

## 2 Timothy 4

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[ 0 : 00 ] In the past there have been big milestones in the past year. Perhaps children starting school, or moving from primary to secondary.

Perhaps sitting exams, perhaps starting study or training. Perhaps people graduating or starting a new job. Perhaps some falling in love, getting married, the birth of a child, moving house, retiring. All sorts of things that may make the past year memorable for us. Inevitably, as we look back over the past year, we ask ourselves, well what have I achieved?

There may have been successes to look back on. The past exams, the graduations, the promotions, the past driving tests, making the first team. Or whatever it is, memories that we can look back on as achievements.

But there may also have been failures. The failure, perhaps, to find work. Or work that really suited you. Perhaps failed exams. Perhaps broken relationships.

[ 1 : 10 ] For most of us, as we look back, it will be a mixture of success and failure. A mixture of satisfaction and regret.

But what about spiritually? You may have made great strides in material or social terms. But has the same been true in spiritual terms?

As the Apostle Paul looks back, not on one year of his life, but as he looks back on his whole life, there is a quiet satisfaction. Not a smugness, but a quiet satisfaction as he looks back over his life. That he feels there have been good things that the Lord has achieved through his life. And as he contemplates the future, it is not with fear and dread or worry, but with confidence.

So let's look then at the Apostle's experience and his words here as he sums up. At this particular moment of time in his life, as he looks back, if he considers the present, and as he looks into the future.

[ 2 : 19 ] And the first thing is life in the present tense. Because Paul here speaks of what is happening to him at that moment. In verse 6, he says, For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.

Now these, of course, relate to the very specific circumstances of his life at this time. But he is acutely aware of the passing of time. Because he is nearing the end of his life.

He faces death in Rome. And we understand that this letter was written shortly before he was put to death in Rome. He lived his life in that knowledge.

He spoke here in terms of his departure. And that word sums up the idea of a ship setting sail.

Perhaps those of you who are familiar with the Lord of the Rings, and particularly the film of the last of these books, The Return of the King.

And at the end of it, some of the main characters in the story set sail in a ship from the Grey Havens. And it is a picture of death, the passing from this world.

[ 3 : 30 ] And so that is the kind of word that the Apostle Paul uses here. His departure. The time has come for my departure. So he is very, very conscious of the passing of time and the shortness of time.

Now our deaths may not be as imminent as Paul's. But who knows that? We are constantly being reminded around us, even people we know of, whose lives are cut short.

Or apparently, to our point of view, are cut short. But we may face declining health, encroaching old age. We may be aware that our powers are failing in various ways.

Every passing year reminds us that we are nearing the end of our lives. So how do we view our life in those circumstances?

Paul here saw his life as being poured out. Now that is quite a common picture that is used in poetic literature of our lives.

[ 4 : 32 ] Being poured out or being spilt. Our lives are being poured out like water that is spilt and can't be gathered up again. And we have this feeling about our lives, don't we?

And as we look back in the past, whether over the past year or further back than that, we see things that have been done that can't be recovered. Things that have happened that we can't run over them again.

They're gone. It's like water being spilt on the ground. Can't be gathered up again. How do you see your life? Do you see your life simply as that?

That it's being poured out, it's being spilt, it's being wasted. As you look back on the past, you just see that aspect of it and you don't see any achievement.

Perhaps you see life slipping through your fingers. Paul used this picture not in the idea of your life just being spilt or wasted.

[ 5 : 31 ] But he says that his life, he is being poured out like a drink offering. Now what does that mean? Paul saw his life as an offering to God.

He saw his whole life as being offered to God. That's what he urged others to do. To give themselves as offerings to God.

And that's what he himself did. Offering his life to God. And these were, as he saw it, the last drops of his life. You might say the dregs.

But the apostle Paul was not pessimistic. He didn't just see these last few moments or days, whatever they were, as just the dregs of his life. But he saw them as last drops to be offered to God. Like the libation, which was the last part of the sacrifice. And so as he sees his life as a sacrifice being offered to God, for God's glory, for God's service.

[ 6 : 33 ] He sees these last few moments or days also in that regard. He's not giving up. He's continuing to do. He's still working. He's still writing. He's still encouraging.

He's still proclaiming the gospel there in Rome. That's what we get from this letter as we think of Paul there nearing the end of his life. Now, the circumstances of our life will be very, very different. Those circumstances were unique to Paul. But still, the lessons that we can learn from this are relevant. How do we see our lives in the present tense?

Even perhaps if our strength is failing. Even perhaps if our resources are not what they once were or what we would like them to be. Even if we don't have the gifts, perhaps, that we think we would like to have.

How do we see life in the present tense? Do we see it as being earnestly and excitedly offered to God, whatever our circumstances may be?

[ 7 : 34 ] Surely, if the Apostle Paul, in those difficult circumstances of his life, imprisoned there in Rome, facing death, if he could continue in the present with that attitude, surely there's a great challenge for us in our circumstances.

To be wholly committed to the Lord and to see our life as being poured out in offering to him. So that's the first tense we see here.

Life in the present tense. But then there's also life in the past tense here. In verse 7. What does Paul feel as he looks back in his life?

What do you feel as you look back? Do you feel regret? Do you feel just concern about all the things you've got wrong? Was that what was uppermost in the Apostle Paul's mind?

There's no doubt he had got many things wrong in life. We know some of that from the New Testament. No, that's not what was uppermost in his life. What was uppermost was something positive.

[ 8 : 46 ] Something that he could say. And that was that he had fought the good fight. And that picture is one that I think is dear to the Apostle Paul.

He uses it several times. And it's the idea that the Christian life is a battle. The idea here of the fight is the contest. The wrestling in the arena.

And that tells us that the Christian life is not a picnic. It's not something just that we slide into easily. It's a real fight.

It's a real battle. Like wrestling with someone in the arena. Fighting to overcome. And Paul calls it here the good fight.

Or the picture that he uses is of a fight. But it's a good fight in terms of the Christian faith. The Christian fight. And we can think of expressions that are used of sports.

[ 9 : 45 ] Like some people call football the beautiful game. And it's that kind of idea here. That yes, the Christian life is a battle. Yes, it's a wrestling match. But it's a good fight.

It's a beautiful fight. It's something worthwhile doing. Now even this kind of language of fighting and struggling and competing.

Is perhaps something that today. I worry about sometimes. The opposition that there seems to be to this kind of emphasis. Perhaps in school and in education.

Because it is something that is there in human nature. That desire to fight, to battle, to be competitive. And if it's not channeled in a good direction. It will come out in other ways that are perhaps not so good.

And so it is important that we do have things like sport and all the rest of it. To channel that kind of desire to fight and to compete. But to do so within a structured situation.

[ 10 : 49 ] But of course, in the Christian life. There has to be this same competitiveness. This same desire to fight and to struggle.

The Christian must have at least something of this spark within him. Now of course, we all differ in personalities and the mentalities that we have. Some are much more competitive than others. But every Christian surely must have something of this.

To fight and to struggle for God. We must have something of this fire in our bellies. To actually compete in the Christian life. To win something for God.

This real feeling that our opponent will not overcome us. Because we have a deadly opponent. Whose desire is to destroy and to undermine our Christian faith.

And surely we must have that desire that he is not going to win. That we are going to battle to the end. As Paul says here, I have fought the good fight. Now of course, it is by God's grace.

[ 11 : 56 ] And by God's power. And by God's wisdom. That the Apostle Paul can say that he has fought the good fight. We may take that for granted. Although he doesn't spell it out here.

But the Apostle in so many ways in his letters. Emphasizes the sovereignty of God. In his salvation and so on. But having said that. It is still the Christian.

Who is in the arena. It is still the Apostle Paul. Who had to do the fighting. And that is something we must remember too. Yes, God is sovereign. And our salvation is because of his great sovereign grace to us.

But the Christian. Is in the arena. You as an individual. You are there to do the fighting. Yes, God has all his resources. Made available to you.

For that battle. For that struggle. But you have got to do the fighting. Think of David in the Old Testament. David had so many setbacks in his life.

[ 12 : 59 ] It is a tremendous story. Just to read the story of David in the Old Testament. And all the struggles that he had. All the setbacks. But David essentially was a fighter.

And none of those circumstances overcame him. Now, that aspect of his life. It didn't just happen. I don't believe.

It was something in which he trained himself. You see, if you think back to the beginning of his story. When he enters public life. He defeats the giant Goliath.

Now, that didn't happen just suddenly. Out of the blue. That attitude that he had to fight them. To compete. He told Saul he already had that attitude.

He had trained himself. So, he was unafraid to face this giant. Because he had faced the bear and the lion. And he had fought them off with his bare hands. It's because he had that desire to protect his sheep.

[ 14 : 01 ] It had that desire to stand for what was right. And to stand against injustice. That he therefore was able to fight against the giant. Now, that's just one example. But it's obvious that he developed this attitude.

Of fighting for what was right. And what was good. And there's a lesson there for us all. To fight the little battles of life. Sometimes we have in our imagination.

Eddie, oh, when some great situation arises. We'll rise to that occasion. But so often that never happens. If you've not been fighting your little battles.

And winning them gradually day by day. You've got to look at your life now. And think. Where have I failed in this past year? Where have I failed in my life up until now?

And start grappling with those little issues. Those little sins. And seeking to overcome. In that situation by God's grace. So that yes, one day then. When you are confronted with the big battle.

[15:01] When you are confronted with the giant. Then you'll be able to deal with that situation. There is a sense of completeness here.

About what the Apostle Paul has to say. Because the tense that he uses here. Is what's called the perfect tense. He has fought the good fight. That means it is complete.

He's nearing the end of his life. And he has done it. He has reached the finishing line. As it were. As we'll notice in the next picture. That he uses. His fighting days.

Will soon be over. Now that may very well not be the case for us. We're involved still in the middle of the battle. And yet. Surely that's a great encouragement. As we look forward.

There will come that time. If we're faithful. And remain faithful. That we'll too be able to say. By God's grace. We have fought the good fight. And it's complete. Then he uses the picture.

[15:59] I've finished the race. Now he doesn't say. I've won the race. He says. I've finished it. I've completed the course.

That God gave me. Now you see. We know that in the world of sport. And athletics. And so on. There's a great honor. In winning a race. But there's sometimes.

A great honor. In finishing. A race. Think of a marathon. Or something like that. Just to finish that. Is a great thing. Or think of.

A disabled person. In say. The Paralympics. Competing there. Just to finish the race. Is a great honor. Now you see.

That's something. Of what the Apostle Paul. Is saying here. I have finished the race. The race that God. Has given to me. I've finished it. I've completed it. Now it's not just.

[16:55] True. Of course. In races. Is true. In a lot of life. It's important. To finish something. So many of us. We start something. And we don't finish it. You know.

I'm sure. In some cupboards. In our houses. We've got things. That were unfinished. Whether it was making a model. Or whatever it was. It's unfinished. But there's a great.

Satisfaction. About completing something. Persevering with something. Until we finish it. And of course. Sometimes. It's true. In the area of.

Of treatment. Of medical treatment. It's important. To finish the course. That's what they always say to you. When you get an antibiotic. Make sure you finish the course. Complete the course. Or if you have a course.

Of chemotherapy. Of course. It's tremendously important. That that is completed. And so. There's so many things in life. That are so important. To complete. But surely. Supermely important.

[17:51] Is to complete. The race. To finish the race. As a Christian. You need perseverance. For that. Because many give up. It's a great tragedy.

That we still see. In this day. Where. You would think. It's so difficult. For people to make that. First step. To show interest. In Christian things. And perhaps even.

To make some profession. Of saying. But then. After that. Something goes wrong. They don't persevere. And they seem to have.

Turned away completely. From the church. And from the Lord Jesus Christ. You see. It's so important. The New Testament. Emphasizes this.

Again and again. It's so important. To persevere. The going may get rough. The opposition. May become. Strong. We may have.

[18:46] The snide comments. We may have. Some loss of status. Because we're. Seeking to live. As a Christian. There may be. The sheer drudgery. Of it. As a Christian.

Seeking. To just keep going. In certain circumstances. Maybe just the constant. Battle of it. But you've got to persevere. Can you look back. On your life. And say. I've persevered.

Maybe. Not like Paul. That you're saying. You've actually finished. But you can say. I've persevered. To this moment. And I'm going to finish. That's my intention. And then Paul said.

I have kept the faith. Now faith. Is the essential element. Of the Christian life. Believing the truth. And trusting the person. The Lord Jesus Christ. This morning. Do you know the truth. About Jesus.

Do you know who he is. That he is the eternal son of God.

[19:41] Do you know what he's done. That he's come. To give his life. To pay for our sins. So that we can be admitted. Into God's presence. Not only now. But forever. And if you know that truth. Do you believe it.

And do you trust. In the Lord Jesus Christ. And in him alone. For salvation. That's what the apostle Paul. Is speaking about here. That's what he did. Those many many years ago. As he fell down.

In front of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the road into Damascus. And he trusted in him. And he says. I have kept. That faith.

It's not just something. That I exercise. For a few moments then. It's not just something. That sort of comes to me. Every Sunday. When I'm in church. It's something. Persistent.

And constant. And I can say. I have kept it. I've held on. To that message. I have guarded it. I passed it on. To others. As well as continuing. To believe it myself.

[ 20 : 38 ] If you're a Christian. Can you look back. And say. I've kept the faith. And thirdly. And finally. Here.

We have life. In the future tense. In verse 8. Now. There is in store for me. The crown of righteousness. Which the Lord. The righteous judge.

Will award to me. On that day. And not only to me. But also to all. Who have longed. For his appearing. Now. As we look at the future.

Of course. It's so uncertain. We can look back. In the past. And we can see. The things that have. Certainly happened. Sometimes our memories. Play tricks on us. And we're not sure. Of what has happened.

But mostly. We know. What has happened. And as we look. In the future. Of course. We don't know. What's going to happen. That's the very definition. Of the future. It's still unknown to us. We may have.

[ 21 : 31 ] Guesses. As to what's going to happen. And we may sometimes. Feel things are inevitable. That they're going to happen. But who knows. What a day. May bring forth.

And sometimes. That very uncertainty. Can be very unsettling to us. And set up all kinds of worries. And anxieties. Was Paul. Anxious.

And uncertain. As he faced the future. Well no doubt. There were many things. That were uncertain. In his future. How things were exactly. Going to work out there. In Rome. But it seemed. He had a pretty.

Clear conviction. That he was going to die. There in Rome. But there was one thing. He was absolutely. Certain of. One thing. He was certain of. Was that there was going to be.

A day of judgment. He spoke of the Lord. The righteous judge. And he spoke of that day. And he's speaking there. Of the day of judgment.

[ 22 : 27 ] Now many people. If the thought. Of a day of judgment. Ever enters their heads. That would be something. To fear. And to be worried about.

And to be concerned about. And that's why. Perhaps most people. Have just explained away. These kind of emphasis. In the Bible. And say. Well that's never going to happen. But the apostle Paul.

Knew. For certain. That that would happen. That is the one certain thing. That is appointed unto men. Once to die. And after that. The judgment. Absolutely certain.

And yet. He did not fear. That reality. Why not? He didn't fear. Because he knew.

He had a righteous. Just judge. He knew. That whatever happened. When he faced. Caesar. However just. Or unjust.

[ 23 : 22 ] Caesar might be. In his court. He knew. That one day. He would appear. Before a perfectly. Righteous judge. Now you see. You in this life. You may be judged.

By all kinds of people. You may be judged. By people around you. Who make. Make false judgments. About you. You may be judged. By your boss at work. You may be judged. By all kinds of people.

And their judgment. Is imperfect. And sometimes. It's so frustrating. You feel. When people have judged. You wrongly. But one day. You will face. The perfect judge. And his judgment.

Will be absolutely fair. Now how can the apostle Paul. Look forward to that time. With anticipation. Because surely. For most of us. That feeling.

That we're going to face. A judge. Who's absolutely just. Is scary. Because yes. Even although people around us. May make wrong judgments. Of us. Generally speaking.

[ 24 : 20 ] They're just as bad. As we are. And they kind of make allowances. For each other. And that kind of thing. And their judgment. Perhaps. Errs. Sometimes. On the side of.

Being. Sort of kind. And letting people off. But this judge. Will be absolutely. Judge. How then. Can the apostle Paul. Look forward. With anticipation.

To the coming. Of this great day. Well. He can look forward. With confidence. Because he knows. That he. Has been granted.

The righteousness. Of God. He is the one. Who has trusted. In the Lord Jesus Christ. And through him. Has been made righteous. And so he knows.

That God. Will never be so unjust. As to punish him. For the sins. That have already been punished. In the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why he can look forward. To this day. With confidence.

[ 25 : 14 ] And this is. This judge. Is the Lord. That is the Lord. Jesus Christ. He appeared. The first time. When he was born. In this world. When he lived. And died. And rose again.

But he will return. You know. How one of the books. In Lord of the Rings. Is the return. Of the king. Well. That's exactly. What we have. In the Bible. Promised. About the Lord Jesus.

The return. Of the king of kings. He will one day. Return. And he will judge. The world. Do you know him. As your savior. And Lord. It's only.

If you know him. In that way. That you can have. The confidence. That the apostle Paul. Had here. As he faced. That day of judgment. Because he believed.

That there. He would be. Awarded. A crown. Of righteousness. He says. There is in store. For me. The crown. Of righteousness. Now the crown.

[ 26 : 09 ] The word. That's used for it here. Is not our picture. Of a crown. Like the queen's crown. A royal crown. It's the laurel wreath. It is the crown. That was given. To the champion.

The winner. Of the race. The winner. Of the fight. That's the picture. That is used. And so. It ties in. With what he's just. Been saying. It's because. He's fought the good fight.

He's finished the race. He's kept the faith. That he's awarded. This crown. Of righteousness. But it is. A crown. Of righteousness. It's based on this fact.

That he has been. Made righteous. He's been put into. A right state. With God. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. Through faith. In the Lord Jesus. It's not because.

Of him. His own. Righteousness. Or anything like that. And one day. Paul says. This will be. Openly recognized. No doubt.

[ 27 : 06 ] There'll be many surprises. On that day. Many people. Who. Thought. That they would be. Welcomed. By the Lord Jesus. He will say to them. Depart from me.

I never knew you. And others. Who perhaps. Are in fear. And trembling. Will be welcomed. Come. Blessed of my father. But in that day.

There will be. A perfect judgment. And. Paul says here. That this crown. Of righteousness. Is in store. For him. It's reserved. For him. Now.

Sometimes. When we. Think of things. Being reserved. We think. It should be. Absolutely certain. That they're reserved. For us. But you know. Sometimes. You can have a ticket. On a plane. And you think.

My seat is reserved. There. It's absolutely certain. I'm going to get on. And you come to the airport. And you discover. Your seat has been given. To somebody else. Because. They overbooked. And you're the one. That lost out.

[ 28 : 01 ] Well. It's not at all. In that sense. That we're told here. That this crown. Of righteousness. Is in store for him. It's absolutely certain. It is reserved. We've got to ask ourselves today.

Have we made. That reservation. We make all kinds of reservations. In life nowadays. You can reserve. Your seat in the theater. Your seat in the cinema. Or whatever.

Or your seat on a plane. And as I say. Sometimes. These are very uncertain. But we make all these reservations. And all these appointments. But have we made. The greatest reservation. Of all. That we know.

That the Lord Jesus Christ. Has gone to prepare. A place for us. How can we know that? We can know it. If we have trusted. In him. Take him now. As your savior. And you will know.

That certainty. That reality. Of having your place. Reserved. And that crown of righteousness. Reserved. So.

[ 29 : 00 ] As you stand. At this moment of time. At the end. Of one year. The beginning of another. Very conscious. Of the passing of time. What are your thoughts? Of the past?

Regrets perhaps? Of the future? Fears? Remember the words of the. Carol. Little town of Bethlehem. The hopes and fears.

Of all the years. Are met in thee tonight. They meet. At this moment. Of the present. In us. Jesus. And at this moment. Against that background.

Choose Jesus. As the apostle Paul. Surely was doing here. When he says. I fought the good fight. I finished the race. I kept the faith. That faith.

Was a living reality. For him. Right up to that present moment. And he was conscious. Of his life. Being poured out. Minute by minute. Hour by hour. In service.

[ 29 : 57 ] Of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have not already chosen Jesus. Choose him now. And if you have chosen him. Then. Fight the good fight of faith. Persevere.

And he will bless you. Not only in this life. But in the life to come. With eternal glory. Let's pray. Our loving Heavenly Father.

We thank you for your great grace to us. In Christ Jesus. We thank you that your grace. Is a reality to us. Past. Past. Present. And future. Because Jesus Christ. Is the same yesterday.

Today. And forever. Look on us in mercy. Then this day. And enable those. Who as yet. Have not trusted in you. To see. The great peril. In which they are.

The great. Unsatisfaction. Of being. In a situation. Where. Nothing is certain. And may they know. The certainty. Of faith.

[ 30 : 54 ] In the Lord Jesus Christ. And of a future. That is guaranteed. By him. So many people. Promise us. A future. Guaranteed. Whether financial. Security.

Or whatever. And we know. That that is rubbish. We know. That the words of men. Fail. But we know. That God. Never lies. And we thank you.

For the great promises. We have. In Christ Jesus. And so. We're guaranteed. A certain future. Enable us. To look forward. With anticipation. To those great days.

We've been thinking about. And not only great days. At the end of time. But great days. In the immediate future. For we know. That Christ is building. His church. Here and now.

And the gates of hell. Will not prevail. So enable us. To fight the good fight. Of faith. And to walk with him. And to serve him. All our days. We ask it in Jesus name.

[ 31 : 48 ] And for his sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Now we close by singing.

To God's praise. Psalm 20. We sing. The whole psalm. In sing psalms. This is on page 24.

And this is to the tune. Saint Daniel. Psalm 20. May the Lord answer you. When you cry in distress.

May Jacob's God keep you. Whose name you confess.

May God send assistance. From his holy place. And grant you from Zion. Support. By his grace.

Psalm 20. To God's praise. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The love of God. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Be with each one of you. Now and forever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. zusammen. Amen.

[ 32 : 51 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.