. He set his affections on things above (Col 3:1). He knew his citizenship was in heaven (Ph 3:20). But he also faced life's obstacles head on. He was realistic.

In fact, he had an amazing, realistic view of death. The subject of death is taboo for most Americans. We don't like to talk about it. We ignore it. Staggering numbers of people don't have a will. You should. I would also recommend you take necessary steps to prepare for your funeral arrangements while you are living. It makes it so much easier on you surviving family. But look at Paul's realistic view of his death.

Q: What did Paul call death in v 6?

A: "My Departure."

Watch this. Death is not a cessation. Death is a departure. Death is a change of residence. The word "departure" was a traveler's term in Paul's day. It was used of a soldier striking or loosing a tent. It was also used of boats. The last thing a sailor must do before heading out to sea is to untie the boat from its moorings. The cords that held Paul to this life were about to be cut. The time of his departure was at hand.

Q: Who sets the agenda for your schedule in life?

In Paul's case, God did. Paul realized he was living on borrowed time. Do you? He knew time was not his to waste. He was a steward. Jesus Christ was the Master. He knew that everything he had belonged to God--his time, his health, his skills, everything. He knew that God set the agenda for his life.

Key: As a steward of Jesus Christ, I have one basic task--To please my Master for as long as He chooses to give me life.

Q: Is that the way you view your life?

Listen. One day, all of us will die, unless Christ returns first. The time of our departure will come. We will change residences. Do you know for sure where you will go? There are only 2 choices: Heaven or hell.

Illust:

Tran: Remember the original question, "What kind of race is the Christian life?" There's 3 components to that answer--First the Runner.

## **II. The Race (7)**

In v 7, Paul describes the race itself.

Notice 3 claims Paul made. He's not boasting. But as he shares with Tim, he's very personal and autobiographical. For over 30 years, since that day Christ changed his life on the road to Damascus, Paul had run the race. He describes his race with 3 potent verbs:

### A. Fought

V 7 "I have fought a good fight"

"fought" = to contend for a prize, to struggle; lit. "I've struggled a good struggle." In fact, the greek word for fight is "agona" from which we get our word "agony."

Listen carefully to the testimony of a runner who had run his race, finished his race, and finished well. No one ever said the Christian life would be easy! It's a struggle! It involves agony! The course is hazardous! Why keep running then? Because after the course comes the crown!

Problem: Some want the crown NOW. In fact, there are plenty of religious teachers around that have developed an erroneous theology to make that possible. The "name it, claim it" Christianity. Look out for people who say if you're suffering, if you're poor, something is wrong with your Christian life.

Paul said he "fought." It's a perfect tense verb (all 3 are in v 7). A perfect tense verb is not a one time shot. It's something that started in the past and continues to the present.

Illust:

### B. Finished

V 7 "I have finished my course"

Now that's quite a claim. In a day when many Christian workers start in a flash, and fizzle in a hurry, it's rare to hear the words, "I have finished my course."

Observation: 4 of the most discouraging words to me as a pastor, "Well I used to..." "Well I used to attend church every service, I used to work with the youth, I used to be involved in the ministry, I used to..."

Listen. When it comes to the Christian life, there's no prize for starting well, only for finishing well.

Illust: I read about a very famous man. He was approached with the proposition that his biography should be written while he was still alive. He absolutely refused to give his permission, and gave this reason, "I have seen so many men fall out on the last lap."

The Christian life is not a 100 meter dash. It's a marathon.

Illust: Origin of marathon "Pheidippides"

### C. Kept

V 7 "I have kept the faith"

Paul said "the faith," not "my faith." What is "the faith"?

See: II Tim 1:14 "That good thing...keep." (also I Tm 6:20)

"The faith" is that sacred deposit which God entrusted to Paul, and to Tim, and to us. That sacred trust is the content of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Good News concerning the Person and Work of Jesus.

Paul could say, "I have kept it! I didn't get sidetracked from it! I didn't water it down to make it more palatable. I kept the faith."

Please notice v 7 again. When it came to the Christian life, Paul fought, ran, and kept. That's the way it is in a race. A runner has one consuming goal--to finish the race by doing his best.

Here's what Paul told the leaders in Ephesus, where Tim was now serving. Acts 20:24 "...so I might finish my course..."

Illust: Runner who pulled muscle in Barcelona 92, but finished!

Key: I'm not responsible for winning the race of life. I am responsible for finishing the race, for being faithful to the end.

Q: Are you giving your best to the Master right now? Are you?

Application:

Tran: The Christian life involves a runner and a race. You may ask, "Is it worth it? Why give my best? Why not just coast along like so many do?" Thirdly...

### III. The Reward (8)

Three questions about the reward...

#### A. What is it?

V 8 "...a crown of righteousness"

When a competitor won a race in the Greek games, he didn't get a gold medal. His reward was a garland made out of green leaves. Intrinsicly the prize had no value. What made the garland so valuable was what it represented. If you received a garland, it meant you finished and finished well, in fact, the best!

The reward made the race worthwhile for Paul. He knew the King of Kings was going to honor him for his faithful service. Just think of it. What did he say would be his?

"crown of righteousness"--either:

1. A Crown which is righteousness itself
2. A Crown which is a reward for righteousness in his life (Rev 22:12)

#### B. Who gives it?

V 8 "which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me"

Think about something. Where was Paul? In prison, on death row. Why? Because Emperor Nero declared him guilty, and condemned him. But what did Paul know? One day soon, Nero's corrupt ruling would be reversed! One day soon the Righteous Judge, Jesus Christ Himself, would declare Paul to be Righteous!

Do you ever get weary for doing what's right, and getting shafted anyway?

Illust:

Don't lose heart! Some day we'll all stand before the Righteous Judge.

#### C. Who receives it?

V 8 "to me...to all them that love His appearing"

Who will receive the crown of righteousness? Those who preached the best sermons? No. Those who led the most to Christ? No. Those who gave the most money to church? No. Who will?

Key: Those who love the appearing of Christ will receive the crown of right.

What does that mean? To love His appearing means you long for His return. This word is a perfect tense participle as well. That means we're talking about something that is to be the characteristic of our life.

Q: Is it apparent to people that you are longing for Christ to return? Is it apparent to your children that you can't wait to see your Lord?

Problem: Many of us live distracted lives. We're preoccupied with temporal matters. We major on minors. We've lost our focus. Not Paul. He didn't fear seeing Christ. He longed for the privilege to do so.

Illust:

Q: How many times in the past week did you consciously spend time thinking about and longing for the return of Jesus Christ?

Listen. If you love His appearing, it will affect your values...

Illust: Article in Ports Times

**Conclusion:**

Q: Who wins in the race of life? Those who run with the right perspective.

Illust: Butch Sowers, 2 mile race at State Meet

We need Christians who will determine to run the Chr Life like that. Will you?