

Text 2 Timothy 4:7-8
Date 6 January 2021
Event Robyn Marais Memorial
Title Living to Die Well

- A) Two Pictures of a Christian's Life
 - 1) Fight
 - 2) Race

- B) The Point of a Christian's Life
 - 1) Repentance
 - 2) Faith in Substitution

- C) The Prize after a Christian's Death

- D) The Participants after a Christian's Death

INTRODUCTION

In one of the Wisdom Books in the Bible, God says this: Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die." This is a time/less truth for every one of us. We remember today the time between the appointed time of Robyn's birth, and the appointed time of Robyn's death.

Ever since the entry of sin in this world as recorded in history for us, earthly life has an end date. Among all the many noble purposes of our earthly lives, we should not forget that we are, in part also, *living to die well*.

John Wesley, a Christian of the 1700's, once affirmed on behalf of all Christians that "Our people die well". That is so true. Our bodies might not die well, for death is a rude, inconsiderate, and brutal interruption of life. But, nonetheless, Christians die well.

John Wesley even affirmed the benefit of dying slowly—the kind of death we tend to wish away. The benefit of dying slowly is that it gives you the opportunity to prepare better for it. Just like a meal always tastes better when not rushed, but carefully prepared, so death's unpleasantness is overcome by careful preparation.

Jonathan Edwards, the American version of the British John Wesley, resolved as a young man already "to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death".

I mention John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards this morning to you, for Robyn had the same desire—to use her time in

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preparation, to die *well*. Externally it was evident to us all that the last few months of Robyn's earthly life were months of physical pain, loss, and suffering, but internally, amidst all the emotional ups-and-downs, she was *living to die well*.

"What does the Bible say about dying?" was here request when things took a turn for the worse. There was much for us to fellowship in, in answer to that request. We dwelt on the glories of Heaven. We dwelt on 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 about the picture of an earthly tent being replaced with a building from God upon our death. We dwelt on 2 Corinthians 12 about our physical weaknesses proving that *God* is our strength. We dwelt on Philippians 1 that affirms that though we do not despise this life in some hopeless despair, we *do* know that death is *gain*. We dwelt on the realities of arriving in Heaven ["Arrived" by Enfield]. We dwelt on the reality that, for a Christian, "it is not death to die", but to die is simply to close our eyes to this world and awake in the joy of being with Jesus ["It is not death to die" by Sovereign Grace].

But among all the fellowship around dying that Robyn had, her own personal prayer request was simply "Pray for the ribbon." She could not explain what she meant by that, but we had spoken about death being the end of the race of faith, and the ribbon could therefore either be the ribbon that you burst through at the end of the race, or the ribbon that is awarded to those who finish the race with excellence. "Pray for the ribbon" she asked. And so we prayed. We prayed that when she loses the race against cancer, she would have won the race of faith. We prayed that when she finishes the race of faith, that she will be awarded the crown of righteousness which the Lord Himself

awards those who die well. Then for three weeks, she sprinted to the ribbon marking the end of the race, and by her testimony of faith, we can be sure she received the ribbon of reward for excelling in keeping the faith.

We remember today, the time for Robyn to be born and the time for Robyn to pass away. We also remember though, the race. Not the race of life. Not the race against cancer. Not the race of earthly accomplishments. But the race of *faith*. The race she won.

TWO PICTURES OF A CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

There are two sections from the Word of God that I knew would be very significant in memorial for Robyn, and as ministry to Johan and the dear family, and many friends. The one passage was very lengthy, 2 Corinthians 4:7 to 5:10. But the other passage was simply two verses. Just two verses. Let me read to you 2 Timothy 4:7-8. These are the words of a godly man, flowing from his ancient quill, instilled in him by God Himself, making these the Words of God for all of us.

2 Timothy 4:7-8, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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."

This is a testimony of a man with "the faith", living so he can die well. This is a testimony of every Christian passing over the great divide from earthly death, to eternal life.

The Two Pictures of a Christian's Life are evident in these verses. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race,".

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The Christian's life is a "fight", and the Christian's is a "race". Two pictures of a Christian's life.

The Good Fight

The fight picture is not of an angry brawl outside the bar. It is "the good fight". In the verse just before this, we see it is a fight to keep serving others, to endure difficulty so as to remain faithful, to maintain a clear mind and not just give up. It is "the good fight". A very specific, spiritual, fight—it is not just any display of struggle and victory, it is "*the good fight*". The fight to be joyful even if emotionally drained. The fight to be thankful in spite of suffering in pain. The fight to be loving when drama abounds. The fight to believe God when others use your sickness to mock your faith. The fight to believe God's Word about events after life that cannot be confirmed experientially before hand. The fight of spiritual purpose and conviction (1 Cor 9:26b). "The good fight"—the fight that really matters. The only fight that is rewarded with eternal life.

The Race

The second picture of a Christian's life is "the race". Again, not just any admirable display of fitness and endurance, but "the race"—a very specific, spiritual, race. The race that has is to be run according to very specific rules so as not to be disqualified (1 Cor 9:24). The race that offers an imperishable medal (1 Cor 9:25). The race that cannot be run aimlessly, but has to cross the ribbon of dying well (1 Cor 9:26a). "The race"—the race that really matters. The only race that is rewarded with eternal life.

THE POINT OF A CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

These are good metaphor, but we all know that the illustration isn't the actual point. What is the actual *point* of a Christian's life? The Point of a Christian's life is the very next line in the verse. "I have kept the faith".

"The good fight" and "the race" are simply picture of keeping "the faith". Again, it is not just any faith. Faith in 'whatever' isn't "the good fight". Faith 'in itself' is also not "the race". "The faith" that is both "the good fight" and "the race", is a very specific faith. And it is not even accurate to simply call it "the Christian faith", for that has been reduced to simply "believe in Jesus", or "read the Bible", or "be baptised", or "get the Holy Spirit", or "grow up in it." None of those are "the faith".

Sadly the word "faith" is a word that very few "with some faith" can even explain. So much more so when we need to explain "*the* faith". To explain what we mean when we say Robyn "kept the faith", we need to explain the word "faith", but also, the word "repentance". The word "faith" is too common to be the only word to explain "the faith". Even God added the "the" to the word "faith" so we are no longer confused. I believe the word "repentance", when added to the word "faith" is very helpful word to explain "the faith."

Repentance

Repentance is a loaded word. The most clear display of true repentance, especially in contrast to false repentance, is given to us by God in Judges chapter 10. In Judges 10 the Israelites have replaced "the faith" with the alternatives in the world. They remained very religious, but in all kinds of other ways. God, in His corrective discipline, sends them a series of trials to shake

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them out of their complacent ignorance of Him. Thankfully, they eventually get the point, and cry out to the Lord, repenting of their evil ways.

However, God rejects their repentance. It sounds fairly good, but it was obviously missing something very important. They had adopted the same definition of repentance and faith as is common to our own day. They were quick to acknowledge their sin, even mention it by name—that is certainly better than most forms of false repentance. But they still had no real understanding of the gravity of their offensiveness to the almighty, Holy God. So God rejects their repentance. In fact, God starts listing some of the things He had been doing for them for so long already to make them understand how much they received from Him every time, and still how little they honoured Him for it. God then tells them to get their help from their own useless faith.

Repentance that skims over one's sins and treats God with familiar ignorance is not "the faith", but just "a faith", a personalised, defined-mostly-by-me-and-my-friends faith—not "the faith" in "the God" of all.

Thankfully the Israeli's in Judges 10 realise their hypocrisy and start getting a sense of exactly how good and powerful and just and perfect God is. They realise that their sin is not just an "oopsie" or a "negativity", but a serious offence. They go back to God therefore, but this time they truly repentance. Their repentance is a model of what true repentance looks like. In Judges 10:15 and 16, 1) they acknowledge and confess that they have *sinned*, 2) they justify their deserved *punishment* rather than excusing their behaviour, 3) they plead for the

mercy of God, knowing they deserve the opposite, 4) they *stop* their sinful behaviour, and 5) they *turn* to the commandments of the LORD God. *That* is true repentance! That is the starting blocks of "*the* race of keeping *the* faith". That is the beginning of "the good fight" to "keep *the* faith".

It is all summed up very beautifully in Psalm 32:5 one of the famous repentance Psalms. "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." Later, in Psalm 32:9-10 we are warned, "Be not like the horse or a mule, without understanding, ... many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord".

The contrast between God's perfections and our sinfulness is explained in another repentance Psalm, Psalm 51:5-6, as, "I was brought forth in iniquity, ... but You delight in truth". It continues in Psalm 51:10 with a prayer to God to, "Create in me a clean heart".

That is the repentance that defines the *founding* moment of "the faith" and that *remains* as a pattern of your life before God from that moment on. That is how sinners become Christians. That is what we need to explain to others who want to know how to become a Christian. That is what we need to talk about when we explain how we became Christians. That is what, if it has not yet taken place, confirms that your faith is just "a faith", not "the faith".

To "keep the faith", as we even remember today, is to know that we are sinners, deserving nothing good from God, but receiving His graces every day, obligating us to humble

ourselves before Him, confess our offensive sins to Him, asking Him to show us mercy, and replacing our wicked deeds with true obedience and worship. To understand "*the faith*", you need to understand *repentance*.

Faith in Substitution

But we still need to clarify the word "faith" too. Faith. I love simple and clear, more than I love lengthy and complicated, and so did Robyn, so I found the shortest, and clearest verse in the Bible to explain what our faith is in.

Faith is a belief in *something*. Many people often use the word "faith" as though it has some intrinsic worth, but it doesn't. It is the *object* of faith, that gives it any significance. "*The faith*" is faith in "the God". "*The faith*" is faith in the existence and work of Jesus, the Christ. "*The faith*" is faith in the written Word of God revealed to mankind and preserved for us in the Bible. But perhaps most specifically, "*the faith*" is faith in a very specific spiritual reality that took place the day Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and from which He was raised three days later. The one verse that most clearly, and most simply, explains that spiritual reality that our faith is in, is 2 Corinthians 5:21. Listen to it very carefully, "For our sake, He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God." "For our sake God made Jesus to be sin so that, in Jesus we might become the righteousness of God." There are two spiritual events that are described here. Each one is an event of *substitution*. When Jesus died on the cross, things got swapped between us, who have faith in Jesus, and Jesus.

The first swap, or substitution, was our sin on him. God took the sin, of all who would repent, and placed them on Jesus. That is why Jesus died. Death is a result of sin—we all eventually die because we all sin. But Jesus knew no sin. Jesus never sinned. For Him to die, God would have to place sin on Him. But God cannot sin, or make sin, or create sin, or coerce sin, so God took our sin, and placed it on Jesus as our substitute. And so, Jesus died—the just punishment for everyone with sin. That is the first substitution that this verse talks about. "The faith" is faith in this our-sin-on-Jesus substitution.

The second substitution is from Jesus to us. Our sin on Him; *His righteousness on us*. "so that, in Jesus, we might become the righteousness of God." With our sin taken away from us, we are guilt-less, but we are not yet righteous. To be with God one day, you *need* the righteousness of God! Therefore, so as not to just half-save those who believe in Jesus and repent of their sins, God completed salvation with this second substitution. On judgement day, when you stand before God the righteous, perfect Judge, He will look at all those who have "the faith" and have "kept the faith", and He will have brought down the gavel of justice for every one of our sins on Jesus Christ, so that He can look at us, see Jesus' righteousness and welcome us as good and faithful servants into His kingdom (Lk 19:17).

Repentance and Faith in Substitution. Those are concepts that well describe "the faith". To be able to say "I have kept the faith", you will, like every true Christian has, have to repent in the full sense of the word, and you will have to believe—have faith in—the substitution of sin and of righteous that God

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accomplished with Jesus for your sake. Then you will be living, to die well. And when your time comes, whenever it might be, then you can die well.

THE PRIZE AFTER A CHRISTIAN'S DEATH

But that is not the end. Death ends this life, but it begins eternal life. After a Christian's death, there is an eternity of life, in some ways much like this life, only sinless, and perfect, and Garden-of-Eden kind of qualities. But before all that gets to be lived to the max, there is prize-given for finishing "the good fight" and for finishing "the race" of true faith in this life. The Prize after a Christian's Death is one of a kind.

Back in 2 Timothy 4 it says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. *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."

There is the obvious prize of "the crown of righteousness", and then the more subtle extra, of being with the Lord and with all who have lived a life longing for the end of it all.

"The crown of righteousness" is that wonderful, tangible, evidence of believing that the whole substitution part of the Gospel was really true! The righteousness is yours! By repenting of your sins, and by faith in the substitution of your sin and Christ's righteousness, you got it! You get His righteousness! Now the judge can be perfectly just, and still welcome you to glory! The prize proves that the spiritual realities of life are really real! You really receive the righteousness!

It is a crown, because it is given as a wreath, or we would say a medal, at the end of the race. The prize after a Christian's death, is a crown, rewarding "the good fight", and "the race" of "keeping the faith". It is also though, a vindication that your faith was the real deal.

THE PARTICIPANTS AFTER A CHRISTIAN'S DEATH

And then there is the added bonus of all the participants after a Christian's death. The Lord, the righteous Judge is there, but thankfully in a rewarding sense, not a punitive sense. You will be there, if indeed you have "kept the faith". And all those who loved His appearing when they were still on earth, will be there too.

CONCLUSION

When we lose a loved one we always remember the earthly things that are no more. And today is evidence that there is certainly much to remember very fondly. But let us not only remember the obvious visible things. Let us also reflect on the faith that Robyn had.

Similarly, we are quick to comfort our own hearts at funerals and memorial services with sayings like "He/she is in a better place" or "One day we will be reunited." Know for sure, that such statements are only true for those who had "kept the faith" and for those who would love it if Jesus appeared today to judge all—all sinners for their own sins, and us by His own substitutionary death.

If you want to live to die well, you need to fight "the good fight". Not the fight against cancer, or some other physical

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suffering or injustice, but the fight of faith, that believes the truth in spite of personal feelings, that repents of sin irrespective of the consequences, that loves the Lord Jesus more than anything, that longs for the ribbon of reward, affirming that "the good fight" had been won.

If you want to live to die well, you need to run "the race". Not the race defined by your own rules or the race defined by everyone running their own way around you, but "the race" of faith, defined in terms of repentance and belief in the Divine act of double substitution, vindicated when you break through the ribbon at the end of the race.

Then you will die well. And until then, you will live well. Then you will, as Robyn experienced so vividly, experience the eternal weight of glory after what are relatively "light momentary afflictions" here on earth (2 Cor 4:17). Then you will, though perhaps groaning under they sufferings of this earthly tent, be welcomed into a building from God, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor 5:1). Then you will experience that as your body continues its daily process of dying, your spirit is being renewed day by day (2 Cor 4:16).

You live to die well when you "keep the faith" until the day that Jesus rewards you.

Amen.