

Finishing Well

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, everyone. It is lovely to be back. Alistair, very impressed by all the names. There's quite a few of them, and some challenging enough. But the church I normally attend is Bellevue Chapel. For those who have been coming to Brunsfield for a while will be familiar with Bellevue, as there are some great strong links. But it's lovely to be here this evening. And also, there was a swap that we needed to make because last week, for very good reasons, but we had people wanting to be baptized, and Graham filled in for me last week. But it does mean that I'm closing off this series in 2 Timothy. So I hope, maybe not having been able to listen to all the sermons so far, that what I can share with you this evening will fit in with what you've looked at so far.

Again, I don't know how many of this series you have been able to listen to or attend to, if there's quite a few. I hope it's been really worthwhile. It's an absolutely tremendous letter, one of the most personal ones that we find in the Bible. And yet, although it was, of course, first and foremost written to Timothy, it is very applicable to us as well.

And talking about applying, that's always the challenge, isn't it? You go through a series, but what about the application? I do hope that we don't just rush on to the next letter, the next book, but that we will take time in what God has been speaking to us about as a church, but also as individuals that we will take time to apply. Well, this evening, the title is Keeping Your Head, which is not in the ESV, but is actually found in the NIV. But if you don't mind, I'm going to change it slightly. Because with you tonight, I want to think of the simple words, finishing well.

Finishing well. Because I think that captures what Paul is trying to, in his final charge, tries to lay on Timothy's heart. And when I talk about finishing well, I had to think of a picture that I remember seeing in the newspaper a couple of years ago, of a beautiful replica of one of those 17th century ships, one of those tall ships. I don't know if you can picture it. I can't remember if it was built either in the Netherlands or in England, in the UK itself. But it was built over several months, maybe even over a year, trying to use the same materials, trying to use the same techniques as they would have done back in the 17th century. And then they moved the ship, they sailed the ship all the way across to Australia, where it was to be docked and used as a museum.

And of course, the building took a long time, the sailing took a long time, several weeks. But the headline in the newspaper was that the ship stranded three miles outside of Sydney Harbor.

[3 : 0 2] Can you imagine the feelings? The disappointment, the embarrassment, being so close, and yet so far. Even the people waiting on the dock site, waiting for it to come in and to welcome it, it didn't come. It was stranded and they did repair it.

And I think it's there now. But just one of those examples of not finishing well. I do remember reading this article at a similar time of being at a conference where one of the speakers was a man called Don Carson. He's written a variety of books. He's Canadian originally. He's a professor in America.

But one of the most personal things I heard him say during that conference was, and it's not the exact words, but basically that it was telling us who were sitting there as church leaders, that he was very conscious of the fact that he, and he was, I think at that time, about 60s, early 60s, he could still do something that would totally mess up all that he had been able to do for his God and for his King.

He could have done something that would just totally discredit any books that he'd written. And he wanted to press upon us the need and the importance of finishing well.

It's one thing to start well. And how exciting. I hope you experience that here in Brunsfield, of people starting off on that journey with Jesus. And how exciting it is to hear their testimony of how God has been very patiently working, and how they finally come to say yes to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

[4 : 35] But that's only half the story. The other half is for us to finish well. And it's hard to finish well. I mean, the Bible is full of examples. Think of God's very own people.

Where we know of a whole generation who ended up in the desert and never moved out of the desert, even though it had been God's intention to move them to the promised land. Think of King Saul.

Taller than me. Much better looking than me. A very obvious choice is king. Much more obvious than King David. But as far as we know, he finished his life by throwing himself on a sword.

I was even thinking of the prophet Jonah. We don't actually know a whole lot about his life. But you get the impression that the story we get when he's called to Nineveh isn't so much the only thing that he did in his life.

He was a prophet. So he must have very faithfully and honorably served his God, proclaiming the truths of God. But the open ending of the book of Jonah gives us that question mark.

[5 : 41] Did Jonah ultimately finish well himself? And I think that's the essence of what Paul's final charge is all about to his dear son in the faith, Timothy.

By the way, there's a little side note. I remember running a summer camp and I wasn't very well versed yet in the Bible. And somebody asked me, so was Paul a father? Well, me reading about him calling Timothy a son, I thought, well, he must have been married.

He must have been a father. But this is a son in the faith, Timothy. And he loved him dearly, like as if it was one of his own sons. And tonight I simply want to look at, first of all, the how we finish well. Secondly, the why we must finish well. But also, lastly, the help that is available to finish well. Is that okay? Three points? First, the how, the why, and then the help.

Because we'll need help. First of all, then the how. I think the how is found in verse 5. It says in verse 5, and I'm just reading from the NIV, it says there, but keep your head.

[6 : 49] There's the title of tonight's sermon. Keep your head. In the ESV, it says be sober-minded. Keep your head sorry in all situations.

Endure hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. And discharge all the duties of your ministry. Or again, if you're using the ESV, which is more literal.

The more literal translation is fulfill your ministry. Four elements. And what I find very interesting here is that actually the list doesn't allow us as followers of Christ to simply cruise through our Christian life here on earth.

We don't finish well by running off into the desert, sitting in some kind of cave, or for that matter, even running to church and hiding in church.

Desperately seeking to avoid any danger or any conflict or any distraction or any temptation. I think Paul very simply wants us to realize that part of finishing well comes from doing.

[7 : 59] Now, I know this is a slight generalization, but I sometimes get the impression that Protestant theology has at times moved away from works and have been shy to talk about works being part of the Christian life.

Because, and this is very true, this is very much what the Bible teaches us. We are saved by faith alone. And it's true, let there be no doubt about it. It's as simple, but also as challenging as that. That simply by believing who the Lord Jesus is, and that he died for you and for me on that cross, and that his death took away our sins, so that we receive a righteousness that is of God, is how we become a Christian.

But the Bible is very clear that what follows faith is works, is doing, is obedience. There's another word that isn't all that popular anymore.

But faith works. From faith comes service. To give you an example, in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he says, at the end of chapter 15, he says, Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm.

[9 : 16] Let nothing move you. And always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Now, I know in myself, I have a tendency to sometimes rely on what I do for God, that that will buy me his approval. So again, I also will try very much to rely on faith.

But we mustn't be shy on understanding that part of finishing well is faith combined with works. And Paul says here in verse 5, that part of that doing should be the work of an evangelist.

And part of that doing should be to fulfill our ministry. And yes, these both apply to Timothy as well as ourselves.

Now, of course, the Bible teaches that there are certain people with the special gift of evangelism. But hopefully, we will also know that in many different places in the Bible, but specifically Matthew 28, it teaches all of the followers of Jesus, without exception, that we are to go into the world and make disciples.

[10:37] Baptizing them and teaching them all that Jesus had been teaching us. And when it comes to fulfilling the ministry, very specifically, Paul mentions in chapter 4, verse 2, that the ministry, referring to Timothy, is to preach the word.

Which I think sometimes automatically makes us think of a pastor standing on a platform preaching. But actually, the word there, the literal word there, is proclaim the word.

And some clever theologian from Canada, sorry, from Australia, totally different part of the world, from Australia, called Peter Adam, actually very wisely, I think, points out the fact that proclaiming the word, or the ministry of the word, is much more than just what happens on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening.

And then actually, it is the call of all of Christ's followers to also handle God's word correctly. In the sense that even in a home group setting, we proclaim the word. Even in our home setting, if we have family worship, or even in a one-to-one, we proclaim the word.

[11:55] And so both the going out there, sharing our faith, handling, as well as handling God's word correctly, will help us to finish well.

And I'll explain this to you. I believe that the more we speak, or share God's word with one another, in all these different kind of settings, the more it actually helps us in our own understanding, our own conviction, as well as our own joy.

You have a Sunday school here, don't you? Maybe you call it something. What do you call it here? Kids Church.

Is any one of you involved in Kids Church? A few of you. Do you ever feel that you are totally capable in serving the children that you serve?

Most people, certainly when people enter into that wonderful work, don't feel capable, or don't feel they have all the knowledge or the know-how.

[13:00] But actually, because of the simple discipline of having to prepare the lessons, prepare for the next Sunday, gets us into the word, and by serving the children, we find, and I'm not speaking for you, but I have found so often people growing in their own faith, stronger, wiser.

I certainly experience it as a pastor. I have to be very honest that I wonder if I would be studying God's word as much as I would if I didn't have to prepare for another Sunday.

And I see it as a great blessing and a great privilege that I cannot preach or feed people if I do not feed myself first. And through it, I have realized that God allows me to grow deeper and stronger and that I wouldn't be where I am now.

Now, the other thing, he says, that strikes me about this isn't just the doing, but it's also the importance of the mind, says Paul, with regards to finishing well. Literally, it says, be sober-minded or keep your head.

The word that Paul uses here refers to anything from being alert, being awake, being watchful, even with a hint of concentration.

[14:27] In the best picture, and it's probably not a good picture, but have you ever been to London? That's the only place I can think of it. But anyone ever been to London? It is a busy place. Now, I'm really nice and tall, so on the underground, it's okay for me.

But we were there recently with our little girls, and boy, they found it stifling and very busy. But we went to the horse guards parade. There you have them, on the horses. And everybody does the same joke, don't they?

They try to distract them. But they train. Not to be distracted. They're focused. Part of it is, of course, symbolism, and there is, but they have a job to do.

If anything would happen, they would be right there. They're alert. They're awake. They are sober-minded in many ways. And Paul says, so must we. I actually wonder how we would do if that was our job.

I wonder if I would actually get bored. I mean, I don't know how long their shifts are, but having to sit there with all these people pulling funny faces, I might get fed up and say, I'm going to try to do something else.

[15 : 33] But we'd certainly, a lot of us, would be distracted. Now, how does that work in our walk with God? What distracts us?

I don't know if it matters what age you are, what season in life you are. There will always be things that will distract us from faithfully following Jesus. and following him closely.

We've been looking at the book of Daniel, which I think you're doing in the morning. Then you'll know that in chapter 1, Daniel resolves not to defile himself. And he does that by choosing not to take any wine or any of the meat or the nice delicacies of the king.

Now, there wasn't anything wrong with that. But it's simply Daniel wanting to make sure that he doesn't get too comfortable. He doesn't get distracted. He never wants to forget his true home. He wants to remain sober-minded. Live in the world, but not allow the world to live in him. How is that with us?

[16 : 43] Even the word endure, where Paul talks about enduring suffering, picks up that image of a marathon. Well, there was a marathon today in Edinburgh. I don't think I'll ever end up doing that again.

Running is boring. No, sorry, if I have heard anybody's feelings there. But anyway, with a marathon, it must be so hard, you know, those last couple of miles to keep going, to finish the race.

And you must need all the cheers and the people pushing you on. But that's us. We're on a journey. We are on that race. This world is not our home.

We are just passing through. Heaven is our true home. And we must do everything in our power to set our eyes and our mind on the truth and the reality still to come.

I wonder if we actually take our mind as serious as we should. I find a lot of even Christians say, well, as long as it's up here, it won't do anybody harm.

[17 : 52] I think God knows that what is up here often comes out. Hence, in Philippians, Paul says, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely and commendable, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What occupies our mind? What needs cleaned up? What takes away our alertness? Is it pride? Is it bitterness?

Is it immorality? Remember what it says, the great commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

So there's the how. By doing the work of an evangelist, by proclaiming the word, by keeping our head. And here's the why.

And I'm sure that I'll touch on a few things that you've already looked at in the series so far. May they serve as a reminder. But Paul mentions three reasons why we must work so hard at making sure we finish well.

[19 : 04] First of all, there's the danger of wondering. Secondly, there's the discouragement of opposition. And thirdly, the reality of judgment. First of all, the danger of wondering is mentioned in verse 3 and 4 where Paul says, for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.

Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. And they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

people will wonder. People will wonder towards myths. And this wondering will happen as a result of consciously deciding to move away from God until we move in the opposite direction of God.

It might start subtly that we start questioning things in the Bible as maybe not being true and then we start wondering, well, if that isn't true, then maybe something else isn't true either and we struggle with miracles and we end up denying the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul, unfortunately, has experienced this himself. If you look at verse 10, he mentioned a man called Demas. And Demas, he says, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

[20 : 31] Here's someone who has wondered off. And I'm sure that Paul doesn't just want Timothy to realize that there are other people that might wander off, but he wants Timothy to realize he could wander off.

And I'm sure he even includes himself, that he himself could be naive and also realize he could wander off himself. What about the opposition?

Well, Paul mentions it in chapter 1, verse 8, chapter 2, verse 3 and 9. And in our passage, it comes as an example in the person of Alexander. Chapter 4, verse 14 and 15, he says, Alexander, the

metal worker, did me a great deal of harm, and the Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him because he strongly opposed our message. As a church in Bellevue, we have been looking at the book of Ezra and Nehemiah. We've been looking at the book of Acts. We've been looking at the gospel of Luke. We have tumbled over the fact that time and time again, opposition is part of the Christian life. [21 : 41] The opposition might come from the outside in, it might come from within, but there are constantly people, even spiritual opposition in the form of Satan himself who is described as a roaring lion seeking who he may devour that will try to discourage us, tip us up, try to keep us away and take us away from the Lord.

The result that might be that because of the opposition we want to give up, it's too hard. And Paul knows that and has experienced that himself. But I think the most important one that Paul wants to hold before Timothy is simply the reality of judgment.

He says it twice in our passage. Chapter 4, verse 1, he says, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this chart.

And again in verse 8, he says, now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Timothy, Brunsfield, you may face opposition. Any of us could be in danger of starting to wander away from truth.

[23 : 17] But most of all, there is in the future a day where we will have to face the judgment seat of God. Now, in many ways, this is good news.

And if there's anyone who is here tonight who's ever suffered injustice or ever suffered from pain or have been a victim on the receiving end of injustice, this is great news because one day things will be set right.

But it's also bad news because it includes us. But fortunately, there's also good news because in Christ Jesus, we have nothing to fear, only to look forward to.

When we come before the throne and we can claim the grace and mercy that was brought through Jesus, but also if we've lived faithfully like Paul received the crown of righteousness.

But if we live consciously with that future, knowing that there will be a day that all of us will have to give account of our life, will help us as Paul to finish well.

[24 : 34] It will motivate us. And I really think that these three, the reality of wondering, the opposition as well as the future judgment day really put power in Paul's charge.

Paul is not giving a little pat on the back to Timothy. It's not a little hot cup of cocoa. It's just encouraging. Paul knows what lies ahead for Timothy. And his charge comes from a deep, deep care and love.

And I hope you feel that deep love and care. Because I hope, honestly hope that we will all of us see each other in the life after this.

That we will not come to heaven and all of a sudden thinking, I used to sit next to so and so and they're not here. But let me finish on the encouraging word and the news that there is help.

Because I don't want anyone, and I don't think Paul wanted Timothy to go away frightened and worried. Am I just going to drop off? Am I going to slip? No, Paul says there is help. And help comes really in two forms.

[25 : 46] And I think it's really important to acknowledge and receive the help that is available. Sometimes I think in our individualistic society we fall in the trap of applying all this on our own.

But we need help and it's there. And the first help is actually Paul offering in himself. Look with me to verse 6, 7, and 8.

He says, For I, Timothy, 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. What is Paul doing? I don't think he's boasting.

I don't think he's always saying to Timothy, you know, na, na, na, na, na, I'm already here. Now you try. That's not Paul.

[26 : 48] I think Paul simply wants to encourage Timothy to realize, you know, it is possible. And if you know of any, even part of what Paul had to go through for his faith, the lashings, the

imprisonments, yet for him to testify that he's finished the race, kept the faith, he's saying to Timothy, it is also possible for you to follow my example, be encouraged, and remember me.

That Paul himself was able to do it, meaning also you can. Practically, I think it means, and I'm borrowing a phrase that I found in a book written by John Piper, where he says, in one of his chapters, he says, read Christian biography.

Basically, that chapter is all about that we should make more effort in reading of some of the, we call them heroes of the faith. I think that's a terrible, terrible phrase or title.

Paul isn't a hero of the faith, he is just like one of us. We shouldn't put him on a pedestal, but we should learn from his life and how he remained faithful to Jesus.

And we should read all the Christian biography that is in the Bible, but throughout history, there are so many great books out there that can encourage us, of people that have gone before us. I also think that is what church is all about.

[28 : 20] We should allow people to read our biographies, we should share stories, much more than we do. and I would say to the younger people in this congregation, look at the older generation who are a little bit closer to going to the true home and learn from how they have continued to stand firm and keep the faith.

That's what Paul is doing. And vice versa, those who are a little bit further in the season of life, allow and take the opportunity to teach generations growing up what you've learned to stick to the path and to the road.

Paul offers himself as that help. But lastly, and most importantly, the help comes from Jesus himself. Because Paul says in verse 17, but the Lord stood at my sight and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it.

And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. And again in verse 18, he says, the Lord will rescue me from every evil attack. Here are two thoughts to finish on.

Finish well does come from combining faith with works and doing, serving the Lord. It is also being aware of opposition and the danger of wandering.

[29 : 59] But the helper kid is a Jesus who will strengthen us at every stage of our journey. What's one of the names given to Jesus?

He is Emmanuel, God with us. God with God with me.

But we should. Because God hasn't changed. And the same God who gave strength to Paul, and through what Paul is sharing here, would give the strength to Timothy, would also be the one giving strength to each one of us.

us. But most importantly, is that the Lord will not just give strength, he also is able and willing to rescue us from every evil attack and will bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.

So ultimately, understanding the call to not just start well, but also to finish well, boils down to trust, and starting each day in dependence of him and say, Lord, I need your strength.

[31 : 17] I need you to take me safely home. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you so much again for your precious word, how every part of your word is inspired by you, is your living word to us today, and we thank you for Paul's words to Timothy and through Timothy to us tonight.

I pray that whatever stage we are in our following of you, Lord Jesus, that you will give us that strength to do whatever is necessary, to put in that extra effort to not only start well, but also to finish well, to fight the fight, to keep the faith and finish this race, but knowing that we can call on your help that is available to us all the time.

Lord, it is my prayer that we may all see one another in our eternal home in heaven, but we need you to take us safely there.

So I pray that for this church, I pray that for Bellevue, for other churches in this city, in this country, Lord, help your people, your children, to keep the faith and to finish well, for your glory and for your honor, in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.