

THE REWARD FOR EQUIPPING THE SAINTS
2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

Winning the biggest sports contests and the prizes that come with them are rare:

- Only 25 players are on the roster of the team that wins the World Series
- Only about 50 players are on the winning team of the Super Bowl
- Only 26 players will be on the winning World Cup team — and that happens only every four years
- Similarly, athletes have opportunity to win Olympic medals only every four years.

But perhaps the rarest of all sports prizes is the **Olympic medal** named after the founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin. It was instituted in 1964 as an award for special gestures and acts that exemplify the spirit of the Olympic Games. But not every summer or winter games recognizes an athlete with this award: since 1964 only 17 athletes have won the medal, including one posthumous award given to German long jumper Luz Long who befriended American Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics in Munich and then embraced Owens (who was black) in front of Adolf Hitler at the end of the Olympics. To win the Coubertin medal might be the most unique athletic accomplishment.



Seeing athletes raise a trophy or medal over their heads in victory is satisfying for both the athlete and his supporters. But most of us can only imagine what that might be like; we have no realistic opportunity to receive such rewards.

But for the believer, there is a better day coming. It is the day of reward that is coming from the Lord Jesus Christ for our efforts in serving Him. The rewards on that day are rare because they are infinitely great; but they are attainable, because every believer in Christ will enjoy them.

The past few weeks we have been thinking on our theme for ministry this year, **"Equipping the Saints."** We have talked about the goal of equipping, the people who equip, and the character of the equippers, and the way that we equip. Today we will answer the question, *why do we equip others?* Why should we expend ourselves for caring for others? Why would we pay the costs we will have to pay in caring for others? From the final letter of Paul, we are going to find in 2 Timothy 4 that —

SERVE THE LORD BY EQUIPPING HIS PEOPLE — BECAUSE A REWARD IS COMING.

There is hardship in life and there is hardship in ministry. Ministry is not complicated, but it's often hard (Paul calls it "toil"). But the effort is worth it because of the coming reward.

Someone has noted that in these verses there is an emphasis on the present (v. 6), the past (v. 7), and the future (v. 8). That's true; but all these verses are looking toward the end of life and the evaluation that is coming then:

- “the time of my departure has come” (v. 6)
- “I have fought...I have finished...I have kept” (v. 7) all point to a final evaluation at the end of life
- “in the future” (v. 8)

So these verses are Paul's final exhortation to persist, endure, and persevere to the end in ministry. When ministry is hard, continue serving Christ and His people because our expectation of reward is sure. As you anticipate the end of life (and all of us should), remember **three principles** in equipping others:

1. One Continual **COST** for Equippers (v. 6)
2. One Final **PURPOSE** for Equippers (v. 7)
3. One Great **HOPE** for Equippers (v. 8)

1. One Continual COST for Equippers (v. 6)

- These verses are a personal epitaph by Paul; he is **thinking about the summation of his life/ministry**. But he is also connecting his present and future status to the charge to **preach the Word** (v. 2) with the word **for** (v. 6). This is *why* Timothy should preach the Word — because Paul is about to enter eternity and Timothy must remain behind to continue the ministry.
 - ✓ The story of history is how God uses remarkable men to influence each generation.
 - ✓ But God is not dependent on the individuals and the power to change people's lives is not in the individuals but in the Gospel and the preached word. So —
 - Abraham was followed by Isaac, who was followed by Jacob, who was followed by 12 patriarchs
 - Elijah was followed by Elisha (and 7000 other unnamed prophets who were faithful to God)
 - Samuel was followed by Saul, followed by David, followed by Solomon, followed by many (both righteous and unrighteous, all of whom accomplished God's purposes)
 - Even Judas (a rebellious "follower") was succeeded by Mathias
 - Peter was replaced by John Mark
 - And Paul will be succeeded by Timothy
 - ✓ Be encouraged that when you and I pass away, the gospel will not be compromised or left without a testimony; God always has His people, and He will for us and the next generation(s) as well.
 - ✓ But Paul was also purposeful in preparing the next generation (cf. **2:2**) and we should be as well.
- **Paul was preparing Timothy** for his life of ministry; Paul was concerned because he saw his immanent end:
 - ✓ ***I am already being poured out*** — Even while he wrote, Paul was aware that the end of his life was imminent. In fact, **already** means "my death has begun." It's now. And he seems aware of that because the legal process is turning against him (**vv. 14-16**).
 - ✓ Paul uses a figure of speech about his life — ***being poured out as a drink offering*** — but the meaning is clear: his death is soon. (That is emphasized by the present tense of "poured out.")
 - This phrase was used secularly to refer to a drink offering being poured on the ground to honor a deity; similarly, Paul views his life as a fitting form of worship to God (Rom. 12:1).
 - But this phrase referred primarily to the OT sacrificial system — after the Jewish priest sacrificed an animal (lamb, ram, or bull), as part of the same act of worship he provided a drink offering in which he poured wine beside the altar to signify the devotion of the worshipper.
 - This sacrifice was a regular part of worship on all Sabbaths (Num 28:9-10) and feasts (28:14-31; 29:6-39). "Since this wine was gradually poured out, was an offering, and was the final act of the entire sacrificial ceremony, it pictured most adequately the gradual ebbing away of Paul's life." [Hendriksen] His death is pictured by the final drops of the wine leaving the cup.

- ✓ And he emphasized the certainty of his death with ***the time of my departure has come***.
 - This is another euphemism for death: like a ship pulling up an anchor and sailing away, so Paul is nearing the end of life — “The hour has struck. The time has come.” [Robertson]
 - This is not the only time he has anticipated (or even desired) death. He is certain of its reality, but also remember this: he is unafraid (vv. 17-18; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:21ff).
- ✓ In this verse Paul not only prepares Timothy to take over for him, but also prepares him to suffer...
- As Paul evaluates his present condition, **he is preparing us for the nature of care** in the church.
 - ✓ Caring for one another in the church is not always easy (Col. 1:29; Rom. 16:6, 12; 1 Cor. 4:11ff; 15:58).
 - ✓ Caring for one another in the church is often costly. Being obedient to follow Christ and fulfill the ministry duties he has for you *will* cost you, and it will sometimes cost you deeply. That’s Paul’s example, and we read of examples of persecution and martyrdom in Scripture (2 Cor. 11:23ff) and history (*Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, Five English Reformers*) and we are reminded of the cost.
 - ✓ Christ also told His disciples to count the cost of following Him (Lk. 14:28-33; Jn. 21:18-19).
 - ✓ Don’t think ministry and life will be easy when you follow Christ. If you are committed to serving Him and caring for His people, it will cost you.
 - ✓ Paul’s point in the verses that follow is that the cost is worthwhile. Don’t despair in the sacrifices. They will be repaid a hundred times over — and then get eternity and its treasures (Mk. 10:28-30).
 - ✓ Piper has rightly said, “Christians lean toward need, not comfort. Toward love, not safety. That’s what our Savior is like. That is what he died for.” [*Coronavirus and Christ*, 91.]
- There is a second principle for us to remember as we contemplate equipping others and end of life:

2. One Final **PURPOSE** for Equippers (v. 7)

- In v. 7 Paul uses three analogies to make one point — while we are serving Christ and His church (and equipping the church), our personal purpose and goal is to remain faithful.
- Some think that Paul is mixing military and athletic analogies in this verse, but since the reward for all three is an athletic crown (v. 8), it is most likely that all three (v. 7) are athletic events (wrestling/boxing and running).
- As you meditate on this verse don’t think this is for Paul alone — every believer is in the spiritual fight of faith, as Paul used athletic imagery for Christian life several times (2:5; 1 Tim. 6:12; 1 Cor. 9:24-27).
- Paul has ***fought the good fight***...
 - ✓ It is probably similar to the boxing analogy Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 9.
 - ✓ When he says “good” fight, he is not talking about his participation — i.e., “I kept the rules...” He means that the fight itself is good. There is inherent beauty and goodness in the fight of faith. Which means that when we have to fight for perseverance and endurance, nothing has gone wrong; God has designed the spiritual life to be a fight (to make us dependent on Him).

- ✓ There is labor and hardship in the fight — both the noun (fight) and verb (fought) are from the same root that indicates something that takes sweat and toil; it's not easy and God intended it not to be easy. It was always that way for Paul and it will be that way for us (so we learn to depend on Him).
- ✓ How encouraging that Paul can evaluate his life and say, "The end is in sight and I've been faithful."
 - Just because the fight is hard doesn't mean we will be defeated.
 - It is in the hardness of the fight that we will particularly see the grace of God. If the fight is not a fight but a nap, then we don't need a sufficient Spirit or Word. When it is a fight, we go to Him for help and find that He is sufficient for us (vv. 17-18). When the Lord is with us, it is enough.
- Paul has ***finished the course***...
 - ✓ We might say "I have reached the end of the race; I did it all; nothing more needs to be done."
 - ✓ Paul said something similar to the Ephesian elders — "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus..." (Acts 20:24). In Acts 20, he was still somewhere on the race course; now he is at the finish line and breaking the tape. It's done.
 - ✓ And notice that he doesn't say, "I have won the race." "Winning" isn't the goal. Finishing is the goal. Completing God's objective is the goal. Faithfulness is the goal. And he achieved the goal.
 - ✓ Paul is not the only person to say this about himself at the end of life: in Jn. 19:30, after Jesus absorbed God's wrath against sin, He said, "it is finished." The work of redemption was done, the course set for His life by the Father was finished, nothing more needed to be done.
 - ✓ Now Paul uses the same word to evaluate his life. Paul, who had been appointed by Christ to this ministry, could summarize his ministry with the same word that the Son of God used for His life.
 - ✓ This is an encouragement that while there are hardships in ministry, the course set before us by God is not unattainable. All He has called us to do He also equips us to do and we can finish well.
- Paul has ***kept the faith***...
 - ✓ That is, Paul has remained faithful and true to Christ. He has kept on believing.
 - ✓ Like the athlete that takes an oath to abide by the rules, Paul has lived by the truth of Christ.
 - ✓ What He has called Timothy to do (1:14; 1 Tim. 6:20) he has done. He has preserved the gospel and been personally faithful to Christ, and "done his job" in serving Christ.
- These three analogies can be summarized by the last — be true to God and His calling. That's our personal goal and intention — just do what He has called us to do.
 - ✓ Our goal isn't to save people (we can't).
 - ✓ Our goal isn't to build a church to a particular number (we can't).
 - ✓ Our goal is faithfulness and endurance — do what He has called and gifted us to do. And when we do that, there are no regrets. We can rest that He considers us faithful (Mt. 25:21ff).

3. One Great **HOPE** for Equippers (v. 8)

- Here is what drives Paul to pay the cost and stay faithful: reward. Because of his faithfulness to God, **in the future** (a reference to eternity) **there is laid up for me the crown...**
 - ✓ That the crown is “laid up” means it is preserved and guarded by a heavenly Sentry (1 Pt. 1:3ff).
 - ✓ The verb “laid up” is a present tense meaning it is already there; and the form means that someone else (God) has put it in Heaven for Paul and is keeping it. That makes this a certain/sure desire.
 - ✓ The idea of rewards of crowns in the NT is common: God will bless His people with crowns of life (1 Cor. 9:25; Js. 1:12), crowns of glory (1 Pt. 5:4), and crowns of righteousness. Further, Jesus says that the Father will honor all servants of Christ (Jn. 12:26).
- **Here Paul anticipates a particular reward — the crown of righteousness.**
 - ✓ The phrase can mean “the crown is the source of righteousness,” or “the crown is given for righteousness” (because the person is righteous — or declared righteous).
 - ✓ It is true that only people who are declared righteous can receive this crown, but a similar phrase is used about the crown of life (Js. 1:12; Rev. 2:10) meaning that life is granted through the crown. Paul most likely means that the “crown” is the gift of final righteousness for those who believe in Christ — it is the gift of final purity and the removal of sin.
 - ✓ Final righteousness is “the victor’s wreath” for the believer in Christ. Sin, desire, and temptation are all removed — there will never again be the slightest inclination to sin.
 - ✓ Because Christ wore the crown of thorns, believers are made recipients of the crown of righteousness.
 - ✓ Notice that the reward of righteousness comes from **the Lord, the righteous Judge** —
 - The One who has been granted authority to judge will evaluate every heart and accurately evaluate and graciously dispense the reward of final righteousness.
 - It is not always a joy to stand before a judge — there is a difference between standing before a judge for a criminal hearing and for being awarded a child in adoption.
 - Paul who had recently stood before a judge and was condemned (v. 16) would soon stand before the ultimate Judge, Christ, and be rewarded with final righteousness and adoption as son.
 - ✓ But Paul is not speaking self-servingly; this crown is also **to all who have loved His appearing**.
 - The crown is for *all believers* who anticipate and look for His second coming (**appearing**).
 - When one believes in and loves Christ, he purifies himself (pursues sanctification, 1 Jn. 3:3) and waits eagerly for the return of Christ so he can be with Him (Phil. 3:20).
 - This v. reminds us God doesn’t bless everyone with righteousness; it is only for those who believe.
 - ... To clarify, to believe in Christ is to **love Christ**. To love Him is to desire Him (and eternal fellowship with Him in Heaven). You can’t believe in Him and not want to be with Him.
 - ... This verse is a reminder that the main battle of this world (**fight** of faith) is the battle of loves — will I love this temporal, dying world, or will I love Christ and His coming?

... We must guard our affections (consider the warning of Demas' life, v. 10). Only love of Christ is worthwhile.

... "Of all the indications that one loves the Lord, this earnest longing for His return is one of the best..." [Hiebert]

... If you don't believe in Christ, I encourage you to repent of your lack of love for Him and begin believing in His death for you, and loving Him for His fellowship with you....

- **It is legitimate to work for Christ's reward**, anticipating the crown of righteousness (and other rewards).
 - ✓ In fact, the Bible tells us of rewards, anticipating that we will be motivated by them (**Mt. 16:27**).
 - ✓ Even more, the Bible compels us to live for the reward of God (**Heb. 11:6**).
 - ✓ And the great reward we get is righteousness, by which we will see God (1 Jn. 3:2).

"...we are afraid that heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal we shall no longer be disinterested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to. There are rewards that do not sully motives. A man's love for a woman is not mercenary because he wants to marry her, nor his love for poetry mercenary because he wants to read it, nor his love of exercise less disinterested because he wants to run and leap and walk. Love, by definition, seeks to enjoy its object." [C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 150.]

- ✓ The previous passage included an exhortation to endure (v. 5). How do we endure? By remembering the reward (righteousness and seeing Christ) that is coming for us when we endure.

CONCLUSION: **William Borden** was a member of the Borden dairy family and an heir of their wealth. In 1904 he finished high school and was given a world cruise as a graduation present. On that trip, he developed a longing for the salvation of the lost particularly those in the Far East. After the trip, he went to Yale University for four years and then to Princeton for seminary, where he studied under J. Gresham Machen. During those years, he wrote in the back of his Bible: **"No reserves."**

His family pleaded with him to take over the business, which was struggling but he refused saying that God's call on his life to the mission field had priority. He not only didn't take over the business, but gave away his wealth and underneath "no reserves," added **"No retreat."** On his way to China to witness to the Muslims there, he contracted cerebral meningitis in Egypt. He died within a month. It seemed that his life was wasted. Then someone looked through his Bible and found that under the two other sayings he wrote two final words: **"No regrets."** He knew that the Lord does not require success, only faithfulness.

Life and ministry are hard. God calls us to faithfulness (not "success"). It is worthwhile when we consider and work for the reward of final righteousness and seeing Christ.

New Member Testimonies and Benediction Prayer: