



SELECTED TEXTS

Why is that Skull on your Desk?

4TH SUNDAY DURING LENT – MARCH 26, 2017 (PM)

I was at a Biblical Counseling conference a few years ago, Albert Mohler was speaking. He spoke about the fact that he had the replica of a human skull on his desk. He had explained to some friend that he'd noticed that in pics some of the medieval philosophers & theologians had skulls on their desks – and he did some research to find out why.

Turns out, these guys would have a human skull on their desk to remind them of their short life on this Earth, keep them mindful of their mortality – with the thought that this would inspire them to spend their time on this earth wisely. They wanted to focus the limited years & energies of their lives on aspects of time & eternity that really matter.

SOME EXAMPLES:

Painting by Pieter Coecke van Aelst

St Jerome; here pictured with a human skull. He's best known for his translation of most of the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate), and his commentaries on the Gospels. Jerome was also known for his teachings on the Christian moral life, especially to those living in cosmopolitan centers such as Rome, where as a young man he lived a bawdy lifestyle prior to his conversion. He was baptized about 365AD and died in 420AD.

Pieter Claesz painting; "Vanitas" A human skull with opened case-watch, overturned emptied wineglass, snuffed candle, and a book: "Lo, the wine of life runs out, the spirit is snuffed, oh Man, for all your learning, time yet runs on: Vanity!" [The visual cues of the hurry and violence of life are contrasted with eternity in this somber, still and utterly silent painting.]

And what's the significance of the burning candles on the human skull? The slow burning away of your life until all the wax has melted away, symbolizing that the end of your life has been reached.

This truth of about the importance you being aware of your brief life and your looming mortality is a Biblical principle. BUT NOT to be morbid thought, though it can sometimes seem that way.

Psalm 39:4-6: "O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah. Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!" King David.

Then from Moses →

Psalm 90:10-12: The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. Who considers the power of Your anger, and Your wrath according to the fear of You? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Or *"present to you a heart of wisdom."* (NASB)

And from the New Testament → **James 4:13-15:** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

Here James is teaching you that not only is your life just as transient as a puff of smoke – you also have very little power to make certain things happen in your life. Don't forget that God is the Sovereign Lord of the universe, Jesus Christ is the Lord of your life – and He will ultimately determine what you do and where you'll go. Not as some fatalistic determinism, but as the Great Shepherd of your soul (**Heb 13:20**).

So, in our passage tonight, St Paul is making an assessment of his life, his walk with God, and his fruitful ministry, in the context of his looming death. **2Tim 4:6:** "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." Paul probably wrote this during his 2nd Roman imprisonment, about 64-65AD, some 30+ years after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul uses an OT sacrifice to illustrate the nature of his life & death. And in particular, Paul likens his soon departure as a drink offering already being poured out. The drink offering was an offering that accompanied other offerings – Israel did not offer drink offerings alone, but offered it along with other offerings. And Paul may have been referring to the daily drink offering that was poured out.

Num 28:3-7; “And you shall say to them, “This is the food offering that you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs a year old without blemish, day by day, as a regular offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight... It is a regular burnt offering, which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. Its drink offering shall be a quarter of a hin for each lamb. In the Holy Place you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD.”

So, each day a drink offering is poured out with a food offering. I think Paul is communicating that he considered every day of his life an out pouring of a drink offering to God. Therefore Paul says “I am **already being poured out** as a drink offering...” Paul’s daily life is a life lived as an offering poured out to his God.

And the soon-to-be day of his departure will bring that daily drink offering to a close; it’s over, finished, mission accomplished. His earthly life has come to an end – he has departed from this life and his daily offering. No further opportunity to present his body as living sacrifice, holy & acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (**Rom 12:1**).

So – in 2Tim 4: 6, Paul is speaking of his impending death as putting a stop to his daily offering of himself to God in worship and Gospel ministry.

NOW - WHAT DOES PAUL THINK ABOUT THE DAILY DRINK OFFERINGS THAT HE HAS BEEN MAKING TO GOD FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS?

2Tim 4:7: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Paul testified, with a clear conscience (just as he has said at other times – **Acts 24:16; Rom 9:1; 1Tim 2:7**), that as he looked back at the sweep of his life, he maintained that he had...

1. FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT →

As Paul had fought the good fight, so he exhorted Timothy to do the same – **1Tim 1:18** (wage the good warfare, holding faith) & **6:12** (Fight the good fight of the faith). Notice that this fighting & warfare are linked to **the** faith and **our** faith – even in this verse “kept **the** faith.” Throughout 1Tim & 2Tim, Paul is continually reminding Timothy to avoid, rebuke, and stop any & all false doctrine and faulty teaching (unlawfully using the law).

A. In 1Tim, Paul warns against different and demonic doctrines, wrong use of the law, idle talk, endless genealogies, lies of hypocrisy, profane babblings, and old wives’ tales.

B. In **2Tim 2:16-18** : “But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting **the faith** of some.” WHAT?! Wait, wait, wait... you’re saying that the resurrection has already happened – that we’ve arrived at our glorified destination? (**Rom 8:23,24a**). “Please say it ain’t so, Joe!”

C. **2Tim 3:7,8,9,13**: “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men ... while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

D. Fighting the good fight of the faith will keep you from suffering shipwreck of your faith, from ungodliness, from swerving from the truth, from worldliness, from being deceived (as Eve had been), and from the damage & destruction you will bring upon yourself by your foolish & harmful lusts.

2. FINISHED THE RACE →

While fighting carries the idea of exerting yourself against danger to avoid severe injury and even death, finishing a race indicates that the exertion of training & competing is for the purpose of winning a prize, or receiving a reward – you’re being recognized for some significant achievement or accomplishment. You’re declared a winner! You competed well and according to the rules, so you get the prize - **1Co 9:24-27**: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” SO, as Paul reviews his life, he is certain that he trained well & competed well. He had been trained by others (**Gal 1:14**) and he trained himself in the Scriptures (**2Tim 3:15b-17**) and Paul now exhorts Timothy to have that same discipline (**2Tim 2:15**).

3. KEPT THE FAITH →

This is related to ‘fighting the good fight’ noted already, but remember that Paul has warned Timothy & Titus against deceiving spirits, doctrines of demons, lies of hypocrisy, irreverent babble, profane speech, and old wives’ tales. One of Satan’s time-tested tactics is to introduce false doctrine and to cause people to doubt God’s word; “Has God indeed said... You will not surely die.” Sez Satan in **Gen 3** – this tactic is old, old, old – but still soooo effective. That’s why he uses it all throughout history over all this planet earth. One of the latest examples – The Shack, written by former missionary kid William Paul Young, this book along with his other book (Lies We Believe about God) promote heresy. And all the modern books about going to heaven & returning do the same. False doctrines are being taught regularly (**Col 2:16-19**). We are to avoid such things - **Titus 3:9** “But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.” So, as St Paul made an earnest effort to keep the faith, so you must also be a well-informed, well-studied believer (**Acts 17:11**); such that you will remain faithful to our God & Savior, Jesus Christ.

What was Paul’s exhortation to Timothy? **1Tim 4:14-16**: “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things,

immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Certainly Paul lived a life of following his own instructions so that he will fight, will finish, and will keep the faith.

When Paul’s candle has gone out, when his watch has stopped running, when his wine glass has been emptied – having been poured out as a daily drink offering, and all that’s gonna be left is his skull in the grave –

WHAT DOES PAUL BELIEVE IS GOING TO HAPPEN THEN?

2Tim 4:8: “Henceforth 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.”

Paul’s personal faith, his obedience of faith (brought about by the Gospel, **Rom 1:5 & 16:26**), his faith in the truth of God’s word, and his faith in God’s faithfulness and power to fulfill His promises – from all this Paul is confident that he will receive an award from God. Paul had received an apostleship from God (**1Tim 1:1; 2Tim 1:1**), was God’s servant with the ministry of preaching & teaching the Gospel to the Gentiles (**Acts 9:15; Rom 1:1; 1Tim 1:12 & 2:7**), received revelation from Jesus Christ Himself (**Gal 1:15,16**), and had his singular focus to fulfill his ministry (**Acts 20:24**) – Paul was confident therefore that God was going to give him the crown of righteousness.

Keep in mind that God had given this calling & ministry to Paul (**Acts 9:15**), had worked in Paul’s life to will & to work for His own good pleasure (**Phil 2:13**), and had given Paul abundant grace for Paul to work hard (**1Cor 15:10**) – and Paul was faithful to fulfill his Gospel ministry – and so God will award Paul with the crown of righteousness. I believe that this is a real crown, not a righteous standing.

Paul had already received the imputed righteousness of Christ at the moment of his salvation, that very moment when, in Christ, God forgave Paul’s sins and gave Paul an alien righteous – declaring Paul to be justified in Christ.

So here in this passage, I believe that God gave Paul an actual 'crown of righteousness,' - Paul heard from God, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And he entered into the joy of his master (**Matt 25:21**). And he received this crown because our Lord is righteous, and our righteous Lord will reward righteous service in His Kingdom.

Heb 6:10-12: For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

James 1:12: Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

2Jn 7,8: "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward." NOTE: this is a warning not to fall prey to false doctrine, but stay faithful to the faith.

Neh 13:31b: Remember me, O my God, for good. **Neh 13:14,22**

God has promised an award and He will reward His faithful people **on that Day**; that Day which God has determined beforehand when He will reward everyone who loves His appearing again for our salvation. Paul had mentioned this Day already in **2Tim 1:12**, where he said that God would guard Paul with the Gospel entrusted to Him until that Day (**Acts 17:31**).

Finally, Paul will one day probably cast that crown at the feet of God in worship; **Rev 4:4,10**.

PS. What was Paul's joy & crown in this life? His crown & joy was his spiritual children, the family of God, the household of God, the church of the Living God. **Phil 1:3-5 & 2:15,16 & 4:1 and 3John 2,3**

APPLICATION – ABIDE IN CHRIST (JOHN 15:1-11)

John 15:3 – study God’s word; **2Tim 2:15 & 3:15**

John 15:7 – prayer to God

John 15:10 – obedience to God’s commands; **2Tim 3:16c,17**

John 15:11 – joy; **2Tim 4:8**, the crown of righteousness

Don’t neglect your spiritual gift – faithfully serve as God has gifted & called you to be involved in the life of the church.

Daily – so as you pour out yourself as a drink offering, fight the good fight, finish your race, and keep the faith.