

## Fight the Good Fight 2 Timothy 4:7

Just before I start sharing some thoughts to conclude our mini series on Timothy I just want to bring you up to date with our finances.

Thank you to all of you for what you give to God and St Georges in both time and money.

I just want to let you know that having looked at our expected income for the rest of the year, it looks as if, come the end of December, we will be £8000 short of what we need to fulfil our financial commitments.

Please can I ask you all to pray about this and pray for God to provide for all our needs.

I don't want you to feel pressured but please pray ... and be prepared that He may use you as an answer to our prayers ! :-)

LETS PRAY NOW.....

So - back to Timothy

For the last few weeks, in our sermons, we have been focusing on the readings from 1 & 2 Timothy. Thinking back a few weeks, Penny shared with us about the transforming power that Jesus' love can have in our lives.

A couple of weeks ago John reminded us about our call to share that love of Jesus with others and to 'go in peace to love and serve the Lord'... those familiar, yet challenging, words that we say at the end of our service each week

Last week we were thinking about Scripture. I was checking out some of the things we know about the scriptures, the Bible, and Jenny should have been awarded a gold star :-). And I challenged all of us, including myself, about how much we truly value the Bible and its purpose in our lives.

And today we have come to the last week of these letters from Paul to Timothy being part of our set Sunday readings. And what a beautiful passage it is.

Last week we were reminded that scripture can be used in all sorts of ways - for teaching, rebuking, correction... And as in today's reading - for encouragement.

Those of us who read for us in church know how long and complicated some of Paul's writings are. Some of his sentences go on and on, we run out of breath as we read, and we have to read and re-read to try and understand what Paul is saying.

But here, in these few verses from 2 Timothy 4, the ending of his letter, we sense a different mood. Paul is in prison. He has a court date with emperor Nero. He knows, therefore, that his life is probably very near its end. And he is writing some final words of encouragement to his friend and mentee.

If you were asked to write your own 3 line Eulogy I wonder what you would write? ...

I was actually asked that at an interview once! And in front of 4 people I had never met, with no time to think, I had to say what I would like it to be!

I wonder what you would say?

The words from Paul in verse 7 are pretty good

I have fought the good fight

I have finished the race

I have kept the faith

I have fought the good fight... the noble fight

Paul's life as a Christian had not been easy

It started with being struck blind on his way to Damascus. And it was a few days before God sent a messenger to him and things like scales fell from his eyes so that he could see again

He went on 3 missionary journeys encountering all sorts on his way including ship wrecks and storms.

He spent a lot of time convincing the Jews that the Gentiles were acceptable to God AND also the Gentiles that they were acceptable to God!

He worked as a tent maker in order to support his ministry

And he helped settle disputes between different groups of new believers that were all part of maturing in their faith

His life had not been easy. It had felt like a fight at times.

But he knew that it was the right fight to be fighting because it was for Jesus, sharing the Gospel message with all those he encountered. As he writes in vs 17 'the Lord stood by me... so that through me the message might be proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it' Paul was prepared to do this even if it meant being put in prison as a result

So at almost the end of his life Paul could say 'I have fought the good fight' !

Could we say the same thing? Are we engaged in the right fight? Do we live our lives listening to God, following His example and guidance, sharing God's love and hope with others?

When our time comes could we say as certainly as Paul that I have fought the good fight?

Paul's second line is I have finished the race

I have never run a marathon. Nor have I any intention of doing so... madness!!! :-)

But I can imagine that at many points along the way it would be easy to stop and give up.

You get off to a good start, the adrenalin gets you through the first few miles, the crowd through the next few but at some point you 'hit the wall' physically and psychologically and it would be oh so easy to give up. To think - well at least I have run 9, 15, 17, 20, 22 miles!!! I can't go on any further! That's more than I have run before.... I'm done!

But no... so many keep on going and going and going and going

Some folks even run multiple marathons!!

The Christian faith is definitely a marathon and not a sprint

As Christians Jesus calls us to be in it for the long haul... the full 26 miles 385 yards

Are we still in the race? Are we still running the journey of faith? Or have we stopped and now standing on the side lines.

There are times when it feels tough. More than tough - even impossible to keep on keeping on. Times when, just like marathon runners we hit the wall But look what Paul says 'the Lord stood by me and gave me strength'

As Christians we never retire. Our course may change slightly. We may slow down a bit.

But the Lord will stand by us. He will cheer us on. He will even support us over the finishing line

Just think of the HUGE satisfaction of completing a marathon. Of actually sticking with it Keeping on keeping on

When our time comes wouldn't it be fantastic to be able to say I have finished the race!

And Paul's 3rd line I kept the faith

Through all that he had been through. Through the physical dangers of storms and travel in those early days. Despite every evil attack that he experienced. Paul always kept his faith  
Paul believed in and trusted in his Lord, a righteous, honest judge.  
He believed in a heavenly Kingdom that was yet to come  
Paul had faith that God was looking after him in his earthly life but he also had a hope in something bigger - in a heavenly kingdom.  
Paul believed that his life story was set within a larger framework. He trusted in the Lord who overcame evil. And despite knowing what was coming to him from the most evil Emperor Nero, he kept his faith.

Will we be able to say the same?

I have fought the good fight  
I have finished the race  
I have kept the faith

Paul had an encounter with God and decided to make sharing the good news of Jesus his life work come what may.  
Why? Because he had faith in his Lord who is righteous, an honest judge, who never deserted him but stood by him and strengthened him. A God who rescued him and gave him a hope, an assurance, a confidence not just for his earthly life but also for the heavenly kingdom to come.

I have fought the good fight  
I have finished the race  
I have kept the faith

May we encounter the living Lord so that we are committed to fighting the GOOD fight  
May we know God's strength so that we persevere and also finish the race  
May we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus so that we too may keep our faith  
And then we too, along with all who long for Christ's appearing, will also receive the crown of righteousness that the Lord reserves for us.  
Amen