

2 Timothy 4:6-8

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Paul knows he is going to die soon. Unlike other letters, where he writes of running the race to win, now Paul concludes that he has finished the race, he served God unto death. He looks forward to the heavenly reward Christ will give him and all others who endure to the end.

Timothy needs to *fulfill* his *ministry* because Paul's ministry is coming to an end. Timothy is the successor. He won't have Paul as a mentor much longer. This is it. Timothy is about to take the baton of leadership. Paul says that he is *already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of his departure has come*. A *drink offering* was poured out before the altar, unto the Lord. Paul is using this picture as a euphemism for his death. The *departure* of which he speaks is his *departure* from this life, to the next life.

Paul is about to graduate to heaven. In his case, he had seen a glimpse of heaven, and had a good idea what awaited him (2 Corinthians 12:2). That is likely why he told the Philippians in his letter to them during his first imprisonment in Rome (from which he was released) that it was better for him to depart and be with Christ than to remain upon the earth (Philippians 1:23). But now Paul's race is finished. He harkens back to the image of running the race to win, that he used in his letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthians were familiar with the Isthmian games, which were like the Olympic Games, and were held in off years to the Olympics. Paul used the image of the Olympics in terms of running the race of life, saying:

“Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”
(1 Corinthians 9:26-27)

Now Paul no longer speaks of fighting the fight, he says *I have fought the good fight*. Paul's life is at its end. He looks back, and based on his evaluation, believes he has fought until the end. He did not give up. Similarly, Paul no longer speaks of running the race to win, but says *I have finished the course, I have kept the faith*. Paul has endured to the end, as he admonished Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 2:12. In 2:12, Paul made clear that if we do not endure in faithfulness, we will not receive the reward of reigning with Christ. This is the best part of the reward of the inheritance, which Jesus will give to those who live their lives as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23).

As a result of having endured to the end, Paul is confident that *in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day*. The phrase *that day* refers to the judgement day, the day when Jesus will judge all the deeds of believers, and decide their rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-17). It will not just be Paul who will receive the *crown of righteousness*. Jesus will award this crown *also to all who have loved His appearing*.

The phrase *loved His appearing* refers to an attitude, or mindset. Those who are faithful, and suffering the sufferings of Christ, will not be comfortable in this world, but rather will live as though their true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:17). They will be faithful, and endure. They will have the mindset of Christ, to do the Father's will (Philippians 2:5-10). But they will also be eager to see Jesus return, and make all things right. They will not be at peace with the current world, and its ways. It is those who live with this mindset of faithfulness toward Christ that He seeks to reward.

The word translated *crown* is the Greek word "stephanos." It is the same word translated "wreath" in 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul uses the image of the Isthmian (Olympic) Games to illustrate his dedication to Christ:

"Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath ('stephanos')." (1 Corinthians 9:25)

The wreath was an award given to the victors, or in Greek, the "nikeao." In Revelation, the word "nikeao" is translated "overcomer." The letters to the seven churches lay out a series of rewards for those who "overcome" or are victorious. The way to be victorious at the judgement seat of Christ is to follow these commands of Paul. To be conformed to the image of Christ through being taught, reprov'd, and corrected by God's word. To be zealous to apply our gifts in full service to Him, regardless of rejection by the world. To endure to the end in looking for and longing for His return.

The word translated "loving" in the phrase "all who have loved His appearing" is "agapeo." "Agape" love is a love of choice, based on true values, and commitment to mission. Jesus will award those who have made the choice to seek the ways of Christ, and to please Him, rather than the ways of the world, to please men. John wrote 1 John to believers, those who he calls "my little children." In 1 John, John makes it clear that believers can "agape" (choose to love) the things of the world:

"Do not love ['agape'] the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves ['agape'] the world, the love ['agape'] of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." (1 John 2:15-16)

If we choose to love the things of the world, we will gain the rewards from the world. The world promises life and happiness. But the true rewards of the world are death and corruption. The Bible promises difficulty and rejection if we walk in obedience to Christ. But the rewards will be so great that they are beyond our ability to comprehend (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Biblical Text

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸ in the future 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.