

Sermon: God gives color to this life

2 Timothy 4

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What is truly important in this life that we live? St Paul wrote his last letter, his final words, to bishop Timothy of Ephesus, and in the end of the letter he describes how many people left him and did not stand by him in his trials in Rome. He was about to die and he knew there was no escaping from it, and he felt alone.

That is not a happy ending. Was Paul maybe a bit down, depressed? I would be – if friends leave you, the government holds you and the lions are hungry.

Why bother about this life? What is the value of our life? It is short and full of ups and downs. Many downs. And then we die.

In these few pages to Timothy, Paul underlines how our present life is truly meaningful and valuable. The heart of the matter is, the value and the meaning of our life depends on the extent to which it is related to the Kingdom of God, yes to the King Himself.

Life on this earth receives its true value by being connected with the life of God. Does this make our present life unimportant?

The opposite is true – how we live our daily life, practically, reflects how we are linked to eternity, and it determines how we are linked to eternity.

Life on earth separate from God is dark and grim. But why live life without God? He is present in this life, in your life, and exactly this makes life not only bearable, but even joyful.

1 the kingdom of God

Paul advises Timothy how he should live, and in order to impress the importance of this to Timothy, Paul points at God, and Christ Jesus, and the return of Christ, and the Kingdom of our Lord.

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, He knows your life, your thoughts, your words, your deeds. Your life on earth is not far away from God; it is not distant from eternity. Our present life and eternity are thoroughly interwoven.

God is present, Jesus Christ is present, so we live today in his presence. Then we live all of our lives in his presence.

If we do not experience the presence of God, it does not mean he is not present. Just as two people can be in one house together and you are not aware of each other.

But God is present, all the time, in all of our lives, and we live in his presence.

It is not as if today we live our normal lives, and one day we will live with God.

Surely, one day, earth and heaven will be fully united. But even today, the Kingdom of God is here; it is in our midst. And God Almighty, our Loving Father, the King, the ruler of the Kingdom, draws us today to himself through Jesus Christ, to live for him.

We live in His Kingdom, and in His Kingdom, the King rules and he does so by the book. He is not a dictator who does one thing today, something else tomorrow. He does not say A and he does B.

The King rules by his own rules that are completely in line with his character, and this is revealed to the highest extent in Jesus Christ. Look at Jesus Christ, our Lord, and we know how God rules. With love, and justice.

This Kingdom is in our midst and we live in it.

And the secret of the art of living is to perceive this spiritual reality in which we live, and to live in accordance with it.

2 serving the king

The constitution and the laws of the Kingdom of God are very transparent as God himself became Man. How should we live in harmony with God and his Kingdom? How to live in a manner that accords with the spirituality of life?

By focusing on Jesus Christ; by living as he lived; by loving as he loved. By being righteous as he was righteous.

What should Timothy do to live by the Kingdom rules? Paul says: fulfill your ministry. Complete what you are supposed to do.

In the case of Timothy, this meant: Preach the Word of God. Preach the rules of the Kingdom. Who would dare to tamper with those Kingdom rules! They have been perfectly shown to us by the King, in his written Word and even more fully, in his Living Word.

Only that Word should be preached and nothing else because He is the heart of reality. He is the divine presence in our existence.

We are not all preachers of the Word – but we must all live by these same Kingdom rules. Just as our Apostle Paul did. He says:

I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Earlier in his letter Paul compared the Christian life with being soldiers, athletes, and farmers. He now comes back to this comparison. He is assured that during his life he has been involved in the good fight of the soldier.

He also finished his race; only those who run the race by the rulebook, will get the price. Paul here underlines that he ran well. He has come to the end, and he has run the race in accordance with the rules – that is - he has kept the faith.

I think actually that Paul intends the three statements to be understood almost as parallels: He fought the good fight, He finished the race, He kept the faith

Keeping the faith, in the midst of all that happens to us, that is truly the victorious Christian life; this is the life of the Kingdom. To keep the right faith, to believe it with all your heart, and to live in accordance with this faith.

Whether you are a missionary or whether you sell shoes in Ataba; whether you preach the Word of God or whether you work in a bank; whether you are a student in school or the president of the USA. What really counts for God is that we keep the faith.

I do not know what God wants me to do exactly with my life; I often have only little insight in why problems and blessings come my way.

But whether we are rich or poor, weak or strong, ugly or beautiful, who cares. Well, you maybe, but God does not. He does not judge us for our jobs, our looks, our bank accounts.

So why not adopt this viewpoint of God? Look at your life with the loving vision of the one who created you, who created reality, and whose presence pervades all of your days, even the lousy ones.

What really matters is that we run the race of life, fight the fights of life, with guts, with perseverance, and by the book. With faith in Jesus Christ.

But does this make the “normal” things of life unimportant? Not at all. Paul is worried about the coat, that he left with Carpus at Troas. He wants his books delivered to him in prison. Even though he knew his life was short, he cared for the normal things.

Eternity does not mean that this life under the sun is not important. Your teaching at school, your cooking at home, repairing a bicycle, buying clothes, tending your garden, all of this is not unimportant - but it is exactly because of the presence of God, and because you live by this faith, that we see the true value of all those normal things.

This life has color, fragrance, value, because God is present in all things. And those who hold on to the faith, who live this life with faith, they see this true value. People who do not care about God, artificially make life into a very grey and sad and gloomy thing. Without God, we are born, we eat, we make babies, and we die. Over and out.

But with God all of our days on earth will become more precious.

3 being received well by the king

And as the farmer, after a day of backbreaking work, is the first one to rejoice in the food that he planted, so those who live today in the presence of God, will one day rejoice in the full reality – the unity of earth and heaven. The unity of God with humankind.

What do we look forward to? Paul speaks:

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.

After running the race we will meet with the Righteous Judge. This sounds fearsome. But is it?

But imagine that God would not be a righteous judge, then what? You prefer an unrighteous judge? Here in Egypt, and in many countries we have bad judges. When you bring your case to such a judge, you never know what will happen because he may base his judgment not on truth, not on what really happened, but on the one who paid him the bigger bribery.

God is a righteous Judge. He judges by the book. He is totally transparent. So we know what to expect, because he published his laws and he sent his Son to live those laws.

So when the books will be opened, we also know with certainty what will happen. We belong to eternity today; we belong to eternity forever.

The Lord will judge us; that is, Jesus Christ. He will open the accounts with your name written on it. And when He looks at you and at the book, what does He see? Our moral bankruptcy? Your sins?

When your book is opened, by Jesus who bore our evil deeds, we find out that the debts are wiped out. And not only is your slate clean, no, your account is even filled with the goodness of Christ that is credited to you.

So our righteous Judge will say: enter into the feast – you are one of us! You belong here. You have lived your life on earth with me in faith, now live with me and feast eternally; feast with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit at his table.

We will receive a crown of righteousness. This means: the crown that you deserve because the righteousness of Jesus was put into your account. And it means: The crown of your factual righteousness. God is perfect, and when we enter into his perfect presence, we will be as He is. No more sin; no more imperfection.

So being judged by the righteous judge is what we should look forward to. We desire to appear before Him, to be in his presence, for all of

us who have been part of his Kingdom during our days on earth, all of us who are hooked into eternity through faith; all of us who keep the faith during the race of life, all of us will have wide access to Gods eternal Kingdom when the great day comes.

Our present days may be evil sometimes. There is much misery. Loneliness, sickness, death, sin, people stealing from our church. When Paul says: the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, he does not mean that our lives become easy – Paul expected to die in the arena.

But he speaks of his impending death as a drink offering to God. The blood he will shed is a sacrifice to God. Even the normal, even the awful things of life, get a different feel and importance if we live our lives with God. The presence of our Lord makes all the difference.

The Romans had the habit after a meal to take a cup of wine and pour it out for a sacrifice to the gods; after that, the meal was over and they would go home.

Paul says: my meal is over, I am ready, it is time to go home now, to my eternal home.

Conclusion

We already live in this Kingdom today; this insight gives color to our lives. And at the same time, we are not there yet. Much more is awaiting us. Today we still live with joy and good things mixed with sadness and misery.

But if we hold on to the faith, we have an anchor into heaven that ensures our eternal security. You are safe in the hands of God, now and forever. May this give us much joy today.