

Title: Sweet Resignation
Text: 2 Timothy 4.6-8
Theme: Dying well
Series: 2 Timothy
Prop Stmtnt: You are prepared to die well when you have lived well.

Read Text:

Would you like to come to the end of your life and be completely at rest? What would it be worth to die with complete satisfaction? We tend to think that the greatest life, or the good life is a life that is absent of adversity. The perfect life would be something like this: She had a happy and healthy childhood. She married an amazing man. They had 4 perfectly healthy, educated, athletic, musical, talented, balanced children who all married amazing spouses and had wonderful careers, wonderful houses, wonderful vacations, wonderful in-laws, and never had a broken bone, never lost a game, never lost a job, never had to wear braces, never had allergies, never had a car or AC unit break down and all the grandchildren and great grandchildren, slept through the night their first night, walked by the time they were 6 months old, were potty trained by 8 months and never fought, or got acne. She and her husband were married for 75 years, in perfect health with plenty of money and spent the last 25 years traveling the world and one night, before they had experienced any sickness beyond a runny nose once, they were raptured into heaven, where their amazing life just kept going on. That, to so many, is the dream life. No adversity, no challenges, no strain, no worries and of course, no God. After all, if life is perfect, who needs God?

But, (spoiler alert!) no one has a life like this. However, we are all tempted to make plans for a life that has no adversity or struggle. And since we tend not plan for it, we are repeatedly stunned when we have to face it, live it and endure it. I have been with many people in the final stage of life. What I am saying is not theory. This is first hand observation. I have witnessed people who are angry because their imminent death is cheating them out of the life they had planned for. I have also witnessed people who are content in their final stage of life and view their ending with a sweet resignation. And I'm telling you that age has nothing to do with it. I have seen old people dying in bitterness as well as sweetness. I have seen younger people die in bitterness and some in amazing sweetness. How you live affects how you die. And paramount to that is how the gospel fits into your life. That is what that little preposition "*for*" is all about at the beginning of v.6 because that word connects Paul's admonition to Timothy with his own experience. In spite of his life and ministry being cut short (from our perspective), in spite of spending the last months, perhaps a couple of years in prison (and again from our perspective) wasting such a valuable spokesperson for the gospel, Paul is not angry. And I am convinced that the grounding source of his ability to sweetly and attractively resign himself to this "fate" is revealed in this opening phrase of v.6. In these 3 verses there are four things (2 sermons) I pray that you either say now or will say with passionate conviction. But if you don't get the first one in order, you will never be able to say the other three. The first one is like first base. If you don't get there, nothing else matters. Therefore, point #1 is long and the 2-4 fall into place rather quickly.

1. My life is not my own. (6)

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering.”

First of all, let's understand what he means by a drink offering. Every morning and evening a lamb would be offered on the altar at the tabernacle or temple. As part of that offering, the priest would take a mixture of flour, oil and wine and pour it out upon the altar. There are two things to note about this phrase: 1) Paul is saying that his life is already being given over as a sacrifice. His life, and he may even have his own blood in view in a literal sense as he anticipates being executed, is being poured out as a sacrifice to God because of his commitment to the gospel. But there is a second thing to note.

Paul is not saying that he has poured out his life as a drink offering. He is saying that his life is like a drink offering that someone else has poured it out. Someone else offered all of the contents of his life on the altar of sacrifice. Who did that? God did! But rather than being ticked off with God for doing that, Paul is thrilled. This is what he lived for. He lived in order to be used up by God. He offered his life like a cigarette to be smoked by God. And God did and Paul was so happy. He lived as if his life was not his own, because it wasn't his own.

If you have become a follower of Christ, your life is no longer your own. You are following Christ! You are not in charge. You do not make the rules and that is a beautiful thing! Listen to the beauty of these words from (SLIDE) 1 Corinthians 6.19b-20. *“...you are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.”*

Let me give you 2 illustrations: 1) This past week, the Tigers traded J.D. Martinez to the Arizona Diamondbacks. Four years ago, the Houston Astros released J.D. from their organization. That means that they no longer wanted him. They did not think he would work out. J.D. was free from the Houston Astros. He did not have to wear their jersey, did not have to go to the games, did not have to go to practices or team meetings, did not have to travel with the team. He was free and it hurt deeply. But, then the Tigers came along. They bought him with a price. They paid money for him to join their organization. They saw potential in him and J.D. was thrilled. The fact that they owned him was not a bother; it was a huge blessing! The fact that he had to wear the Tigers jersey was an honor, not a restriction. The fact that he had to go spring training, team meetings and show up every day was not a burden but an enormous joy. He loved being bought with a price. It meant that someone wanted him.

2) I meet with couples in our church who just got engaged and are planning a wedding. As part of our conversation, I love to explore with them the wonder that there is someone in this wide world who actually wants to spend the rest of life with them. The girl is amazed that someone actually said, “will you marry me?” And he is amazed and enormously relieved that she said, “yes.” The girl is so happy about it, that she is willing to change her name because she is now known by another and he is so happy about it that

he is willing to start doing dishes more than once a month. Being owned by another means, that someone wants you.

When Paul says that you are bought with a price, he is speaking about being bought by Christ. Christ's death paid the price to secure my redemption from sin. Christ's death paid the price for my forgiveness. Christ's death paid the price for my justification. Christ's death paid the price for my adoption. If you are a follower of Christ, you are known by his name. You are bought and paid for. You are wanted. You are loved. You are named. You are treasured. Your life is not your own, your life is God's to be used by Him to accomplish his glorious plan. Your life is like a drink offering that he will pour out as he wisely and lovingly as he chooses. His plan is far better than your plan. Embrace it. Don't fight it. Believers know this; but many do not live like it. God is not your power source in order to get the life you plan on. God is the plan and your life is the means that he has chosen to accomplish it. If you got to make and carry out all the plans, your plans would be way too small.

Unbelievers do not know this and live with angst. Unbelievers want to be free, but their freedom is bondage. They are free from security. They are free from hope. They are free from purpose. They are free from freedom. They live in pretend freedom that is actually bondage.

Since adversity is a wonderful tool that God uses for us to trust less in ourselves and more in God, God will use adversity in an effort to stretch your heart so that your heart is bigger in order to hold and know more of him. When your heart is bigger, you have a greater capacity for joy. The bigger your heart, the more love, the more joy, the more happiness, the more contentment you can hold and the greater your capacity to worship, to love, to adore, to be amazed and to be humbled is.

Do you believe and live as if your life is not your own?

How do you view your time?

How do you view your children?

How do you view your possessions?

How do you view your money?

How do you view your abilities?

How do you view your relationships?

How do you view your place in life?

Is your God so small that you only throw him a leftover once in a while or is God so glorious that he is worth the complete surrender of everything?

Paul lived with an open hand. His life was God's to be used as God saw fit and God poured him out. If God wanted him shipwrecked on an island, so be it. If God wanted him enjoying rich relationships with believers in Ephesus, so be it. If God wanted him getting rocks thrown at him in Lystra, being imprisoned in Philippi, being arrested in Jerusalem and rotting in prison in Rome, so be it. This attitude allowed him to realize that his life had been used. It had been poured out and it was about all done being poured out. There wasn't much left in the jar. So, he could say...

“the time of my departure has come”

The words that are used here were used by soldiers who had made camp and were now getting ready to leave. When you make camp, you are not planning to stay forever. When you make camp, you do not pour footings, or dig out a basement. You know that you are only here for a while. But, if, like Lot’s wife, you get too attached to what will burn up, you will find yourself looking back instead of looking forward. This phrase “the time of my departure” was not only used of soldiers breaking camp, but it was a phrase used to describe a ship that is leaving the harbor and heading on a voyage. Paul knew that his time had come and he was ready for the journey. Will you be?

I don’t mean that simply in physical terms. Yes, our bodies wear out. They wear out and begin to shut down, and there is nothing wrong with acknowledging that reality and cooperating with it. But, this language is speaking of Paul’s ongoing surrender to God’s plan for his life. He knows that from God’s perspective he has done what he needs to do, its time to get on the ship and head to the other shore. This is helpful to for you and me to consider. Can you say that you live with such surrender to God’s plan, that should he call you home earlier than what you planned, that you would be at peace?

2. I’ve fulfilled my mission. (7)

What do you want to accomplish with your life? We start pestering kids about this sort of thing when they are in the 3rd grade. What do you want to do when you grow up? I think it would be better for us to talk with our kids about what they want to accomplish versus what they want to do. The doing (job) should not be the goal, but should be a means to accomplish a goal. Have you thought about what you want to accomplish with your life?

Do you have a bucket list? Do you have a list of things that you want to accomplish before you die? I love the setting of and pursuing of goals. But, how do the goals that you have reflect what really matters for eternity? In other words, what is behind your goals? What are you really trying to accomplish? Are the things that you are pursuing, things that really matter? Or, are the things that you are pursuing being done for reasons that really matter?

I want to make the starting team.

I want to set a personal best record (running, swimming)

I want to make a 4.0.

I want to get a good job.

I want to get out of debt.

I want to have a weed-free lawn.

I want to shoot a deer.

I want to bowl a 250.

I want to buy my own home.

I want to make (income level) or (work level)

I want to lose weight.

I want to quit smoking.
I want to graduate from college.
I want to get a good job.
I want to see the Lions win the Super Bowl.
I want to retire so I can _____ and _____.
I want to get married.
I want to have children.
I want to save (so much money)
I want to go on a cruise.

Look at the things that you have on your bucket list. Let's say that everything you accomplish, you get a commemorative ribbon or a patch (like a window sticker) and when you die you are able to take all of those ribbons with you and present them to God, will you at that moment, think, "yea, that was worth it."? Or, will you realize that you spent way too much time pursuing things that really don't matter.

I think we have a window here into Paul's bucket list. He is writing with sweet resignation, meaning, he has accomplished his mission. His mission has three aspects.

A. I have fought the good fight.

This could be an athletic metaphor (boxing, wrestling) or a military one. But, the point is, that Paul lived his life in the battle. He lived engaged in a struggle. Think about that phrase with me. 1) In order to successfully fight the fight, you must know what the fight is. Not all fights are the good fight. You can give yourself to a cause that is not worth fighting for. In order to successfully fight the fight, you must know what the fight is. The fight is the struggle for the gospel of Jesus Christ to penetrate the darkness of our world by rescuing one person at a time. Paul knew the gospel and his life had been changed by it and he lived to share it with others. The fight is the advancement of the fame of Jesus by means of lives being changed by the gospel and churches being established and functioning as outposts of the kingdom. If you are not focused on advancing the fame of Jesus, you are wasting your life and whatever else you will have accomplished, will not matter.

B. I have finished the race.

For Paul, this was a way for him to refer to his ministry or his mission. When you read Paul's opening lines of his letters, he refers to his calling from God and his purpose in life. He was called to be an apostle. He was called to be a servant. He was set apart for the gospel. He was a servant and an apostle to advance the faith of God's elect... That was his race to run. And here he is, coming around the final corner, looking up and seeing the finish line and the very thing that he has longed for, all of these years, is now here. He could die with sweet resignation because he ran with the finish line in view. Whoever said that it isn't the destination, but the journey, was lost. Paul lived with the end in view and he is realizing as he gets there that, "I did it." "I made it." "I didn't quit."

C. I have kept the faith.

Paul is saying with satisfaction, even a sense of relief, “I still believe. I’ve persevered in the faith.” I do not take this for granted. I do not take this for granted in your life or in mine. Life is fraught with many difficulties and many disappointments. At any point you could say, “that’s it, I’m done. I can’t take it anymore.” I get the sense after reading 2 Corinthians, that if Paul was ever close to being at that point, it was when he was writing that letter. The very people he had poured his life into were turning on him and had no reason to do so. It happens, though, doesn’t it? In fact, it probably happened many times to Paul. Life is hard. Following Christ is not easy. Following Christ means that you are choosing to go uphill and with the wind in your face.

Through many dangers, toils and snares, I’ve already come. Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

It is a beautiful thing to be able to come to the final stage of your life and look forward. Looking forward happens when you know that you have fulfilled your mission. You have completed your calling. Think of this from Paul’s perspective. Why didn’t he die when he was stoned in Lystra and left for dead? His mission was not yet accomplished. Why was he delivered from prison in Philippi? His mission wasn’t done yet. Why didn’t he die from the beatings he endured and from being shipwrecked three times? God had him on a mission and the mission wasn’t done yet. The fact that he wasn’t going to be released from prison this time, made it clear to him that his mission was over. It was not what he had planned, because he planned to go on to Spain. But, when Paul made plans he held them with an open hand. The unfulfilled plan of going to Spain was not a bitterness for him. He accepted the fact that God’s plan for him to die now was better than his plan to go on to Spain.

Yesterday, our elders read this text together and discussed it. Obviously some passages are theologically rich and invite that sort of conversation. This text grabbed each of us by the heart and I suspect that it has for most of you as well. I’ll finish this text next week. But, let me conclude with an example that I’ve shared before, but fits this text well.

It is easier for me to start books than finish them. It is easier for me to start projects than complete them. It is easier for me to make promises than keep them. That worries me. It worries me because I know that I am prone to not finishing what I start, and I want to finish what I start. I want to finish well in my marriage. I want to finish well as a dad and grandfather. I want to finish well as a pastor. And ultimately, I want to finish well as a follower of Christ, because that is the grounding of everything else in life. I want to say these words with Paul. I want to get to the end and look back and laugh the laugh of faith with amazement because I made it. By God’s grace, I made it! How can I do that, and not only me, but how can I pull as many people as I can, along with me?

So, in an effort to instill this text into my DNA and to confront the tendencies I have to quit, I have, through the years taken on big things. I have made big goals. Some have worked, some haven’t. But, the driving force behind it, is “do big things for God. Don’t

settle for small stuff. Don't get complacent. Don't get lazy. Don't mark time." Do hard things. Do hard things because life is hard. Do hard things that force you to rely upon God. Do hard things that will amaze you at God's grace in your life.

So, a number of years ago, I started running marathons. And, I determined that I would try to qualify for the Boston Marathon. It took 14 years to accomplish that goal. But all of that time was reminding me of a greater race, a greater goal, and a greater pursuit. Boston was not the final goal. What mattered was living with a focus on a goal that forced me to live with focus and intentionality. But, I finally qualified and had the honor of running that race two years ago. When the day came to run the Boston Marathon, it was one of the worst conditions ever. It was 39 degrees, raining, and with a headwind of about 20 m.p.h. How do you prepare for that? By mile 24 I know I was hypothermic, my leg muscles were so constricted and cramping that I could only run for a while then, stop and stretch, run for a while, then stop and stretch. I was doing this, when at one point while I was stretching, a young university student from Boston College started yelling at me. He saw my name on my bib, so he made it personal. And since I had moved to the side of the street to get out of the way, this guy was right in my ear. "Hey Johnson, you are not quitting. You are not staying here. You are going to finish this race. You are not quitting on my watch. Keep moving. Keep going. You didn't get this far to quit now. I'm not letting you go." It was a great moment. I had no intentions of quitting, but if I had, I didn't any more. And, I finished. But, it was a picture of a greater race that we are running together. Listen to Paul. I will yell at you and I want you to yell at me. You're not quitting. Not on my watch. And we can say this because Christ did not quit on us and he will see us through.

Our brother Paul who wrote to Timothy from near the finish line, now cheers us on from the stands. It's worth it. It's a hard fight, but it's a good one. It's a long race, but it's worth finishing. And the faith? The gospel is worth living for and dying for. Keep the faith. Keep the faith and one day you will be able to enjoy a sweet resignation.

3. My reward is safe. (8a)

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