

## TO MY SON

An Expositional Study of II Timothy

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### CHAPTER FIFTEEN -

### AT THE END OF THE ROAD

II Timothy 4:6-8

**6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.  
7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:  
8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.**

HERE is one of the most familiar passages in the New Testament, and one of the most exhilarating. As he dictates it to his amanuensis, Paul is, in very truth, at the end of the road. He began on the Damascus Road over thirty years ago: that time when, in all his pride and prejudice, he was suddenly, even dramatically, arrested, and humbled to the very dust, and converted, and commissioned. What a day that was!

He could never forget it; he never tired of telling the story - three times over we have it, within the brief compass of the Acts. How he would have sung our hymn, "O happy day that fixed my choice." I wonder if you, my reader, have a "day" - a definite time of conversion to GOD, of trusting on CHRIST, on which you can put your finger and say "That is when it happened"? If so, it will often help to refresh your spirit, and renew your devotion, to go back to it in grateful recollection, and perhaps tell others how "the great transaction" took place.

If you can't put your finger on a specific day, never mind, so long as you know you are on the Road.

There are many real Christians, treading the Way Heavenward, who cannot tell you when they started: they only know that, by the grace of GOD, they are on it. Or, rather, on Him; for He said, didn't He, "**I am the Way . . .**" - John 14:6. For Paul, anyhow, the beginning was so clear and clean-cut; and so now is

### THE CLOSE

He is evidently quite conscious that the end is approaching.

The "I" here is emphatic; it supplies the reason why Timothy is now, in a particular way, to "watch . . . endure . . . do . . . make . . ." as in the previous verse, "for I am now ready to be offered."

Up till now the Ephesian Christians, and Timothy himself, have been able to turn to Paul for comfort, and guidance, and help; but the apostle is now to be taken from them, Timothy must brace himself and step into the lead. "**Moses, My servant, is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan,**" Joshua 1:2; "**The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha**", II Kings 2:15. Joshua, Elisha - great successors of the great; Timothy is to be another of them.

How does Paul view his end? First

(a) As the Offering - "**I am now ready to be offered.**" In Philippians 2:17 it had been hypothetical, "**if I be offered**"; now it is actual, "I am being offered." The picture is of the drink-offering being poured forth, in the Mosaic economy, over the sacrifice, a libation of wine. With Romans 12:1 in mind we can, I think, say that his life has been the sacrifice, the "**living sacrifice,**" and now his death, the outpouring of his blood in martyrdom, is the drink-offering, setting the final seal upon the whole burnt-offering of his sacrificial life. He was not only ready to suffer but proud to die, for such a Master and for such a Cause.

It reminds one of Browning's young soldier who came flying from the battlefield to report to Napoleon the victory at Hatisbon. Wounded, but eager, he brought the glad news, and then the Emperor noticed his wounds:

"You're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride  
Touched to the quick, he said:  
"I'm killed, Sire!" And his chief beside,  
Smiling the boy fell dead.

Wounds, he felt, were but second-rate honours: he craved the highest, and must needs give his utmost. So was it with Paul, who longed to go the whole length - not mere wounds, but sheer death.

That is one way that he looks at his coming death.

Second

(b) As the Departure - the "*unloosing*," as the word literally means. This is a most interesting word, and most illuminating.

It may be said to have at least five connotations, each of them throwing a flood-light on death.

(i) *It is a prisoner's word* - meaning his "release." What especial comfort that would bring to Paul, shut up as he is in that foul Roman dungeon: he is about to be let loose. It carries that thought also to us who are imprisoned within this mortal body, and who that day will be set free from all its restrictions and disabilities.

(ii) *It is a farmer's word* - and would signify the "unyoking" of an ox, when its long hard day's work was done. Paul had ploughed a toilsome furrow all through his life's long day, and now comes rest. A thing that we too shall greatly esteem if our life has been strenuously occupied in GOD's service.

(iii) *It is a warrior's word* - the encampment has been pitched here, and a fierce battle joined; now that is victoriously over, he strikes his tent, "unloosing" its cords and stakes, and is on the march again to the last great conquest of the campaign. How true of the battle-scarred old veteran who pens the words, and of all who follow In his steps.

(iv) *It is a seaman's word* - and would be used for the "unmooring" of a ship that has been tied up to the quayside, and which must now put to sea again. In Paul's case, and in ours, it is the setting sail upon the ocean of our last voyage, Our vessel Homeward Bound.

(v) *It is a philosopher's word* - suggesting the "unraveling" of a knotty problem. How many puzzles have agitated our minds, and disturbed our hearts, while we have pondered upon our life here, and its mysteries; "**but then shall I know even as also I am known**," as Paul himself said in I Corinthians 13:12.

How utterly grand to have all our questions satisfyingly answered. Well now, our "**departure**" implies all this - and more, much more, besides. It is true, of course, that Death is an intensely solemn thing - that comes out in Paul's first figure of the "outpouring"; but, looked at in this second way, it is an unimaginably glorious thing.

It would appear to be no exaggeration to say that, for the believer, the very best thing that can happen to him is to die. In fact, now I come to think of it, Paul himself says that very thing, in Philippians 1:23, " . . . **to depart, and to be with CHRIST . . . is far better**." For ourselves, let us not be anything else than happy in the thought of our departure. Of course, if the Lord were to come first, we should not have to pass through the grave at all, "**we which are alive . . . shall be caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air**", as I Thessalonians 4:17 says - no death, no coffin, no grave, no tombstone, no epitaph!

But, even if we do die, let us look on it as our "**departure**", and rejoice accordingly. Sadness, perhaps, for loved ones left behind to miss us, but for ourselves only gladness.

Paul reminds his son Timothy that his time for that is "**at hand**." It is only natural that he should, at that point, turn retrospectively to look at the days that are past; and so, next he speaks of

## THE COURSE

Here, once again, the heart of the old sportsman peeps out: he turns to the field of athletics, as he has so often done, for illustrations of his life.

If he had lived in modern times, I am sure he would have been, like myself, a member of the Surrey County Cricket Club; and if I had chanced to sit near him in the pavilion at the Oval, I feel certain I should have found him, every now and then, making a note on the back of an old envelope, as he saw something in the game that he could use to enforce a spiritual truth.

We preachers would be much more interesting and impressive if we were more alert to see, in common happenings and things, pictures of deeper concerns. Paul was expert at that; and first it is

(a) The Wrestling - "**I have fought a good fight.**" Most of the scholars think that it is this that he is referring to here rather than to soldiering. When he uses that word "**good**", I do not imagine he means that he has fought well, but that it has been a well-worth-while fight, a struggle that called forth a man's worthiest and best.

There are some causes that we would scorn to take our coats off for; but the cause of GOD is great enough, and "good" enough, for us all, and for our all. What a wrestle his whole life had been!

Constantly he had wrestled with circumstances - hardship; and loss, and suffering, and shipwreck; but "**in all these things we are more than conquerors**", he avers, in Romans 8:37. If only we also could learn "**through Him**" to triumph over our circumstances, what a difference it would make - both to our experience and to our influence.

How, too, he had wrestled with enemies - they had dogged him at every step, plotting against his very life; but at every turn he had proved victorious. If you had spoken with him about his struggles, I am sure he would have referred you to a deeper antagonism, even as he had reminded the Ephesians (6:12) that "**we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.**"

When a believer is "**all-out**" for GOD, he is bound, sooner or later, to have to do battle with evil powers. For Paul, the fight was now done.

For further illustration he turns to

(b) The Racing - "**I have finished my course.**" The running-track had provided him with many a lesson. One of the completest New Testament references is in that Hebrews 12:1, which, though it is the fashion now to hold as not written by him, is yet so thoroughly Pauline in tone and expression, "**Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus . . .**"

Quite a number of tips are offered us.

(i) *Keep the weight down* - for "**weight**" in this verse is, as we indicated in an earlier Lecture, a medical term, and the phrase would seem to say, "let us get rid of every ounce of superfluous flesh", which is just what an athlete would try to do. Its spiritual significance is, of course, that we should become smaller - less and less of self!

(ii) *Keep the limbs free* - "**the sin which doth so easily beset us**" which doth so closely wrap us round, as it means, like some impeding garment that gets in the way of free movement. You can't

run in an overcoat. Well, yes, you can; I have done it myself - and then I missed it! But you can't run well - and it is good running that the Bible is concerned with; it is not interested in jog-trotting. How many a Christian is slowed down in the race because of some besetting sin that clings to them; they never will be able to run all-out until they have learned to throw this off.

(iii) *Keep the eyes right* - "**looking unto Jesus.**" It is strange how important the eyes are in athletic affairs: boxing, cricket, golf, and so many others; and even in racing. I think, with sadness, of the silver cup that isn't on my study mantel piece! It ought to have been; but, leading near the tape, I heard someone coming up fast behind me, and foolishly I turned my head to get a glimpse of my antagonist. In that split second he flashed by. If only I had kept my eyes right! Now I have left only the pathetic picture of the cup that isn't there! Proverbs 4:25 is a fine piece of advice for the Christian racer "**Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.**" Never mind about other people. Peter asks, in John 21:21, "**Lord, and what shall this man do?**" and gets his Master's answer, "**What is that to thee? Follow thou Me.**" Eyes off all other people: eyes on Him, "**the Author and Finisher of our faith,**" Who was at the start of our race, and now waits at the end of it, watching for us to come in - eyes on Him.

(iv) *Keep the race going* - "**run with patience.**" As we saw in an earlier Lecture, this is not a sprint, but a long-distance race, and we are to go on and on, plodding along the track, yard after yard, year after year. "**Let us go on . . .**," says Hebrews 6:1. Paul had now been at it for more than thirty years, and will not finally cease until he breasts the tape. In his charge to the very Ephesians over whom Timothy had the oversight, he had said, in Acts 20:24, "**. . . that I might finish my course with joy**"; and now he is almost home.

It has been, as it will be for us all who would be "GOD's athletes", a set course - for GOD Himself has chosen our path, and marked out the way wherein we shall go;

- it is, as we have said, a long course - whose finish may be yet far off, but may be just round the bend;

- it is a strenuous course - with plenty of opposition, and an abundance of difficulties: it may indeed, for that very reason, be thought of as something of an Obstacle Race.

Such is "**the race that is set before us.**" Paul had so magnificently sped along the whole length, and will at any moment now triumphantly finish; and out of all his experience this Old Athlete would say to those who are following on the same track, to Timothy, and to all others, what he counselled the Corinthian believers (I Cor. 9:24), "**so run, that ye may obtain.**" There is a prize to be won, of which we shall speak presently.

But first there is a third illustration of the truly successful Christian life,

(c) The Safe-guarding - "**I have kept the faith.**"

It is as if some valuable thing had been entrusted to your care for delivery to someone on the other side of the world. You had it carefully wrapped, and secretly strapped about your person; you met professional thieves on the ship going across, you encountered fierce robbers on the roads; but you managed to keep your treasure intact and at last, with utmost relief and joy, you arrived at your destination, and handed the thing over to the one to whom it belonged. So, as

Jude 3 has it, "**ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.**"

Paul had done that pre-eminently. On his journey he has frequently been, as he says in 2 Corinthians 11:26, "**in perils of robbers,**" who in the spiritual sense as well as in the material, have sought to despoil him of his treasure, and to damage his "trust"; but now he is at the end of the voyage, and is able thankfully to deliver up his treasure, to hand it on, unmarred. In 3:8, he had told Timothy about those who were "**reprobate concerning the faith.**"

He is thankful beyond measure that it has been so different in his own case; for here, we repeat, is no wrongful boasting - as we have previously noted, in I Corinthians 15:10, he would ascribe all that he might have become, all that he had ever done, to the mighty "**grace**" of GOD. He has seen that, as his spur and secret, all along the Course of his eventful life, and now he comes to -

### THE CROWN

At the conclusion of our last Study we promised that we should have much to say about the crown; and here it is, discussed in some detail in this eighth verse of our present passage. And first we will take note of what I shall describe as

(a) The display of the prizes - "**Henceforth there is laid up for me.**" At the Greek games, of which Paul is still thinking, there would be displayed, in some public spot, the prizes to be awarded to the successful entrants - spectators and competitors alike might view them, in the one case with interest, in the other with hope. They would not be silver cups, as with us, but only wreaths of pine or laurel; yet what high value was set upon acquiring them. Not only were the athletes themselves honoured, but even the cities from which they came; when the conquering hero returned home with his Wreathed Crown, there was given him a procession and a reception.

I remember visiting a certain school on Sports Day and walking with my boyhood friend around the field before any of the events had begun. Up in one corner was a tent, outside which was a policeman. On going inside, we found a second constable. Ah, but, you see, on a table were set out the prizes for that afternoon's competitions - and these guardians of the law were responsible for their safety. There were the prizes safely "**laid up**" - for whom? Well, I can only say that my young friend pointed out one cup to me, with its little card attached, and said,

"That's what I'm after!" I am happy to relate that he got it. My point here is that there it was, safely "**laid up**" for him, until the time of his receiving it.

Thus is there also laid up, and with infallible security, the rewards in Heaven for all who "**run well.**" We cannot see them with the eyes of flesh; but our hearts can joyfully and thankfully contemplate this "**goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee**", as Psalm 31:19 says.

I know there are some high-minded Christians who think nothing of rewards, who just "do right, because it is right." But I am bound to confess that, like Paul (alas, it is the only thing in which I can claim to resemble him) I covet my reward that GOD's grace can, of His goodness, devise for so ordinary a performer.

I should frankly rejoice if I could think that there is any reward "**laid up for me.**"

Now let us consider

(b) The character of the prizes - "**a crown of righteousness.**" I suppose we shall be right in saying two things about these prizes:

(i) *They are for righteous people* - those who have the "**imputed**" righteousness of CHRIST, that is to say, all true believers. If we are not Christians, we have not even entered the race, and are certainly not entitled to the prize.

(ii) *They are for righteous lives* - those who, having first become Christians, "**by faith in Christ Jesus,**" then devote what remains of their lives to His service and His honour. Moffatt's translation of the phrase puts it, I think, exactly: he has "the crown of a good life." To have Life - is not a reward for our merit, but a gift of GOD's grace; to live Good Lives - is to be eligible for a reward.

Yet even this is not strictly a reward for our earning; if we do well, we have not really become entitled to reward, "**when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do,**" Luke 17:10.

I so well remember, many years ago, being appointed to supervise the "Little Its' Race" at a Children's Special Service Mission Birthday Sports. I gave the wee people their handicaps - all, of course, sheer guesswork; and one Delectable Dumpling I placed well in front of the rest, for she could only toddle - or waddle. I then explained the rules, and gave the word "Go!"

I greatly hope that the Governing Body of the Athletic Association will not, at this distance of time, declare the decision of the race void when I confess that, besides tying the starter, I also myself ran with the competitors running backwards in front of my little friend, luring her on to catch me! The result was that she won the race, although she was really too young to realise what was happening.

Surprised by all the clapping and cheering, she looked up at me and said, "What has me done?" Ah, my friend, if, at the end of the race, you receive the plaudits of the Master, and a prize at His hands, know that you will say, "But, Lord, what have I done?"

You will realise that you haven't deserved, or earned, a prize, and will only be amazedly thankful that, in spite of that, He has awarded you one.

Think, just a moment, of

(c) The Giver of the prizes - "**the Lord, the righteous judge.**" You see, Paul has had, will have, to appear before Nero, the unrighteous judge - he knows, to his bitter cost, what that means; he is not unprepared to receive at his unjust hands the sentence of a cruel death. But he has a reward to look forward to that he is to receive at the hands of another - a Judge, inescapably just, almost unbelievably generous. Don't you think it makes some subtle difference, at any prize distribution

function, who gives them away? There are some people we could all name, from whose hands it would be an added honour to get our prize. But what shall be said of our being rewarded by the Wonderful Wounded hands of the Living Lord?

Now come to

(d) The day of the prizes - "**at that day**." When we were dealing with 2:5, and the word "**crowned**", we called attention to "**the prize of the high calling**" in Philippians 3:14, as being the "**upward**" calling: the ceremony, at the end of the Games, of being called to go upward to the Grand Stand to receive the prizes. An illustration of "**that day**", referred to again in our present passage, when we shall be called up, "**caught up**," as I Thessalonians 4:17 has it, for one thing, for those who have won prizes to get them. What a grand day is any Prize Day; but was any such like this one that is to be? What a thrill to see the famous veterans of the track file up to get their crowns; yes, and what a thrill to see all the humbler runners, too. What a tragedy if, readers and writer, any of us should be missing from that list - in Heaven, because that doesn't depend on the quality of our running; but no reward. A place; but no prize.

Well, look lastly at

(e) The winners of the prizes - "**not. . . me only, but . . . all them also that love His appearing**." Why so? Because, if we have set our heart on His appearing, it will so affect our Christian life and service that we shall qualify for the prizes He will then distribute; the thought of meeting Him will put that something extra into our Wrestling, our Racing, and our Safe-guarding, which will render them so successful as to be rewarded.

So it is pertinent to enquire, are we thus eagerly looking forward to His return? The great and profound scholar, Dr. Alfred Plummer, has written, "Are our hearts longing for CHRIST'S return? Or, are we dreading it, because we know that we are not fit to meet Him, and are making no attempt to become so?" It is a very solemn, and important, question; and it is very evident from our verse that "Prize, or No prize" depends upon our answer.

And now, enough about prizes. As I have indicated, I set great store upon them. I am not going to be so foolish as to affect to despise what the Master, and the Scriptures, speak about so much; I am not going to attempt to be so superior to Paul as to think lightly of what he thought of so highly.

Yes; and yes, again. But I want to finish on another note. Do you remember those lines of the old hymn

"The bride eyes not her garment,  
But her dear bridegroom's face.  
I will not gaze at glory,  
But on my King of grace.  
Not at the crown He giveth,  
But on His pierced hand:  
The Lamb is all the glory  
Of Immanuel's land,"

After all, no it will utterly satisfy in "**that day**", however beautiful, and however wonderful it may be - no, no it; but only He. So our last word from the passage is not of the Prize and its arrival, but of the Person and "**His appearing.**" I don't think I can write any more about that: I just want to put down my pen - and think, and pray.

Will you join me?

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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