

Marks Of A Successful Life.

Text: 2 Tim 4:5-8

1) Look back on a life of faith

Suggested Hymns:

2) Look forward to eternal life

12, 352, 493, 293, 157

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Timothy 4:5-8, ⁵ *But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

⁶ *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Success counts for much in our culture. Our whole vast educational system is geared to help individuals reach success. Mothers and fathers, dreading that any of their children would fail in material success, often deny themselves many luxuries of life in order that their children may have a chance to succeed. Businessmen often burn themselves out prematurely in quest of success.

But what are the marks of a successful life? If we ask people around us we are bound to get a variety of answers. Some people will argue that success must be measured in terms of one's ability to drink deep of the cup of pleasure. Others measure success by the size of one's bank account; still others find it in the social position that one attains. Yet, other people count success in terms of the good that one is able to do for other people.

But as long as person has a soul and an eternity to face, these goals shall forever be inadequate. Paul in our text gives us the marks of a truly successful life. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Successful Person Is One Who Can Look Back On A Life Of Faith

Paul writes to Timothy, his son in the faith and his co-worker, ⁶ *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.* ⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* Paul penned these words as a prisoner of the Lord in Rome.

During the blood stained persecutions under Nero he had been seized at Troas and hustled off to the Roman garrison to await trial as a criminal simply because he was a Christian. Paul had little hope of being acquitted, for he says that he is *already being poured out as a drink offering*. Death is on his heels.

Judged by ordinary standards, Paul's life had ended a failure. He had no wealth. He told Timothy to bring his cloak which he left in Troas.¹ He had few friends. Many had forsaken him at his first trial. "*Only Luke,*" he says, "*is with me.*"² He had a clouded reputation, not because he was bad, but because people thought he was bad. A poor, solitary, laughed-at man is he who writes the words of our text. Judged by human standards, his life had been a failure.

But by his own standards his life was a glorious triumph. With quiet composure he looks back upon the life he has lived and says, "*I have kept the faith.*" Paul regarded his faith as the most precious gift he had received in his life. He could never forget the day the ascended Lord Himself, on the hot Damascus road, put a sudden stop to his blaspheming and persecuting of the church by bringing him to faith. Faith is a gift.

To Paul this was the noblest blessing he had in life, because by faith he knew Jesus to be his Saviour from sin, death, and hell. By faith he knew that nothing could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. By faith he knew that he was a child of God. That is why Paul counted the faith he had been given as the highest good in life.

Paul regarded his faith not only as a gift of God but also as a sacred trust. It was something which he was obligated to keep.

This was not an easy matter for him. He speaks of his life as a battle and a race. He says, ⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race.* On every corner there were enemies who were seeking to take this gift of faith from

his grasp. He had, first of all, to do battle with his own sinful flesh, which was constantly tempting him to give up his faith. In Romans 7:23-24 he declares, ²³ ***But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?***

In addition, Paul daily faced the enemies of the Cross of Christ, who sought to silence the testimony of his lips. He himself records the list of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, ... ***in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.***

²⁵ ***Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; ²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.***

But instead of destroying his faith, these trials only caused his faith to shine all the more brightly. Wherever he went, he proclaimed his faith. His watchword was, ² ***For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.***³ His motto is revealed in Galatians 2:20, ²⁰ ***“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*** His whole life was a sacrifice to the Lord. And now he looks forward to death, his life to be poured out as a sacrifice, a thank-offering to God for having given him the gift of faith.

Therefore he has no regrets. His life has been crowned with success. He has kept the faith. In spite of all the temptations of his flesh and the persecution of the world, he still remains united with Christ, his Head, and has for his comfort the love of God, the forgiveness of sins, and heaven itself.

Before he leaves, however, Paul thinks also of Timothy. Timothy is to keep the faith. Timothy is still in the race and now he has taken up the battle in the place of Paul. And in our text Paul encourages Timothy to fight the good fight of

faith, as he says, ⁵ ***But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.***

He is to watch his sinful flesh, lest he be tempted to forsake the faith. Paul reminds Timothy that the time will come that people ***“will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”***⁴ Timothy is therefore to watch that he is not shaken in his faith by false teachers. He is rather to endure manfully the afflictions that come to him as a minister of Christ.

In the face of all difficulties he is in season and out of season to do the work of an evangelist, so that he may carry out to the full his ministry for Christ. Then when he faced the end of his life, he, too, could look back and know that his life had been a success because he kept the faith.

God also thought of us, that day long ago, when he inspired Paul from his prison cell to write to Timothy to encourage him to steadfastness in his faith. He wanted to urge us on as he did Timothy to remain true to our faith. The most precious gift you and I have is our faith in Jesus Christ, our Saviour. This is God’s greatest gift to us.

In His mercy He has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. He has given us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.⁵ By faith we know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sins. When our sins rise up to accuse us, we can find refuge in the assurance that there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.⁶

With Paul himself we can declare, as it is written in Romans 8:33-34, ³³ ***Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.*** ³⁴ ***Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.***

We know by faith that we are joined to Christ as branches to the vine, as sheep to the shepherd, and as members to their Head, that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.⁷

Our faith, Paul wants us to know, is a trust which we must guard. For we face the constant danger of losing our faith. On the one hand we must guard against the forces which are seeking to rob us of our faith. We must watch the deceitfulness of our own hearts. We must be steadfast and unmovable in the face

of those who either by false doctrine or by ridicule seek to cause us to make shipwreck of our faith.

On the other hand, we are to be ready to suffer for our faith by showing forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. Then when we stand at death's door, we, too, shall be able to look back upon our life and know that it has been a success, for we have kept that supreme gift of life, our faith.

Like Paul, we may be able to declare, *⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* Therefore, *Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown* as written in Revelation 3:11. Then your life, too, will be marked with success.

2. A Person Is Successful If He Can Look Forward To Eternal Life With Hope

Paul counts his life a success not only as he looks back upon the life he has lived, but also as he looks forward to the life he shall live. Even though he is chained in body, his spirit is free. And from his death chamber he looks beyond the shadow of time into the light of eternity and declares with full confidence in our text, *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.*

Observe the quiet composure of Paul as he faces death. There is no fear in his heart, but only confidence and hope. He knows that soon he will see his Saviour, Jesus, face to face, whom he first saw on the Damascus road. In death he will be personally reunited with Christ, for whom he has lived. Moreover, he is sure that Christ will give him a crown of righteousness. In heaven he will be perfectly sinless, with no temptations or sin to mar his bliss. He looks forward to the day when he will stand before God in a white robe, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

That crown of righteousness, the only righteousness which avails before God, that spotless robe of perfection, which the Christian will wear throughout eternity, these are the product of Christ's atonement, won at the cost of His lifeblood on Calvary's cross. While they become the Christian's possession in the fullest sense in heaven, they are already assured to him in this life by faith in

Christ, which has placed him under God's favour and guaranteed him *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away.*⁸

In contrast to this success, life without heaven is a failure. No life can be successful that does not end with Christ in heaven. The Lord Jesus Himself says in Mark 8:36-37, ³⁶ *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"* ³⁷ *"Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

It is precisely here that so many people make their mistake. They measure success only in terms of this life. Jesus tells us about a man like that. One year his fields yielded a bumper crop. So richly was he blessed that he was at a loss as to what to do.

Finally he reached a decision. He said in Luke 12:18-19, *'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.'* ¹⁹ *'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."'* But God called that man a fool. He said in the next verse, *'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'* Even though he was an astute businessman, this man failed to reckon with eternity. His life, after all, was a failure, and he was a fool.

There are thousands of people like that man in the world today. But their indifference notwithstanding, they shall one day stand before their Maker. For Scripture says in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.* And on that day neither a person's wealth nor social position nor learning shall count for anything. Unless a man knows Jesus as his Saviour from sin and rests his hope of heaven in Him alone, his life will be a miserable failure, for Christ, the Judge, will say to him, *'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'*⁹

But life doesn't have to end that way for anybody. Today Christ still offers to all people the prospect of heaven. He assures us in John 11:25-26, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."* ²⁶ *"And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"* And it is written in John 3:36 that ³⁶ *"He who believes in the Son has*

everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Today, as always, Jesus offers us heaven, without money and without price.

May God grant that the life of none of us ends in failure! Let us in faith always cling to Jesus and the righteousness He purchased for us with His blood. The crown of righteousness is there for all “*who have loved His appearing,*” who in faith look to Him as the one in whom they have righteousness before God, because He purchased it for them.

If in steadfast faith we cling to Christ and His righteousness, then we can say with Paul, as it is written in 2 Timothy 1:12, *for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.* Then when life’s little day is done, we can face death with the calm assurance of Paul. We can have for our comfort the certainty that we shall soon be forever with the Lord, in heaven with Christ, where there is no sin, no sorrow, no disappointment, no death, but only righteousness, joy, peace, and rest. Then our lives will be crowned with success eternally.

May God give us all His grace that we may keep the faith throughout life, and take us all at last to heaven. These are the marks of a truly successful life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Tim 4:13

² 2 Tim 4:11

³ 1 Corinthians 2:2

⁴ 2 Tim 4:4

⁵ 2 Cor. 4:6

⁶ Rom. 8:1

⁷ Rom. 8: 39

⁸ 1 Peter 1:4

⁹ Matthew 25:41