

Text: II Timothy 4:7-8

Theme: All for the Crown

July 2, 2017

How many of you would expect to win the state football, basketball, or volleyball championship by offering only a little effort? How many of you would expect to win if you offered eighty percent? To win any prestigious title requires 110%, that you give it everything you've got. Our readings for today speak about a reward and not losing that reward. That reward is the crown of eternal life and to obtain that coveted prize, we give our all; we give everything for the crown.

I. God has placed us here to do everything for the crown. A. For the crown, we fight the good fight. 1. To fight the good fight, we acknowledge that life is a battle. As you typically look at life, do you view it as a battle? To fight the good fight, Paul says we need to step beyond the entertain me view of life and acknowledge that life is a battle. Because the crown matters, we say each morning, "Today, God has set me here to face the battle of life, to stand, to engage, to fight so that I don't lose my faith and thereby lose my crown." Our world promotes so intensely the view that every day should be a wonderful, but God says, "prepare to engage; the crown is on the line."

2. To fight, we choose to be strong and courageous. Last Sunday, we focused on Joshua's encouragement to be strong and courageous. Today, we need to apply those words to our daily battle. We can't hide in the corner and hope the battle will go away or bring out our cardboard swords and think we can conquer the enemy. Every day, we face serious stuff. God needs us to be strong, to take the strength He gives us and utilize it, to stand courageously. If we could eliminate the devil, the world, and our sinful self, the battle would not be a battle. But as long as one of those three exist, we choose to be strong and courageous and we choose to do it all for the crown.

3. To fight for the crown, we engage daily. Suppose you were in a hand-to-hand combat type of war. Would you wake up every morning for months saying, "Bring it on," or would some days lead you to say, "I don't feel like fighting today?" To obtain the crown, God says, "You gotta engage daily. Fighting today, but not on Tuesday and Wednesday isn't how it works. You can't afford to let your guard down because the evil three are waiting for the perfect moment." When we feel like it and when we don't, the crown motivates us to press on convinced that the crown and everything connected to it will make everything we face worth the effort.

B. For the sake of the crown, we finish the race. 1. To finish the race, we step onto the track. When you step onto the track at the state track meet, what are you acknowledging? You're saying, "I'm here to run, to finish, to win the prize. I will do all I can to make that happen." To run life's race, we move from the grandstands to the track. Rather than watch someone else run, we say, "This is my race; I must run it to obtain the crown!" It may be easier to sit in the grandstands and it may be a more popular place to gather. Even so, for the sake of the crown for the sake of eternity, we boldly step onto the track and rivet our eyes on the finish line.

2. To finish the race, we run with endurance. Hebrews 12 says, "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with endurance the race set out for us." How many races can you win if you step off the track the moment you notice pain, the moment your heartbeat increases, or the moment someone else

passes you in the other lane? Every runner runs with endurance in his back pocket or he has no reason to run. To finish our race, to arrive at the finish line, we endure life. We endure heartaches, pain, discomfort, ridicule, inconveniences. Whatever stands before us on that track, we must endure it for the sake of the crown.

3. To finish, we run the race marked out for us. Again, it's Hebrews 12 that says that we need to run with endurance the race marked out for us. It sounds so simple, but too often we miss the point! We are called to run our race. Not his race because it looks easier or her race because it doesn't even look like she is running, but your race. Your race is different than my race and my race is different than your race. You may want to run the fifty yard dash and be done in less than twenty seconds. But that's not your race. Your race, my race is more like the cross-country 2.5 mile race that's chucked full of obstacles. Whatever your race, run it for the crown.

C. For the sake of the crown, we keep the faith. 1. We keep the faith by acknowledging the value of our faith. How valuable is your paycheck or your retirement benefits on a scale of 1-10? How valuable is your house, your property, your things? Now, how valuable is your faith by comparison? If faith disappeared while you slept tonight, would life be different tomorrow? The world will tell you otherwise, but faith isn't optional. It isn't a take it or leave it part of life. It's the core, the heart, the soul of everything you are and do. Faith matters more than anything else you can name because faith is the only way to the eternal crown.

2. We keep the faith by refusing to walk away from it. It's easy to think, "Why would anyone walk away from faith, from all the promises of God, from that spectacular promise of the crown of life?" Yet it happens every day. Virtually every main line Christian church today is facing the reality of a generation that is disinterested in faith. Today, we're in a tough place and it's not easy to hold on. It's even more difficult for our younger generation because the world is pulling at them more than ever. For the sake of the crown, we refuse to walk away and we do all we can to encourage the younger generation to do the same.

3. To keep the faith, we do everything we do for the crown. If it's not for the crown, not related to, connected to, or enabling us to move closer to that crown, does it matter? We can push a little harder every year because that's the way of the world, but does it ultimately matter? We can rush here and rush there, run ourselves ragged, but will it matter in eternity? We can try to play the world's game because it appears we have no other option, but is it worth it if we lose the crown? As we face each new challenge, we ask ourselves, "Will this move me closer or draw me away?" As we mentally answer that question, we will know what to do next.

4. We know that we can't win a championship with halfhearted effort. Likewise, obtaining the crown will only occur when we make it our goal every day to do it all for the sake of the crown. Amen.