

## **“End of Life Issues”**

### **2 Timothy 4:6-8**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

November 6, 2016

**All Saints Sunday**

### **Communion Devotion**

I listen carefully to people who are dying. As a matter of fact, these are some of the most meaningful conversations I have. People who know their time on earth is coming to an end focus upon what is important and necessary.

When it is appropriate, I ask a few questions to stimulate the discussion.

Why do you think you are dying? How do you feel about this? What do you think is going to happen? What do you hope will happen? What do you need to say or do to die in peace? How can I help you die in peace?

What kind of funeral plans have you made? Have you shared these plans with people who will honor your wishes? What would you like for me to say on your behalf at your funeral? What can I do for your family after you are gone?

It appears Paul was thinking about end of life issues in today's text. In this letter to his son in the ministry, Timothy, he shared some of his thoughts.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought a good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. 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.” (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

**You know what impresses me about what Paul has written?** It is his acceptance of reality.

I sense no denial. Paul was looking death squarely in the face and preparing not only himself for what was coming but those around him.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.”

How did Paul know his death was imminent? It appears the Roman Emperor, Nero, had ordered his execution, and it would soon be carried out.

Like Jesus, Paul’s life would be taken from him by those who deemed him a threat. Also like Jesus, being faithful to God was more important to Paul than saving his own life.

At his conversion, Paul offered God everything he had—heart, mind and soul. He suspended his future plans and replaced them with God’s dreams for his life.

He traveled far beyond his homeland to places that were friendly and hostile in his attempt to build bridges of goodwill, understanding, hope and reconciliation. If his work and life were now ending, he would accept what was beyond his control and die with the same dignity and grace Jesus did. And he did.

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.

**I’ll tell you what else impresses me about some of Paul’s final words recorded in this passage. It is the way Paul looked back upon his life and ministry and looked ahead to his life after death.** It is obvious Paul’s faith enabled him to die in peace and look to the future with hope.

“I have fought a good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.”

Paul was not only realistic but also reflective. Looking back, he took solace in the fact he did his best along his spiritual journey and was faithful to God to the very end. Again, I think you see comparisons to the One we remember as we gather around this sacred table.

It is often easier to begin a journey or mission than it is to follow through to the end. This requires perseverance and endurance. The road will not always lead downhill, and the wind will not always be at our back.

What we can count on, though, is the eternal presence of God who is closest to us when we are struggling. The God of the mountain is also the God of the valley as a gospel hymn reminds us. Paul knew this, and I pray all of us do, too.

Paul's focus was not just on the past as his death drew closer. He looked forward with great anticipation.

"The time has come for my departure," he wrote to Timothy. What a hopeful way Paul described death.

Departure is the word for unyoking an animal from a cart or a plough so it can rest. It is the word for loosening the ropes of a tent so a camper can continue his or her journey. It is the word for releasing the ropes from a harbor so a ship can set sail. It is the word for taking the chains off a slave so he or she can go free. Departure is a word filled with movement and anticipation.

Surely, you see why Paul chose this word to describe his death. To Paul, death was a move from a full life on earth to a fuller life with God in heaven. Death would not have the final word in Paul's life. God would have that final word, and it would be good.

This good news was not just for Paul. Every faithful believer could also have this blessed assurance.

"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."

I hope you have this kind of faith and confidence in God. They will serve you well in life and death.

**Why do you think Paul shared these personal thoughts with Timothy?** I think Paul wanted Timothy to fight the good fight, finish his race and keep the faith just as he did.

All of Timothy's decisions, big and small, needed to be made with these goals in mind. It would be too late to make changes standing on the finish line. Each day, Timothy needed to be the presence of Christ in a broken world so he, like Paul, could die in peace, knowing he did his best and kept the faith.

As we gather around this table of remembrance today, think about where you are on your faith journey. **What changes do you need to make to finish strong?** Ask the Lord to help you begin making them today.