

The Final Week

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

I remember back when everyone was looking forward to the turn of the millennium. The year 2000 always seemed like the distant future. Now it is swiftly becoming the distant past. Within this next week we will turn over another number on our calendars. 2004 is fading and 2005 looms on the horizon. For most of us, this week will be one of reflection. For some, it will also be a week of planning. As we consider what we have done with 2004 and plan what we will with 2005, what should be our standard and guide? How can we know if 2004 was a successful year? How can we know what we must do in 2005 for it to be a successful year? As Paul prepared himself for death, he made a powerful statement in **II Timothy 4:7**. Though Paul was examining his life, the same three criteria for success should apply to our lives, to each year of our lives, each day of our lives. Paul said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." As we evaluate 2004 and plan for 2005, these same three criteria for success must be in the forefront of our minds as individuals and as a congregation.

Discussion:

- I. "I have fought the good fight."
 - A. Christianity is not a walk in the park. It is not rolling around in a tub of butter. It is a struggle. It is a fight. We have enemies pressing against us (**Ephesians 6:10-12**). We have hardships to overcome and obstacles to hurdle. In **Luke 13:24**, Jesus encouraged us to "strive" to enter the narrow door, using the same term Paul did to describing fighting the good fight. As Jesus said in **Matthew 7:13**, our way is narrow and difficult. **Colossians 1:28-29** explains the purpose of our struggle—to present every person complete in Christ.
 - B. In order to evaluate 2004 and plan for 2005 we must notice two keys.
 1. First, fighting the good fight, struggling to enter the narrow gate can only be done if we do it on purpose. We must be intentional. Too often we walk through life haphazardly, making decisions on the spur of the moment based on what seems or feels good at the time.
 2. Second, fighting the good fight means we will face opposition and we must stand up to it with the armor of God.
 - C. I am not going to evaluate your life or even the work of this congregation for you. I am simply letting you know the standard. Have we with purpose striven to enter into the narrow gate, helping others be complete in Christ and done so despite what naysayers and enemies have said and done against us? Have you?
 - D. Finally, what do you plan to do differently, to do more of, to do better in 2005 to purposefully fight the good fight? How are you going to strive to enter in the narrow gate? What are you going to do to help people be complete in Christ? Throughout this week you must think about this. You will not accidentally fight the good fight in 2005. You will only fight it if you have purposefully planned to do so.
- II. "I have finished the course."
 - A. In **John 19:30**, Jesus, while on the cross, was able to say, "It is finished." The Father had given the Son a job and Jesus had completed it. He had finished His course. Paul, in like manner, while facing the prospect of death was able to say the same thing. He was able to say, "I have done what God wanted me to do." Finishing the course means staying on track. It means completing the goal. It means winning the prize. As Paul's death approached, he evaluated his life and said it was a success because he followed the roadmap laid out for him by God.
 - B. In order to evaluate 2004 and plan for 2005 we must notice four keys.
 1. First, finishing the course means having a goal. Paul knew where he was going and therefore was able to say he had made it. **Hebrews 12:1-2** says we can run the race set before us only when we keep our eyes on Christ. When we focus on the goal of being with Christ, we will run properly (*cf.* **Philippians 3:14**).
 2. Second, finishing the course means sacrifice. In **Acts 20:24**, Paul said that he did not hold his life dear. Rather, he held finishing God's course dear. While Paul was saying he was willing to die to serve the Lord, his main point was that his desires were not the driving factor in his life. He wanted to run God's course, not his own.

3. Third, finishing the course means enduring through personal discipline. As **Hebrews 12:1** said, we must endure to run the race. Running God's race is tough. It hurts deeply at times. But we must endure. We will only do so through personal discipline as Paul demonstrated in **I Corinthians 9:24-27**.
 4. Fourth, finishing the course means making progress. In one sense, Paul had not reached his goal. Remember **Colossians 1:28-29**? His goal was to make every man complete in Christ. He had not done that yet. But he had done whatever he could, whenever he could, with whomever he could. He had made progress.
- C. Whether we see our death on the horizon or merely the close of another year, these keys provide the basis for evaluating 2004. Did we know what our goals were? Did we sacrifice to reach our goals? Did we exercise personal discipline and therefore endure through the hardships of the race? Did we make any progress?
- D. What about 2005? What are the goals? How will this year fit in with our goals for our entire life? What sacrifices will you make to progress to your goals? What personal discipline do you need to develop and strengthen to make progress on your goals? What will you do daily, weekly, monthly to make sure you make progress on God's course in 2005?

III. "I have kept the faith."

- A. Finally, the third standard for evaluation that completed and perfected the other two. While some fall away from the faith (**I Timothy 4:1**), deny the faith (**I Timothy 5:8**), wander away from the faith (**I Timothy 6:10**) and will therefore be rejected in regard to the faith (**II Timothy 3:8**), Paul had kept the faith. The picture presented by saying Paul "kept the faith" is not just a picture of one obedient to the faith, but of one guarding the faith as precious and valuable. The system of faith established by God through Jesus Christ was precious to Paul. He protected it against false teachers. He defended it against gainsayers. He exemplified it for his brethren.
- B. In order to evaluate 2004 and plan for 2005 we must notice three keys.
1. First, to keep the faith, we must live by faith. In **Galatians 2:20**, Paul said he lived his life by "the faith of the Son of God (KJV)." Keeping the faith means we live our lives based on Christ's direction.
 2. Second, to keep the faith, we must contend for the faith (**Jude 3-4**). This brings us full circle back to fighting the good fight. Keeping the faith means we defend God's word against those who would deny it or twist it.
 3. Third, to keep the faith, we must work together. **Philippians 1:27** says we must stand together "in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel." None of us will be able to keep the faith alone, we must work with one another, helping one another, stimulating one another. This is so much more than just making it to the assemblies. This is developing relationships that develop spirituality in each other.
- C. As we evaluate 2004, have we lived by the faith, making decisions based on the faith which Jesus revealed? Have we defended the faith as we ought against those who would deny it and twist it? Have we worked with our brethren to develop our faith through the faith?
- D. As you plan for 2005, what decisions are you already considering? How are you going to make them based on the faith of Jesus Christ? What plans do you have to defend and contend for the faith of God? What relationships do you plan to develop or strengthen in order to work together for the faith of the gospel?

Conclusion:

In **II Timothy 4:8**, Paul was able to say, "There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness." He was able to say that because he was able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." We will only be able to say a crown of righteousness awaits us if we can say we have fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith. However, we must not make the mistake of waiting until the reaper comes to take us to evaluate our lives. Our lives are built one day, one week, one month, one year at a time. What can we say of this year? What will we say of next year? Make this week one of evaluation and planning. Above all, no matter how you have to evaluate 2004, plan 2005 in such a way that you will be able to say at the end of it, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith."