

Fighting the Good Fight
2 Timothy 4:6-8

Have you ever played that game in which you write your own epitaph? What would you want to appear on your gravestone? How would you like to be remembered by the world after you die? Would you like to communicate a message to those who happened to read your gravestone, even in passing?

Here are some memorable ones I discovered on, where else, the Internet. Allegedly, these are actual epitaphs:

On the Gravestone of a Dentist in Edinburgh,
Scotland

Stranger tread
This ground with gravity.
Dentist Brown
Is filling his last cavity.

On the Gravestone of John Yeast, Ruidoso, NM

Here lies
Johnny Yeast.
Pardon me
For not rising.

You have to believe that sometimes they didn't read the text before they finished the engraving:

Sacred to the memory of
Major James Brush
Royal Artillery, who was killed
by the accidental discharge of
a pistol by his orderly,
14th April 1831.
Well done, good and faithful
servant.

Some folks chose to comment on their marriages:

Burlington, VT

She lived with her husband for 50 years
And died in the confident hope of
a better life.

Anna Wallace, Ribbesford, England

The children of Israel wanted bread
And the Lord sent them manna;
Old Clerk Wallace wanted a wife,
And the devil sent him Anna.

Some betray a passive-aggressive tendency on the part of the composer:

Nova Scotia

Here lies
Ezekiel Aikle
Age 102
The Good
Die Young.

Some Atheists Claim to Fame in Thurmont, MD

Here lies an Atheist.
All dressed up
And no place to go.

Some speak of the deceased person's cause of death:

Harry Edsel Smith, near Albany, NY

Born 1903 - Died 1942
Looked up the elevator shaft to see if the car
was on the way down.
It was.

Some speak a message the deceased probably never intended:

Effie Jean Robinson (Waynesville, NC)
1897-1922

Come blooming youths, as you
pass by,
And on these lines do cast an eye.
As you are now, so once was I;
As I am now, so must you be;
Prepare for death and follow me.
[Which is not funny at all. But underneath,
someone had added:]
To follow you
I am not content
How do I know
Which way you went.

And some saw a marketing opportunity:

Annapolis
Here lies Jane Smith
Wife of Thomas Smith
Marble Cutter:
This Monument Erected
By Her Husband
As A Tribute
To Her Memory.
Monuments of this style
Are 250 Dollars.

Finally, those of a certain age might remember Mel Blanc, the voice of cartoon character "Porky Pig", and whose headstone reads simply:
"That's all, folks!"

Many of those are humorous, some sad, some chilling, and some, the most sad of all, are hopeless.

This text is from the last letter of St. Paul, the great apostle to the world outside Judaism, to his friend and protégé, the young pastor, Timothy, pastor of the Christian church at Ephesus.

Paul knows is a prisoner of the Emperor of Rome, imprisoned for faithfully preaching the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and knows that his life is nearing its end. In fact, it is believed that Paul was beheaded by Emperor Nero shortly after the writing of this letter to Timothy.

This portion of Paul's second letter to Timothy is, in effect, his epitaph. As you read it you can tell that this is how Paul wants to be remembered.

As we would expect it is exclusively concerned with his relationship with Christ. It's focus is on his faith and how He served His Lord because of that faith.

Throughout his life after his conversion, Paul never lost a sense of awe and amazement that Jesus had chosen him, first to be saved, and, second, to be Jesus' foremost missionary to the *Gentile*, or non-Jewish world. He talked about himself as "the least of all the apostles" and the "chief of sinners". When one remembers that Paul was an ardent Jew, a despiser of *Gentiles* and an active and enthusiastic persecutor of Christ and His Church, responsible for many Christians being imprisoned for their faith, one may understand Paul's awe., amazement, and gratitude to the Lord who chose Him and called Him and commissioned Him to be a bearer of the Gospel to the world.

Now, as we look at his letter to Timothy and hear his summary of his own life and ministry, we realize that this is how he wants to be remembered.

He wants to be remembered as one who finished the race. Paul liked footrace analogies when talking about the Christian faith.

"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." [Acts 20:24]

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." [1 Corinthians 9:24]

Its important for us to read all of Paul's epitaph. If we don't we might come to the conclusion that Paul is saying that as a crown of laurel is a reward for winning a race, so the crown of righteousness is God's reward for living a good life.

So, note what he says: "I have fought the good fight. I have kept the faith!"

Heaven is not a reward for being good. Heaven is a gift given to those who are faithful, i.e, for those who have put all their hope and trust in the Savior, Jesus, who died and rose to rescue us from our sins, and not in their own goodness or good deeds.

He says that the crown of righteousness is awarded not only to him, but "...also to all who have loved Jesus' appearing." That's "faith language"; that's not "good works language." He's talking about those who have trusted in Jesus alone for their salvation and have looked forward to His triumphant return.

It is faith which saves. The good fight which we who believe fight is to remain in faith, to resist any and all of Satan's attempts to tear us from the arms of the Savior who loves us and gave His life for us.

The Christian life is the good fight of faith, of remaining in faith, of nurturing faith, of putting relationship with our Lord first and foremost in our life, despite all the other things which would try to displace Him, and of living a life, then, which reflects that He is # 1, that there is nothing more important than the relationship He has established between us.

Paul's entire life from the time of his conversion to his beheading by Nero reflected that Jesus was first in his life, that nothing was more important to him than that relationship and helping others to know Jesus and have that relationship, also.

So, how's the fight going in your life? Are you fighting the good fight of faith everyday with all your heart, soul, and mind? Is Jesus # 1 in your life? Does your life reflect that?

If so, praise God, and, with the power of the Holy Spirit, continue to fight on, resisting the devil and all his wiles. If not, turn to the Holy Spirit for help, for strength, for guidance, for inspiration. Make Jesus, and your relationship with Him, your #1 priority in life.

Could your family honestly put on your tombstone:

"He/She finished the race. They fought the good fight of faith, and we saw it everyday in their life." ?

May it be so for all of us!