

A few times a day, I swipe to the right on the home screen of my iPhone. There, I find a sampling of breaking news stories at that given moment. On Tuesday, I saw a headline that was at once both startling and profoundly sad. I clicked to read an account of how Colleen Burns, 35, had fallen to her death in the Grand Canyon. Her hometown newspaper, the Orlando Sentinel, described the story this way:

Colleen Burns had a “million-watt” smile and a laugh so contagious it’d brighten anyone’s mood, friends said. She was thoughtful, real, honest and caring. She loved many and connected with thousands on social media, but most notably, she connected with Orlando. Burns, a regional marketing director for Yelp, died Friday after falling from a Grand Canyon Trail. The Associated Press is reporting that Burns accidentally stepped off an edge at Ooh Aah Point on Friday, about a mile down the popular South Kaibab Trail. Park Rangers located her about 400 feet from where she had been standing. Park officials say Burns had been with family hiking and taking photographs of the sunrise on the trail.

In a CNN article Burns’ friend Jessica Roman, who was also with her at the time of the tragic and fatal accident, recounted more precisely what happened: “She was stepping out of the way for another gentleman to squeeze in, and unfortunately Colleen just kind of got tripped up on her own feet and fell backward.” My heart breaks for the family and close friends of this young woman who obviously died in a most surprising and impossible-to-prepare-for kind of way, and I urge all of us to pray that those left behind will find hope and comfort in the person of Jesus Christ.

So why share such a story at the beginning of this sermon? How could such a tragic tale relate to our passage of the day in 2 Timothy chapter 4? My answer to those questions is found in the form of another question...a question many if not most would prefer to *avoid*...but a question that nonetheless I believe we should *all* wrestle with...not *just* at the end of life (that is, assuming we know such a thing is coming), but also that we should wrestle with *today*. It is not a question to be put off, ignored, invalidated, or otherwise cast aside. The question is this: *Are you ready to die?* Please allow me to repeat the simple question: *Are you ready...this day, Sunday, July 17, 2016...to die?* Now sadly, many live life – even professing Christians – as functional Epicureans. And just what is an Epicurean? Here’s what the solid website gotquestions.org states:

The ancient philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BC) recognized that the fear of death was present in everybody, and he sought a way to remove that fear. Epicurus taught that humanity not need fear death because human beings are nothing more than a composition of atoms, which at death simply disperse, and that is the end of things. Epicurus didn't believe there were any gods to fear or anything to face once a person breathed his last. His teaching of maximum pleasure in this life with minimum pain and suffering dictated that everything ends when death occurred.

My goal this morning is to challenge this philosophy with the truth found in Scripture. We're going to consider what the Bible has to say about death generally, as well as how the Apostle Paul reveals his readiness to die in 2 Timothy 4 more specifically. And hopefully, at the end of our time together, all of us – you and I – will be better prepared to answer the question of the day: Are you ready to die? Please join me in prayer.

Gracious Heavenly Father, we join with the psalmist and ask that in this hour you "...teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom." In Jesus Name, Amen.

Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 4, beginning with verse 6. This is our final sermon in this marvelous book...a book that is rather unique in all of Scripture in that it is a very personal, intimate, one-to-one pouring out of the heart of the Apostle Paul to his son in the faith, Timothy. So as I read this passage, try to put yourself in the shoes of both Paul and Timothy. Paul is most likely within six months of his death, and apparently he knows it. His words are rich, dense, and heartfelt. Timothy, on the other hand, is presumably taking the ministry baton from Paul, this man whom he loves dearly and has followed closely. Now, let's turn our attention to this precious text:

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. ⁹ Make every effort to come to me soon; ¹⁰ for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. ¹² But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵ Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. ¹⁶ At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me,

so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen. ¹⁹Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. ²¹Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. ²²The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

As we continue forward, you may be helped by this very simple three point outline. [Slide] First, we'll explore briefly what the Bible has to say about death. We won't cover the topic exhaustively, but will rather highlight a few of the key passages to consider in Scripture. Next, as we review the passage we *just* read we'll examine the grid the Apostle Paul used as he contemplated his own death...a grid I would submit to you is both appropriate and essential. His grid is comprised of three basic parts: An evaluation of his *own* life, an evaluation of *relationships* in his life, and an evaluation of critical divine *resources* for life. Finally, we'll close by considering where each of us is in terms of answering the aforementioned question: *Are you ready to die?*

First, then, Who is the author of life? Scripture reveals it is *God Himself*. He is the only eternally existent One. Every one...and everything...else has been created by Him. Specifically regarding humans, God created mankind when as yet mankind had never before existed. There is a latin phrase that captures this reality – *creatio ex nihilo* – creation out of nothing. Genesis 2:7 describes God's creation of mankind: "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." In that same chapter, verse 22 describes how God created woman from man: "The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man." So, we *start* with God the Creator Who made mankind. Then, we *continue* with God. God not only made man and woman, but he also measures out the span of each of our lives. Listen to the words of David in Psalm 139: 13-16: "For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made

in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance and in Your book were written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.” Well then, just how long do those foreordained days last? Moses, in the one psalm written by him...Psalm 90...describes it this way: “We have finished our years like a sigh”, and later he says of human life on earth that “soon it is gone and we fly away.” In the New Testament, James trumpets a similar refrain. In James 4:14, he writes: “...you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.” For those of us who might be a bit slow on the uptake, I’ll simplify. Scripture basically says *life is short*. For a select few, short means hitting the century mark or beyond. For others, short means an abrupt end to life at age 35. And there are virtually endless *other* possibilities and scenarios. Each of us has a custom entry in God’s book that records the number of days our life on this earth will last.

So, in light of the reality of the brevity of life, what does the Bible say should be our response while on earth? In other words, does the Bible tell us ways we should live specifically because we know life is short? Consider these two key answers, both of which come from Scripture passages we’ve already referenced. First, remember the sentence I used in my prayer? It comes from that psalm of Moses, specifically Psalm 90:12. Hear the words again: “...teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.” I think a key word in that verse is “number.” Listen to what it means in its original context: to count, to reckon, to assign, to appoint, to prepare. Isn’t that rich? It speaks to living life on purpose...to living life intentionally. I’ve *reckoned* on the days of my life...that they’re short. And I’ve *prepared* in light of that reality. Therefore, I’ve *assigned* and *appointed* my days. And just how are those days to be assigned and appointed? Look at the second phrase of the verse: “...that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.” Are we living wisely before God according to His ways, His truth, His standards? Will it be said of us when we’re gone from this earth that we lived a life that was distinctively wise before God, or will it be said of us that we lived for ourselves...or some other

cause...indeed, that we lived foolishly? The other passage we've already touched on is James 4, and it speaks to the fact we should live *humble, properly ordered* lives before God. Here's how our earlier verse fits into this fuller picture. James 4:13-15 states: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'" In brief, we make plans but God is in charge of whether we will live to see them through. Did you see that in the last verse? Notice what it says: "If the Lord wills, we will live...." Two things to understand here: First, it is *only* by God's will that anything happens. And secondly, the first order of business is whether we're alive or not to see the plans through! "If the Lord wills, we will *live*...."! This is why I said the passage speaks to the fact we should live humble, properly ordered lives before God...this One under Whose will we live and function.

These are important truths from Scripture for us to use as our baseline as we consider the question "Are you ready to die?". Regarding life, God is both author and creator. Regarding death, He has predetermined our days according to His will...and any life span we live is short. So our response should be to number our days and live them out one-by-one with a posture of humility before and submission to God.

Turning now to 2 Timothy, it is clear these things were settled firmly in the heart and mind of the Apostle Paul. He obviously used them as his baseline as he considered the question "Are you ready to die?" And I would submit to you that he responds with a resounding "yes" in this passage.

Furthermore, I believe what he is essentially doing in this text is tackling the question regarding *himself*, and in so doing he is giving *us* an additional layer of detail regarding how to evaluate our *own* response to the question. Quickly, let me remind you of the context surrounding these verses. Paul is writing

from prison, not the house arrest variety as with his previous imprisonment but most likely in solitary confinement marked by dark, dirty and deplorable conditions. I don't know how as the text doesn't tell us specifically, but it is apparent that Paul knows the end of his life is at hand. He's been in trouble before, he's been left for dead before, he's been thrown into prison before. But somehow, God has given him an understanding that *this* is to be his final imprisonment, and that he will lose his life in what turns out to be a matter of a *few months*. In terms of the immediate context of the verses, remember that Paul has just charged Timothy to preach the word in and out of season, to reprove, rebuke and exhort with great patience and instruction, to be sober in all things, to endure hardship, to do the work of an evangelist, and to fulfill his ministry. And Timothy is to do all of these things despite the fact that the people to whom he is ministering will be turning away from him toward those who will give them what they want rather than what they need, tickling their ears and ultimately leading them *from* the truth and turning them aside to myths.

Right on the heels of this starkly contrasting picture, Paul starts verse 6 with the words "For I....". When you jump back into those previous few verses, an interesting construction appears. Verse 3 refers to "they," namely those who are turning away from the faith. Then, there is an emphatic and contrasting pointer to Timothy in verse 5, marked by the phrase "But you....". Then, Paul takes up a discourse of his own life in verse 6 with the phrase "For I....". To summarize and paraphrase, then, these verses taken together could go something like this: *They* will desert the faith, *but you* Timothy remain faithful, *for I* Paul have done so before you as I'm about to share with you. And with that construction Paul launches into this marvelous grid through which he has processed and lived his life, and through which he is also contemplating his death.

Paul reveals in verse 6 that he knows his life is quickly coming to an end. Though it might be hard to handle for many people, imagine on the positive side the immense benefit that could accrue to any of us

were we able to know when death would come. How might perspectives change? How might decisions change? How might actions change? Samuel Johnson, the great 18th century English poet and author, pithily put it this way: “When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.” Well, Paul knows he is going to die soon, and his heart and mind are already concentrated wonderfully. To express this awareness of his imminently concluding life span, Paul uses the Old Testament illustration of being poured out as a drink offering. This offering was used as part of the sacrificial ceremony where wine was poured out along with the other thing, such as an animal or grain, being offered as a sacrifice. The full amount measured was poured out as part of this consuming sacrifice. This indeed was a picture of Paul’s life. He further states that the time of his departure has come. This word “departure” is packed with meaningful and helpful imagery. It more precisely means “loosening.” It was used in ancient times in three main ways: (1) to refer to a beast of burden being unharnessed and unyoked in order to roam freely; (2) to refer to a ship lifting its anchor so as to be carried by the wind to shore; and (3) to refer to soldiers pulling up the cords of their tents to break camp and journey to their home base. Yes, Paul was going to die. But he didn’t see it as final. He saw it as a loosening...a freeing up into his next – and permanent – home. Think for a moment about your own view of death. Does your default perspective lean toward finality and closure, or toward freedom and commencement into the endlessly wide place of eternity? Paul does, however, stop short of this future frontier in verse 6. Indeed, he is primarily evaluating his *present* reality.

Then in verse 7, he turns his attention to the *past*. In doing so, you can hear the echoes of his life as we know it from Scripture beginning on that Damascus road when God saved him clear up to this dark prison cell under the shadow of death. We’re talking a span of perhaps 30-35 years being referred to in this verse...not incredibly *long*, but oh how very *full*! Paul breaks down his life as a believer *in* and servant follower *of* Jesus Christ using athletic metaphors as he is prone to do. First, he says he fought the good fight. Back in 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul used this same word to describe how he was to conduct

himself – and how he was urging Timothy to do the same – regarding the ministries to which they had been called. The Greek word for the phrase “I have fought” sounds like what it means: *agōnizomai*. It essentially means to agonize, to struggle, to strive with strenuous zeal. And what of this fight Paul has fought? Rather than being used to describe how he fought, the term “good” most likely is used to explain that the fight itself he was engaged in was inherently good and worth the battle. Next, Paul says he has finished the course. Does that mean the race is over? No, because the race is still going on to this day! What Paul means is that he had a leg to run in the race. He has done his part with single-minded focus. Mission accomplished...duty discharged...service fulfilled. Now, it is Timothy’s turn to keep running. Paul’s final analysis of his life that has elapsed to this point is summed up in the phrase “I have kept the faith.” Based on the totality of Paul’s letters to Timothy, he is probably referring to some combination of being nourished on the words of faith and of sound doctrine (see 1 Timothy 4:6), persevering in the faith (see 1 Timothy 6:12-14), and guarding the faith (see 1 Timothy 6:20).

Verse 8 marks yet another shift in directional perspective. Paul has evaluated his readiness to die based on his present in verse 6 and his past in verse 7. Now, he turns to the *future*. Whereas verse 6 might be described as *poignant* and verse 7 might be described as *resolute*, verse 8 rings with the sound of *triumph*! As Paul looks to the future...indeed, to eternity...he sees there being a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to him. Alistair Begg, in preaching on this verse, pictures the reality that this crown isn’t just any old crown. He remarks that God isn’t saying here, “Hey, Paul, go pick out a crown of righteousness from the pile.” Rather, Paul’s custom fitted crown with his name on it is already laid up for him in heaven. And when will Paul receive this beautiful crown? The verse tells us... “on that day”. What is “that day”? In short, it is the day when Jesus Christ will return to establish His kingdom. It is a day yet in the future, and a day that should be anticipated with joy by all Christians.

Having evaluated his *own life* in terms of his readiness to die, Paul evaluates his *relationships* in light of this question. Time doesn't permit me to go into great detail here, but I'll share a few observations quickly from verses 9-21. First, notice that Paul is almost alone in these last months of life. Indeed, only Luke is with him as noted in verse 11. I take it this is why Paul is making such an urgent appeal in verses 9 and 21 for Timothy to come quickly to be with him. Some have wondered why Paul is so focused on life this side of heaven in these verses in light of what he has just said in verses 6-8. Without question, Paul is a man at peace with God and himself and he is unmistakably ready to die. However, that doesn't invalidate the preciousness of the relationships God has given him *up to* this point. How rich the bond between Paul and Timothy must have been. They had been through so much together, beginning with Timothy's entrance into the faith through the many trials and troubles they journeyed. All of those things make for the kind of relationship with one another that is only possible in and through Jesus Christ, the Person most dear Whom they shared in common. So of course, then, Paul was justifiably eager to see his dear friend and son/brother in the faith. Note also that Mark...yes, that Mark who had abandoned Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey...is on Paul's list of people whom he longs to see. Over the years, apparently both Paul and Mark had changed to the point that Paul was now able to say in verse 11 that Mark was "useful to me for service." Those three – Luke, Timothy, and Mark – are the really good relationships. Two bad relationship examples also emerge in these verses. Demas traded in God's path for worldly pleasures, resulting in his desertion of Paul. Also, verses 14-15 describe Alexander the Coppersmith, a fierce opponent of Paul's who was also a potential opponent of Timothy. Paul's views on this man are decisive: *God will repay him* according to his deeds (*not* a good thing), and Timothy was to be on guard against him. The most important relationship of all in these verses is that of Paul with His Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice how precious this relationship is described in verses 17-18: "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of

the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." To put it plainly and simply, when *all* else failed and *all* others abandoned Paul, there was *One* who *never* failed him and *never* abandoned him. It was Jesus Christ, whose constant and abiding presence *strengthened* Paul, *drove* the accomplishment of his ministry to the Gentiles, *rescued* him from every last trial and tribulation, and would *ultimately* bring Paul safely to His heavenly kingdom. That is why Paul confidently and reverently says "...to *Him* be the glory forever and ever."

To close, notice in verse 22 the divine resources that sustained Paul and that he commends to Timothy...and to us. "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you." These are not a couple of tacked on sentences Paul used because he didn't know how to cut off the letter. Rather, they speak to his *undeniable* source of *strength* and *hope*. The presence of the Lord in his life...indeed, the fact that Paul is *in Christ*...and the *grace* of God that *saved* him, *sustains* him and takes him *home*...are why Paul can unequivocally, unashamedly, and unceasingly say, "Yes, I am ready to die!" Commenting on this final sentence of the book of 2 Timothy, William Mounce says the following in his fine commentary on the Pastoral Epistles:

If the traditional historical reconstruction of the P[astoral] E[pistles] is correct, then these are the final recorded words written by Paul, apostle to the Gentiles. God's grace overflowed in his life with the faith and love that were in Christ Jesus. He lived a life characterized by the grace of God calling sinful men and women to Christ by faith. And he ends his ministry having fulfilled his calling with "grace" on his lips. Sometime that fall Timothy may have made the trip to Rome to see Paul one last time on earth. Paul lost his life most likely that winter. According to the Ostian Way tradition, Paul was beheaded at Aquae Salviae near the third milestone on the Ostian Way. Paul looked forward to his crown of righteousness, to being with the Lord, to seeing Him face to face, and to knowing God just as he is known. His wish was that Timothy and all who long for Christ's appearing be found as faithful.

So what about you and me? *Are you ready to die? Am I ready to die?* Having reviewed Scripture generally and 2 Timothy 4 specifically, this is a question that is not only *not* overblown, but is one we must *all* come to terms with ultimately and would do well to contemplate regularly...starting *today*. So, let me ask again: *Are you ready to die?* Hebrews 9:27 says "...it is appointed for men to die once and

after this comes judgment....". Do you dread that day of judgment, or do you look forward to it as one who loves the appearing of Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge, when He comes again? The verse right before in Hebrews 9, verse 26, says Jesus came the first time "...to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." That means *your* sin, that means *my* sin, that means the sins of the *world*. As I mentioned last week, 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that Jesus who knew no sin was made sin our *your* behalf and *my* behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. I urge you to put *all* your weight...*all* your trust...*all* your hope...on Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to save you. And not only are you justified before God by His grace, but once in Christ you are also *made more like Him* by his grace as well. I can assure you it is only by the grace of God that you and I will ever come to the point where we can join Paul in saying, "*Yes I am ready to die.*" That said, *don't let today be just any other day. Slow down. Stop. Take stock.* Allow the Spirit of God to give you His eyes to review your life according to the present, the past and the future. And as He reveals these things to you, I urge you to come to terms with Him wherever He reveals misalignment between *His* ways and *your* ways...between *His* path and *your* path...between *His* desires and *your* desires...between *His* will and *your* will. And as you come into line with *God's* ways, *God's* path, *God's* desires, and *God's* will, you will be coming closer to rightly answering that unrelenting question: *Are you ready to die?* Let's pray.

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He will also bring it to pass." In Jesus name, Amen.