

“THE RACE OF LIFE”

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

The Christian’s lifetime on Planet Earth is described variously in the New Testament as:

- A Walk To Be Maintained. (“Walk in love”; “Walk in the light”; “Walk in truth” etc.)
- A Battle To Be Fought. (“Fight the good fight of faith”; “Put on the whole armor”; “good soldier of Jesus Christ” etc.)
- A Race To Be Run. Hebrews 12:1-2

I encourage you to walk as a Christian ought to walk; I encourage you to fight the good fight for the faith; I encourage you to walk and battle, but what I want to emphasize the most in this message is “run”! Run the race of life.

I have 3 thoughts to give you about running the race of life that I hope will encourage you to run well: (1) Life is a race (2) there are rules (3) there will be rewards.

I. THERE IS A RACE TO BE RUN.

“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” (Heb. 12:1)

The believer’s life is repeatedly pictured as a race in scripture. Look at a few references:

- A. We Are To Run With Purpose.** “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.” (I Cor. 9:26)
Paul is saying, “I do not run like a man running aimlessly” - there is a purpose to this race of life.

Look back a few verses in I Cor. 9 and Paul explains his purpose for wanting to run the race of life well: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (I Cor.9:24-27)

Paul’s purpose? To run for the crown of Christ’s approval! In Paul’s day the Olympic Champs were given crowns made of laurel leaves that faded. The Christian’s crowns Will be fadeless!

B. We Are To Run With Perseverance.

The word “patience” in Hebrews 12:1 is the Greek word “*hupomonee*” which means endurance, persistence and perseverance. It is the mind-set of one who everlastingly stays at it. This type of tenacity is pictured well in Isaiah 40:29-31:

“He gives power to the weak; And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”

“Perseverance” means, (and this is my own home spun definition) “Keep on purring regardless of how severe things may be”! Just keep at it! How did an acorn become a giant oak tree? It kept at it! It persevered! To be sure, perseverance requires patience. No impatient person is going to persevere very long! The race of life is to be run, not in stops and starts, not in spurts and sprints but with perseverance.

Illust: You remember the story of the tortoise and the Hare (or for the updated version, the turtle and the rabbit). Rabbits run, jump, dart here and there – scurry and flurry, stop and start. In the story the rabbit got off to a blazing start but stopped to rest. The turtle, however, just kept perseveringly at it and passed the sleeping rabbit!

Don't be a rabbit type of Christian. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shallrun and not be weary; ...walk and not faint! The Christian race is not a sprint but a marathon! The winners in the Christian Marathon of Life are not those who finish first but those who finish well! Don't be a drop out! Don't fall out either! But persevere like the Apostle Paul who said: “I have finished the course.”

Run the race of life with purpose and perseverance! However, that is not enough! It would be a sad thing to run the Boston Marathon and at the end find out that you were disqualified because you broke the rules. So it is with the Christian's Race of Life. There are rules for the race !

II. THERE ARE RULES TO BE FOLLOWED.

It is not enough to want to run the race of life. We cannot run as we want, when, where and how we want. We can't make up the rules as we go along! There are God-given rules that we must obey. After all, The Race is God's idea and we run it His way or we will run in vain.

There is no such thing as an official race without rules. Any organized race must have rules else no one would compete. The starting line, the finish line, the course to be run, the qualifications of the runners and many other stipulations are necessary. There are any in our society who do not like rules, do not want any rules, rebel at rules and they have that same attitude about God's rules. I want to point out a few rules for the race of life that God has given us:

Rule # 1 – Lawfully Run.

II Tim. 2:5 “If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”

Illust. In 1988 Ben Johnson of Canada won the 100 meter race in the Olympics in

record time and was declared “the fastest man on earth.” But he tested positive for drugs and was stripped of his gold medal and banned from future races. He did not run lawfully!

Rule # 2 – Lay Aside Hindrances.

Hebrews 12:1 “let us lay aside every weight and the sin.” The Christian runner must not allow anything to hinder his running for the crown. “If we would run well on the Christian pathway, we must run light.” (Alexander Maclaren) Shed the baggage! The “ensnaring sins”

Rule # 3 – Look To Jesus!

“Looking unto Jesus” - One translation says, “Fixing our eyes on Jesus....”

Illust. Roger Bannister was the first man to run a mile in 4 minutes. Three months later, John Landy beat Bannister’s record by 1.4 seconds. Finally the two men met for an historic race. As they went into the final lap with Landy in the lead. He was haunted by the question, “Where is Bannister?” As Landy neared the finish line he could not resist the temptation to look over his shoulder and the instant he did, Roger Bannister passed him on the opposite side to win the race.

Afterward Landy was interviewed by a Time Magazine reporter and he said in that interview, “I made the mistake of looking back. If I had not looked back I would have won the race.”

Too many Christians look back to measure themselves by other people’s progress. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

- Look back and you will be defeated;
- Look at yourself and you will doubt;
- Look around at circumstances and be discouraged;
- Look at the crowd and you will be deceived;
- Look to Jesus and you will be declared “Winner!”

There is a race to be run; there are rules to follow and thirdly,

III. THERE ARE REWARDS TO BE DISTRIBUTED.

In the Olympics we often hear it said, “Go For The Gold!” In the Christian’s Race of Life, there is something better than Gold awaiting us. Paul speaks of this several times:

I Cor. 9:24,25 - “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.”

II Tim. 4:7-8 - “I have finished the raceThere is laid up for Me the crown of righteousness....”

II John 8 - “Look to yourselves that we may receive a full reward.”

Rev. 3:11 – “Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

Rev. 22:12 - “I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”

CONCLUSION

What more can I say to encourage you? Just this as I conclude:

- Get on God’s track team!
- Run purposefully and perseveringly!
- Run lawfully, laying aside hindrances and looking to Jesus!
- Keep the goal in mind - awards await all who finish the race of life!

Illust. I like to watch the Olympic events - especially the swimming and track events. I worked at a YMCA during college days teaching swimming and I have been a lifeguard. I’m a water bug! And I ran track – the 440 and high hurdles, so I appreciate what these athletes who make the Olympics have gone through to get there.

I have watched the medal ceremonies when the winners are standing on the pedestal and the medals are placed around their necks, the flag is raised, the anthem is played and the spectators cheer. What elation! What joy and fulfillment!

Most of us will never get to attend an Olympic event let alone participate in one or stand on the Champion’s Pedestal. However, there is coming a reward ceremony in heaven that will eclipse anything seen on earth! Don’t you think Jesus can put on a better program than earth can? No national anthem will be played; no country’s flag will be raised; no gold medals will be distributed.

But the angelic choir will sing! All who live for Christ and are faithful to the end will be standing on streets of gold! The banner over us will be “LOVE”! And Jesus Himself will present the rewards with those nail-pierced hands! Hallelujah! It Will Be Worth It All!

“It will be worth it all
When we see Jesus;
Life’s trials will seem so small,
When we see Christ.

Just one glimpse of His dear face
All sorrows will erase;
So bravely run the race,
“Till we see Christ!”

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