

Keep on Running

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[0 : 0 0] to begin our worship today, and obviously we can't sing, but we'll read from Psalm 18. Psalm 18. And we pray that God will bless our worship to each and every one of us. I'm going to read from Psalm 18, and this is a reading from Sing Psalms, but it's from verse 27. You save the humble and the meek, but bring the proud down from their height. You, Lord, will keep my lamp aflame. God turns my darkness into light. With help from God I can advance against a troop and rout them all, and with the aid my God will give. I can leap over any wall. For perfect is the way of God, no flaw is found within his word. To all who put their trust in him, a shield and refuge is the Lord. For who is God except the Lord?

Besides our God, who is a rock? He is the God who gives me strength, and he perfects the path I walk. He makes my feet like feet of deer. Upon the heights he makes me stand. My arms can bend a bow of bronze. In skills of war he trains my hand. Your right hand gives me victory.

You stoop down low to make me great, so that my footsteps do not trip. You smooth the pathway for my feet. And may God bless to us this psalm that we have just read. So let us now bow in prayer.

Let us pray. O Lord, O Lord, O gracious God, as we bow before you today, we give thanks for another opportunity of worshipping you. We give thanks, O Lord, that we're able to meet together, and although there are still restrictions in place, yet it is good that we're able to take this step and to be able to come to your house. And we give thanks for the way that your word has been conveyed over these last number of months. But we missed the fellowship of togetherness. And although it is still restrictive, we give thanks that we're able to take these first steps. And so, Lord, we pray that you'll bless us all.

And we give thanks for the promises that you give in your word, the promise that where even two or three gather in your name, that you are there in the midst. And that is what we want. There's nothing we want more than to have the presence of God with us. Lord, we want to know you. It is a great desire in the Christian's heart. It is one of the great marks that of any passion, if any passion says that they want to see more and more of the Lord, and they want to hear his voice more clearly, and they want to see him more clearly, and they want to be like him. Lord, that is the great evidence that they belong to you, irrespective of the many troubles and difficulties that may be in their lives, and the many doubts that overwhelm them. The great sense of the desire to see you and to hear you and to be like you. We give thanks, O Lord, that your people will echo the words in Revelation with the sense of the coming of the Lord Jesus, where the word says, even so, come, Lord Jesus.

[3 : 3 5] And while we pray that, especially in our, for our gathering here today, that you will be here in our midst, that you will bless us, and that we'll be conscious of your presence and your power.

Lord, we pray, Lord, to bless those who cannot attend, those who are unable to be here, and again, there's restriction with regard to numbers, and certainly restriction probably with regard to those who are older. And we pray, Lord, that you will bless them where they are, that you will bless them in their own homes. And as we engage, and we pray as we engage even in the worship just now with others. We give thanks, Lord, for the great link and for technology which binds us all together.

We pray, O Lord, that you will watch over us and that you will do us good. Pray to bless this congregation. We ask, Lord, that you will guide them in the right way. You are God of your people, and we pray, O Lord, that your people will know that you're guiding hand and leading hand upon them.

You are the Lord who says, I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you shall go. I will guide you with mine eye. And we pray, O Lord, that that might be true in their experience, and that you will guide them in the right way. And we ask, O Lord, that they will be led, and they will know the shepherding and the guiding hand of the Lord in all their deliberations.

We pray, O Lord, that you will bless every home represented, every family. We pray, O Lord, for those who nurse broken hearts. And we realize that although people say time is a healer, sometimes the pains and sorrows that loss have brought into our lives, there are days where many will feel that there's no healing at all. And so we pray, O Lord, that you will comfort all those who feel bruised and battered and broken, and that they might know the comfort that the Lord alone can give. You are the God who gives us strength beyond ourselves.

[5 : 43] And we give thanks, Lord, for that. We pray then that you will bless all our loved ones. We pray especially for those who might be still outside the kingdom. We pray for any in here today who might be still outside the kingdom, that they can be inside church and yet outside the kingdom.

We give thanks, Lord, that there is a desire within their hearts. And we pray that you will fulfill the desire. And just like the Greeks long ago, they said that we would see Jesus. We pray that that might be true in their experience. We give thanks, Lord, for all those who listen in to services who maybe were not in the habit of doing so in the past. And we ask, Lord, that your light may shine into their hearts and that you will open their eyes that they may see and open their ears that they may hear, open their minds that they may understand, open their hearts to receive and to trust you.

Help us, Lord, in our walk as we go forward day by day. We give thanks, O Lord, that we are not walking on our own. We would confess and we do confess we couldn't make anything of it.

We find it hard enough with your grace as we struggle so often against the temptations and against all the lusts and against all the forces that are opposed to us. But, Lord, if we were to try and do this on our own, we couldn't take one step. We would be done. So we give thanks, Lord, for the grace which, first of all, found us and the grace that has so far kept us and the grace that we are assured from your word will keep us. We give thanks, Lord, for that great word kept, that we are kept by the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time.

We pray then that you will watch over us nationally and internationally. Lord, we pray wisdom for our leaders and those in authority over us. We're conscious, as we're hearing on the news again of the the development of this virus. It seems to be gathering speed again.

[7 : 46] And as we will be heading into winter with the approaching flu as well, we ask again for your protection. You have been so gracious to us here, Lord, not according to our deserving, but, oh, Lord, you have been merciful to us. We pray that it might please you that you will continue to be merciful to us and that you will put your arm around us and protect us. And we know that we haven't any power or force within ourselves, no strength that is natural to us to protect us from this virus. And so, Lord, we are in your hand. We pray for those who are working towards finding a vaccine. Lord, grant them wisdom and direction. And we pray that they may soon find one that is safe and effective and that it will indeed change lives for good. Help us, Lord, through these times to look to you. May our leaders learn to look to you. Because if we don't, we will reel and lurch from one crisis to another. Help them, Lord, to look to you and to hear what

God the Lord will speak. Man's wisdom will lead us into confusion. The wisdom that is from above will always lead us in the right way. And so we ask, Lord, that you will bless us. And as today, as the rain pours down upon us and the showers from above, we pray that there will be spiritual showers from above and that you will rain down your blessing upon this congregation. We ask, Lord, for reviving power, that in a day of small things that you will turn it to be a day of great things. And so we pray then that you will watch over us, have mercy upon us. We come confessing our sin, knowing that you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Pray, Lord, to bless all the young people. And we give thanks for every effort that has been made with the young in this community. And we give thanks, Lord, for those who are committed and have been committed to teaching them and instructing them in the way of truth. And Lord, as we look back over our lives, we give thanks for youth leaders and Sunday school teachers and those who taught us in the way of the Lord. And often, although they may not see the fruit immediately themselves, as we look back, we realize the impact that was made upon us when we were young. And so we give thanks, Lord, for that. So, Lord, continue to be with us and bless all and everyone of this congregation. And we pray that you will guide them in the right way, taking away our sin for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Now we're going to read God's word and we'll find this in Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews chapter 12.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

[11 : 53] And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.

For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all are participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time, as it seemed best to them. But he disciplines us for all good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.

[13 : 03] But later it yields a peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God.

That no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words make the hearer beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

[14 : 23] For they could not endure the order that was given. If even a beast touches a mountain, it shall be stoned. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I tremble with fear.

But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gatherings, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him, who warned them on earth? Much less will we escape if we reject him who warns us from heaven.

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens. This phrase, yet once more, indicates the removal of things that are shaken, that is, things that have been made, in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

[16 : 04] Amen, and may God bless to us this reading of his own holy word. And I want us to think for a little today the first couple of verses of this chapter that are well-known words, where we find Jesus as the founder and perfecter of our faith.

So we read there, 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, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now this chapter, or at least the verses at the beginning of this chapter, as you can see, are tied very closely to the previous chapter, chapter 11.

Because in chapter 11, there we are given this list of great men and great women who were men and women of faith. And that's what made them notable.

That's why they have taken their place in this particular chapter. We talk of a hall of fame. Well, here's the hall of faith. And when you look at the list, of course the list could be far bigger than us here, but it includes obvious people that we would expect.

[17 : 43] Abraham was the father of the faithful. By faith, we read in verse 8, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.

And we can rightly see how the likes of Sarah and Isaac and all these people that we would expect to be there, and Jacob and Moses and so on, the great people of faith.

But then the list goes on and we, of course, we expect to see and David is there and Samuel is there, all these people. But it's one of the things when you go right through it, it talks of the faith of Gideon and the faith of Samson and the faith of Rahab.

And what you're brought to realize is that all these people together, while they were great men and women of God, they were also very, very human.

And sometimes, that's one of the beauties of Scripture, is that Scripture reveals to us exactly how it is, warts and all. And when you go and you read the historical life of people like Gideon and people like Rahab and people like Samson, yes, we see their faith, but we also see their thoughts.

[19 : 03] But the wonderful thing is that it's for their faith that they're noted. And at the end of the day, it's a faith that is imperative and important to have. Because if we are Christians, it is by faith we walk.

We don't walk by sight. If you and I try to walk by sight, we'll make shipwreck very quickly. It is by faith and faith alone that we walk.

And I think we're all conscious at the times when we've kind of lost our way a wee bit. It is because the eye of faith is not focused upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we have this great, it's termed here, surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. And the thing that I think that obviously that we highlight here is that although these men and women have been set before us as examples and sometimes even warnings because God has included everything about the people in the word of God to set them out as examples for good and for bad.

Because there were aspects often in some of these people in their lives that wasn't good. And that is set out for our example as well, set out as a warning to teach us. So we've got to realise that the scripture includes these things to teach us these truths.

[20 : 33] But while we look to the cloud of witnesses as an encouragement because you and I know that there are certain Christians that you meet in this world and you always feel the better of meeting them.

They're the kind of people that they sort of encourage you and they inspire you in the faith there is a stamp about them that when you're in their company in their presence you know that this man or this woman or this person is a real strong Christian that you feel the better of being in their presence and in their company.

We can all think of people like that. And sometimes when we go back to the Bible and we look at these people we look at Abraham who was a frontiersman of faith we say I would love to have met Abraham.

I would love to have been in his company and to hear some of his stories because he really was the most amazing man. I would love to have sat down with David and heard some of his stories just so that he could explain what he was actually feeling in his heart when he went out to fight Goliath.

I would love to hear it from his own mouth. So they're inspirational characters but they're not to be our focus. We look at their lives we learn from their lives but they are not our ultimate focus.

[22 : 03] These men and women they look to Jesus and you and I we are to look to Jesus because Jesus alone is the author and the perfecter of our faith.

the Old Testament believers remember looked to the Messiah the Jesus who was to come. They look to the promised one. They were saved in the exact same way as you and I are saved.

We are saved by looking back to the Christ who came and who died upon the cross of Calvary and so we are saved by believing in the Christ who has come.

They were saved by believing in the Christ who was to come who was set out before in all the sacrificial system in all the types and all the symbols that were set out.

So it was by faith. They didn't believe it. It wasn't the sacrifices that were made in the tabernacle and the temple that saved them. It was the Lord Jesus Christ and so their faith looked ahead to the Saviour and they trusted in it.

[23 : 12] They believed in it. That's why it says of Abraham that Jesus said that he saw my day and rejoiced. Abraham's faith was so strong he could see long, long, long, long, long before the coming of Jesus.

He saw him and he believed and he accepted and he lived his life based upon the coming Messiah. So for the Old Testament believers and for us who are New Testament believers, our focus is upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we're surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses. And I believe that those who have departed, all those who are in Christ and have gone to be with Christ, I believe that they're far closer than sometimes we realise.

I have no idea, we don't know. but sometimes people have the idea that to be with Christ and where the Lord is, that it's on the furthest outside, way beyond the furthest part of outer space.

We don't know. And sometimes the heavenly abode where the Lord is with all the saints that have departed might be an awful lot closer than we realise.

[24 : 34] and what they know about us here, I don't know. There are indications here and there in the scripture that they have an idea, they have a knowledge of what is happening here.

We have like for instance questions in Revelation where those in glory are asking about who are these. And we know that there is rejoicing in heaven over every person that comes in repentance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. So I think there is maybe an awareness but it's not so much here the idea of those in glory as a cloud of witnesses looking at us but as us looking at them and the encouragement and the examples that they have set before us.

As they ran the race so we should also be running the race as well. And as we said they ran this race looking to Jesus.

Now as we see here we're told here not only that we run a race but we're also told how we are to run this race.

[25 : 47] So the moment that we begin to run this race and remember it tells us here that it is a race with endurance that is set out before us and that's one of the great things that there's a starting point.

Every race has a starting point. And so this is a race that is set out before us. And that moment that we begin to run the race is the moment we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The moment that you begin to follow Jesus Christ you have started to run this race. And a particular race has been set out for you. You didn't choose it but the Lord has chosen where you run and how you run.

And how thankful we are to the Lord for that. And it's important also to say that in life if we are not running this race our life will not be fulfilled.

And there are many people who are trying to run in life and they're running going nowhere even though their lives may appear to be very fulfilling and there might be times when they're satisfied in life there is still an empty void.

[27 : 08] And I don't believe for one moment that a lot of people who will say oh life is great I'm satisfied and fulfilled that they will always be like that. We can go through moments outside of Christ when we can feel satisfied within ourselves but it doesn't last.

you see God made us for ourselves and as Augustine has said there's a God shaped void in the heart of every man and we will always be lacking in rest until our souls come to find rest in Jesus Christ.

It isn't possible to know the peace and that sense of purpose that sense of identity that sense of belonging outside Christ.

And when we look around even our own nation today and we see so many people and you can see there's an emptiness in their life. And the funny sad thing is that they look everywhere but the place where there is the fulfilment of that emptiness can be found with Jesus Christ.

But the wonderful thing is that God has revealed this to us and made known to us by his spirit. And so the moment that we come to faith in Jesus Christ we begin to run this race.

[28 : 20] Now it's a race. It's not a walk although the Christian walks with God. It's a race. It's not a jog. Because if you go out for a jog you can go at your own pace.

If you go out for a jog there's no pressure on you. You can even stop and speak to somebody. But when you're running a race that race is controlled and you have to give your all during that race.

You can't stop in that race and have a blether with somebody. That race is something that will take up everything that you are. And that's how it is for the Christian.

You see the Christian life is a life of activity. And when you go right through the Bible you will never find that the Christian is somebody who takes their ease. Here in this world we run the race.

In glory we get the rest. Racing here, rest there. And we've got to remember that's the order. And when you go through scripture the Christian life is shown in pictures of fighting and wrestling and pressing and pushing and striving.

[29 : 30] It's always activity. Sin is shown as taking one's ease of just being lazy. But the Christian is somebody who's involved and engaged all the time.

Christian. And so the Christian as we say is living this life of faith. And as we know this life of faith changes who we are. It changes our affections, it changes our will, it changes our desires, it changes who we are.

Now that doesn't mean that when we become Christians that everything that was in us before has disappeared. Because you and I know the battles that remain, the struggles that are there, there is a daily conflict between the lust of the flesh and the spirit.

You go to Galatians chapter 5 and you have a list there of the lust of the flesh and you have a list there of the fruit of the spirit. I would say that the Christian is somebody who has to know both.

Because if a person will say as a Christian you know this, I don't know anything now of the flesh. It's gone. I would say four. I don't know how that is. That's not what the Bible shows.

[30 : 46] That is a conflict that will remain. Before we become Christians we're not conscious that there is this struggle going on. We're aware of different things going on within us.

But you see once we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the fruit of the spirit is at work conforming us, changing us so that we're wanting to become more Christ-like.

There's a desire within us that we might become more and resemble more and more the Lord Jesus Christ. And we see that this race is one that will sap our energy.

It's a race that will sap the strength and the strongest and will something slow down the speed of the fastest. Christ. But every step that we take we take by grace.

And as we run this race we're seeking to glorify God. And again that is something that separates the Christian from the non-Christian. Because you ask somebody who isn't a Christian what really is your main aim in life?

[31 : 59] I'd be very surprised if they would say to glorify God and to enjoy him. But when you become a Christian that actually is what you want to do.

And you're saying to the Lord often in your prayers Lord help me to live in a way that glorifies you. Now our glorifying God can often be very perplexing to us.

Because sometimes the things that happen in our lives we would say to ourselves this can't be glorifying to God. God. And so sometimes when you look at maybe the illness and maybe struggling with things like depression or serious illness or loss where you've lost members of the family loved one and you say Lord how can you how is it possible that there's glory to God and the like of this?

I'm broken hearted. Where is the glory to God? Well we've also got to remember that God's ways are so different to our ways that it's described in the Bible that as the heavens are higher above the earth so are my ways and your ways and my thoughts and your thoughts.

And when you go to the Bible you will see people for instance like Jacob. Jacob's life brought so much glory to God and yet there were periods in Jacob's life where he thought everything was against him.

[33 : 28] that's what he said all these things are against me. Few and evil have been the days of my life. That's how Jacob summed it up.

And yet when we go and read the account of Jacob's life you can see how God was structuring his life ordering it. Oh yes there were pains and sorrows and losses and difficulties along the way.

but God was planning for the future. And God was working in Jacob changing Jacob. Jacob became a totally different man by the end to the one that we meet along the way.

So God was changing Jacob and bringing glory to his name and glory to his cause. Same with David. You go to David's life and you look at all the sorrows and hardships and pains that were going through that he had to go through.

And yet all the time God was taking glory to himself through it. And he's doing the exact same with you. One day you will see it. You might never see it in this world.

[34 : 38] Only faith can say well Lord your word tells me that you're taking glory to yourself through this. I can't understand how but one day you will.

One day when we are brought to being as presence we will understand in a way we are incapable of understanding here. And we'll see that there was a beautiful thread working through it all.

Just the handiwork of God. And so that is why we must trust him. And that is why we are ready. This is part of what grace does.

As we seek to become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. You know one of the greatest ways of resembling Christ is by being submissive to the will of God. And you know that's one of the hardest things for us to do.

To submit to God's will. Lord make me willing to do your will every day. Because even when we do become Christians that's one of the things and I believe it's a great stumbling block to people coming to faith is where they have to submit their will to God.

[35 : 52] Because we want to be in charge of our life. We want to be boss. It's my life and I'll do what I want. That's an anthem. It's a song I remember from my way back. But it's so true of our lives.

It's my life and I'll do what I want. But God comes in his grace and says no you won't. It's my life. It's your life and it's my life. But I want you to do what I want.

And so grace changes us so that we come and we say Lord make me willing to do your will. You see the great example the one that we're looking to is Jesus. And that was one of the wonderful things about Jesus' life.

It was a life that was lived all the time to do the will of the Father. He kept saying that. I've come not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

And so Jesus all the time was submitting himself to the will of the Father. And it does not think for one moment that it was an easy journey for Jesus.

[36 : 55] You know sometimes we have this misconception that somehow because Jesus being the Son of God that he didn't face the struggles in life that you and I face.

Well obviously there was a difference because in a sense that he was sinless. but in some ways that made the struggle all the more intense. You and I know like for instance in the field of temptation when we're really tempted to do something or tempted by something the easiest thing to do is to give in isn't it?

Because when you give in the temptation goes away because you've given in to it. But of course then afterwards then the gift comes in and you feel terrible for having given in. And the more we give in to temptation the less strength we will.

The more we give in the readier we will be to yield to temptation. It's painful resisting temptation but we become stronger by it.

As Martin Luther used to say it was one of the three things that God used to regulate Christian growth was temptation. Would we struggle against it and fight against it?

[38 : 09] Well Jesus fought against temptation all the time and he beat it and he conquered it and he promises us the grace in it. But the point we're making is that all the time Jesus in our nature he went ahead of us and he submitted to the will of the Father.

He was hungry, he was thirsty, he was weary, he went through all the human experiences that we did, that we do apart from sin for us and in submission to the will of the Father.

So that's why we're having to look to him and we realise that he is the one who has set out this way for us.

us. But you see that as we run this race it tells us there's a couple of things here. We're told let us also lay aside every weight and then the second thing the sin which clings so closely.

Let us lay aside every weight. Now I believe that what is spoken of here is things that are actually legitimate in life but can weigh us down.

[39 : 26] things that are spoiling our fellowship with the Lord and hampering our walk with them. They can be things that are completely right and legitimate in their own sense.

Jesus gives a very extreme example of this with regard to faith in Jesus Christ and of the possibility of being lost.

And remember what he said if your hand or your foot offend you cut it off for it is better to enter into life maimed than to be lost than to go into eternity with your hand and your foot and be lost.

I can't remember exactly the quote but that's the gist of it. Now you and I know that hands and feet are not only legitimate they're God given. God has given us hands and feet. and they're essential to our life.

But what Jesus is saying is that the good things the essentials of life the things that are important to us and we enjoy can be such that we become so absorbed with them that we actually lose our weight as a Christian and that they hinder our growth and they hamper our walk and that these things that are actually blessings from God can be such that they would become poor Christians as a result of them.

[41 : 05] You remember Jesus told the story of the great feast and how invitations were sent out and that they all with one consent began to make excuse.

One said I would love to come but I'm sorry I can't come but I bought a piece of ground I have to go and see it. And another said I bought well in today's language it would be I bought a tractor I bought a yoke of oxen I need to go and try them out.

I bought a tractor I'll have to go and try it out. Another said I married a wife I can't come. These are all blessings from God because this is the world we live in. It's a world of involvement and work and engagement and all these things blessings from God.

But these blessings stop them from accepting the invitation. So the wrong use of right things can damage us and that's really the point that is making here.

Don't let anything get in the way. Put the Lord first. It's going back to the very simple part of the gospel. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the other things will be added to you.

[42 : 10] Put him first and the Lord will see to all the other things. That's the order. So that's what we're told. Let us lay aside anything that is hindering us. And that might be difficult to do.

But then we're told also the sin which clings so closely. I think the picture we have is somebody trying to run a race and they've got a loose cloak on and they're trying to run on.

Can you imagine trying to run? Today athletes have the best of running gear. it's so streamlined and scientifically made so that it will help them in every possible way.

Nothing to hinder them in any shape or form. And sometimes when you see pictures of how athletes used to be and the running gear and the clothing they had, it seems so totally different to today.

Everything's so streamlined and just ideal for whether it's cycling or running or swimming or whatever it is. And so the idea is that we have to free ourselves up to run this race properly.

[43 : 20] And it talks about the sin, the sin which clings so closely. You and I know I can't go into your life, you can't go into my life.

But there are areas in our lives that we're more prone to sin than in anything else. and what might be a difficulty for you might not be for me and vice versa.

But you know the areas of life that you struggle in. And you know the sins that you're weakest in, who you're most prone to.

And it's caused you grief over the years. And you wept over it and you repented. But these sins are still there. and I remember a man, not on this island, an old man, I knew him very well.

And he had as bad a temper as anybody I ever came across. He was a fine Christian but he had a terrible temper. And he would fly off the handle at the least thing. And some of the things he said were terrible.

[44 : 25] And he could be really hurt, he hurt so many people along the way with it. And I used to say to myself, this is not consistent with being a Christian.

But one day I was talking to him and he said, you have no idea how I suffer because of my temper. You probably know I've got a temper. And I said, yes. Well, he said, I have wept before the Lord.

He said, I have cried to the Lord so often to help me and to forgive me because of my temper. It's been a blight on my life.

That made me see that man a totally different light. I thought he was oblivious, but this was the glaring fault and failing in his life.

Now we might have faults and failings that aren't as glaring, but they're still there. And so the Lord is saying, you got to be ruthless in this. And of course this hurts.

[45 : 24] Let us lay aside every weight on the sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance. We've got to keep going. Christian life is not for quitters. we've got to keep going.

That's the whole point of this. And so as we said, we've got to focus and keep our eye upon Jesus. Let us run with endurance.

The race has set before us looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. It all began with Jesus. He found you one day.

You didn't find him. yes you did. But it was him who found you first. And he probably was beside you for a while before he actually drew you to himself.

And the faith that has begun in your life, it will continue. You know that's one of the beautiful things is that the Lord never gives up on us. We could give up on ourselves often, couldn't we?

[46 : 27] But he'll never give up. He will never say, you know, you'll never find the Lord saying, see this man, this woman that I've put my grace upon, and I've spent years trying to work in this person's life.

They are such a disappointment to me. One more day of this carry on, and I give up. No, never ever, ever will the Lord do that.

His love is unchanging. His purposes never fail. Once he has set his heart and love upon you, it is forever. And that is a wonderful thing.

So he's the author of our faith, he begins it within our life, but he continues to work in us, and he perfects it all the way through. But we are to run looking to it.

it's the most simple example in the word. It's the one of Peter walking on the water. We all know it. And that moment of supreme faith when Peter began to walk, he walked because of two things.

[47 : 36] He heard the word of Jesus come, and he saw Jesus. And as he listened to Jesus and saw Jesus, he walked on that water. But then remember what it tells us.

Remember it was a wild night, and the wind was howling, and whistling, and the waves were, you could hear the surge. And it tells us when he heard. When he heard, in other words, when Peter's focus was changed, to hear the surge of the waves, and to hear the roar of the wind, his eyes were taken off Jesus, and he began to sink.

And he cries out, Lord, save me. And you and I will sink too. And it's happened to us so often when we take our eye off. The author and perfecter of our faith.

The only way to keep walking and to keep running is to our eyes upon Jesus all the time. And it tells us that who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame.

There's a lot that we could see here. Just to, in a word, remember what Jesus has done in order that you may run well. He gave everything for you.

[48 : 51] Everything. Every single thing. Despising the shame. You know, shame, shame is a horrible thing. If we're ashamed, you know, when you maybe have done something and you think back over things and you say, I'm ashamed of that.

Or if we did something really bad and we say, oh, the shame. Shame is an awful thing to bear. But let's remember Jesus took our shame upon himself.

And even when you think of him, of what he endured being bruised and battered and flogged and stripped and hung up for the whole world, he did all that for you and for me.

He took it all upon himself. It was like he counted it nothing in order that he may do this for us. But we see what was ahead of him. Where, who for the joy that was set before him.

Because Jesus was looking ahead. He was looking to the day when his bride, remember where his bride, would be brought home with himself.

[49 : 59] And let us always remember that the great high priestly prayer before Jesus went to the cross, this was part of what he was seeing. Yes, there was the agony and the pain.

Remember we said, how Jesus was submitting to the will of the Father, however painful. Remember how painful it was in Gethsemane. If this cup could pass from me, oh that's what I would want, but not my will, Lord, but you.

So he's despising the shame and everything like this. But, before he went to the cross, he prayed, Father, he said, I will that all those whom you've given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, the glory that you gave me before the foundation of the world.

That's what Jesus is praying for. That's the joy. He's looking forward. He's longing for the day that you'll be home with him. And that's what it's all about.

We're running this race in order to get home with Jesus. What joy. That's where it's all going to be joy. There might be pain and sorrow and struggle here, but not there.

[51 : 12] As we said, we're running here, it's west there. There's afflictions here, it's glory there. And so this is what was before Jesus.

May we then run with this faith, being assured that this is a prospect that is out before us. And if there's anybody today who hasn't started running, it's time to start.

Because this race, it's the greatest race. Yes, it's a struggle. You know, when I used to do a wee bit of running back in the day, it's something maybe people looking in my shape now would never believe, but I used to do a wee bit of running.

And I remember, I used to do cross country, and I remember doing the first few half marathons and things like that. And there were periods during the run, and you would feel, oh, this is hard going.

But you know when it was over, there was a tremendous feeling of satisfaction. It felt good. Well, you know when our race in this world is over, and sometimes, particularly if you're working really hard or struggling or striving, the rest, even in a day, if you're going through a hard day, when you rest at night, it's wonderful.

[52 : 25] When you climb into bed after an exhausting day, you're thanking the Lord and say, oh Lord, thank you for this bed. It's so simple, but it's wonderful. Well, there will be an eternal thank you to the Lord, even for the pains and the struggles, because of the wonderful weight of glory that you will be enjoying.

So if you're not running, time to start. And the time to start is now, because Jesus has promised to be where his people are.

Let us pray. Lord, our God, we pray to bless us. We give thanks for being able to reflect on your word for a wee while. We pray that this word may encourage us as we go on.

And we give thanks, Lord, that despite who we are and our own sense of failure, and Lord, how often we look at our lives and we say, oh Lord, my life is a calamity. But we give thanks, Lord, that you're there to deal with our calamities and to deal with all that we can't deal with ourselves.

And we pray that you'll bless us. Bless every home and every family and guide us, we pray, and guide this congregation in the way forward that they may know your guidance, your grace, your help, your strength, your leading.

[53 : 42] Watch over us then, we pray, and do us good and take us all home safely and bless all whom we love for giving us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. we're going to conclude just reading from Psalm 71 in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 71 in the Scottish Psalter, and we're going to read from verse 14.

Psalm 71 in the Scottish Psalter from verse 14. I will hope in name, but I with expectation will hope continually, and yet with praises more and more I will demagnify.

Thy justice and salvation my mouth abroad shall show, even all the day, for I thereof the numbers do not know, and I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord.

Thine own righteousness, even thine, alone I will record. so we pray that the lord will will
bless his word to us all and we'll disclose with a benediction and i'll go to the door but i
can't shake your hands now may the grace mercy and peace of god the father son and
holy spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore amen