

ARE YOU READY?
2 Timothy 4:6-8
Ted Schroder, September 5, 2010

The bellhop, who was helping me with my bags at our hotel, while I was on vacation, discovered in conversation that I was a preacher. He said, "I'm going to a revival at my church tonight. You've got to get ready. Lots of people aren't ready. They need to get ready." I thought that was a wise remark. "You've got to get ready. Lots of people aren't ready. They need to get ready." So I ask the question this morning: "Are you ready?" Ready for what? Ready to meet your Maker, of course. St. Paul was ready to meet his Maker. He was facing execution for proclaiming Jesus as Lord and the coming of the kingdom of God. Like his Master, this was regarded as treasonous to the Roman military dictatorship. He was getting ready to meet his crucified Lord.

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

The end of his life – outpoured on the altar – is the beginning of another – putting out to sea. "Already the anchor is weighed, the ropes are slipped, and the boat is about to set sail for another shore." (Stott) "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." (Philippians 1:23) His life has been a living sacrifice, and now he is ready for his departure. What makes him ready for the great voyage from this life to the next?

He makes three statements about his life. First, "I have fought the good fight." This life is a battle. There may be periods of peace, but there are also lengthy stretches of warfare. Warfare between nations is but an outward manifestation of the conflict that takes place between us and within us. From the beginning of Christ's life there was the threat of death, as King Herod massacred the babies of Bethlehem to safeguard his throne. He battled in the wilderness with the Tempter, and was in continual conflict with his own family and the religious leaders of his day. Jesus warned us that life would not be easier for his disciples. Suffering is part of the human condition. Paul wrote, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." (Ephesians 6:12,13)

We have to fight the good fight every day of our lives. We have to fight against anxiety, depression, pain, resentment, loneliness, fear, guilt and shame. We may have difficult marriages, dependent relations, ungrateful children, limited means, unkind neighbors, poor health, and uncertain prospects. Circumstances have to be fought lest they overwhelm us. We cannot be conscientious objectors in the battle of life. We cannot avoid conflict. We cannot surrender to the enemy. We have to stand our ground and fight in the armor that God supplies: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet

of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In all these things we can be conquerors through him who loved us. Can you say that you have fought the good fight?

Secondly, “I have finished the race.” This life is a race.” “Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.” (Hebrews 12:1,2) “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-26)

If we are to get ready, we must run with perseverance the race marked out for us; we must run in such a way as to get the prize; we must run with purpose, not aimlessly. The race of life is full of pitfalls, full of obstacles, full of discouragements. I remember going into training in high school for a cross-country race I badly wanted to win. I spent endless hours running parts of the known route, although the exact course would not be revealed until the day of the race. When the day came, it had been raining, and part of the course ran through a boggy area next to a pig farm. I had been doing well until my feet sank into the bog and I lost my running shoes! By the time I retrieved them I was too far behind to catch up. Imagine my disappointment after all that training. Life is like that. The unexpected occurs. Accidents happen. Tragedy strikes. Competition in the rat-race of life beats us. Debilitating illness hits us or our loved ones. We are disabled. Yet we have to get up again and finish the race. We cannot give in. We cannot give up. We have to run with our eyes fixed on Jesus, “who began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed – that exhilarating finish in and with God – he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. When you find yourself flagging in your faith, go over the story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls.” (Hebrews 12:2,3, *The Message*) Can you say you have run the race?

Thirdly, “I have kept the faith.” St. Paul did not lose his faith despite his sufferings. “I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed and am convinced he is able to guard [keep] what I have entrusted to him for that day.” (2 Timothy 1:12) “Guard [keep] the good deposit [of the faith] that was entrusted to you – guard [keep] it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” (1:14)

The keep is the central tower or stronghold of the medieval castle which can be defended against all comers.

The faith of Christ is like a precious treasure of the soul that is to be guarded with the help of the Holy Spirit from those who would steal it from us. We are not to grow complacent about our faith. We have got to pay attention to its care and nurture. We have to protect it from the assaults of the enemy, from disappointment, grieving as those without hope, doubt and despair. Worship, Bible reading, prayer, receiving Holy Communion, fellowship with other believers all help us to keep the fires of faith glowing. Those who lose their faith neglect it. They drop out of fellowship. They stop reading their Bibles. They abandon the habit of prayer. Are you keeping the faith?

St. Paul was ready. The prize awaits. The Emperor Nero may declare him guilty and condemn him to death, but there will soon come a magnificent reversal of Nero’s verdict when the Lord, the righteous Judge declares him righteous, justified, accepted and forgiven. This same vindication by Christ also awaits all who have loved his appearing. The unbeliever will dread the coming of Christ in glory when it happens. Being unready for it, he will shrink in shame when he

meets his Maker. The follower of Christ, looks forward to Christ's coming, when every tear will be wiped from his eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Being ready for it, he will rejoice when Christ appears. Are *you* ready?

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