

Text: Psalm 71 (Pew Bible, pg.573)

Title: “Faith Sings ... Strong to the End”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Psalm 71. Today I’ll conclude the series of messages from the book of Psalms entitled “Faith Songs.” And today “Faith Sings ... Strong to the End.” That’s the way to live life ... strong to the end.

Now there’s strong indication that this psalm was written by David. It has no inscription indicating that, but many scholars lean toward David as the author. Psalms 69-71 are generally considered to be a unit ... they go together. And Psalm 69 and 70 both have inscriptions telling us that David wrote them, so he probably wrote Psalm 71.

And David probably wrote this psalm toward the end of his life. We’ll see David’s concern that God would give him strength for the last lap of his faith race ... for the last years of his life.

So I want to begin by reading the first few verses, and what I want you to notice is the strength of David’s faith in the last lap of his life. Read vv.1-4.

When the life of David was summed up by Paul in his sermon in Acts 13, this is what was said...

Acts 13:36a - “For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep...”

That’s the challenge for each of us ... to serve God’s purpose in our generation. Students, that should be your aim more than being popular or excelling at sports. Young adults, that should be on your mind in every circle of your life. Mid-life adults, that should be your aim above making a nest-egg for your retirement. Senior adults, that should supersede any fears that you have about growing old.

ILLUSTRATION – I heard about two elderly women who were discussing the problems of growing older. One commented, "The worst thing is when your memory starts to go. I've known you all my life and I can't think of your name. What is it?" The second lady thought for a moment and said, "Do you need an answer right now?"

David’s faith was strong at the end of his life. He wasn’t perfect. He made many mistakes, and failed miserably at times. But still, when his life was summarized it indicates that he “served God’s purpose in his own generation.”

The Apostle Paul talked about his life and ministry as a race. He said...

Acts 20:24 - However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

He also said...

2 Timothy 4:7 - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

So here is David at the end of the race of his life, and his faith and confidence in the Lord is strong to the end. And there are indications here in Psalm 71 of how that faith was birthed and grew through the different stages of the race, through the different seasons of his life. Each lap is important.

1. START THE RACE PROPERLY (vv.5-6,17).

ILLUSTRATION - If you watch extraordinary track stars they work a lot on how they start the race. Sprinters will spend hours perfecting their explosion out of the starting blocks to begin the race. Even long distance runners are concerned about start the race properly. If they start out too fast, there's nothing left in the tank for the end of the race. If they start out too slow they won't be able to catch up. So it's important to start properly.

And how you start the race of your life in God is very important. How you begin your "faith race" is so crucial. David talks about that in...

Psalm 71:5 - For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth.

Psalm 71:6 - From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you.

Psalm 71:17 - Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.

So there was a point early in his life when something happened that changed his whole attitude about life. Somewhere early in his life David began to put his hope, his confidence in God (v.5). He learned to rely on the Lord (v.6). He was taught by God (v.17).

The Apostle Paul reminded his young friend Timothy about the importance of starting the faith race properly.

2 Timothy 3:14 - But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,

2 Timothy 3:15 - and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Note: Parents, here's important biblical counsel for you about how to build the spiritual life of your child. From their earliest days teach them the Word of God. Read the Bible to them. Tell the Bible stories. Help them memorize verses from the Bible. Pray for them that they would grow as Jesus did in Luke 2:52, in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man. Pray urgently for their salvation. Be alert to how God is working in their lives.

I talk to young parents all the time who are anxious about this stage in their child's life, particularly if they start asking questions about receiving Christ and being baptized. The best thing you can do is not to push them or to rush them, but simply teach them the Gospel. Let the Holy Spirit draw them to Christ. Listen to how they talk about their knowledge of the Lord. And when you sense from the Lord that the time is right, help them call on the Lord by asking Christ to save them. We have a wonderful New Christian's Class for boys and girls that will reinforce all that your child has been learning on their way to Christ, as well as about the meaning of baptism. Another great thing you can do for your child, particularly if they are saved very young is to write them a letter detailing all the things you've observed about their growing spiritual life. It will help them in later years when they begin to doubt their salvation because they just don't remember.

Now it's great if you can start your "faith race" early in life. You will be spared years of darkness away from God. But if you haven't started your faith race, it's time to do it ... now! And start properly. Put your hope and confidence in what God did for you on the Cross of Christ. Learn to rely on God. Let God teach you.

Now once you start the race properly, the next important thing is to...

2. RUN THE RACE CONSISTENTLY (vv.14-17).

Now as I read vv.14-17 I want you to notice how David's faith and confidence in God is steady and consistent, even growing in its consistency.

Psalm 71:14 (NIV) - But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

Psalm 71:15 (NIV) - My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure.

Psalm 71:16 (NIV) - I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.

Psalm 71:17 (NIV) - Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.

What consistency! Again, David wasn't perfect. He made some terrible mistakes in his life. There were some bumps in the road for him, and David regrets that fact in other psalms. But when he fell down, he kept getting back up.

As a pastor one of the saddest things I observe is students and young adults who are so on fire for God, starting the race so well, but then they drop out of the race. Sometimes it's because of the company they keep. Sometimes it's because they get so wrapped up in having a good time that they make no time for God.

Whenever you start the race, make sure you run your race consistently. Hit your stride and keep it steady.

3. FINISH THE RACE SUCCESSFULLY (vv.9,18).

The point of starting the faith race properly and running the faith race consistently is so that you can finish your faith race successfully.

Now to finish strong does not mean to finish fast. The older we get we slow down physically. But they can be some of our best days spiritually. I love what Paul said in

2 Corinthians 4:16 - Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

That's supposed to be the pattern for life. But so often when the outward person begins to waste away, we are not inwardly renewed day by day.

ILLUSTRATION – A few years ago Newsweek magazine featured an interview with Billy Graham. The author was amazed by Billy's attitude in spite of his deteriorating health. The author wrote: "He seems congenitally incapable of surrendering completely to the weakness of the body."

One of Dr. Graham's daughters, Anne Graham-Lotz, told of a conversation she had with her father on the subject of aging. Billy said, "All my life, I've been taught how to die, but no one ever taught me how to grow old." She replied, "Well, Daddy, you are now teaching all of us."

Anne also said that she had learned an important lesson about aging by observing her father: "When you get older, secondary things, like politics, begin to fall away, and the primary things become primary again. And for Daddy, the primary thing is, as Jesus said, to try to love God totally and to love our neighbor as ourselves."

Young people, one of the best things you can do is to find an older saint, man or woman, and ask them to pour their life into you. When I was in my twenties I was blessed to have a couple of retired men who took me under their wings and taught me and encouraged me. I learned from them how to walk with God and how to serve God.

And listen, you never know when the race will end. You never know when Christ will come again, or when Christ will call you home. Be ready to finish strong and successfully.

As I mentioned earlier, growing old is really on David's mind. He was getting close to the end of his faith race and he was concerned that he would finish the race successfully. He wanted to keep the faith to the end. And he prays about this.

Psalm 71:9 (NIV) - When I am old ... when my strength is gone.

Psalm 71:18 (NIV) - When I am old and gray...

Now there are many things about this season or stage of life that concern older adults. Perhaps you have parents who are reaching this stage in life. You need to know what they may fear.

There's the FEAR OF DISGRACE, disrespect and dishonor.

Psalm 71:1 - In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame.

There's the FEAR OF DISREGARD ... that people won't listen to us ... perhaps that God will not listen to us.

Psalm 71:2 - Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me.

There's the FEAR OF DISADVANTAGE ... that others will take advantage of us in our weakness.

Psalm 71:4 - Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men.

There's the FEAR OF DISAPPOINTMENT as we come to the end of life that we haven't accomplished all we wanted to accomplish.

Psalm 71:7 (NIV) - I have become like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge.

That word "portent" means a "warning example." In other words, David is aware that others are looking at him and they are reminded of what can happen to anyone. Note: Many people look at the elderly with disdain because they remind them that we are all aging. We are reminded of our mortality as we see people aging and declining in health.

There's the FEAR OF DISAPPROVAL from people we love.

Psalm 71:9 - Do not cast me away when I am old...

There's the FEAR OF DISABILITY and disease when our strength is gone.

Psalm 71:9 - Do not forsake me when my strength is gone.

All those fears about growing old caused David to cry out to God. He was honest about his fears and he talked to God about it. And God has great promises for His again saints:

Isaiah 46:4 - Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Note: You need to know that this is part of the package of eternal life. When you put your faith in Christ he imparts to you a gift that can never be revoked. You *will* persevere to the end. You *cannot* be lost. So this is part of your salvation when you receive this gift by faith. There's no possibility of

your losing your salvation. Jesus said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." He will make sure you finish.

But how well we finish is determined by us.

I'm impressed that David, all the way through the psalm keeps what I will call a "positive perspective of praise."

Psalm 71:6 - I will ever praise you.

Psalm 71:8 - My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long.

Psalm 71:14 - But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

Note: This is the real casualty of old age ... we grow sour.

ILLUSTRATION – I heard about a little girl who asked her grandmother, "Grandma, are you rotten on the inside?" Grandma answered with some surprise, "No, sweetheart, why?" The little girl said, "Because when apples are all wrinkled on the outside, they are rotten on the inside."

Now, I've earned the right to speak frankly with you if you're an older adult. I'm 57 and I qualify for a senior discount many places I go. Now Nan's not that old, but I am. I want to tell you that I don't want to be a grumpy old man. All my life I've watched people grow old and negative. They figure their old age has given the privilege to gripe about everything. I want to be a Caleb whose faith and confidence in God was as strong late in his life as it was early in his life ... "I want that mountain." He waited a long time for the fulfillment of the Promised Land. You talk about change and upheaval! It didn't matter to Caleb. He wasn't going to stop short of the fulfilled promise of God.

And it's not just our sour words and disposition. It's also our sour countenance. Now we have to work against this because gravity over time can take its toll on our face. It pulls the edges our mouths down to where we have a frown and a scowl on our face much of the time. Now I know sometimes you don't mean to be this way, but you can look pretty sour.

I give you permission to come up to me and tell me, "Hey Dean, you're scowling, you're frowning."

David didn't want to be a grumpy old man. He kept a positive perspective of praise. And he prayed...

Psalm 71:18 - Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God...

Why is this a concern to David? Is it just that David didn't want the discomfort of getting old? Was it just that David couldn't stand the thought being an older person? No, that wasn't it at all. He needed God's presence and God's protection because he wanted to finish the work that God had

given him to do. David wanted to serve God's purpose in his generation. And what was that purpose?

Psalm 71:18 - Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

You and I have an important purpose. We are to declare God's praise and power to the generation that follows us. And you can't do that if you're stuck on sour ... if you're a grumpy old man or woman.

ILLUSTRATION – After the Mavericks clinched their spot in the NBA finals on Wednesday night Mav's owner, Mark Cuban, addressed the crowd. Now I don't agree with much that Mark Cuban says, but he said something that we should keep in our minds constantly: "All I can tell everybody is, we ain't done yet!"

CONCLUSION

And why shouldn't we? What a bright future we have before us.

THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

Psalm 71:20 - Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.

Psalm 71:21 - You will increase my honor and comfort me once again.

When you start your faith race properly, and run your faith race consistently, you can finish your faith race successfully.