

Ready - Set - Go

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Date: 24 September 2000

Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 24th of September 2000.

The preacher is Warwick Grant. His sermon is entitled Ready, Set, Go and is from Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 to 3.

Good day everyone, how are you going? Excellent. Fiona mentioned the Towards the Goal New Testament at the start of the service.

This is a New Testament, as she reminded us, it's been put out by the Bible Society and copies of this are being distributed to all the Olympic athletes. And I've got about half a dozen copies of this. They're only about \$3.

If you'd like to buy one, just see me afterwards. Not only is it the New Testament, but it's got some great testimonies from Christian sportsmen and women from Australia and other countries. And it's a great gift for yourself or to give to a Christian friend or maybe a non-Christian friend.

[1 : 06] So see me later if you'd like to grab one of those. Well, in case you hadn't noticed, the Olympics are on.

And someone mentioned something about it to me before. So apparently they've started. And it's that time every four years when all the nations of the world or pretty much all the nations of the world get together and compete against each other.

I don't know about you, but for me, and I'm not... I like sport and my favourite sport is beach cricket, so I'm not a too sophisticated sports person. But it's a pretty emotional time.

There's a lot of... Watching the tally, it's a pretty emotionally charged time, I think you'd agree. And, you know, our nation is hosting the Games the first time for 44 years.

So we're very aware of that privilege as well. And we've also had the torch relay in the months leading up to September. We may have even seen the torch ourselves. I think even someone on the periphery of our church, David Remington, he actually carried the torch.

[2 : 11] So it's actually sort of close to home for some of us. And some of our church folk have even gone up to Sydney for the Games. But if not, we can always catch it with Bruce McEvane on Channel 7.

And there's a real sense of history, isn't there, when records are made and our old records are broken. But we're bombarded with just a huge range tweety-something sports at the Olympics, from archery to volleyball, from fencing to judo, from hammer-throwing to gymnastics.

And then there's the races, there's the swimming races, the track races. I mean, there's just so much sport coming at us. And we're only just recovering from AFL. There's the 100-metre sprint. Just think of the track races, for example. There's the 100-metre sprint. Then there's the 10,000-metre run. There's hurdles, there's relays, there's men's races, there's women's races. Which is the most important race?

Is it the 100-metre sprint? After all, I think we'd all agree that it's in that race that we determine who the fastest human being on the planet is.

[3 : 24] I remember, I think it was the Seoul Olympics, 1988, when Ben Johnson ran the 100 metres. Now, at that time, we didn't realise that he was going to be disqualified for taking drugs.

And he got a world record. This was sensational. This man had run 100 metres faster than anyone else ever had. Well, that didn't stand for long because he was disqualified for taking drugs.

But he was the fastest man on earth, so we thought, for at least a day or two. So the 100 metres, that's a pretty important race. Or perhaps it's an event a bit like the pentathlon, where an athlete needs to show their versatility over a number of different events.

Perhaps it's the marathon, not strictly a track event, but a road race that tests the runner's endurance over, I think it's, is it 40 kilometres or so? I think it's around 40 k's.

And that's held on the last day of the Olympics, traditionally. So which is the most important race? I'm sure for the athletes, if you were to interview them, they'd say, oh, my particular event, that's what's important.

[4 : 31] That's the most important thing. But in the whole scheme of things, we are just talking about a sporting race. And while we admire the discipline and the training that these athletes go through in order to become the fastest or the strongest or the highest in the world, after a few minutes their race is over and life goes on.

The Bible speaks of a much, much more important race that we can all participate in and in which we can all be winners. The prize isn't just a gold medal.

It's much better than that. And I'm not decrying the efforts and abilities of some of the sportsmen and women we've been seeing on our TV screens. I admire them immensely for their courage and their discipline.

But what is this race I talk about that the Bible talks about? Well, the Bible speaks of following Jesus as being like in a race. I thought it would be fun and helpful to see what the Bible says about running this most important race.

Let's firstly have a look at Paul's letter, Paul the Apostle. He wrote a letter to the church in a town called Philippi, the letter to the Philippians, chapter 3. And I want to look at verse 8.

[5 : 53] You can find it in those black Bibles in the seats on page 955. Page 955. You'll probably find it helpful if you had that in front of you. It's Philippians, chapter 3, and it's page 955.

I've asked Olive to read this for us, so let's follow as she reads from verse 8. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached a goal, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

[7 : 15] Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the price of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Well, the goal of an athlete, in any event, whether it's a 100 metre sprint or a marathon, is that finishing tape. That finishing line is what they strain for and go for.

That's their goal. What's your goal in life? What's your life on about? What do you want to do with your life? Where are you heading? If you're on the younger side of things, like me, you may have not thought about it very much.

Sorry, someone laughed. That wasn't me. No, if you're on the younger side of things, you're perhaps still at junior high school or things like that, you may have not thought about it very much, where your life is heading, what your goal is.

Now, I don't know what your goal is in life, but Paul the Apostle, in this letter to the Philippians, tells us his. He says that his goal is that he may gain Christ and be found in him.

[8 : 32] He says that at the end of verse 8. And he has another goal, which is pretty similar, in verses 10 and 11. He writes this, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Do you have that same goal as Paul the Apostle? Can you say like him that you really want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings?

Do you really say that with all your heart, that you really want to know Christ and know Jesus in all your heart? Now you may have worked out your life goals. You'd say, yes, I'd like to do this uni course, I'll do these subjects in VCE and I'll do this uni course and have a job of this standing and perhaps get some promotions and I'd like to do something else after that.

Do you include this goal amongst your most important goals, to know Christ and the power of his resurrection? Is it your most important goal?

Maybe it's one of your goals. Is it your most important one, to know Christ and the power of his resurrection? Notice that Paul reminds us that being a Christian is not going to be easy.

[10:02] He doesn't promise an easy road. Jesus reminded us we will have trouble in this life. Paul talks about sharing in Christ's sufferings by becoming like him in his death.

What that's saying to us is that the way of Jesus is a way of suffering. Following Jesus incurs suffering. For some people, we could even have to lose our lives for following Jesus. Some Christians in other countries, that is their life slot every day. They could lose their life for following Jesus. In Australia, we don't have that trouble of great persecution in the way that many other Christians do.

In verse 11, Paul says, If somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Now Paul in that verse isn't questioning, well, somehow I'll obtain the resurrection from the dead.

He's not questioning whether or not he will have eternal life with God in heaven. He just doesn't know how that will come to happen. He doesn't know the circumstances that will befall him. Will he die naturally as an old man?

[11:18] Will he be executed for his faith? And we believe that that's exactly what did happen. Will perhaps Jesus return in glory before he has died? Paul didn't know, he wasn't sure, but he said, somehow I will obtain the resurrection from the dead.

Let's look at verses 12 and 13. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached a goal, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

Okay, we'll go to verse 14 shortly. But Paul acknowledges in these two verses that he hasn't arrived. He's still pressing forward to this goal he's going for.

He hasn't reached the goal of verse 10. He's still pressing on. We need to be very wary of anyone who's a Christian who declares that they've arrived.

[12:25] They've arrived as a Christian. They're complete. They're deceiving themselves. None of us have. We're still going towards that goal of knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.

When Paul wrote this verse, he'd been a follower of Jesus for about 30 years. But he's still yearning to know more of Christ and the power of his resurrection. He's still going for that goal.

I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. The expression, Christ Jesus has made me his own is perhaps better translated that Christ Jesus has seized me and taken possession of me.

Many of you will know that Paul, his name was previously written in the Bible as Saul, had been a zealous Jewish leader and he'd travelled even as far as a city called Damascus to get Christians and to persecute them, throw them into jail and some of them probably died for their faith and he was rounding them up and getting them persecuted.

In Acts chapter 8 we read that Paul was an approving witness at the martyrdom of a guy called Stephen, the first Christian martyr who died for trusting in Jesus and Paul was there witnessing that martyring of Stephen and he approved of what was happening.

[13:54] That's in Acts chapter 8 and in Acts chapter 9 we read about how Paul was seized by Jesus in a miraculous way and changed to become a follower of Christ.

Jesus had seized him and made Paul his own and Paul said in return he wanted to make Christ and knowing him his goal.

Friends, let me ask you, have you let Jesus seize you and take hold of you? Have you begun to experience the power of his resurrection in your own life as well as the sharing of his sufferings? If you're a Christian let me ask you, are you single minded about this goal or are you obsessed with other goals? Paul makes this point again in verses 13 and 14.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own but this one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the price of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

[15:12] This one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I wonder if you're the sort of person who's very conscious of your past sins.

I know I am and I'm sure Paul was. Before he was a Christian as I said he'd been on the hunt for Christians to track them down and to persecute them. He had a heap of things to repent of but he put all these past sins behind him as done with and settled.

Not to say he'd had some memory loss he couldn't remember what he'd done when he says forgetting what's behind he's aware of these bad things he did but he knows that Jesus has died for his sins taken the punishment on the cross for his sins.

Those bad things he did are done with and settled as far as God is concerned. His sins are paid for completely. What about us? Are we just so conscious of our past sins?

Are we burdened and riddled with guilt? God promises if we confess our sins to him he is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all our sins.

[16:24] That's in 1 John 1 verse 9. If the God of the whole universe that's made those galaxies and planets and stars we see has forgiven you don't presume to be superior to him and not forgive yourself.

The God of the whole universe has forgiven you you must find it within yourself to forgive yourself for the wrong things you've done. If we don't we're putting ourselves in a position superior to God. I don't think any of us would want to do that. If he forgave you you'd better forgive yourself and forget what lies behind and press on to what is ahead. the expression straining forward to what lies ahead is sort of like a runner going for the tape that last couple of metres where they're putting their head out just in case the next runner gets there before them just pushing their whole body ahead to try and get to that tape first.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Well the winner of the races in ancient Greece received a wreath of leaves and maybe a cash reward.

The Olympic Games the ancient Olympic Games were held and there were also other games called the Isthmian Games and they were held every two years I think. But this wreath of leaves that would just wither and be destroyed and just be useless and be thrown out.

[17:53] The Christian however receives a reward of everlasting glory in heaven with Jesus forever. Those who accept what Jesus has done have this fantastic promise.

We're forgiven we're with God forever. As John says in his first letter Whoever has the Son has life Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

The prize which is won in the Olympics for the first person is a gold medal and that's a pretty good prize and it honours the person for their achievement but the heavenly prize is much better than that.

Eternity with God and his forgiveness. That's the prize that awaits everyone who trusts in Jesus. Everyone is a winner. Everyone gets the prize.

Now as I said before being a Christian isn't always easy. It requires discipline. We're all tainted by sin. We all are tempted and succumb sometimes to temptation to do the wrong thing.

[19:02] But we have God's forgiveness to liberate us and free us so we can go ahead again. Being a Christian requires discipline like an athlete in training.

I met a girl who's probably in about year eight or nine at Doncaster Secondary College now and she's really serious about swimming. She is in the water training three or four times a week at 6am during school time.

Now I don't know what you're doing at 6am. I'm snoring normally. But this girl is so serious about her commitment to swimming that she's in the water three or four times a week at six o'clock in the morning.

Being a Christian is a discipline. We need to discipline ourselves to pray and talk with God, to read the Bible, his special book to us, the special way he reveals himself to us, to enjoy the fellowship of other Christians, to let them encourage us and us encourage them, to worship God together as we're doing tonight in church.

And also we need to be witnesses to him and for him to our non-Christian friends and neighbours, sensitively speaking about the great love that he's given us to these friends that don't know him.

[20:16] I just want to look at before we finish another reading from the letter to the Hebrews and this is on page 978 and it's just the first three verses of chapter 12.

Page 978 and it's the first three verses of chapter 12. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of weaknesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. Chapter 11 of this letter talks about a whole lot of heroes, if you like, from the Bible who show their faith in God.

It's a great chapter to read, chapter 11, and we haven't got time to go through it now. And the writer of this next chapter begins by saying, therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, and these witnesses are not so much in the stands observing us running our Christian race, but they're more like examples for us to follow.

And the writer exhorts us to lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely. One of the funniest things I have ever seen was when I was driving over the Westgate Bridge.

[22 : 13] There was a motorcyclist who was in the lane next to me, and I don't know how this happened, but he was not quite covered, but he was quite dangerous, I suppose, tangled up in audio cassette tape.

Now, you probably think this is another one of my silly stories, but this is a true incident, and he was tangled up in this cassette tape, and he was riding his bikes, and he was taking it in good humour, even though it was quite dangerous, trying to get this cassette tape off.

He was doing this as best he could and driving along the Westgate Bridge. And looking at this verse, it's true, okay, it's true, believe me, okay, it really happened, I'm not making it up, okay.

And I just saw this verse, and it reminded me, this incident, of the sin that clings so closely. This guy had this tape, get this stupid tape off him. And it does cling so closely, doesn't it?

Don't we find that we have sins that burden us and drag us down, and we get tangled up, and we get untangled, and then the next minute we're tangled up in it again, and we constantly have to go before God and say, God, I'm mucked up again, please forgive me, and we receive God's forgiveness, and it liberates us to keep going, and then we fall again and get tangled up again, and on it goes.

[23 : 23] Life's like that as a Christian. But it just reminded me that this sin does tangle us up, and we can constantly go before God with it and start again afresh. We need to run with perseverance, it says in verse 1, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

In verse 3, it reminds us to consider him who endured such hostility himself from sinners, so that as you run this race, and they're my words, you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Jesus says in Matthew chapter 10, verse 22, But the one who endures to the end will be saved. The one who endures to the end will be saved.

Just enduring the Christian life is succeeding in it. Steve Monagheti on Sunday next, when he runs that marathon representing Australia, if he just endures, I think, running 40 kilometres, he'll be a victor, even if he doesn't come first.

Running for God is the most important race. And let me just repeat what Fiona said as she quoted Angela Harris from her introduction to the service.

[24 : 46] Angela Harris, the Olympic swimmer says, and she's quoting the Apostle Paul from 2 Timothy, I have fought well, I have finished the race, and I have been faithful.

Is that a prayer that you could say to God, that you fought well, you've finished his race, and you've been faithful? He who endures to the end will be saved.

? Yes.

You