

Run the Race

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Date: 16 May 2016

[0 : 00] Hebrews 12 Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside patience 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds.

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. The gospel race. The gospel race is pictured here. And funnily enough, Hebrews 12 follows from Hebrews 11. I don't know if you've noticed that. It's quite interesting. Hebrews 11 is the chapter before Hebrews 12. And of course, Hebrews 12, it carries on. Because Hebrews 11 is the account of the honour roll of the champions of the faith. God's faithful people from the Old Testament times are cheering us on. You could imagine it or picture it as such. The great honour roll of the champions of the faith. We've got folk in Hebrews 11. You've got Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, the prophets and others.

The heroes of God. Those who excelled with their faith. By faith, they're the ones that we're surrounded about by this great cloud of witnesses. In a figurative sense, we could imagine them as spectators viewing the race, as it were, as we are running it. And they are the ones who've run it before us. And it's as if they're in the stadium watching over the race, cheering us on by their example. You could understand it that way in reading this, I believe. And so now, for us, it's our turn. It's your turn. You're on the racetrack, Dennis. With all your togs on and your running shoes and that determination in your face, that grit, that resolve. You're down there. Brother Neil, down there at that racetrack, raring to go. Just waiting for that bang to go off, as it were. And now it's your turn to run the race. Your turn to run the race with faithfulness and finish it. Some folk today, however, are running a different kind of race. You could see in the world that we live, as some have called it, the rat race. Isn't it? It's like someone said, and even the rats don't win in the rat race. And the rat race is all around us, isn't it? The race of the world, racing here and racing there, a race for success materially or a race for affluence or for self-centred kind of peace by some kind of mystical achievement, some elusive joy of their own making or of buying things.

The world is running a different race. But this earthly life, for us, it's meant to be something much more, much, much more than some aimless kind of existence. This is a contest. This is a race for champions, for the champions of the faith, the Christian race, the Christian life. It's a process too. As you can imagine, as it's pictured as a race, it's a process to it. The holy race. There's a starting point, there's an in-between, and there's an end point, the finishing line. And you are the faith people that are running this race, looking unto the Lord Jesus, the race of living a life in obedience to God's Word. Run the race. The word race here in the underlying word that underlies the word race is the word from which we get the word agony. And you could say sometimes that Christian life can be an agony. I know sometimes, as we know, our loved ones and friends, and even this morning someone's telling me of tragedy and of loss and bereavement. I know some folk have experienced that this last week gone by. And sometimes life throws things out of us that are not always pleasant. It can be an agony. The Christian life can be an experience that takes some vigorous activity, some straining, some application. It says in

[5 : 01] Amos 6.1, Woe to those at ease in Zion. God doesn't want us to be at ease. He wants us to be invigorated with vigor and vigorous activity. The word agony is a sense of application of energy applied. And we are going to look at this Gospel race in three aspects, in three stages if you like. The from, the during and the to. Running the race. Firstly, the from. The racer has something to leave behind.

Something to leave behind. Something to leave behind them. The writer of Hebrews says to us, Let us lay aside the weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us. There's a letting go of that.

There's a letting go of that which would hinder, that which would obstruct us in this race. As we know, can you imagine a racer in the Olympics dressed like brother Dennis's at the moment. With his great big parker on. You know, he's probably got a jumper or two underneath there. And he's all covered with lots and lots of weight of material of clothing. No, the runner will shed that. You see them down there as they take their tracksuits off. They get down to the minimal amount of obstruction. And in those days of Bible times it would have been flowing robes and so on. They would have taken those things off that would deter them.

[6 : 29] That would hinder them. And like that too we need to leave the baggage behind. Leave that behind. That weight that doth so easily beset us. The sin. Leave it behind.

In Bible times, as is still the case, runners used to load themselves up with weight. Whether it was weight on their chest or weight on their legs.

The runner used to practice and train with weight strapped to their legs. I'm told, or to their arms in Bible times as still runners can at times today. They carry more in training so that when the race comes they'll be even faster.

They'll be used to going through that pain. Come race time the weights are released and the runner feels energized so they can race faster. Our weights were released at Calvary.

The weights for you, believer today, were taken from you at Calvary. At the cross, the Lord Jesus, He took the weight. He is the burden bearer of our sin, of our shame, of our guilt.

[7 : 36] Our weights were released there. And we shouldn't be trying to put them back on. Don't put the weights back on. Sometimes as Christians even we can think back of regret, even of our unsaved life, and think of mistakes, of errors, of faults, of sin that are in our past.

Leave it at Calvary's hill. Leave it with Christ at the cross. Leave that sin, that weight. And as a Christian still too, we know that we're still human.

We still have self and flesh to combat. And every weight, that which slows us down as a Christian. We know as a Christian, sometimes a slip of the tongue, an action, an activity that is not glorified to God, bring it to Him.

Bring it to Him day by day. Day by day by day. Every weight. That which would weigh you down. That which would hinder your walk with Christ. That which would damage your witness to others that would see you.

Whatever will slow you down. Get rid of it, Dennis. Amen. Rip that stuff off you that's holding you back. And leave it. Leave it behind.

[8 : 43] That weight. Don't try to put it back on. And whatever slows us down. Let go of that stuff. There's baggage, isn't there? Baggage, if you like, that hinders us from being a winner.

The sin that does so easily be said. And it dogs our step. It's got a picture of this word here of entanglement. Of a dogging of our steps. Of a clinging. Of a distracting.

Of a tripping up. Look at the people in Hebrews 11. The men and women of faith. Some of them you'd have to say they weren't really, as the world would regard it, of exceptional character.

They were quite ordinary, normal, everyday garden variety people. Some with some shameful history. As we know, Rahab, for example. Yet, faith made the difference for them.

And faith makes the difference for you. At that starting block, it's faith that puts you on the starting block. That is the starting point. You know, some, they're not even in the race.

[9 : 45] Because they're not saved. They don't know Christ. They're not in the race. And that's sometimes evident by the fruit of their lives.

As we know, they're not there yet. They're not even started the race. Friends, start the race. Leave the sin behind. And that means letting it go to Christ.

And realizing he's paid for every sin. He's paid for it there. And verse 4 speaks of an intense striving against sin. Verse 4. Striving against sin. And that happens through the Christian life too.

There's still a striving that needs to occur. It's like someone said, sin is like an octopus. It's just like that. Just a puff.

Just a drink. Then pretty soon another tentacle comes and grips you. With those gripping things that tentacles have. Just a lustful look.

[10 : 45] And then comes another tentacle wrapping its arms around you. Wrapping that tentacle around you. Just a little lie. Just a slight rearrangement of the truth. And out comes another tentacle entangling you.

Think of it as that. The octopus, if you like, of sin. And sin can corrupt the Christian. It can damage. It can control. It can change. It can conform you to the world and consume you.

And so, an old time quote here. A man called Thomas Guthrie said this. If you find yourself loving any pleasure above prayer. Any book better than the Bible.

Any house more than the house of God. Any table better than the Lord's. Or any person more than Christ. Take alarm. Lay aside every weight. Every sin.

Repentance and faith are very much allied and together. In God's word. They're joined together. And at the starting blocks, if you like.

[11 : 43] We're talking about the gospel race. At that starting blocks. As you're in those. Mounted on those blocks. Ready to start the gospel race. We realise our sinful condition.

We realise our lost estate. That we need the Saviour's work to save us. We need the cross for eternal life. Not just a prospect.

But a present day reality. We need to have our own race to run. There's some here. You're further ahead down that track. You're stronger as a Christian than I am.

And there's others behind us both. Friends, there's a race. And your race is different from mine. We all have our own race to run. And when you think of the runners in a race track.

There's strict training. It's like Paul said. That bodily exercise profits a little. But godliness is profitable for all things. And there's an exercise in yourself unto godliness.

[12 : 40] And I understand the original word. It's got the sense of going to the gym. It's got the sense of going to the gym. It's got the sense of going to the gym and build up that spiritual. Build up that muscle. And you can take it in the spiritual sense too.

So there's the from. There's the leaving behind the weight. The sin. And then we come to the middle part of the race. The in between. The actual running of the race. The during the race.

And the writer says here. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us. The Christian race. Run with patience he says. It takes stamina.

It takes stamina. There's lots of things that deter people from running the Christian race. As it were. You know even. Sadly. Just even coming to church.

Is a hard thing for some people. I was surprised. You get all kinds of excuses when you're the bus driver. You know. All kinds of excuses. When you're the bus driver. Go to pick people up for church.

[13 : 37] And I phoned a lady and asked her. Oh are you coming tonight? And she says. No. She's got to look after the dog. But. That's a. I've never heard that excuse before.

But. You wonder. Are you in the race or not? Is it important to you? To be in the house of God. To worship the Lord. Let us run with patience. Have you got that stamina?

That keep on keeping on. We can all feel like giving up from time to time. And quitting. And being weak or lackadaisical. Don't lose heart.

This is a race that takes determination. It takes stamina. It takes resolve. And perseverance. It's a marathon. A long term. A long distance event. It takes sustained effort. And the commitment of faith.

Of self discipline. Run. Move forward. Move forward. There's an activity here. And refuse to be detoured too. In Galatians 5.7 it says. You did run well. Who did hinder you?

[14 : 36] That you should not obey the truth. It's the. Writer. Paul is saying to the Galatians. You're running so well. How come you. You're hindered. What's hindering you from obeying the truth? Lots of Christians are hindered in the Christian race.

But there's always some. Whether you could say excuse or alibi. Or some reason why. The Christianity doesn't seem to rate that highly.

In their priorities. As it were. But we need to consider this as critical. As vital. And persevere. And go through the hardness. Go through the pain barrier.

The pain barrier. It's been said that. As you know. A runner in a race. When they get to that kind of halfway point. Sometimes they. There's an expression. They say that.

They hit the wall. They hit the wall. And then hopefully they get beyond that wall. And get the second wind. They've got to go through the pain barrier. Go through the pain barrier.

[15 : 35] You know. It's easy to be a quitter. It's easy to be a quitter. I was thinking. Of the agony of trying to fix this roof. Of late. And how easy it would be.

Just to throw the towel in. And just to give up. Just to feel like. It's just too hard. And you can't seem to get anywhere. After how many years. Of trying to fix it. But friends. You've got to go through the

pain barrier.

Doesn't matter what your body feels like doing. Doesn't matter what your feelings are saying to you. You've got to go through the pain barrier. As a Christian. And that applies to witnessing too.

Witnessing is the most.

At times it can be the most uncomfortable thing that you can do. To have to confront someone with something they don't want to hear. But they need to hear. And friends.

Are you willing to go through the pain barrier as a Christian. Even to be a standing out Christian at work. It can take some resolve. To be firm. To have that British bulldog determination.

[16:34] To run the race with patience. With perseverance. And join the race. The gospel runner has the Lord Jesus Christ there. You're not on your own on that race track.

And there's others. Brothers and sisters running alongside you. Your teammates. Your fellow runners. Our fellow believers. Are running that race with you. And here's the one.

That is before us. Here's the finisher of the faith. He's the one who empowers us. And invigorates us to press on. And elsewhere. Philippians 3. Paul says. He was determined.

In this race. And we need to have the determination. That Paul pictures here. For example.

Philippians 3.13. He says. I count not myself to apprehend it.

But this one thing I do. Forgetting those things that are behind. And reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark.

[17:30] For the prize of the high calling of God. In Christ Jesus. There's no greater endeavor. For your life. Than to be a sold out Christian. There's no greater cause.

There's no greater aspiration. No more important a prize. Than this. Than you should be reaching forth. To those things. That are ahead. And this verb.

Reaching. It refers to an athlete. It refers to an athlete. Who runs with all his might. Who strains his entire body. To cross the finishing line. It's quite a graphic picture. And you see that sometimes in those.

Finishing line photos. Don't you. As you see that athlete. Just stretching. Every nerve. And muscle. And tendon. Stretching. Reaching.

Extending. To cross that line. That's the picture here. Of reaching forth. Reaching forth. Straight into cross that finishing line. This is not some finite event. This is an everlasting life.

[18:27] That we yearn for with every fiber of our being. Christianity. The Christian life. It's meaningful. It's. It's. The absolute. Ultimate. And the gospel runner has an endurance to face.

Whatever lies ahead on this race. It's an obstacle course at times. I know as a youngster at school. I used to like the obstacle course. You know the obstacle race. What do they call it?

The cross country. You know where you're going through creeks. And up hills. And around bends. And whatever else. And jumping over things. And underneath things. A cross country.

An obstacle course. And in a way. You could think of. Sometimes the Christian life. It's not all. All plain sailing. It's uphill. Or downhill. Or. Or rugged terrain. And yet.

He's gone before us. Hasn't he? The one who endured. The cross. And 1 Corinthians 9. Paul writes again. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all. But one receiveth the prize.

[19:27] So run. Run. So run. That you may obtain. He talks about. Every man striveth. For the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to attain a corruptible crown.

But we're incorruptible. So. In the days which Paul was writing in here. He was talking about people. Striving for the mastery. So wanting to be an athlete. Wanting to be a champion.

Wanting to be a winner. And what did they have to do? They would. As they still do. Practice and train. From day break. To day at dawn. To midnight.

Whatever. They train. Lung hours. They watch their diet. Everything they take in. To their body. And everything is specially examined.

And their lives are totally devoted to that cause. Of winning that race. That event. And Paul writes. They do this to obtain a corruptible crown. In the Greek races.

[20:23] They used to have some kind of laurel wreath. Like a. That was made out of leaves. And a special. Winning. Token. Was having this wreath. That they wore on their head. But of course.

After a few days. These leaves would fade. And fall. And dry. And that was a corruptible crown. But we are running not for something that's going to wear away. And fade. And frizzle up. And die. Our crown is forever. It's incorruptible.

It will never corrupt. It's everlasting. Paul writes. On further. are running not for something that's going to wear away and fade and frizzle up and die. Our crown is forever.

It's incorruptible. It will never corrupt. It's everlasting. Paul writes on further, 26 of 1 Corinthians 9, I therefore so run, not as uncertainly, so fight I, not as one that beats at the air, but I keep my body and bring it into subjection.

We've seen the fog, the weight, the sin, the joring, the application, the so running, the stretching forth, the reaching forth, the running with patience, with perseverance, with determination. And thirdly, the to, where are we going to?

[21 : 39] Looking unto Jesus, verse 2, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God, the throne of God.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. This is serious. Our Lord endured the cross, despised the shame. We are to be looking unto him. Looking. Now this word, looking, verse 2, looking unto Jesus, it means our undivided attention.

Undivided attention. Looking away from all distractions, everything that would take our attention and fix our gaze on the one object.

Now I heard a young lady who attends this church, and she visited another church, and she said to me, and it was actually a false cult that she went to, and she said, oh that's okay, I wasn't really listening.

[22 : 41] I was going to feel I was going to feel that's what she's like here sometimes too. We don't want to be distracted, and deterred, and not paying attention. This is something that we need to pay earnest heed to.

The word of God, and the gospel race, this is something we shouldn't take lightly, and flippantly, and carelessly, and unheeding. We need to heed the word, and apply it, and fix our gaze with that concentration, with that focus, that looking unto Jesus.

At the finishing line, there he is, our Lord and Master, our Saviour, the one who died for us. He is there, the author, and the finisher of our faith. Resurrected, alive, and living in our hearts by faith. Run, the race, looking unto him. Run with focus. So with your Christian life, brothers and sisters, be encouraged. Look unto him. Day by day, have that look. Have that aspiration.

Have that focus to your life. It's like has been said, and we can all, at times, do this, and I think there's truth to this small statement, don't sweat the small stuff.

[23 : 52] You know, sometimes in life, we sweat the small stuff, don't we? But really, this life is just a vapour, and our cares and concerns in the here and now, whilst they may be real, and I'm not discounting that for some.

Don't sweat the small stuff. There's something much more, something much, much more. We sung about the mansion, just over the hilltop. It's real. The Lord Jesus said, I go to prepare a place for you, in my house are many mansions.

There's a place, even now, for you that believe, there is a place being prepared for you, by his very hand. And don't sweat the small stuff in the here and now.

Don't put your focus on the here and the present, and whatever might be distracting, and frustrating, and upsetting you, even now. Have that focus beyond, to the to, to the looking unto, Jesus.

And let us fix our eyes upon him, the one who has gone before us, the one who's been there and done that. He can empathise with our feelings, with our experience of life. Keep your eyes on him, brother, sister.

[24 : 59] A quote here, it says, if you want to be distressed, look within. We can all look within and see, I'm undone. I'm unworthy.

Every one of us here, I am undone. I'm unworthy. Look within, and be distressed. If you want to be defeated, look back. Look back down the track, to your regrets, to your disappointments, to the loss, to the shame, to the guilt, to the faults.

Look back. If you want to be defeated, look back. If you want to be distracted, look around. There's lots to distract you, to take your attention, from what really counts. If you want to be dismayed, look ahead.

It could be future concerns, of debts, or whatever it might be, of worries, of life, of fears. If you want to be delivered, look up.

If you want to be delivered, look up. Look unto Him. Look unto Jesus. We can look around. We can look ahead. We can look back. We can look all about us, and look within.

[26 : 06] And yet, the Bible says, look unto Him. Look unto Jesus, the author, and finisher of your faith. Run towards Him. Run towards Him. His arms are open. He's reaching to us.

I mean, I'm being somewhat creative, to put it this way, but I would imagine the Lord Jesus is like that. Can you imagine that? I believe He'd be like that.

So yeah, come on. Run a bit faster. Come home. Come to me. Come to me. I know you could take some license about these things, but I'd imagine the Lord Jesus is looking for you.

He's looking for you, as well as you should be looking to Him. It's a bit like, I could picture as the Word shows us of the prodigal, and the Father. The Father was there looking, searching. He was looking for the Son.

He was looking for that lost Son who'd wandered astray. And the Father was looking. And I could imagine the Lord Jesus is looking towards you too. And we can see the love in His eyes.

[27 : 03] We can see that He's welcome as He awaits us. And here's the finisher. Here's the model. Here's the forerunner. And Christ is the finisher. And it's got the sense that He will complete.

This word finisher, it means He's the completer of our faith. Because He's the one who gives it to us in the first place. He's the author of it. He makes faith. And He's the one who completes faith.

He's the finisher of it. He's the one who completes your faith. And in Him is your security. In Him is that eternal life. He is the one who will take us all away from the starting block to the finishing line.

He's the one who will see you through. So finish strong. Sometimes it's been said, some Christians, some preachers, they don't finish strong. For some, through history, you can look back and see what were strong preachers of the gospel and they didn't finish strong.

And we all can make that mistake too. Every one of us. We can falter. You see some who do falter at the end. And you wonder, well, that's a shame that they're distracted, that they're hindered as they come to the close.

[28 : 12] If only they could just finish the race, finish their course and fight the good fight right to the end to finish strong. God wants you to finish strong. Keep looking to Him, to the Lord Jesus.

And be as poor as he testified, just to close, 2 Timothy 4, verse 6 to 8, He says, For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day and not to me only, but unto all them also that love is appearing.

At the close of this earthly race, there's a crown, there's a prize, there's a mark, there's the Christ of Calvary who came and took our place, He took our sin.

Capture that. If only we could capture that. What it means. What it means. We really can't comprehend it, can we? That He would take our sin and take our fault.

[29 : 21] And yet His welcome is there. His reward awaits you. Are you in the race? That's the question. Are you in the race? I'm preaching to Christians tonight, really, to encourage you in that race.

But there may be some, you're not even at the starting blocks yet. You're not saved. Don't leave it too late. You know, the Bible talks about some that boast of tomorrow, but they don't see it.

You might have plans about what you're going to do tomorrow, but God says, it's over. This night, thy soul is required of thee. There may not be a tomorrow. Make today the day.

As He says, today, now. Behold, now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. If you'll hear His voice, trust Him.

It's so simple yet so profound that if you can just trust Him and let go of your own weight, of the sin, run the race with determination, with perseverance, looking unto Him, the author, the finisher of your faith.

[30 : 28] Be a hero of the faith. Be one of the champions of Hebrews 12. The Hebrews 11 ones are listed. You can be one in Hebrews 12 running that race.

Are you in the race? Step onto the track. Get your running shoes on. Get back in the race if you've faltered. Stay in the race. Press on in the race and run for your life.

He is there waiting to receive you. I love to tell the story of haunting things above of Jesus and His glory.