

Running the Race of Christ

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- [0 : 00] Good morning. Happy New Year. I hope you all are still feeling fresh or are flipping today, since it's only the second day of the year yet.
- Or do you just feel the same as last week? Well, it's always exciting when we are in the New Year. Our spirits are always uplifting.
- We plan for the whole New Year in terms of how we will live differently in this New Year. However, a month later, most of us will go back to the lifestyle we used to live a month ago.
- So, we are not happy, again, with the way things happen to our life. Our relationship with friends and family stay the same.
- Our relationship with God stay the same too. Do you think it's going to happen this year again? Most likely so.
- [1 : 15] As believers, we can only look up to Christ, who is the champion of faith, and learn from Him, in terms of how He had run His race prior to His crucifixion.
- This morning, my message title is, Running the race that Christ has set for us. Running the race of Christ.
- My message will be based on Hebrew 12, verses 1-2. I believe many of you have read it several times and get encouraged from it.
- I'm going to read it now. Therefore, since we are surrounded by a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up, and let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.
- We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.
- [2 : 36] Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is sitting in the place of honor beside God's room.
- We are in the second day of the year. We do not know what will bring us this new year yet. We may have plans out for the whole year, but we don't know if things are going to turn out the way we planned.
- Sometimes unexpected things happen to our life. I've seen on the news that house was burning down on New Year's Day.
- I've seen wildlife. We have seen wild fire flooding in BC. Thousands of people are affected by those disasters.
- We have seen the news on the Colorado wild fire just recently. About a thousand homes were destroyed.
- [3 : 49] Unexpected thing happens. I don't know if you follow the news on Myanmar this day. It's terrible right now. Just a month after, from the new year of 2021, on February 1, the military took over the power in the country.

About ten years of democracy in the country died out again. The whole system has been shut down or not running well since then.

Ten or a thousand people were hopeless. If you check the news, you may see the news on uprising, conflict between military and local people daily.

School has been closed now for almost three years. Don't know what the future of Myanmar will hold without education. Health and banking system has been running very poorly.

Of course, of course, I was constantly bothered by what's happening in Myanmar. My whole point here is, like what happened to others recently, anything could happen to our life as well as we journey this new year.

[5 : 19] Apostle Paul is saying in this scripture that Christian life is a race. We are called to run that race with intensity and endurance.

We are required to look up Christ, Jesus Christ, the champion of this race, in order to finish the race we have now.

Many of you are much older than me. Some of you are like my grandparents. I have learned that some of you are faithfully running this race with intensity and endurance.

If you run the race long enough, you know what is best for you, and you know what slows you down. And you enjoy running this race, and you know what is waiting for you at the finish line.

If you run the race long enough, you can easily identify who is the new runner, and you don't mind helping them if necessary.

[6 : 32] Apparently, the Apostle Paul, what Apostle Paul talked about here is like a marathon. It's not a short, distant run.

Definitely not joking one at all. Like the marathon, the race had a starting point and a finish line.

Definitely it required hard work, intensity, and endurance. I have experienced running mini-marathon three times in Myanmar. It's only about 14 to 16 miles.

I think kilometers would be 22 to 25 kilometers. On my first experience, lots of people were very excited because we rarely have marathon events when we have 1,000 people sign up and run.

I was way behind the crowd. Didn't even hear the gunfire. I just run when the crowd was moving. After a while, I came across a pile of shoes on the way.

[7 : 48] They were there because somebody else was stepping on someone accidentally. Many were shoeless from their starting point.

How far do you think they can run? Not much. For me, in the beginning, it was fun. But when I reached a half point, I felt tired, exhausted, wanted to give up.

Start thinking why I'm doing this. Start thinking, is it worth putting effort for the prize if I win?

And I start seeing many give us took a ride back to the starting point or to their home. The longer I run, the fewer runners I met.

To make it short, I make it to the finish line, thankfully. Once I reached to the finish line, I forgot everything what I had gone through.

[9 : 01] Even though I didn't get any prize, I was overjoyed and proud of myself. I cheer with some of my friends who make it to the finish line.

That was my first experience running a mini marathon without proper training. But I definitely put intensity and endurance. The Apostle Paul is saying, like a race, Christian life involves hard work, intensity, endurance.

The verses say that we must strip off the excess weight that slows us down. Most marathon runners just wear short and lightweight clothes and running shoes.

Of course, they are required to discipline themselves in terms of their physical fitness and their training. They may have to give up certain activities and habits for the race.

For us as believers, do we have anything that endanger our relationship with God? Do we have anything that jeopardize our relationship with God?

[10 : 22] Do we have any bothersome thought in order to trust God? Do we have any addiction that disables us about disabilities to trust God?

Do we have any secret way such as pornography, gambling, alcohol, gossiping, or others?

Apostle Paul is encouraging us to strip off any excess weight that slows us down and that endangers the relationship with God.

How can we do that? There can be many ways. We need to choose the right friends who are also committed to the race we are in.

The right friend will support us and challenge us in order to reach to the finish line. The wrong friend has different values, different activities that may discourage us from the race.

[11 : 33] The Apostle Paul is also talking about running the race with endurance. God has said before us.

Basically, Christian life must be run with patience and perseverance. Usually, we don't need patience and perseverance or endurance in the beginning.

However, on the halfway or near the finish line, we definitely need patience. We definitely need endurance. There will be a need of patience to encounter hardship and discouragement that live in our way or that may come in this new year.

We probably don't understand when it comes. Why me? Why now? Why my family? We need to be patient in order to see God's greater plan for us.

There will be a need for endurance to resist all temptation to abstain or to overcome. We may be getting tired.

[12 : 50] We may be exhausted. We may want to give up. We may start thinking why we are doing this. And we may start rationalizing with other behavior or other attitude.

The Apostle Paul is encouraging us to keep our eyes on our Lord Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

Our Lord Jesus has set up a perfect example for us in terms of how we should choose the will of God when we are in a desperate situation.

We can take a look at Matthew chapter 26 verses 36 to 46. Jesus was with his disciples at that seminary to pray.

And verse 37 is that like that. He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons James and John. He became anguished and distressed. He became anguished and distressed.

[14 : 03] You know, if I could speak English very freely, I can illustrate this bigger. But, you know, what Jesus is feeling is he is feeling anguished here.

and he is distressed. He told them, my soul is crushed with grief to the point of death.

Stay here, keep watch with me. He went on a little farther and bowed his face to the ground and praying, my fathers, if it is possible, let this cup of offering, suffering, be taken away from me.

Yet, I want your will to be done, not mine. Then, he turned to the cyber and found them asleep. He said to Peter, couldn't you watch with me even an hour?

Keep watch and pray that you may not give into temptation. for the spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

[15 : 20] Then Jesus left the second time and prayed, fathers, if this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.

When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they could not give their eyes open. So he went to pray. At that time, saying the same thing again, then he came to the cyber and said, go ahead and sleep.

Have your rest. But look, the time has come. The son of man is betrayed into the hand of sinner. Up, let's be going.

Look, my betrayer is here. From these verses, we learn how the champion of faith, our Lord Jesus, respond to his hardship and discouragement.

Of course, we know why he came to this heart. But when the time really came, he checked if God would change his mind. He prayed three times, my father, if it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me.

[16 : 36] But ultimately, our Lord Jesus chose God's will to be done, not his. He said, yes, I want your will to be done, not mine.

Dear friend, God tests our faith mostly when we are having hardship, when we are discouraged, when we couldn't understand the way things happen to our life.

He is checking if we are really on board with his will or our will. Of course, like a race, we will have a reward after all if we reach the finish line.

Jesus Christ is rewarded. It says here now he is sitting in the place of honor beside God's room. Friends, we plan out for the whole new year in terms of how we will live differently.

Christian life is like a race. Christian life involves hard work. If we have excess weight that slows us down, we may have to strip it off.

[17 : 57] When we have hardship, discouragement, we may have to choose to follow the will of God rather than ours. When we raise this race with intensity and endurance, of course, following the will of God, I believe our life will be transformed daily for His glory.

Regardless of any hardship, regardless of any discouragement, we will be able to comprehend well with the will of God as we journey this year.

Our relationship with friends and family will always flourish, will always have a deeper relationship with God. After all, we will surely be able to break the cycle of unproductive lifestyle.

Finally, the race we run is for our Lord Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfect and perfect our faith.

Amen.