

Title: Finish the Race

Date: 3-9-14

Text: **2 Tim. 4:6-8**

Place: DCOG

Introduction: Did you know that the lives of the Apostle Paul and the Emperor Nero overlapped for a short time in the city of Rome? In the seventh decade these two famous men lived in the same city. While Nero's name was making headlines, Paul's wasn't. Oprah would have wanted to interview Nero. Larry King would want Nero on his show. Nero would have been invited to state dinners hosted by the President. Nero was hero.

Paul was zero. Paul was a stoop-shouldered, balding, crooked nose, cloudy-eyed old man. Paul kept talking about Jesus as if he were God. So, Paul got locked up in prison in Rome. If you asked anyone in Rome in the seventh decade, "Who will make the greatest impact on the world, Nero or Paul?" everyone would pick Nero. Nero was married to Poppaea Sabina, a blonde, head-turning beauty who bathed in donkey milk. Four hundred donkeys were kept on hand for just that. She would be dried by swan feathers and massaged with crocodile mucous. Nero liked soft skin, and what Nero wanted, Nero got.

At age 25, Nero deified himself by erecting a 120 foot tall statue of himself. People looked up to Nero, but looked down on Paul. Paul was common, described as bald-headed, bow legged, small man with a big nose and scruffy, thick eyebrows that met in the middle, and a body covered with scars.

I. The New Testament records the dynamic life and deep struggles of Paul.

A. Paul tells of his tumultuous life.

2 Cor. 11:23b-28

... I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. [24] Five times I received from the Jews the forty

lashes minus one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, [26] I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. [27] I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. [28] Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

* Where have you traveled? Maybe you have been to the Grand Canyon, or maybe Lookout Mountain in Tennessee. Maybe you have seen the Whitehouse in Washington, D.C. or maybe Disney World in Florida.

Some have probably traveled outside the US. Have you seen the Canadian side of Niagra Falls? Have you seen the rushing waters as the Nile begins it's descent from Lake Victoria? Have you crossed the Thames or seen the Mayan ruins?

What does that compare to Paul's journeys?

B. Paul walked in the major cities of the known Roman world.

C. Paul worked as a tent-maker in the mornings and spoke about Jesus Christ and the Gospel from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day except the Sabbath.

D. Paul wrote books as he traveled and as he sat in prison, and we treasure his words to this day.

* You have the sheet that helps you understand the timeline for Paul's journeys and his writings.

1. Paul was both a prophet and a pastor, who never got over that the living Jesus met him, changed him and commissioned him as an apostle.

2. Paul was a spokesman for God's grace; he was a messenger of grace; his favorite word was "grace."

* Some of us have children who always seem to be in the midst of trouble. Some of us are the children who always seem to be in the midst of trouble. Well...

3. Everywhere he went Paul caused an uproar.

Acts 21:30-31

The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. [31] While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar.

*How do you handle the uproar? Whether you are simply around it, or the cause of it, how do you survive? Many of us simply want to give up, ignore it, or "pray" that it will solve itself.

II. Paul reveals the secret of his ability, in the face of opposition, to endure to the end.

A. Being rejected and often left for dead, how did Paul face the severe challenges in his life?

Application: We need to know the answer for some of us are rejected by our families for following Jesus. Some think we are crazy for believing in Jesus. Some feel the isolation that comes from being devoted to Jesus. We all have storms of some kind—relational, financial, personal...

* Remember, we want to know how to finish the race!

B. While in the Roman prison Paul wrote to Timothy revealing the secret of his endurance.

2 Tim. 1:8-12

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, [9] who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, [10] but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. [11] And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. [12] That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

1. Paul anchored his life to a hope out of this world.
2. Paul entrusted his life into the hands of God.

Application: We can identify with Paul because many times we feel like nothing in life is going right.

* How many here can hold up a hand and testify that you have experienced in life those times when nothing seemed to be going right? Notice Paul's response...

- C. Paul ended his life very well; Nero did not.

2 Tim. 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. [7] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. [8] 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.

1. Paul's new life began on the Damascus road and ended on a chopping block in a prison cell in Rome.

2. Nero at the age of 29 was lonely and paranoid; his second wife killed his first wife and Nero kicked his pregnant second wife and she died; and four years after Paul's death, Nero committed suicide. Nero was no hero. Paul still impacts us to this day.

Application: There are no Saint Nero Cathedrals. People do not name their sons Nero. Lots of people are named Paul and Paula. Who are the real difference-makers in the world? Not the spot-light seeking, attention-craving celebrities. It is the ordinary Pauls and Paulas, the church, who are making a difference for all eternity.

Only the church has been given the story of grace!

Are you fighting the good fight?

Are you finishing the course?

Are you running the race?

Does God have you?

The Book of Acts still continues and it is the story of our local church.