

READY TO DIE—WITHOUT FEAR!

INTRODUCTION: I'm quite certain that most of us—the adults, anyway—are aware that tomorrow is **Memorial Day**—a day where we commemorate those who gave the **ultimate sacrifice—their very lives**—while serving our country. How many men—and/or women—have died serving **our** country? A lot!

According to Wikipedia: **Combat** deaths = 666,441+ **Non-combat** deaths = 673,929+ Total = 1.35 million

Did all of them die **bravely**? Probably not! But many of them did! And many of them did acts of bravery that certainly **could** have killed them and—humanly speaking—probably **should** have killed them, but didn't! One such act of bravery was displayed by **Duane E. Dewey** on April 16th, 1952, during the Korean War.

Marine Cpl. Dewey was serving as the leader of a machine gun squad when his position was attacked in the middle of the night. His squad was surrounded and outnumbered—and Dewey had been wounded earlier in the attack by a grenade. While being treated for his wounds by a Navy medic, another grenade landed at his feet. Without hesitation—and in spite of already being in extreme pain—Dewey yelled a warning to those around him and flung himself on top of the grenade.

The grenade lifted Dewey up off the ground—but miraculously **did not kill him!** He sustained multiple shrapnel wounds throughout the lower part of his body and was later found to have also been shot in the stomach! Not only did he survive, but he also saved the lives of all his fellow squad members by his willingness to sacrifice his body for theirs.

Fast forward 55 years to June 1st, 2007. **Staff Sergeant Travis W. Atkins** was manning an observation post in the town of Abu Samak, Iraq, when he was notified that four suspicious individuals, walking in two pairs, were crossing an intersection not far from his position. Staff Sergeant Atkins immediately moved his squad to confront the four individuals. One of them began behaving strangely, so Sergeant Atkins got out of his vehicle to approach the men and conduct a search. The man he attempted to search then started fighting with Atkins. While trying to get the man's arms behind his back, Sgt Atkins noticed the man trying to reach for something under his clothing. Atkins wrapped him in a bear hug and threw him on the ground, away from his fellow soldiers. Suspecting the man was a suicide bomber, Atkins maintained his hold on him—and stayed on top of him. The insurgent detonated the bomb that was strapped to his body, killing both himself and Atkins. Atkins' willingness to sacrifice himself saved the lives of the other 3 men that were with him.

Both CPL Duane Dewey and SSG Travis Atkins acted bravely in the face of death—without regarding their own safety. But is **facing death without fear** only relegated to those in the military? No, it's not!

In fact, I would argue that **not fearing death** is a characteristic that all of God's children should have. Why?

--Because to **die is gain**—not loss!

--Because to be **absent** from the body is to be **present** with the Lord!

--Because leaving this world isn't the **end of life**—it is the **beginning** of real life!

But **saying** we are supposed to have this mindset—and actually **having it**—are often times two different things! This morning, we are going to look at Paul's announcement to Timothy that he was ready to meet God—**without fear or regrets**. But we will see more than his announcement—we will also see **why** he was ready. And by seeing **why Paul was ready**, we can follow his example and be ready ourselves to die without fear. Please take your Bibles and turn to II Timothy 4; follow along as I read verses 1-8.

1. Paul's announcement of readiness

Notice again vs 6: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." We have here in vs 6 Paul's **claim** to be ready—as well as the **circumstance** he was ready for. We also know from verses 3-5 **what caused** Paul to make this announcement to Timothy.

First, let's consider... A. Paul's claim of readiness

"Being ready" is a rather multifaceted concept, isn't it? Here's what I mean:

--You can **be** ready, but not **feel** ready—like me on most Sunday mornings!

--You can **feel** ready, but not really **be** ready—like the student who studies **most** of the test study guide—but is tested on the part he or she **didn't study!**

--You can be ready for **the expected**—but **not be ready** for the unexpected.

--You can **finally** be ready—after keeping people waiting a long time!

--And sometimes you are just plain **not ready** and something like Christmas “sneaks up on you”—even though it has been on the calendar for a long time!

Paul was very matter of fact regarding his announcement. He didn't say, 'I **think** I am ready'—nor did he say, 'I **hope** I am ready.' And he also didn't say, 'I am **finally** ready.' He plainly stated, “For I am now ready!”

B. The circumstance that Paul was ready for

What was Paul ready **for**? Because we already read the text, there is no “mystery” surrounding what Paul was ready for. Paul was ready **to die**—and be **given a crown** by Jesus Himself!

But Paul's death was not to be **an ordinary death** from old age and/or natural causes. Somehow, in some way, Paul sensed that he would not **get out of prison alive** this time. Most commentators suggest that behind Paul's declaration “For I am now ready to be offered” was the thought that he would be **killed** for his faith. He also felt that that might be sooner rather than later as seen in his words “the time of my departure is at hand.”

And yet...he did not know for sure **when** that would happen. Verse 9 says “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me”—and verse 21 says “Do thy diligence to come before winter...” So he felt he had some time—but probably not much.

C. The cause for making this announcement

Why did Paul announce to Timothy that he was ready to die? Did he do it to make Timothy depressed...and discouraged...and sad? I don't think so! We have at least two reasons in the immediate context. Follow along as I again read verses 3-4.

Reason #1) The times demand it! In essence, Paul is saying ‘Sound doctrine needs to be taught—and I won't be around to teach it! So I'm passing the baton to you, Timothy! You need to take the baton from me and run with it!’

Reason #2) I did it—so can you! We see that in vs 7 “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:” Was Paul bragging? **No!** Was he saying this out of pride? **No!**

He was saying it to **encourage** Timothy!

--I have fought the good fight—you can fight it, too!

--I have finished my course—you can finish yours, too!

--I have kept the faith—you can keep it, too!

‘Do your part, Timothy—and God will most certainly do His! The same God who helped me can—and will—help you!’

Before we look at the basis for Paul being ready, I want to recap the situation Paul finds himself in when he penned these words. Steven Cole did a masterful job of describing the scene:

As Paul sat on the hard floor in the cold darkness, enduring the stench of his own urine and excrement, the circumstances outside were not encouraging. Many seemed to be turning away from the aged apostle, and even from the faith, following false teachers. Paul had labored for the past thirty years or more to preach the gospel around the Roman Empire, but at this point, it was at best a tiny sect, scattered here and there.... And yet, the man was clearly at rest, confident in the way he has spent his life, and calmly assured as he faces death....”

(<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-20-finishing-well-2-timothy-46-8>).

2. Paul's arguments for being ready

So how could Paul be so calm—and fearless—as he stared death in the face? What were his arguments for being ready to be offered up? The text gives us four reasons. The three found in vs 7 are rather obvious, but there is another argument in vs 6 that is not so easily seen. We will start with that one first.

A. Ready to be offered—and already **being** offered

The language Paul uses in vs 6 is quite picturesque: “For I am now ready to be offered...”

It’s almost as if Paul is saying, ‘I am like a tied-up lamb—awaiting both the knife and the altar!’

The Greek word translated here in the KJ as “ready to be offered” carries a more specific meaning, though. Instead of an offering that is waiting **to be killed**, it means a **drink offering** that is being “poured out.”

What is a drink offering? Turn to Numbers 15:1-3.

--Vs 3 ends with a reference to making an **offering of the herd or the flock**—which obviously means an animal of some kind.

--Vs 4 begins with “then”—indicating they were to do **something else**. They were to add a “meat” offering to the animal they were offering. But the “meat” offering wasn’t meat—it is actually flour (about 2 qts) mixed with a 4th part of a hin of oil—(about 2 pints). So the **meat** offering is a floury paste that was **put on top** of the animal before it was burned.

--One more thing is added, though. Look at vs 5. On top of the animal—and on top of the flour/oil mixture—**wine** was poured. What was that called? **The drink offering!**

Let’s go back to II Timothy 4. The picture, then, when Paul says, “I am ready to be offered” is this: ‘I am ready to be poured out **on top of the sacrifice I have already given.**’ What sacrifice had he already given?

His devotion...his service...his time...his talents...his **whole being!** He had given **himself** as a living sacrifice—just as exhorts us to do! **Romans 12:1** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

His death, then, would be his **final act of sacrifice** to God because he had **already lived his life** for God.

One more thing regarding the phrase “For I am now ready to be offered.” Before I give it to you, I want to share with **you the dilemma** I find myself in at times. You know what a “Catch 22” is, right? That is what I feel like I’m in sometimes when I compare the Greek with the KJ.

On the **one hand**, I don’t want to discourage you from reading and trusting your KJ Bible.

I don’t ever want you to say—or think—‘I can’t read the Bible for myself because I don’t know Greek!’

On **the other hand**, I want you to study things out. And as you do, sometimes you look at different translations—or have notes in your study Bible. And if you really study **this verse**, you will find out that 98% of the other translations—including the NKJV—say “For I am **already being poured out** as a drink offering...”

Do you see my dilemma? I have one of two options.

1) I can **ignore the discrepancy** between the Greek and the KJ and have you come and ask me about it if you “stumble upon it.” The problem with that is that you might start thinking I’m **hiding things** from you.

2) The second option is to **point out the occasional discrepancy** if it occurs in the passage we are studying and “let the chips fall where they may,” so to speak.

But...since God’s desire is that I share with you the **intended meaning** that the original recipients would have understood, there really is only one option—**point out the discrepancies!**

We also need to remember this: the **original writings** by the **original authors** were without error because they were inspired by God!

But there is no perfect **translation!** There are some excellent ones, though—like the KJ, NKJ, and NASB!

Sorry for the extended detour.... So...what’s the difference between “I am ready to be offered” and “I am already being poured out?” Here, in my mind, is the difference.

“I am ready to be offered” may give the impression that he **wasn’t previously ready**—until now! “I am already being poured out” reinforces the fact that Paul had **previously offered his life** to God as a living sacrifice and was now in the process of having the last little bit of his life poured out for God’s service. Not an earth-shaking difference, but a difference, nonetheless.

Reason #1 that Paul could look death—even martyrdom—in the eye without fear? Because he had previously surrendered himself whole-heartedly to God.

Reason #2? B. He had fought the good fight (vs 7a)

We see that in the first part of verse 7. We know from the Greek word order that the emphasis is not that **Paul fought good**—but that **the fight itself was good**. We see that in I Timothy 6:12 “Fight the good fight of faith.”

Some suggest it is the metaphor of **a soldier**; others suggest it is picturing an **athlete** in a **wrestling** match or even **a race**. Either way, Paul was **not a spectator**—he had been in the fight! And at the end of his life—as he was knocking on death’s door—without regrets he could say, “I have fought the good fight.”

What about us? If you belong to Christ, you’re in the Lord’s army. Like it or not, there are **individual fights** that each of us must fight—the world, the devil, and our sinful nature. But there is also **the war**—the big battle—that we need to fight collectively for the cause of Christ.

The question is, **are we fighting** the good fight? Just because you’re in the army, it doesn’t mean that you are fighting! What a pitiful thing it would be to have **one** man fighting 20 men by himself—when 19 are off to the side watching! I’m afraid we have far too many spectators watching the good fight—instead of fighting!

Reason #3 Paul could die without fear? C. He had finished his course (vs 7b)

We see that in the middle of verse 7 “I have finished my course...”

This is most definitely a reference to an athlete, specifically a runner. I’m not sure **that I’ve personally said it before**, but it is a fairly common saying: the Christian life is **a marathon**—not a sprint! It’s not how **fast you start out** the race—it’s how you finish!

Paul didn’t just **start out** well—he finished well—even though he **knew ahead of time** that his course would be a difficult one that involved suffering. Jesus Himself told Ananias that very thing about Paul in **Acts 9:16** “For I will shew him how great things he must **suffer** for my name’s sake.”

Again, I must ask, **what about us?** Although the word “my” is italicized—meaning it was added by the translators—it is still true that **each one of us has our own course** to run. The obstacles—and route—are different for each of us. **God’s desire** for each of us is the same, though. “Don’t quit. Don’t drop out. Don’t leave the route God wants you to run and try to run someone else’s!”

None of us have a route as difficult as Paul’s—and yet many Christians drop out of the race with far fewer obstacles. Don’t be one of them!

Reason #4? D. He had kept the faith (vs 7c)

This last one—to a certain degree—may be more applicable **to me** than it is to you. It is more about Paul’s responsibility **as a preacher** than the previous ones. Paul had **kept** the faith—the body of truth that had been entrusted to him by God. He preserved sound doctrine by living it and teaching it and exposing error.

And he refused to change the message—even though it got him thrown into prison and run out of towns! So it is obviously **important that preachers** be able to look back over their lives and be able to say, “I have kept the faith; I have done my best to rightly teach the Word of Truth!”

But it’s important for **all of us!** Why? I’m sure there are more, but here are two reasons **you personally** need to know the difference between true and false doctrine.

1) You need to know to **protect yourself**. You need to know what you believe—and why you believe it—so you are not “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14).

2) But you also need to know in order to protect **the church!** Who is supposed to **confront me** if I begin to preach false doctrine? You—the church! But if **you don’t know the difference** between true and false doctrine, you won’t be able to do that!

Why was Paul able to face death without fear? Here again are the 4 reasons:

- 1) He had given himself as a living sacrifice to God—and considered his whole life as an offering to God.
- 2) He fought the good fight! He was a participant—not a spectator—for the cause of Christ!
- 3) He finished his course. He ran his race—and did not give up!
- 4) He kept the faith. He faithfully preached & protected the sound doctrine that had been given to him.

Is that why Paul was going to heaven, though? **No, it’s not!**

--We see in vs 18—probably on the same page you are on—that the Lord was the one “who will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom.”

--Notice the verses I have for you on your outline from Paul’s first letter to Timothy.

I Tim 2:5-6 “For there is one God, and **one mediator** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

⁶ Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

--The mediator between us and God is not our baptism...or our church...or our works. It is **a man**—not a woman—and the man is Christ Jesus! Why is Jesus the only mediator? Because He is the only One who died in our place!

So if giving your life as a sacrifice to Christ...and fighting the good fight...and finishing your course...and preserving sound doctrine ***doesn’t save you***, why all the fuss about doing it?

J.C. Ryle puts it like this: “A good conscience will save no man—will wash away no sin—nor lift us one hair’s breadth toward heaven. Yet a good conscience will be found a pleasant visitor at our bedside in our dying hour.” (pg 101).

Will you have a good conscience on your death bed? Will you be able to calmly look death in the face when it is your turn to die? You can—if you follow Paul’s example!

So, what is it that God wants you **to do today**?

1. First and foremost, you need to ask yourself this question: Who is my mediator—my go-between—between me and God? Stated another way, Who am I counting on to take me to heaven?

--If it is you and your works, you won’t get in!

--If it is your baptism or church, you won’t get in!

--If it is anyone other than Jesus, you won’t get in!

“He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life!”

2. Second, we need to make an honest assessment of our lives.

Listen carefully—If you are a true born-again child of God, you are in the fight—and in the race!

--That means you have started—but because you are still alive—you haven’t finished yet!

--So how are you doing? Have you quit...have you dropped out?

--Get going **today**—you can still finish well!