

Title: Sweet Resignation pt.2  
Text: 2 Timothy 4.8  
Theme: Finishing well  
Series: 2 Timothy  
Prop Stmt: How you live determines how well you die.

Whenever someone whom you care about is on the road, you think about them, you pray for them and often will say, “call or text me when you get there.” We just want to know that they arrived safely. Years ago we wrote out a purpose statement for our church. “Cornerstone Baptist Church exists to glorify God by leading believers toward maturity through worship, instruction, fellowship and evangelism.” It’s a good statement that encompasses a lot of things, but even that could be summarized by saying; we just want to help you get home safe. We just want to help you follow Jesus better. In order to get home safe and follow Jesus better there are 4 things that I want every one of you to be able to say from your heart. 1) My life is not my own. 2) I’ve fulfilled my mission. 3) My reward is safe. 4) I love Christ’s appearing infinitely more than my disappearing. And just as Paul’s mission was to help Timothy fulfill his, my mission is to help you fulfill your mission. These are the 4 things that Paul tells Timothy in his final words to him in 2 Timothy 4.6-8. Last week, we looked at the first two, today we will focus on verse 8.

Read Text:

Julie was very close to her grandfather. In fact, while the other grandkids basically had nothing to do with him, she did. Shortly before his death he confided in her that she would inherit most of his money. And she would have, but the inheritance went first to her mom and her mom died before she drew up a will so that now that inheritance went to her step-dad, who remarried and used it all for his new family. When Julie told her step-dad what her grandfather had promised her, her step-dad said that it didn’t matter, it was all his now.

Darrell never trusted banks. He literally buried his money in boxes in his back yard. He kept maps detailing their locations so he wouldn’t forget where they were. When he was diagnosed with a terminal disease, he dug up all of the boxes and gave the cash to his oldest son with 2 simple instructions. 1) Pay for my funeral expenses. 2) Divide the rest evenly among the other 3 kids. But, as soon as the oldest son got the cash, he disappeared. Darrell died and the other 3 children paid for the funeral. 3 months later, the oldest son reappeared. He had spent the last 3 months in Vegas, gambling, snorting cocaine and doing other related things that fueled him burning through hundreds of thousands of dollars. A family member planned to retire from a company she had worked at for many years and draw upon a pension that was promised to her, when the company went bankrupt and now there was no pension.

The stories go on, and some of you have your own. You know what it is like to be ripped off by your own family. An inheritance that you were promised is gone – forever. Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6.19-21? *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for*

*yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

It is obvious that Paul took those words to heart. He lived his life in such a way that he knew that he had an inheritance in Christ, that as Peter described is imperishable, undefiled, unfading and kept in heaven for you.

It is a fundamental irony of life. If you give away your life to Christ, you get life. And we are witnessing some of the sweet fruit of that. Here is Paul, in the final stage of life. There is no regret, no unresolved issues, no guilt in life and no fear in death, no ragged edges, and in fact, I can't help but smile as I read these words because I think that Paul was doing the same. He lived with eternity in view, and now, here he is. His ship has come in. It is docked in the harbor and he is about to get on board. It is actually happening! He is relieved and grateful that he has made it to the end, but the end is not the end. His death is the means by which God has ordained for him to gain his inheritance in Christ. And it is safe. Paul is able to say,

1. **My reward is safe.** (8a)

The assurance of v.8 is the fruit of the reality of v.6. Paul's life was not his own. He surrendered his life to Christ and when you give your life to Christ, he gives it back forever. When you try to keep your life, you lose it – forever. The fruit of surrendering your life to Christ is knowing that your life with Christ, your eternal life, your deliriously joyful, satisfying, beautiful life with Christ is safe. It is waiting for you and no one can touch it.

I hope that you pay attention to all of the words. This verse begins with the word, “henceforth.” Do you know what Paul means by that? He is connecting what he just said about finishing the race to what he is about to say about receiving the crown. Think of it like this. Imagine that for the last 15 years of your life, you got up every morning at 4am and went to a pool and swam laps. You trained and trained and trained and worked your way from high school to college and now to international competition. You set your mind on the 100m butterfly stroke. Your goal was to get gold at the Olympics, but in order to get there; you had to accomplish many things. But, this was your race and you fought through injury, through rough seasons, through life difficulties and now you were on the Olympic team. You made it through the initial heats and the 100m butterfly finals was today and you were in it and you just swam the race of your life. You just touched the finish pad, you just looked up at the screen and you just realized that you won gold! Those screams and cheers were for you. Mom and dad are going bananas, your hometown is all gathered around their TV's and are screaming, shooting off fireworks and honking horns and you have not even gotten out of the pool yet. This is henceforth! Henceforth is the time between winning the race and standing on the podium and receiving your medal. You won! You won! The medal is yours! The reward is yours! It is not hanging around your neck yet, but it will because it is yours.

That is what Paul is saying. He finished! He's done! All that he is waiting on now is to get the reward that is his. See what I mean? You cannot help but smile at that, can you? To be able to experience that "henceforth" makes everything that you endured to get to that point – worth it.

*“There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.”*

The reward he is talking about, the reward that is his, the reward that is waiting for him to receive is “the crown of righteousness.” The crown was not a gold crown with diadems, but was a laurel wreath that was given to the winners of athletic contests. When he speaks of the crown of righteousness is he speaking of righteousness like it is a crown? I.e. is Paul talking about glorification, that is, the completion of our journey with Christ, when we fully experience the end of our salvation and are like Christ? If so, then the crown of righteousness would mean that righteousness is the crown. Or is he talking about an actual reward that is given to those who have lived faithfully for Christ? I am not certain, though I lean toward this being an actual reward since it fits the context of athletic victory so well. But, you can't finish well unless you are in Christ, so maybe it is a combination of the two. In other words, “the crown of righteousness” may refer to a reward that is given to those who persevere since those who persevere are those who have truly been declared righteous and are justified. Either way, the big idea is clear. Faithful endurance for the gospel will result in a glory and joy that far surpasses anything that you have ever experienced. That is the essence of faith. We consider that glory and joy with Christ will be so full that we live with anticipation and longing. No matter what we experience here (joy or sorrow) will be overwhelmed by life with Christ. So the challenge is clear.

Live for the reward that lasts. Cathi and I recently threw away a bag full of trophies that our kids had. In the moment, they meant something. In the moment, they were very important. In the moment they were displayed on mantles, shelves, and dressers. But, over time, they moved from being proudly displayed, to a box, to a bag and finally to the trash. If you live your entire life for a reward that will end up in the trash, are you aware that you are wasting your life? What are you actually living for? What is the goal? What is the reward? And, is your reward safe?

In 1986, Walter Peyton, an incredible running back won the Super Bowl with the Chicago Bears. 10 years later, Walter was coaching a basketball team of high school boys and as an illustration of trust, he gave his diamond studded ring to one of the players to keep for a few days. The boy lost it. He didn't sell it or steal it. He just flat out lost it. Can you imagine? Put your reward where it is safe. Put your happiness where it is safe. Put it where it will be kept for you. The only truly safe place for your happiness is Christ.

How do you know if you treasure Christ? How do you know if your treasure is in Christ? Where your treasure is, is where your heart is. Your treasure is what you think about all the time. Your treasure is what you want. If you treasure someone, you want to know about them, talk to them and be with them. If you treasure Christ, you will want to be with him. If you treasure Christ, you will think about him and long to see him.

Paul was confident that there was a reward for him, but he knew that it wasn't just for him. It was for everyone who loved Christ's appearing.

2. **I love his appearing infinitely more than my disappearing.** (8b)

At the end of this verse, Paul reflects on the fact that it will be the Lord (Jesus Christ) who will give him his crown. And he refers to the Lord as the righteous judge. Now, I'm guessing that this was a subtle statement in contrast to the unrighteous judge who put him in prison and had sentenced him to death. In the true sense of the word, it was not fair for Paul to be in prison. But, what was "unfair" in man's court was still under the sovereign control of the righteous court of the righteous judge. Paul did not need to fret about things that were out of his control, because he knew that the righteous judge would straighten it all out on that Day. And that day is a real day.

There is a day when all things will be accounted for. The Bible often refers to it as "that Day." "That Day" speaks of the specificity and reality of this event. There is coming a time when every single one of us will stand before the Lord. That day is the day. That day is the day that determines the reality and value of this day. That day is what makes this day matter. What that day is like for you is determined by how you live now.

But, let's talk about that for a bit. Paul speaks of Christ (Lord) as the righteous Judge. This is one of the fundamental reasons why we trust Christ. He is truly righteous and what he does is truly right. We do not have a moral compass that more sophisticated than his. People pretend to be shocked and stunned when sin is labeled as such as if people can somehow be more righteous than Christ. People are offended at the Bible's teaching that sin is serious and that people who die without Christ actually go to hell. Humans are not the righteous ones. We are not the ones whose moral sensitivities can be trusted. It is only the Lord who is the Righteous Judge. While Christ is our righteous Judge he wants to be known as more than Judge. This righteous Judge is our Savior. This Righteous Judge is therefore worth our trust.

If you are a dad, do you want your kids looking out the windows of your home in fear of when you are going to arrive or do you want them looking out the windows in excitement and anticipation of you getting home? If daddy is always angry or no one knows what kind of a mood is going to be in, then your kids will fear you. But what dad wants his kids to fear him? We want our kids to know that we love them so they will trust us.

When you are with Christ, every hole in your heart will be filled. In your presence, the Bible says, is fullness of joy. Think of your life, like a sponge. When you are with Christ, every capacity that you have to be filled will be full. You will not miss anything or anyone. There will be no area of your life that will not be full. Now we have holes. Now we have unfulfilled dreams. We do not meet our goals and others do not meet our goals. We live with the reality of disappointment. When we are with Christ, disappointment will no longer be a word that we use because it will no longer be a concept we will be familiar with. Now, all good things must come to an end. Then, all good things will only get better. But why? It is because of Christ. We will be with Christ! It is not just the fact that

we will be loved perfectly; we are loved perfectly by Christ now. It is the fact that we will be able to accept that love perfectly. And when we accept the love of Christ perfectly, all holes will be filled. So, yes, the surrounding and setting of eternity is wonderful, but the source of our happiness will not be the surrounding, it will be Christ. If you are not loved and you do not love, the greatest surrounding is meaningless. If you are loved perfectly and you love perfectly, then the surrounding is something that you are able to enjoy with others even more. That is why Paul did not focus on his escape from prison. It wasn't his disappearing that he longed for; it was the appearing of Christ that mattered to him. If you only long for your disappearance from a miserable life, but have no real affection for Christ, it may be because you really do not love Christ. This is a good question for you to ask yourself. Do I long to see Christ, or do I just want relief?

Christ is worth longing for? Christ is worth anticipating. Christ is worth looking forward to. What are you looking forward to right now? Going to school? Going to a new school? Band practice? Football games? A birthday party? Getting your driver's license? Going to a game? Going out to eat? Retiring? Getting a new job? Getting married? What are you looking forward to right now?

Let's say that you are 12 years old and your dad surprised you with tickets for the Tigers game this afternoon. This is going to be your first trip to Comerica Park and you can't wait. You know who the starting pitchers are. You checked the batting orders this morning. You have a glove out in your van in the parking lot and your hat and your shirt and you are ready. In fact, you are sitting here thinking, that you cannot wait for me to be done so that you can hurry up and get to the game. Why are you anxious for me to be done? You perceive that the enjoyment factor of what is to come is way more than what you are presently experiencing. So, you are really looking forward. However, if, instead of going to the Tigers game this afternoon, let's say that your mom said, "don't forget, when you get home from church, you have to weed the garden, or clean out the garage (and you hate weeding the garden and you really hate cleaning the garage). Are you anxious for me to hurry up and get done so that you can rush home and weed the garden or clean out the garage? Probably not. In that case, you perceive that your enjoyment level now, is much greater than what is to come.

If you knew that your level of satisfaction and joy was going to be so full that there would be no sense of loss, no sense of disappointment, but only exhilaration and contentment, and that this reality was yours and nothing could take it away from you, wouldn't that reality drive all other realities? Why do people wait in line for 2 hours for a 30-second ride at Cedar Point? Because, the anticipated thrill makes the wait worth it (at least to them). But, what if the wait was 30 seconds and the ride was 2 hours? How much of the wait would you remember? Let's test drive that for a little bit.

Let's say that you are tired of being single and for years you looked for the perfect spouse, then you looked for a not so perfect spouse, and now you are just looking for a spouse. The temptation is to fear that my life is passing me by. If I don't marry someone, even if it isn't someone I ought to marry, that I may miss out. No. If you are in Christ, you cannot miss out. If you are in Christ, you get it all. Earthly marriage is a picture of a

greater reality. If you do not marry, you skip the image and go straight to the reality and while there are times now when you may feel alone, this life is the 30-second wait in line. What if you are married and it is hard? Is your life ruined? No. This life is not the end. In fact, when you know the end is so good and so rich and so long, you can live with disappointment without it owning you. You can see it for what it is.

What if you will never get the job you dreamed of getting? What if you will never get the respect and affection from your parents that you craved? What if you will never get the girl you loved, or the children you hoped for, or the title you wanted? If this life is the only life there is, and you come to the realization that all that is left for you in this life is sorrow and disappointment, then you can understand why so many people despair of life and commit suicide or give up on life in other ways. (Jew in a concentration camp)

This is the difference that Christ makes. It is simply this. No matter what happens to me now, I win because Christ has won. If you are not in Christ, then, no matter what happens to you now, you lose. And beloved, here is where we have such an opportunity to shine like stars in a dark world. The New York Times reported recently on what most of us already knew intuitively, and that is suicide has been increasing at alarming rates. I think that we can understand at least part of the reason for that. If you have no hope in the future, then your only meaning in life is based on what you can get, what you can do, what you can experience now. And when all that you experience now is miserable, empty, unfulfilling and meaningless, then what is the point of life?

If you are in Christ and you are miserable, cranky, irritable, and depressed, could it be that you've lost sight of the end? I want you to finish well. I want you to be able to say: My life is not my own. I've fulfilled my mission. My reward is safe. I love his appearing infinitely more than my disappearing.