

NBC Chapel 10/21/2008

Theme: An Eternity Class Performance

Text: 2 Timothy 4:5b-8

5...fulfill your ministry. 6 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. NASB

Introduction: Paul was a sports fan. Loved to use athletic illustrations and allusions. Esp. the Greek-style events. So, our theme runs along the lines of his sports interests. It just makes good illustrative materials.

Did you watch the Summer Olympics? Track and Field, Gymnastics, Swimming? Michael Phelps and 8 gold medals. Unprecedented. Truly a World Class Performance.

But what would comprise an equivalent Christian performance. World Class is not the right label. Perhaps Eternity Class Performance is a proper title. And where would we turn for the criteria for such a performance. I believe that here, in our Chapel Theme we have such a model.

Paul is writing to his beloved friend near the end of his life. He uses a triad of phrases that, to him, defined his life.

1. I have fought the good fight.
 - The phrasing here seems to be “The good fight – I have fought it.”
 - The emphasis is not on the opponent, but on the fight itself.
 - His wording specifies that the fight was good. That is it was a fight worth joining. It was honorable and proper. Battle of Thermopolae (480 BC) The Alamo (1836) in San Antonio, TX. The passengers of Flight 93 on 9/11.
 - The fight highlights character, courage, straining beyond endurance, giving everything for the sake of victory.
2. I have finished the race

- The phrasing here seems to be “The race – I have finished it.”
- The race is better understood as the event and/or the course involved rather than the need to pit oneself against some particular competitors.
- In some sense, the race is against the obstacles and the challenge rather than people.
- Note that the achievement stated by Paul was in the finishing, not in outrunning his opponents
- Imagine yourself running as the lone contestant in a race. Finishing is your goal. You have run until your strength is at its limit. And then because of a hurdle too high for your reserves, or a wrong turn, or a maze too complex, or a bump, however small that you did not anticipate, you are thrown onto your face, scraping yourself painfully. Your breath in gasps, you roll onto your side and pull your knees up to your chest. You open your eyes and squint at the sidelines and some voice says to you, “Just give up. This is not fair – you didn’t sign up for this – this is above your pay-grade – who else cares anyway?” And then you pull yourself to your knees, then to your feet. A crowd, somewhere begins to cheer and chant – “you can do it; I know you can.” You place one foot toward the side lines, then you turn toward the finish line and begin to walk, then you force yourself into a trot, then a run. And the crowd cheers. You are the only contestant in this race. The course is your opponent. The only way to lose is to quit. And all you need to do to win is to finish.

The only way to lose is to quit. And all you need to do to win is to finish.

3. I have kept the faith.
 - We usually understand “the faith” as the body of beliefs that make us Christian. Or those around us who are the people of faith.
 - Adam Clarke suggests that, following the Greek Games metaphor, perhaps Paul means the body of rules about how to complete.
 - Honesty and integrity. No shortcuts, no cheating, honoring the proper conduct of the games.
 - “There is none who can lay any charge of dishonor to my performance,” he may have been saying.

I have another take on this. Let me illustrate. In the last few years a new phrase has come into our athletic jargon. After a game, an exhausted player is interviewed – he says, “We didn’t leave anything on the field.” Probably a variation of, “We left it all on the field.” He means that they had brought physical training and conditioning, strategy, countless hours of skill practice, and all the passion and commitment to the field, and it was all used up – nothing was left. Paul might have been saying, “I have kept faith with the goal of a perfect game – a truly Eternity Class Performance.”

Consider verse 6: I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. The sentence for his execution has been passed. The date has been set, and he awaits the prison guards. Somewhere around 65 AD, Nero had Paul beheaded for his crime – being a minister of the gospel in a world that did not want to hear.

4. Paul’s Eternity Class Performance gave him assurance of the prize. “...in the future (not many day from now) the Lord, the righteous Judge will give me the crown of righteousness.” And not to Paul only!!! Also to all who love his appearing – to those who by their passion, turn in an Eternity Class Performance!

Closing:

We stand looking at Paul from a distance. He at the end of his performance, and we – near the beginning. I trust you understand that It is not in extraordinary giftedness or by world renown that we will win the prize. It is our loving, passionate commitment to the task that we will fulfill our calling. Will we commit ourselves anew, to an Eternity Class Performance?

One day a plain village woman –
Driven by love for her Lord
Recklessly poured out –
A valuable essence,
Disregarding the scorn.

And once it was broken and spilled out,
The fragrance filled all the room;
Like a prisoner released from his shackles –

Like a spirit set free from the tomb.

Broken and spilled out
Just for love of your, Jesus.
My most precious treasure
Lavished on Thee.

Broken and spilled out
And poured at your feet –
In sweet abandon,
Let me be poured out
And used up for Thee.

Do you have something to say to Jesus?