

## II Timothy, Sermon #32

II Timothy 4

I've entitled this two-part series "The Epitaph of the Apostle Paul."

Paul is in jail and he knew that his present imprisonment would end with his head on the chopping block.

His final words reflect the calmness and peace that comes only from settled confidence in the Lord.

II Timothy 4:6

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word.

II Timothy 4:6-8

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

## The Epitaph of the Apostle Paul

When the Apostle Paul talked about his death—he reflected on his past but not all of his life—just life since salvation

### First, he regarded his life as a fight (vs. 7)

He recognized that the Christian life is a struggle.

A fight implies opposition—from the world—standing in a river—(temptation, warring), from the flesh (inner desires) that are contrary to the Word of God—without and within.

The faithful Christian constantly battles his own flesh, his own sin, his own ignorance, and laziness.

It is a relentless struggle—for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary one to the other.

This word “fight” is the Greek word *agon*, from which we get “agony.”

This word was commonly used in reference to athletic events—How many of us have been in agony? Especially in the training part

It does cost. It is painful.

This word was also used of other types of struggles that involved great effort and energy.

Today, there are not too many believers who agonize in their labors for Christ—given over to the Lord.

They give in to the world and to their own lust.

Paul said, “I have fought a good fight.”

The Christian looks at life as a fight/a battle

What kind of fight is it? What does the Bible say? (vs. 7)

The Bible calls it a good fight—Why?

Because it is for God and for the right

Paul is not boasting of how great a fighter he is.

He is saying that he spent his life in the good fight.

He was fighting **the good fight** – refers to that which is intrinsically good, good in itself, without any qualification.

Nothing mattered but the cause of Christ.

This should inspire every believer to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

It should motivate us to yield every gift and talent, every hour and opportunity, every resource and all of our energy to lifelong service in the will and power of our Lord.

All believers should take this position.

There is a battle to be fought, and every Christian should be in the fight.

Theodore Roosevelt: “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

“Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checked by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in a gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.” (From speech on the strenuous life, Hamilton Club, Chicago, April 10, 1899)

I Timothy 6:12, "*Fight the good fight of faith . . .*"—tree huggers, whale lovers, gun toters—we can be in a lot of fights.

There is a greater battle.

### **Secondly – vs. 7b – “I have finished my course”**

Course refers to a race track.

These are athletic images: like a determined boxer, he had fought a good fight; and, like a runner, he had finished his lifelong race.

So, life is not only a battle; life's a race.

The Christian's life is not a hundred-yard dash; it is a marathon and most often an obstacle course.

Hebrews 12:1-2

The main focus of this verse and the heart of this verse is that phrase at the end of verse 1.

That's the thrust, hammer.

Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

Let "us"—Christians, believers

This is something all believers are to do.

What is it we are to do? We are to run the race.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people that are saved but not running.

Some are jogging, walking, sitting, lying down—we need to encourage them.

We are called on to run the race.

The Greek word for race is **agon**. We get our English word agony.

How many of us have felt the agony of running?

The Christian race is not a walk in the park, a bed of roses.

It is demanding, grueling, agonizing and it requires self discipline, determination.

What is the word here in verse 1—patience/endurance

Patience or endurance is steady determination to keep going.

It means to keep going even when everything in you wants to stop, give up, or slow down.

Far too many Christians that start out fast like a rabbit and fade away like fireworks

The Christian race is a marathon. It's a long distance race. It is not a sprint.

There are many reasons that people have pulled off in the rest area never to leave it, to re-enter the race.

When problems begin to arise, they quit. They look back to their old ways.

Coaches always teach as a runner to never look back.

There should be determination in living the Christian life.

Let us run—in the Greek it means to keep on running, to keep on living for Christ.

The Bible warns us of the two major hindrances that relentlessly threaten to dissuade/discourage believers from their God-given **course** (Heb. 12:1).

Lay aside every weight, encumbrance.

Have you ever noticed the size of long distance runners—lean, thin, no weight, measure their body fat—very low.

You ever notice what those long distance runners wear?

Do we see them in jeans and a sweatshirt?

Anything wrong with jeans and a sweatshirt? Nothing, unless it hinders our running!

Things may be harmless or even worthwhile.

The danger and harm come when such things hinder our service to Christ.

They weigh us down as we are running; they distract our attention or sap our energy when we should be concentrating.

They move our focus from the Lord's work to something else, and they take energy and time that should be dedicated to Him.

Anything can become a spiritual weight/encumbrance.

We have to battle temptation to do things that are perfectly good in themselves in place of other things that are immeasurably more important.

The second hindrance mentioned in Hebrews 12:1 is more obvious.

We are to lay aside the sin that so easily besets us.

A great hindrance to living for God is sin. All sin is a hindrance.

Sin easily slows and may even stop our running.

How do we run the race? Keep on living the Christian life by looking unto Jesus, by fixing our eyes on Jesus.

When we are running, where we look is extremely important—thrown off stride, distracted

Some Christians are looking at themselves, pay too much attention to what they are doing, selfish

Some Christians are looking at other Christians, comparing

Some Christians look at their circumstances, I'm poor, I'm unhealthy, I'm divorced. These things can dominate the thinking, paralyzing the activity of the believer.

★If our focus is truly on Jesus Christ we will see everything else in its right perspective. When we are fixed, that's when we are most effective.★

The only protection against weights and sin is to fix our eyes on Jesus—looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (12:2)

It is imperative that we fix our eyes on Jesus.  
It makes all the difference in the world—work, ministry.

*Acts 20:24, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, 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."*

**I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course**

**Thirdly – (II Timothy 4:7) vs. 7c – I have kept the faith**

The faith referred to here is not our personal faith in Christ but the whole body of Christian truth, i.e., doctrine.

Paul never was detoured by some new wind of doctrine.

★The principle of Paul's life and ministry was his trust regarding the Word of God, the controlling element of everything he said and did.★

Paul said at the close of his life—"I have kept the faith."

We should all want to be able to say with the apostle's truthfulness and sincerity, **we have kept the faith.**

May we be able to say that when the hour of death draws near us.

The Lord does not require success, only faithfulness.

Paul affirms his own triumph, but he also offers motivation for us to live a life of faithful service to Christ.

There is a battle to be fought and a victory to be won.

And the supreme mark of the faithful soldier is to give his life in battle—dying with our boots on!

### **I have fought, I have finished, I have kept**

Paul had no regret, no sense of unfulfillment or incompleteness.

After the Lord took control of his life, he truly had lived life to the fullest.

Everything God had called and enabled him to do, he did.

★ There can be no greater satisfaction—and certainly no more glorious way to end the Christian life—than to know, as he did, that we have finished well. ★

Folks, we can live our lives this way.

“The Epitaph of the Apostle Paul”

Let us stand for closing invitation.



Are we weary in the work of the Lord?

God said—don't faint, press on—you shall reap.

Any weights? Good things?

Any sins—causing disruption?

Are we in the battle? Are we running for the Lord?

Are we keeping the Word of God?

We cannot be in the race unless we have received Christ as our Savior.