Finishing well:

Jesus Brings a Good Ending

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Given at LCM Churches

31 August 2014

READINGS: Isaiah 46 and 2 Timothy 4

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1.6)

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4.7) “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12.1)

“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20.24)

**INTRODUCTION/ Salutation**

Thank you Darren for letting me speak again to our folks here at LCM Anglican churches, all four services today, as we finish the series we have called “Jesus brings.” I hope the series has been useful to you, as you have learned about joy and comfort, and hope that God wants to give you here in Sydney and everywhere you travel.

You have in hand a newsletter with an envelope and a card from Jews for Jesus, the organization for which I’ve worked since 1979, and I hope during my talk you will find a moment to tear the stub off the card, and to fill out the larger card. More on that later. When Darren and I spoke about what message I should bring on this final morning, I suggested whimsically I should teach on Jesus bringing… an end to the series. Which when all is done and dusted, is not a bad idea. Everything we do has a start, and an ending. How do we get a good ending after all?

Dave Whitehead is the Senior Pastor of GraceNYC and said this in a Bible update a fortnight ago: “Though you have been shaped by your past, something else can shape your future. The apostle Paul’s past was one of murder, yet he did not see that as a hindrance to his calling. If anything, Paul’s life is evidence that God can use anyone. So don’t let your past mistakes hinder you from pressing forward. The heavenward call in Christ Jesus calls you to let go of what is behind to embrace what is in front of you.”

**My hope for you is a good ending**

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Since 2012, I have lost some colleagues in ministry. Jhan Moskowitz and I shared the same birthdate, and he was two years my senior. We worked together for 30 years in various places and those three-times-a-year visits I have to San Francisco, especially. He fell on the steps in a NYC subway and the internal bleeding on the brain never stopped. He died very quickly. This year, Sean Trank turned 28 and the aggressive cancers in his body won in June after a 9-month battle. Alex from Kiev was 33 and died in July. Medical situations, deterioration, final goodbyes. That’s how quickly a life in service to God can be snuffed out. At the funeral of each, the highlights on video and in speeches talked about ‘a life well lived.’ I suppose that is impacting my thinking in today’s sermon. How will you live life well, and how will you finish well? A good beginning does not guarantee a good ending. Like the apostle Paul then, let’s consider how to finish well.

Comedian and actor Robin Williams committed suicide last month and the next day his wife and daughter had to pick up the pieces. A sad ending to be sure.

I remember Dr Jack Kevorkian in the US who died in 2011.[[1]](#footnote-1) He was known as Dr Death as he assisted in the suicide of over 100 people.

Closer to home, you might have heard of Philip Nitschke. In July, The Medical Board of Australia suspended Dr Nitschke, after he admitted to supporting 45-year-old Perth man Nigel Brayley in his decision to commit suicide despite knowing he was not terminally ill. Last month he was once again in the news, in relation to the death of Max Bromson, a South Australian senate candidate. After suffering from cancer for five years, 67-year-old Bromson drank some poison, surrounded by his brother and sister and his two adult children. Bromson left a note and filmed himself taking the Nembutal to prove he acted alone. His family members were there because they did not want him to die alone, and said that his passing was dignified and peaceful – but they and Nitschke have been cautioned by police that they may face charges of assisting his suicide. Although I can understand was Mr Bromson was thinking, finishing well is not about taking our own lives. As it is with Dr Nitschke, of Dr Kevorkian reports are clear out there that “60% of the patients who committed suicide with Kevorkian's help were not terminally ill” at all.

Today we are talking about finishing well. And by that I don’t only refer to finishing the month of August well, putting away our sermon notes and driving home. I’m talking about finishing the race, as the Apostle Paul said it, fighting the good fight, and thus Jesus bringing a good ending. Let me then talk about it in this way. 1) What is our ending? 2) Starting well, 3) Pacing well, and finally 4) Finishing well.

**I. What is our ending? What awaits us: Heaven**

The race that is set before us, the good fight, is a comprehensive one, and ends with our going to be with Yeshua, with Jesus, when this is all over.

Before you tell me that it’s not a place with clouds and winged angels, before you knock it back and say anything about how little we know about heaven…let this sink in. 455 times in 434 biblical verses the word “heaven” is found. That’s got to be important. (233 OT, 222 NT; 127 times in the Gospels alone).

Rachmiel Frydland, who died of natural causes in 1984, was born in Poland and came to faith in Messiah during the Holocaust. I was privileged to work with him for a few years in New York City, and his humility and knowledge were unmatched. He died in his 60s, and his regular quote, “he that endures to the end shall be saved.” (Matthew 24) made me think that he did endure, that he made it and he made it well.

Bottom line, Heaven is real. I know there are stories out there about people having experiences of seeing heaven and bright lights and such, and most of us are wary of stories like these, if you will, not needing such if the Bible really is true. But I enjoy considering the reality of heaven. It’s as real as this pulpit, and even more so.

Some worry and use the old adage, “He’s so heavenly minded, he’s no earthly good.” But I argue today that without a heavenly mindset, you are going to wash out here on earth. We need to know where we are going and have that hope fixed.

Heaven is for real. And that’s the place of our true finishing well.

Where are we going to end? Jesus spoke more about heaven and hell than anyone else in the Bible. He taught…

1. …who would not get into heaven (unrighteous (Mt 5.20))
2. …that our reward would be great in heaven (Matt. 5.12)
3. …that the Father lives there (Matt 6.9, 7.11, 23.9)
4. …who would get into heaven (poor in spirit (Matt. 5.3), the persecuted for God’s sake (Matt. 5.10), those who do God’s will (Mt. 7.21), those like little children (Mt 19.14)
5. …that he was the Bread from heaven (John 6.51) and the only one to have ever come from heaven (John 3.13)

Heaven seems to be ‘above’ as angels went up into heaven (Luke 2.14-15), Jesus ascended into heaven (Mark 16.19), Jesus looked up in prayer into heaven (Mark 6.41 John 17.1), the tax collector wouldn’t lift his eyes to heaven (Luke 18.13), the Holy Spirit and the voice came down from heaven at Jesus’ baptism (Luke 3.21-22), and Stephen did look intently there (Acts 7.55). But I believe these verses represent the *physical* heaven we see, which we read about in the first verse of the Bible, where God creates the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1.1). That the word heaven is ‘shamayim’ in Hebrew **MˆyAmDv**, a plural word, indicates that there is probably more than one heaven in *heavens*.

Consider Paul who knew a man who was caught up into the 3rd heaven (2 Cor. 12.2). That sounds like a multi-layer location that one-day we will understand.

That’s why we read in Revelation about an eagle, an angel and a bird flying in midheaven, which if there are 3, would make their location of flying in the 2nd heaven. (Rev 8.13, 14.6, 19.17). The first, that is, the lowest heaven may be destroyed one day, as in “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”(Matt. 24.35), but heaven, the realm of God, will never be destroyed.

Does that all now make sense?

Look, if that’s too much quick Bible referencing, I apologize, and you can come up and review my references, and such, but the end of the matter is this: God rules in heaven and where God is will not be destroyed. It’s a permanent place, perhaps in an alternate dimension, but it’s permanent. Because God is permanent and He will welcome us to Himself. That’s the first part of finishing well—***knowing where we are going and to whom***.

Somewhere between reaching the end of Australian winter today and reaching eternity, let’s ponder how to get there.

**II. Starting well**

Secondly then, to finish well we have to start well. That may be obvious to you, but it’s really important that we get our directions and distance and dimensions and duty and deity all in a row.

Some of you run City to Surf each year. Some of you like my wife are mad cyclists and ride hundreds of kilometres each month. And how do people finish those endurance contests? I think it was Dawn Fraser who said of herself the hardest stroke she ever swam was the first one in each practice session.

So starting well really matters.

A tree wrongly planted will never grow well. A brick mislaid near the base of a wall will make the entire wall, even the entire building, angle wrongly and thus ruin what it’s intended to create. We have to start well on our journey to heaven.

If you are not yet a believer in Jesus, and if you are sorting this out for yourself, you are in a good place. Here at Lane Cove Mowbray church you can do that any number of ways with classes we conduct that are found on the website or by ringing the office. We want to help you start your new life in Messiah, and one-on-one meetings, or small groups are often the way to go.

Starting right means this: Believing that God wonderfully loves you and cares about your life. He wants to fill it full and give you the key to the door to heaven. He wants you to come to Him and find rest. We have a problem though and that’s endemic to all people, not only the madmen of ISIS and Hamas. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3.23) We all need repair. Our sins have separated us from the Lord (Isa.59.1-2) and as a result we are actually prevented from heaven’s gates. But God saw to that when Yeshua died on the Roman cross. His death brought us redemption, forgiveness, if you will the clearing of the path between God and us. The way has been opened up for us. (Hebrews 10.20) And we can be born again. When does that happen?

When we receive Jesus as our Lord, when we confess Him as Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead, we are brought into relationship with the Lord and have actually started right. (Romans 10.9-10). When you do that, you should tell someone else, maybe in the pew near you, or me or one of the ministers after church today. Why? So we can help you continue in that path on which you find yourself. Starting right is good; today we are talking about finishing well.

**III. Pacing well**

Third, you have to set a strategy to get there and learn how to pace yourself.

Have you eaten in an all-you-can-eat buffet? I like the Spanish term for this: tenedor libre (Free fork). Recently I heard of a European country which is now assessing a fee to people who go through the buffet, where the one payment covers all the food any person takes, but that person leaves anything on his plate. In other words, if you take too much, and do not eat it, the restaurant weighs your residue and fines you. Wow, you would have to take smaller portions I guess. But my point is this-- finishing a plate of food…you have to pace yourself.

We see people start races in Tour De France and not finish. We see marathon runners at the Boston, New York, London marathons, and they drop out at the 13 mile or 20 mile marks. Why? They aren’t pacing themselves. Usually they start too quickly and run out of puff. The worst result that triathletes or runners see on the board at the end of a race is the three-letter “DNF” (Did not finish).

The Biblical term for this is “Not Counting the cost.”

Listen to what God says through Isaiah:

“Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (46.8-10)

God organized His own will to be accomplished as He saw the end from the beginning, and obviously paced Himself to get there.

The main trick for us is to read, mark, inwardly digest the words of the Scripture. We need to believe what God says and that will pace us to be sure. Paul said in our reading that there would be people who would watch more Christian TV and find teachers who would tickle their ears. These people would not endure sound doctrine, but would listen to the false myths. Keep your fingers in the Bible and you will do well.

Do you know the real trick in solving mazes? Usually people start at the START entry location and try to figure out how to get to the ending. But the real way to solve mazes is to start at the ending and make your way backwards.

I used to teach high school mathematics back in the US. When I taught geometry with its requisite proofs, many students would shake their heads at me and say, “I just don’t get it. I don’t know how to get to the ending.” But when they started with the ending, and worked their way with postulates and theorems and angles and ideas, back towards what hypotheses or what they had been given at the start, their lives and their papers found good success.

This is true in religion of course as well. Some ministers start well and go off the rails. Their common distractions or traps are gold, girls, and glory, but that’s for another sermon.

The issue is that they started but didn’t finish. God guard us.

God keep us.

God keep us honest and forthright; keep us on the right track.

Yeshua said this about pacing ourselves in Luke 14:

“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish. (Luke 14.28-30)

Every time I’ve moved to start a new ministry or made a significant change in one, I’ve had to consider the effects of that change. I’ve had to count the cost. Not only financial, but also time and other resources, what will this really cost me? What will it cost us? What impact will a new bookshop have? What will happen if we amalgamate two church building sites into one LCM churches idea? I think if you start and do not finish, it’s almost worse than never starting at all.

Map out your resources, map out what the liabilities and the assets are, map out your roadblocks and be honest. When you win, celebrate and shout. When you fail, write it down, learn…Pace yourself. Keep good records. Don’t rush; don’t lag.

Paul wrote in our text, “a crown of righteousness is laid up for us” and the hymn writer said, “Grace will lead us home.”

FINALLY

**IV. Finish Well**

Paul wrote, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4.7) Isaiah in our text said, “even in your old age, and gray hairs, I will carry you, I will sustain you, I will rescue you.”

These thoughts today are designed to keep us looking to the hope that is our forever hope.

I grew up in a religion where things depended on my performance. God would be happy with me if I did the mitzvot; if I fulfilled commandments. But that’s not biblical religion. God’s job is to rescue us, to sustain us, to bring us to heaven. Our job? To believe what God says. (John 6.29)

This is a message for ministers like Darren, Andy, Ken, and David, and for Lisa and it’s for workers who ride the train each day to the CBD and it’s for sportspeople, and it’s for those of you long retired. It’s how we do life—some as young families beginning to consider how many children to have, or those of you watching the nest empty yearly.

The Bible says, “He that has this hope fixed on him, purifies himself, even as he is pure.” (I John 3.3) Our hope is not a new house in Vaucluse or Cherrybrook. Our hope is not a paid-off Mercedes or a sunny afternoon wedding and a great honeymoon as quickly as possible. Our hope is the return of Yeshua, our Messiah and Lord. We will spend eternity with Jesus. When He returns, we are His, and we will be gathered to Him. That’s Heaven. Wherever He is, that’s where the Kingdom of Heaven is…why? He’s the King!

This hope is an anchor of our souls. Paul uses the term, “The helmet of the hope of salvation.” Think about that. The helmet, which is our hope, guards our mind. What we imagine, and what we do in our mind will affect us in the very long run. Guard your hearts; guard your minds; guard yourself and give yourself to Yeshua. He is Lord and the Hope of our Forever. Isaiah in our reading said, “Keep it in mind.”

“But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21.28)

This is not a human dream or a wish. It’s a sure thing. In Jesus we will finish well. Then our faith will put on sight and we will be forever with Him. Hallelujah! Thanks be to God.

Friends, I’ve been with Jews for Jesus for 35 years and one thing I continue to see, in homes of Jewish contacts, in our book shop in Bondi Junction, out on the streets as we evangelize there as well, is that people are looking to find hope, real hope, and people who are not fake who are speaking about it. They are looking for real men and real women who start well, pace well, and finish well. May we be the kind of people who help many find eternity with Jesus.

One last thing. That envelope and card from Jews for Jesus is for you to use if you are a believer in Jesus and if you would like to help us continue to reach people in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and around the country with the good news of Messiah. I hope you will be generous. I hope you will fill out the card and give it to me up the back or drop it into the envelope. I hope you want to hear from us regularly through the newsletter. It’s a good piece with stories of evangelism in Russia, Israel, New York, and here in Australia as well. God is alive and well and drawing Jewish people to Himself. I’m happy to report to you often about how that works.

Up the back are some resources as well like books and calendars, music and DVDs which will help you in your witness with Jewish mates and colleagues. I hope you will pick up as much as you can use. And use what you pick up!

Patty and I want to thank you for 16 wonderful years here as part of our family of faith. We have been able to grow as people, as a couple, as a family because of those of you who are LCM Anglican church. Thanks again to Darren, and to each of you. Shalom!

1. **Jacob "Jack" Kevorkian** (May 26, 1928 – June 3, 2011), an American pathologist, euthanasia activist, painter, author, composer and instrumentalist. He is best known for publicly championing a terminal patient's right to die via physician-assisted suicide; he claimed to have assisted at least 130 patients to that end. He was often portrayed in the media as "Dr. Death"; however, many consider him a hero, as his sacrifices helped set the platform for reform, with many states having since legalized physician-assisted suicide. He famously said, "dying is not a crime".

   In 1999, Kevorkian was arrested and tried for his direct role in a case of voluntary euthanasia. He was convicted of second-degree murder and served eight years of a 10-to-25-year prison sentence. He was released on parole on June 1, 2007, on condition he would not offer advice nor participate or be present in the act of any type of suicide involving euthanasia, to any other person; as well as neither promote nor talk about the procedure of assisted suicide.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)