

“LIVING... FOR HIS GLORY!”
(2 Timothy 4:1-8, 16-18)
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[East Cobb U.M.C. / Marietta Campmeeting; 7-26-09]

-I-

1. Most of you already know that the theme for this year’s Campmeeting has been “*For His Glory*,” and how we go about “*Living... for His Glory*” in our own lives each and every day.

A—Over the last 10 days, our other host pastors (Jimmy Thurman and Jim Higgins) have already led us in an exploration of some of the various aspects and dimensions of what this means.

B—So hopefully without repeating anything they’ve said, today as we wrap-up Campmeeting 2009, I’d simply like to round-out that discussion by talking about Paul’s vision of what how we go about actually living for God’s glory.

C—In other words, once we’ve found and claimed a sure faith in Jesus Christ, then what do we *do* with that faith? How do we make sure it lasts, and isn’t just a passing fad?

2. Well, 2000 years ago, this was probably one of the questions on the mind of the apostle Paul as he sat in the stands of a large sports stadium in Greece, watching athletes from all over the Roman Empire compete in the largest public sports contest of that time.

A—It was known as the “*Panhellenic Games*” (the forerunner of today’s “Olympic Games”), and he would’ve watched a series of athletic events that included what today we’d call the long-jump, javelin, discus throw, marathon, track, wrestling, and chariot races.

B—And as he watched, he probably was considering how, in many ways, the *Christian* life, paralleled these athletic events, and he began using them as a metaphor to teach people how we go about living for God’s glory.¹

3. To this end, towards the end of his own life, he writes a letter to his young partner Timothy. Listen to his words in my reading of today’s scripture from 2 Timothy 4:1-8, 16-18 (Pray).

A—Now, in these verses, I believe we find Paul giving advice not only to Timothy, but also to us today, about how we can effectively go about living for God’s glory – how we can effectively “finish the race” of faith.

B—Specifically: I believe his words remind us of at least two things that often *prevent* us from living for God’s glory; but more importantly, it also shares at least two attitudes that enable us *TO live* for God’s glory every single day – let’s talk about these, in turn.

-II-

4. First of all, Paul reminds us that in the “race” of Christian life, faith, and ministry, there are those who never finish because **they GIVE UP.**

A–In Verses 16-17, he complains about some so-called people of faith who abandoned him, saying that in his time of need “*no one came to my support, but all deserted me!*”

B–Now maybe you know some folks who act like this:

1–People who’ve gotten disillusioned with God or the church because of some tragedy, or disaster, or difficulty in life, or scandal in the church – maybe they don’t like their pastor, or some of their fellow church members, or the direction their church is taking, or something else that disillusion them about faith.

2–And so, they use this as an excuse to abandon their faith journey, or their faith community, or even their relationship with God

(a) For instance, they may quit praying, or reading their Bible, and may not darken the doors of their church (or any other church) ever again,...

(b) ...Convinced that its all just a show, that Christians (or at least, the ones *they* know) are just a bunch of hypocrites, and that God is just a myth!

(c) Just this past week, I read in USA Today about an atheist who participated in a “de-baptism” ceremony, where she publically rejected the Christian upbringing of her childhood.

3–In other words, in the “race” of life and faith, there are folks who stumble and fall (like in a track hurdle), and instead of picking themselves up, brushing themselves off, and getting back in the race, ...

4–...they stay on the sidelines, pouting and complaining about the unfairness of the game, or about the other players, or about their coach (their pastor), or even about the referee and owner of the race (God himself).

C–Now, as Verse 17 reminds us, Paul himself knew and experienced the fact that there IS unfairness in the game of life (and yes, also in the church!). ²

D–But I’ve heard it said that the difficult and unfair things of life can either make us *Better* or *Bitter* – they can help us become stronger, OR we can allow them to turn us away from God and from His people entirely.

E–Friends, when the hard times come (and they *will*), don’t give up “living for His glory,” like some people do because the going gets rough.

5. Still, in today’s scripture Paul also reminds us that there are some folks who don’t finish the “race” of life and faith because **they BURN-OUT.**

A–In Verse 3 Paul describes these as people who “...*having itching ears, accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires; [They] turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.*”

B–Again, we all know people like this, too:

1–Christians who start out “on fire” for God, full of energy and boldness and passion, but who’ve never learned to *pace* themselves, or to plant deep spiritual roots.

2–And so, when the emotional “high” is gone, or when the “new” thing they into has grown stale, they burn out, exhausted, gradually drifting away from church, their spiritual vigor and vitality drained away.³

3–In the meantime, they’ve moved on to the *next* church, the *next* preacher, the *next* religion that (they believe) will set them on fire – in ministry-circles, we sometimes call them “*church-hoppers*,” and unfortunately, they’re “a dime a dozen.”

C–And it may seem exciting at first, but in the end, this restlessness with life and religion is nothing more than a symptom of spiritual burn-out!

6. Thankfully, though, today’s scripture not only warns us about ***Giving-up*** and ***Burning-Out***,⁴ but it also describes two more attitudes that can help us live for God’s glory.

–III–

7. The first of these is found in **those who STEP-UP** – it’s the attitude of people of faith who’re not afraid to face difficult tasks and situations, who “step up” to a challenge and take it head on, even when others around think they’re crazy to do so.

A–You know, how many of US face challenges such as losing our job, cancer or some other disease, the breakup of our marriage, the dissolution of a friendship, or the loss of a loved one, and we feel so distraught and overwhelmed that we don’t want to even *face* life after that experience.

B–Maybe that’s why, in Verses 1-5 Paul tells Timothy... “*In the presence of God... I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or not; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ...Always be sober, endure suffering, ...[and] carry out your ministry fully.*”

C–In other words, “*Even when you’re faced with challenges, hurts, frustrations, tragedies and disappointments, don’t shy away from running the race of life and faith. Instead, put on the ‘track shoes’ of faith in God, step up to the start line, and get ready to run, because God is with you!*”

D–How do the words to the old hymn go? “*Be not dismayed whate’er betide, God will take care of you. Beneath his wings of love abide, God will take care of you. [SING...] God will take care of you, through every day o’er all the way. He will take care of you; God will take care of you.*”⁵

8. And yet, if we’re going to fully live for God’s glory, then not only do we need to “step up”, but **we also need to FINISH-OUT** – that is: if we want to gain the ultimate victory, then we have to persevere and persist through the difficult and challenging tasks of life.

A–In Verses 7-8, Paul writes this to his young apprentice...

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

1–He’s saying, in effect, *“Look Timothy, it’s taken me a while, but I’ve done it! I’ve finished the race of life and of faith. And you can too IF you’ll stick with it!”*

2–He was saying that Christian life and ministry is hardly ever a *SPRINT*, but is more often a *MARATHON* in which the slow-but-steady tortoise wins in the end, beating even the hare. ⁶

B–In the words of author Orin Crain, *“The race is not always to those who are swift... but to those who are faithful.”* ⁷

1–For me, this means that the *“crown of righteousness”* in today’s scripture doesn’t necessarily go to Christians or churches that have the “coolest toys,” or the largest congregation or buildings, or those who have the most “cutting edge/hip” worship, or the most charismatic preachers or members, ...but to those who steadily, surely, and faithfully serve Jesus to the very end. ⁸

2–Marietta Campmeeting is a great example: it’s been around 172 years, and yet still touches the hearts and lives of people with the gospel today.

3–Now, I *do* need to say that a focus on *faithfulness* DOESN’T excuse a lack of excellence or cultural irrelevance in our churches or lives (we need both), but it DOES remind us that what God measures us by in the end is NOT what others see of our faith on the *outside*, but by what HE sees in our *hearts* on the *inside*.

C–And so, “Finish-Out” faith is faith that perseveres and persists in doing *God’s* will, in *God’s* way, in *God’s* time *and* *pace* to very end – even if it doesn’t seem fast enough for some, or too fast others, it gets to the finish line in GOD’S time, rather than our own.

D–How does the great hymn “Amazing Grace” put it? *“Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come. ‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”* ⁹

–IV–

9. Friends, as we seek to be about *“Living... For [God’s] Glory”* in our individual and corporate lives of faith, we can either *Give-Up* and *Burn-Out*, ...OR we can *Step-Up* and *Finish-Out* – what’s it going to be for you?
10. [PRAY]
11. [HOLY COMMUNION]
12. [CLOSING HYMN: (From *“Upper Room Songbook”*): #47, *“Living For Jesus”*]

ENDNOTES:

1. For example, the Christian life contained a “track” on which to run, complete with obstacles/hurdles along the way = life itself. There were also “runners” who ran the race = we Christians. There was a starting line (= our conversion) and a finishing line (= our own death). At that finishing line, there was a reward to strive for, which he later called “*the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:14). And As Paul watched these games, he probably noticed that the Christian race even contained spectators = God Himself, with all the hosts of heaven watching on as the contestants (Christians) “race” in the competition.
2. Paul could have gotten *bitter* about the way church people treated him. But instead, in Verse 17 he reminds Timothy that even *through* the unfairness, through the difficulties, through the scandals, through the pain and hurt, *God* was faithful and so we in turn should be faithful *back to Him* AND to His people.
3. Jesus also described such people in his “Parable of the Sower” in Mark 4:1-9.
4. I think Paul would also even add a third way that prevent people from living for God’s glory: sometimes there are folks who **MIX-UP** – that is: they *confuse the start-line with the finish-line*. I have known people like this – maybe you have, too... people who have some dramatic spiritual experience like conversion or “filled with the Spirit”, and consequently begin thinking that they don’t need the church or other Christians anymore. After all, they were “saved” in a revival 20 years ago, or were “baptized in the Spirit” at a retreat 3 years ago, and so they don’t need all that other church stuff! But isn’t this kind of like saying you had a wedding ceremony 20 or 3 years ago, but you haven’t seen your spouse since? Oh, you may be married, but it’s NOT much of a marriage, is it? You see, biblical salvation is NOT a static *state* that we achieve, but an ongoing *relationship* that we must continually cultivate and grow in. So, whether its about Christian faith or life itself, we dare not confuse / “mix-up” a milestone event for the *completion* of the journey – it’s not the *finish* line; it’s just the *start*!
5. Verse 1 and Refrain of “*God Will Take Care of You,*” The United Methodist Hymnal #130.
6. You will remember the secular fable, in which the prize for winning went not to the hare who was the quickest and fastest, but to the tortoise who was the most persistent and perseverant.
7. During the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, 14-year-old (Muhbid) Mahamane was not someone that many record books would remember. But as a member of her Nigerian track team, she did what many athletes only dreamed of doing... she competed in an Olympic track race. The winning time for that race was 15 minutes, 16 seconds. Mahamane was passed twice. But she finished the race in just over 19 minutes --a full 3 minutes after the rest of the track had finished the race. Yet,... she *finished the race*, and received a standing ovation from the crowd in response.
8. This is not an justification or excuse for lack of excellence, or to not seek to be culturally relevant, but simply an acknowledgment that the Christian life and ministry is first and foremost about faithfulness, not relevance only.
9. Verse #3 of “*Amazing Grace,*” in The United Methodist Hymnal #378.