

No Regrets—Only Victory

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.”

Bucket list. I have to admit it. When I first heard this phrase, I assumed it was the same as a to do list. I pictured a bucket where you put in everything you want to do, and then you do it. But this phrase goes back to a 2007 movie entitled, “The Bucket List.” It starred Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson. It is about folks facing the prospect of death who want to do certain things before they die, i.e. kick the bucket. Hence, a Bucket List. That’s a little different than a to do list.

Did Edith have a bucket list? I don’t know. Did she reach all of her dreams and goals? No one does. Yet, Edith closed her eyes in death without any regrets. That is what Christ does for us. Because of him we can live and we can die with no regrets. Instead, we share in his victory.

You chose this text for today, and it is a good one. Paul is about to die prematurely, not from cancer, but from execution by the government. When you heard those words, I hope you noticed that Paul was ready to die. He was because he had no regrets. He should have had regrets. Let me put it this way. You know you should love you neighbor. Maybe you have. Good. But have you loved him enough? No. You love your family. Good. But have you loved them enough? Well, no, not really. You love God, but have you loved him enough? No. There are days and moments in our lives when we put ourselves before our neighbor, family and God.

We constantly fall short. Paul did. In Romans 7 he admitted that the good he wanted to do, he didn’t do. The evil he hated, he kept on doing. At the end of the chapter he called this his “body of death.” That is what our sins and shortcomings do to us. They enslave us to death.

Yet, Paul had no regrets. Does this mean he achieved all his goals? No. He didn’t complete his bucket list. But he still had no regrets because of Jesus Christ. Instead of death, he saw only life and victory. We haven’t loved our neighbor enough. Jesus does. We haven’t loved God and respected him as we should. Jesus does. Yes, the Bible speaks of Jesus, the Son of God, taking our place on the cross. He became sin for us by dying for our sins. But he took our place in another sense. He lived the life we could not live. He lived a holy life in thought, word and deed, and this, too, he gives to us.

Did Edith have regrets? No, not really. Edith, I am sure, would welcome a little more time to be with you, Carl, and to serve her family. But she had no regrets because she trusted God will take care of you. If she had some list of things she wanted to do, she had no problem not doing them. She knows that the things of this world will pass away; she has the joy of heaven to replace them. She had no regrets because the sins she committed are forgiven in Christ. She wished she did better living a godly life, but Christ’s holiness, his righteousness is the robe we all wear before God.

Someone once said that the way we view death determines how we live, and that is true. Because of Christ, we have the certainty of eternal life. Because of that, we live differently. Paul uses pictures from the sports world to demonstrate this. He describes the life of a believer as a fighter and a runner.

He tells us we fight the good fight. Edith was a fighter. I know, I didn’t see any WWE championship belts in her house. But she fought the devil who leveled all sorts of temptations at her in an attempt to lure her away from Christ. This is why she wanted God’s Word and Communion even if we had to take it to her in her home. She needed, craved that daily reminder that her sins are forgiven in Christ and will not keep her out of heaven. Edith had her physical problems, too. I am sure they tested her patience. I am sure she wondered why God let this all happen. She wrestled with God and her problems, but she trusted that God’s love is unfailing. The devil, the world, sickness, all hurled a lot at her, but she always clung to Christ.

And now the race is over. Any race is grueling. Your muscles are all screaming at you to stop. But we don't because we are focused on the finish line and the prize. Jesus never promised life will be easier because of him. In fact, he promises it will get harder because of him. It is grueling. But we keep running because of the prize. That prize is a crown of righteousness, not our own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ.

Do you have any regrets? We should. Our life falls short of honoring and glorifying God. We, too, are entrapped in a body of death. Besides, the bucket list is full. But look at what Christ does to us. Even our failures can't haunt us anymore as they are forgiven. All we can look forward to is victory and the crown of Christ's righteousness. Fight the good fight and run the race. Edith did. Look at her now wearing that crown of righteousness. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Job 19:23-27 *We have the certainty of death because our Redeemer lives.*

**"Oh, that my words were recorded,
that they were written on a scroll,
that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead,
or engraved in rock forever!
I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!**

John 10:14-18 *Christ is that Redeemer, and this is how he redeems or buys us back. He laid down his life for us.*

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."