

## “Last Words”

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

I’ve got to tell you, I am fired up about this series, *Summer Hits*. As you have just witnessed, we are going to be singing some of the hits – worship-wise from the past. It’s also going to be an opportunity for you to hear from some of the pastors on our team as well as special guests. We are going to roll all our campus pastors through, and I’m going to go to preach at our other campuses as well.

And what I have asked all the pastors and guests you are going to hear from to do, is to preach their favorite verse in the Bible. If they had a number one hit as it relates to a “go to” verse that they lean on, love and often recall, that’s the verse I’ve asked them to preach on.

It’s going to be a GREAT rest of the summer, and by the time we are done, you are going to have an awesome playlist of verses – if you will, to read, memorize and reflect upon.

Now, I love my music...and I love the playlists I have. I’ve got playlist for everything!

- “Hymns” playlist – I was raised on the Gaither’s and so this playlist is nothing but my Southern Gospel favorites and old hymns of the faith. Often times when I’m in kind of melancholy mood or am in reflection mode, this is the music that is played.
- “Easter” playlist – About six weeks leading up to Easter, this is all I’ll be listening to...it’s nothing but songs about the cross and resurrection, and I’ll add to it each year if a great song comes out – LOVE this playlist.
- “Christmas” – Now, don’t judge me, but I start listening to Christmas music sometime toward the beginning of November. If that bothers you, Scrooge, take it up with the Lord – you need some joy in your life!
- “Workout” playlist – It hasn’t been used in quite some time, but that’s got my Lecrae and Mineo music on it.

And listen, I’m just getting started...I’ve got a “revival” playlist, and “Israel trip” playlist. If you move over to my pandora channel I’ve got my “George Strait” playlist – because you can never have too much of the King of Country.

When it comes to “hits”, I collect them. And most of the “hits” were number one on the chart for at least a small period of time, and they’ve got staying power.

Well, if there was ever a number one hit (a singular verse) on my favorite playlist (called the Bible), it would no doubt be 2 Tim. 4:7...this is no doubt for me my summer hit and if you are looking for a verse that is on repeat over and over in my life, this is it!

If you need a name for this hit and we'll make it the title of the message today as well...I'd call it: **Last Words**.

Let me give you some context for what it is taking place so you understand the setting of this passage of scripture before we just dive in.

The apostle Paul knows that the end of his life is nearing. Here is a man that had been changed by Jesus in a dramatic way. If you recall from our *Forward* series in the book of the Bible called, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Paul was the man God used to take his gospel to the Gentile people.

Before giving his life to Christ, he was a fierce opponent of Christianity. He was a Pharisee and thought that Jesus and his band of followers were blaspheming God and leading people away from God...and so he wanted them dead – literally.

Then one day while Paul is on his way with a warrant to arrest and bring take into custody Christians, Jesus confronts Paul. He reveals himself as Lord to Paul, and what we see is that it changed the entire trajectory of his life.

From that point on, he worked tirelessly for the advance of the Kingdom and for the sake of the Church. He traveled throughout the known world making disciples, training up leaders, planting churches and raising funds to help other churches...there was no one like Paul at the time. He gave the Lord everything he had and suffered for it.

In fact, the setting of 2 Timothy, is a prison. Paul is there because of his faith, and this prison is VERY unlike his first imprisonment where he was living in rented quarters and able to have visitors and people could come and go as they pleased.

No, according to his own testimony in 2 Tim. 2:9, he is “bound with chains as a criminal”. This is a dark, damp, lonely isolated place!

**Illus. Locked Up Abroad** - This prison was PRISON – think “Locked Up Abroad”. Have you ever seen that show?! Just so you know, that’s my nightmare. I’m not mentally tough and would not make it very long!

Now, Paul knows that his time on earth is nearing an end...he can sense it! He’s isolated. He’s alone. He’s suffering greatly for the cause of Christ, and as he awaits what is to happen to him, you have to imagine he had a lot of time to think and reflect on his life and ministry.

For 30 years, Paul has been laboring...working...getting after it for the glory of Christ...and the end his near. He writes this letter to who he refers to as his “young son in the faith” – that’s Timothy.

These two men have worked together...traveled together...prayed together...been through tough times together.

Paul LOVED Timothy. And this book...this small letter contains the last words that Timothy would ever receive from Paul. You better believe he leaned in when he got this letter. And we're going to lean into it as well. Let's listen to some of these last words.

**2 Tim. 4:6-8 – “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up 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 loved his appearing.”**

**Illus. Last Words** – If you've ever been around anyone speaking their last words, there's a weight to them. You hang on to final words...you don't forget final words.

You might find this interesting. Tomorrow of course is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. I'm so grateful for our country and what it represents. I am unapologetically patriotic. My granddad served under Paton and fought in WW2. My dad served in Vietnam. My biggest regret in life is not serving in our Armed Forces. My dad always told me growing up, “Boy, you need basic training!”

I love our nation. Concerned about its direction sometimes, but still believe it to be the greatest country on the planet. And listen, as American citizens we should be biased about our country!

Now, I love other countries too and have had the privilege to travel the world, visiting different nations and peoples. But after being away and gone for a long time, there is nothing like hearing that United States customs agent say, “Welcome home.”

This place is special. And it's special to us because of the blood that has been spilled to secure it...because of the uniqueness of how it was founded and what it was founded upon.

This is what we celebrate tomorrow. 246 years of Independence. Speaking of last words and celebrating our independence, did you know that our second and third Presidents – John Adams and Thomas Jefferson – while early on during the Revolution they were friends. Jefferson was the one charged with writing the Declaration of Independence and both signed it!

Years later though they became political adversaries...Jefferson served as Adams Vice President but their opposing viewpoints on the way government should be run and how certain policies should be implemented caused strife and eventual separation.

Amazing how politics can separate even the closest of friends. Sad, really (but that's another sermon for another time!). They eventually did come back together and renew their friendship and on their deathbed...which incidentally was on the EXACT same day – you know what day? July 4, 1826.

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Adams was 90 years old and his last words are recorded to be: “Thomas Jefferson still survives”. His old rival outlasted him...at least that's what he thought!

He had no idea that just five hours earlier, Jefferson at the age of 83, had died. Some of his last words, before refusing any more medicine and saying, “No, doctor, nothing more. He asked this question in his sickened and weakened state. “Is it the Fourth?” He was holding on, until he could get to that day!

Last words. They have meaning. This is actually why I chose this verse as my “Summer hit”. I want this verse – specifically (v. 7) – I want it to be my last words.

Like if and when I die, let there be no question...roll this video back. I’ve already told Debbie. Put (v. 7) on my gravestone. This is what is to be on my epitaph!

**2 Tim. 4:7 – “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”**

I mentioned this in a sermon a few weeks back, but just in case you missed, I was first introduced to this verse as a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader. My aunt made a cross-stitch and put our picture by it, and it hung in our home when I was growing up.

And mine, since I was the middle child – any middle children in the room – I feel for you...I sense your pain. We got the shaft so much growing up. Maybe we should start a support group here in the church?! Ha!

Here it is right here (**SHOW FRAME**)...I’d look at it every day and this verse just got in my heart. It’s been my life verse ever since. I have it in my study here at the church now. Ken Barrett made me a plaque with it on there. I LOVE this verse.

A few weeks ago, one of the pastors that I grew up admiring and had on pedestal had a moral failure – he had been closely following Jesus for going on 50 years. And committed a sin that cost him his ministry...his reputation.

I heard about it, and all I could think of was this verse. It’s not how you start, it’s how you finish. I SO want to be able to say with integrity when it comes to drawing my last breath – “I fought a good fight, I finished the course. I kept the faith.”

I want this for me...I want this for you...how can we make sure though that this is the case? These verses today enlighten us and show us the. One truth I want to extrapolate for each verse (v.6, v.7 and v.8).

If we are going to finish well and with integrity have some last words that have some weight attached to them when we breath our last, then we must understand:

### **1. Our life is not our own**

**2 Tim. 4:6 – “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.”**

Paul is using language here describing an Old Testament sacrifice. In the Levitical system, the drink offering would be poured out around the base of the alter to conclude the sacrificial ceremony.

And Paul is simply describing his life as a sacrifice that has been offered unto God. What's interesting here is the tense that is being used in the Greek language shows that God is the agent behind this act.

In other words, it's Paul's life that is being poured out as a sacrifice, but God is the one pouring it out! He's the one that's behind it all!

Paul knew when he came to Jesus, he was giving up rights to his life – his life was no longer his own. He even says as much in **1 Cor. 6:19b-20a** – “...**You are not your own,<sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price...**”

Paul knew that to follow Jesus was to sign over the rights of calling the shots for himself. In fact, this same kind of language of sacrifice that he uses here in 2 Tim, he uses it also in:

**Rom. 12:1** – “**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**”

Our worship to God is not measured by church attendance or bible studies we go to – ALL of which are good and healthy. Our worship of God is measured by how much of our lives – our heart, our mind, our eyes, our hands, our feet, our mouth, our sex organs is surrendered to the lordship of Christ – that's true worship! It's saying, “Lord, you have everything!”

For us to finish well, we must understand this truth – when we come to Christ, our life is NOT our own. At conversion, God didn't just get a part of Paul...he got ALL of Paul. And this is what means for our life to be a sacrifice to God. Sacrifices in the scripture, gave up their life.

The paradox is, when we give our lives up, that's when we actually find true life. Isn't this what Jesus taught?

**Luke 9:23-24** – “**And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (If you want to follow me, sign over the rights to your life. It's not your own anymore) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.**”

Here Paul is in prison...his life being poured out like a sacrifice – and he KNOWS that God is the one causing this...behind this.

Just a side street here, but what does that do for your theology? God permits pain...he allows heartache...he uses trials and tribulations – sometimes it is his will that we go through the fire and into prison and it may even be his will that we don't make it out physically.

**Illus. Trite, Not True – “You’re Never More Safe Than When Your In God’s Will” –** sounds nice and clean, but being in the middle of God’s will may lead you into more of a mess. Now, it’s God’s mess. And I’d rather be in the middle of God’s mess than me in the middle of my own! (JTB)

This is a nod to the sovereignty of God here...if you were to read the small writing or in between the lines there is a call to trust here.

I SO wish we could hear the tone in Paul’s voice as he writes this letter and speaks it to himself...I think it would tell us so much! The truth is we don’t know what he was feeling.

But in reading Paul and looking at his life, I don’t think his tone is one of defeat. I don’t read this passage as if it is coming from a man broken by his circumstances...someone feeling sorry for himself. That’s not Paul!

Paul was ready and willing to give his life for Christ. He would write the Philippian church in: **Phil. 1:21-23 – “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”**

In Acts 21, some in the church begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem after a prophet warned him that he would be arrested, bound and delivered into the hands of the authorities. But, listen to Paul’s response:

**Acts 21:13 – “Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”**

Paul viewed his life as a sacrifice to God – his life was no longer his own and so if God chooses to have him in prison and suffering, he would see it as an offering to God!

It’s amazing to me that you don’t hear any grumbling from Paul regarding his situation...his lot in life. As a matter of fact, you don’t read anywhere in this letter Paul asking for prayer to be delivered from this prison!

This would be the first thing on my list. It would be like v. 2 of my letter! (READ ch. 1:1-3).

Paul...he’s hardly even thinking of himself! He’s thinking about Timothy...and challenging him and encouraging him to keep going and to finish strong!

How is that? Well, Paul’s life wasn’t about him...it was a sacrifice to God...we must start viewing life in this way if we desire to finish strong!

- If God calls us to go somewhere...we have to go!
- If he calls us to share with someone...we have to share!

- If he calls us to suffer in order for others to see his grace and glory, then we must suffer!

Our life is NOT our own! Secondly, if we are going to finish well, with integrity, we need to understand:

## 2. Our life is full of ups and downs

**Illus. Residents talk this week** – All about expectation and reality lining up (frustration gap). This is true for work...it's true for marriage...it's true for life.

I don't know where this comes from or why it is...some of it is bad teaching within the church...other is just the culture in which we live. But we have bought into this idea that as Christians, we're not supposed to have struggle or hardship.

It's like we come to Jesus and think all our problems will go away! We dealt with this a little bit already. But I see this a lot. It's as if we feel that we deserve to be free from trials and tribulations or at least be delivered from all of them.

But this line of thinking is foreign to the scripture! Life is FULL of ups and downs...it's as Paul says here in (v. 7) a fight...a race.

Listen to the verbiage of **2 Tim. 4:7** – **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”**

He describes his life as one of war...a competition...a race to be won! Again, Paul has been following Jesus for 30 years! And while it's been amazing to see the gospel reach unreached peoples and churches planted where no church was previously established, it has not been easy. It's been full of ups and downs...maybe even more downs than ups!

He writes in **2 Cor. 11:25-28** – **“Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”**

Here is one of the most choice servants of God to ever live and notice he is NOT in the comforts of a den surrounded by family and friends, but instead is in the Mamertine Prison in Rome, located 12 ft. below ground and it's only a matter of time before Emperor Nero will have him beheaded.

I didn't think bad things were supposed to happen to good people? Certainly they are not supposed to happen to God's people!

Hey, Paul is destroying this line of thought...the Christian life is a fight! That word “fight” in (v. 7) means contest or struggle. “Fought” is where we get our English word “agony” from!

This is life! It is a war! It is a race to be won and seeing life in this way understanding that it’s full of ups and downs will help us finish faithful and strong because expectation and reality will line up!

If we accept the premise that our best life is now...if we buy into this idea that as Christians we deserve to be healthy and wealthy and happy, then we will soon lose heart and become disillusioned in our faith because that is not how life works...it’s not even designed to work that way!

The psalmist wrote in **Psalm 90:10** – **“The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.”**

Our life in the here in and now was never supposed to be easy! Easy Christianity is cultural Christianity! Biblical Christianity is hard.

- We have an Enemy to fight...an Adversary who is out to steal, kill and destroy...
- We have our own flesh and sinful nature waging war against us...
- We have the world around us tempting to lure us into the way it thinks and operates...

Paul chose his words wisely here in 2 Timothy...life is a fight! Now, it’s a “good fight”...it’s a worthy fight!

- Dad, the fight for your fidelity to your family is a worthy fight! So stay faithful and keep going! It’s a worthy fight.
- Teenager, the fight for your purity is worthy fight! Live your life in such a way that you have no regrets! Don’t forfeit your future on the altar of immediate gratification...don’t do it!
- Mom, the fight to love and care for your husband and children is a worthy fight!
- Church, the fight for unity and doctrinal purity is a worthy fight!
- On this 4<sup>th</sup> of July, we can say it’s a worthy fight to stand for truth and righteousness in our country – we don’t need to do it, in a hateful, angry way but we fight for it nonetheless. It’s a worthy fight!

I keep this quote on my desk at home and I read it often to remind me that everyday, I am at war...I am in battle. I love this quote.

It's by biblical counselor: **Ed Welch: "How long do we fight? We fight against the desires that wage war in our soul throughout our entire lives. This is the normal Christian life. It ends when we have been fully made perfect either through death or Jesus' return."**

See, life in the here in and now is supposed to make us long for another day...a greater day. And that's what Paul mentions in this final verse.

And it leads to the final point. If we are to finish with integrity, we need to understand and realize:

1. Our life is not our own.
2. Our life is full of ups and downs.
3. **Our life is rewarded when lived well.**

**2 Tim 4:8 – "Henceforth there is laid up 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 loved his appearing."**

How do we stay motivated in a fight...in a long race where we get winded and want to give up? Here is our motivation. It's this award – "the crown of life".

I wish I had more time to go into this...maybe we can make it a sermon series in the future...there are five crowns that scripture mentions in the New Testament that will be rewarded to believers.

**Illus. Disney 5K** –It's proof that I finished the race... you only get this if you run! (Debbie came back with one!)

Now, I don't know fully what it means to have this "crown of righteousness" outside of the fact that it is synonymous with having eternal life. I do know that only those that are with Christ will receive this crown – and being with Christ...standing before Jesus and receiving this eternal crown, it was motivation for Paul.

**Phil. 3:13-14 – "Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."**

**In 1 Cor. 9:24-25 – "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."**

Paul kept his eyes on the eternal reward...

- NOT his circumstances...
- NOT on what was going on around him...
- NOT on what was happening to him...

And I believe this is what enabled him to finish strong and faithful.

The reformer **Martin Luther** - **“There are two days in my calendar: This day and that Day.”**

THIS is the motivation we need to finish strong and faithful. We must keep our eyes on the eternal prize (not living for the here and now) but for the DAY that is coming when we see Jesus face to face.

These were Paul’s last words...and this is my “summer hit”. And I hope that it will become your prayer to finish strong and faithful.

Let’s bow our heads and pray together.

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