

I.N.I.

Last Sunday after Pentecost
Nov. 20, 2011
II Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18

In Christ Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and now rules all things, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How are you doing in your race of life? I remember talking to an elderly pastor when I was fresh out of the Seminary. I mentioned to him that, in order to keep in shape, I would regularly run around Lake Lee in Millston and out to the garbage dump and back. He responded by saying that whenever he got the urge to run, he would lie down and take a nap. I am getting to that age as well.

Unfortunately, there are many people in this world who do just that spiritually in their race for eternal life. When the spiritual race for life gets tough, or as they get older, instead of keeping in good spiritual shape, they lie down and take a nap. Instead of keeping up with the daily personal devotions in God's Word or their family devotions they put them aside. Instead of consistently attending Bible study at church and the hearing of God's Word in the worship service, too many other things interfere. Instead of flexing their spiritual muscles in working for the Lord in outreach and serving others, they feel they are too busy in taking care of themselves.

This second letter to Timothy was Paul's last letter that we know of before he was martyred. Paul is imprisoned in Rome for a second time. Only Luke was with him. At the end of this letter Paul urges Timothy to come visit him and bring Mark with him. He also asks Timothy to bring his cloak he had left behind and some scrolls and parchment. But Paul's greatest need was to once more get out words of encouragement in written form to Timothy and the New Testament Church. How necessary these words from the Lord through Paul would be during the terrible times of persecution that were to come. Their race for life would get much tougher!

The words of our text this morning are Paul's farewell words. He knows his time has arrived for his departure from this world. His race for eternal life is almost over. How does Paul respond? With shock, anger, denial, depression or panic? No! He faces it calmly as one who is **realistic, aware and confident**. And that is the three parts to this morning's theme. From the Apostle Paul's words we can

PREPARE FOR OUR RACE FOR ETERNAL LIFE

I: Be realistic about the Course

II: Be aware of our Source of strength

III: Be confident of the Outcome

Paul was **REALISTIC** about the race of life. He knew that in this race it would not be a bed of roses and a life of ease. There would be sorrows, disappointments, grief and suffering. One such sorrow he endured was when he was first brought before the court in Rome. A Roman citizen bound over for trial in Rome had certain rights. One of them was to call on friends and influential people who could testify on his behalf and defend him. These people had to be of wealth and influence. Well it appears that at Paul's first trial no one of influence or wealth stood up for him or defended him in any way.

Paul writes, **AT MY FIRST DEFENSE NO ONE STOOD WITH ME, BUT ALL FORSOOK ME**. What a great disappointment that must have been. Not a single soul came forward to take his stand at Paul's side. There must have been some influential and somewhat wealthy Roman

Christians, and yet not one dared to confess their faith with Paul. Paul was ready to give his life for the Lord and for his fellow believers and no one dared to stand with him. Paul could readily understand how Jesus must have felt on Maundy Thursday when His chosen disciples all fled and didn't stand by Him.

But Paul responds in a Christ-like way. He writes **MAY IT NOT BE CHARGED AGAINST THEM.** In other words, "Father forgive them for their selfishness, for their fear, for their lack of love." When we suffer neglect or abuse, our innate self-centeredness prompts us to feel sorry for ourselves and to dwell on the hurt and the pain that we feel. When we are forgotten or rejected by others we readily think of revenge as a payback. But as we keep our Savior before our eyes, we shall learn not only from His example, but receive power from His Word to forgive others and to pray for those who use and abuse us, who neglect and reject us.

Paul was **REALISTIC**, he knew what to expect in his ministry, in his race for life and he knew what to expect from sinful mankind. We should be the same. We know ourselves. We know how sinful and self-centered we are, why would we expect others to be better. We know how hateful this world and Satan is against Christ and His children. Then let us be **REALISTIC** in facing the trials, troubles, temptations, tribulations and disappointments in life as Christians. Paul wrote **WE MUST THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

Paul also was **REALISTIC** in the race of life to know that it would come to an end. Some people live as if death will always come to the other guy and will always be years away. They are never prepared for it. What does Paul say in vs. 6 **FOR I AM ALREADY BEING POURED OUT AS A DRINK OFFERING, AND THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE IS AT HAND.** Paul knew that he was facing a martyr's death. Like the wine that was poured out and drunk after the animal was sacrificed to indicate the end of the sacrifice, Paul knew that his blood would soon be poured out in his final act of service to His Lord. And he wasn't afraid. He calls this **THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE.** Literally the word is the **RIGHT TIME.**

Timothy might have been tempted to think that Paul's end was coming too soon, that the Church still needed him, that it was not the right time. We have heard people say of loved ones who died, **"HE WAS TOO YOUNG TO DIE,"** or **"SHE WAS STILL NEEDED BY HER FAMILY, IT WASN'T THE RIGHT TIME."** But the Lord doesn't make any mistakes in His timing. The time He sets is the **RIGHT TIME.** Paul knew that and he wanted Timothy to be sure of that too. As the Psalmist, so should we declare, **OUR TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS, O LORD!**

The Greek for **"MY DEPARTURE IS AT HAND"** is very descriptive and draws a beautiful picture. It refers to untying the ropes on the dock and setting sail for another harbor or pulling up tent stakes, breaking camp and going on to another. That is what death is. It is leaving the shores of this life and sailing off to the safe harbor of eternal life. It is breaking camp in this life and moving on to the eternal camp in heaven. May we be **REALISTIC** about our course in this race of life. It is not easy, it is plagued with hardships and trials and it will come to an end.

II: LET US BE AWARE OF OUR SOURCE OF STRENGTH

In vs. 17 Paul writes, **BUT THE LORD STOOD WITH ME AND STRENGTHENED ME, SO THAT THE MESSAGE MIGHT BE PREACHED FULLY THROUGH ME, AND THAT ALL THE GENTILES MIGHT HEAR. AND I WAS DELIVERED OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE LION.** No one else stood with Paul at his first trial, but the Lord was with Him. In his disappointment, no doubt Paul turned to the Lord for help and He was there with His ever present love and powerful Word. Paul realized that he was given yet one more chance to testify about the Lord Jesus. He was given a chance to speak about Jesus to all of these Gentile unbelievers who were putting him on trial. A chance to tell them that Jesus had come into this world to save them. Jesus

came to live a perfect life for them, and to die as the sacrifice that atoned for their sins and the sins of the whole world. What a blessing! One can imagine the scene. The court room packed, the galleries filled with dignitaries, perhaps the media of their day and the common people to see the trial of this famous Christian preacher and missionary. No one steps forward to defend Paul. So Paul uses the opportunity, not to defend himself, but to proclaim the Gospel message of salvation alone through Jesus Christ.

Were any converted? We don't know. But the Word does not return to the Lord empty. Was Paul released? Yes, at that time. Paul says he **WAS DELIVERED OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE LION.**

In vs. 7 Paul writes, **I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH.** In these three phrases Paul sums up his earthly life. He is saying "I did not sit on the sidelines or take a nap. I entered the competition. I competed to the very end." This word "fight" means a partaking in an athletic contest, not fighting a battle in war. It was a good contest. Not a contest for wealth, power, fame, or personal pleasure, but a good, pleasing battle for the Lord. Faithful in his duties, putting up with the hardships of life for the sake of the preaching of the Gospel, resisting temptations and doing battle with those who would destroy the Gospel and the Church.

He also **FINISHED THE RACE.** This is the foot race that was run in their Olympic games. Paul knew it was not a sprint but a marathon. It meant faithfulness until death, not just till confirmation, or for the moment, or for some earthly blessings. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he did not **RUN WITH UNCERTAINTY or AIMLESSLY.** To the Philippians he wrote, **I PRESS TOWARD THE GOAL FOR THE PRIZE OF THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.** To the Ephesian elders Paul said, **I CONSIDER MY LIFE WORTH NOTHING TO ME, IF ONLY I MAY FINISH THE RACE AND COMPLETE THE TASK THE LORD JESUS HAS GIVEN ME--THE TASK OF TESTIFYING TO THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE.**

He also **KEPT THE FAITH.** The truth that God had given Him he guarded and kept pure, and the personal faith that was given him by the Holy Spirit he also guarded against all doubt. We note that in all three phrases the object appears before the verb. Literally it reads, "**THE GOOD FIGHT I have fought, THE RACE I have finished, and THE FAITH I have kept.**" Even though he speaks in the first person, Paul does not focus attention upon himself. What he had done as a Christian was not due to his own efforts but rather to the enabling power of God's grace in Christ Jesus in His Word. It was the **FIGHT, the RACE, the FAITH** that was important.

Let us be **AWARE OF OUR SOURCE OF STRENGTH** in our race. It is the Lord Jesus and His powerful Word!

III: BE CONFIDENT OF THE OUTCOME

Paul writes in vs. 8 **FINALLY, THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH THE LORD, THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE, WILL GIVE TO ME ON THAT DAY, AND NOT TO ME ONLY BUT ALSO TO ALL WHO HAVE LOVED HIS APPEARING.** Paul is confident of what lies ahead, what is in store for him beyond the curtain of death, beyond the grave--**A CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.** In keeping with his picture of the Olympic games Paul speaks of the wreath that is placed on the head of the victor at the conclusion of the race. Today the winner is given a gold medal. Paul looks forward to that crown he will receive when he finishes his race of life, a crown that is given, not earned.

But it is not a perishable wreath of foliage and branches, or even gold but a **CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.** Paul will be clothed in perfect righteousness. Paul already possessed this righteousness, earned for him by Christ; it was his through faith in Jesus. It is also ours, but we also

still retain our sinful flesh, our Old Adam. At Christ's appearing all of that will change. This present world of sin will be destroyed and we will be resurrected to live without sin in **"everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."** That is why standing before the **RIGHTEOUS JUDGE** on Judgment Day holds no terror for the believer but only joyous anticipation. For the Judge took care of our sinfulness. Paul wrote, **FOR HE (GOD) MADE HIM (JESUS) WHO KNEW NO SIN TO BE SIN FOR US, THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.** It was all accomplished and finished on the cross, and assured to all mankind through Jesus' resurrection. Paul wrote to the Romans, **THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS.**

The crown of righteousness awarded by Jesus, the righteous Judge, is based on His redeeming work. It is Paul's, the same way it is ours, through faith in Jesus. That is why Paul concludes **AND NOT TO ME ONLY BUT ALSO TO ALL WHO HAVE LOVED HIS APPEARING.**

In vs. 18 Paul writes, **AND THE LORD WILL DELIVER ME FROM EVERY EVIL WORK AND PRESERVE ME FOR HIS HEAVENLY KINGDOM. TO HIM BE GLORY FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN!**

Paul had been rescued from countless evil attacks from man and Satan during his earthly race. And even if men now kill him because of his faith in Christ he will be rescued from the evil of eternal death and preserved for heaven.

Because the Lord has given him such confident and comforting assurance, Paul breaks out in a short doxology of praise **TO HIM BE GLORY FOREVER AND EVER.**

What a wonderful way for a man on death row to end his last letter.

May that also be our response and the response of every Christian as we confidently await the Lord's eternal deliverance after our **RACE IS RUN, the RACE FOR ETERNAL LIFE.**

TO HIM BE GLORY FOREVER AND EVER.

Amen.