

The Way To Keep Going

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Date: 25 October 2023

[0 : 00] 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. On Sunday we were looking at that passage where we were reminded because of the incredible lawlessness of the times, that the love of many would grow cold. It was a very sad statement. But then side by side with that, Jesus went on to say that those who endured, those who kept going, those who persevered, the same, these would be saved. So it's following on from that, that wants to look at these as well known words. We're looking more at the manner of running this race.

This is the way we continue, the way we persevere, the way we endure. And we're told very simply what we are to do here. Now, in the previous chapter, the apostle lists this great, as it were, catalogue of men and women of faith. And that's what set them apart. There were men and women who had their flaws and faults. They had their doubts and their fears. But they are in that chapter for one thing, and that is their faith in God. It was by faith that they did what they did. And that's why they are recorded in that chapter. And they are there as an encouragement to us, because it is by faith that we live as well. It's by faith we're here tonight. It's by faith we do what we do. And I know that there are times that we examine ourselves, which we're told to do, and very often we're afraid that we're not doing what we do by faith. But so much of it, it's almost has become natural, and it is of faith. Coming here tonight is an act of faith. You've come here to worship God. And that is an act of faith.

Because thousands don't, thousands don't want to, but you do. And so it's faith that has taken you here. Now some people say that they have faith. But if you delve a wee bit further down, it's not faith in God. It might be faith in themselves, faith that it's little more than positive thinking. Or some people have faith in the church as an institution. Or they have faith in a system, or they have faith in different things. But the Christian is somebody who has faith in the living and through God. And this faith will bring us into places where we are tested and we're tried.

This faith will bring us into situations where every prop and every comfort and every support sometimes is taken from us. And we're left alone with God. There's nowhere else we can turn. There's no one else we can look to. Every human support is taken away. And there are times in our experience where we're saying, well, if God doesn't intervene, if God doesn't help, then there's nothing else for me.

Now, quite often we quote, and rightly so, the verse, we walk by faith, not by sight. And we can say that glibly. But it's only by grace that we can really walk by faith. And of course, faith comes. It is by grace you are saved through faith.

[3 : 53] That not of your shelves. And so the Lord takes us into these places. And we've all been there in different ways, at different levels, where our faith has been tried and tested. And God does that deliberately.

Not for him to discover that we have faith, but very often for us ourselves to discover. But through these testings and trials, our faith develops and grows. We become stronger Christians as a result of it.

And so we're to look to Jesus. And that's what the apostle is doing here, is encouraging the Christians. Christians. And you will find that as you go through the New Testament, all the different writers, although sometimes they're writing to instruct, sometimes they're writing to rebuke, sometimes to challenge. But you'll find all the gospel, all the epistle writers, at some point or another, are encouraging those that they are writing to.

And that's an important part of our Christian life, that we seek to encourage one another. That we live in a world that is so opposed to Christianity. We live in a difficult world. So let us make sure that as Christians, we don't knock each other down, but that we seek to build one another up.

And we can do it by, very simply, by sharing something we've read, which has meant something to you. It's often good when you meet another Christian, you share and you say, well, you know, I was reading this morning and I'd never seen it like this before.

[5 : 30] And you can share that or an answer to prayer or there's so many things. And when you do that, a growing bond develops between you and the other person.

And this is part of the way that our fellowship and our friendship in the gospel develops by sharing and seeking to encourage one another along the way. And so the apostle is telling us that the Christian life is likened to a race.

Again, Paul tells us that in Corinthians and he uses the example of how human athletes will train and they will deny themselves many things in order to get an earthly crown, a temporary crown. But that we are running a race in order to gain the heavenly crown. And there's various examples given in scripture. Now, this race begins the moment that we're converted.

The moment that we come to faith, we begin to run this race and we continue to run it every single day until we draw our last human breath.

[6 : 34] And we are then taken into the presence of the Lamb. Our race here is over. Paul elsewhere, he says, I have run the race. He talks about finishing the course that has been set before him.

He knew the end was coming. And the days of our running, the race will come to an end for each and every one of us. And we also notice here that this is not a random race.

It's not a race that's just sort of thrown together. It's a race that is set before us. It's a definite race. It's a race that's just sort of race.

It's a race that has been set for you by the Lord. And we notice that it's a race. It's not a jog. It's a race.

A jog is something that you, if you go out, if you go out for a jog, I don't know how many of you still do that. Maybe some of you do. I used to. I don't do now.

[8 : 06] But if you go out for a jog, you set the pace. And you're in control of how far you want to run, how fast you want to run. You're in control of whether you want to stop, take a breather, or just say that's enough and head back.

But this is not like that. This is an actual race. And a race is something totally different. It's a race that involves every aspect of our being.

It is a race that will exhaust us and tire us. But the rewards in this race are beyond anything that we can even begin to imagine. The Bible talks of a weight of glory, a crown of glory.

It talks about the most wonderful things that lie ahead. And although there are times that we feel overwhelmed and times that we feel we're being sucked under, we see that the Lord won't let us go. Now, we're told here how to run the race. Very simply, we're told, first of all, to lay aside every weight. That's the first thing. And then we're told the second thing, and the sin which clings so closely.

[9 : 16] So there's these two aspects, first of all. Let us lay aside every weight. And many people think that by the weight here is not something that is necessarily sinful in itself.

That it might be something that's completely right and legitimate. And yet it's something that is holding us back. It is something that is taking up maybe too much time in our lives.

Something that's hindering our running. Something that we have to look at and say, well, maybe it simply means to moderate what we're doing.

Say, for instance, it's a hobby and you find that you're giving so much time to it. And you're saying to yourself, when you look at it honestly and say, well, this is actually coming in the way. This is something that I have to give less time to.

But we've got to look at our lives and look at all the things. Things, as I say, that can be quite right and legitimate in themselves. But they are things that are affecting our Christianity.

[10 : 17] Affecting our zeal. Affecting our spirituality. And then it says that we are to not only to lay aside every weight.

But the sin which clings so closely. And this elsewhere, it says the sin that easily besets us. Now, we all have, we're all individual.

We all have our own particular makeup. And we're, I'm sure, every single one of us are more prone to certain sins than to others.

We have different weaknesses. My word, Satan knows our weaknesses. He knows where to get us. He knows the points that are most likely, the most vulnerable points, where we're most easily tempted.

And so we've got to, we've got to be ruthless. We've got to examine ourselves. And we've got to be, this requires often almost a brutality about it.

[11 : 22] Where we're having to, if we're serious about our walk with the Lord, our run with the Lord, then we have to deal with these things. And when you go through the Bible and you'll see a lot of the characters, you'll see that there were different characters.

There were different areas of their lives. It's that they were more prone to sin. Taking David as an example, David is a man, an exemplary, God-fearing man.

He was a man whose whole life, by and large, was lived to the glory of God. And the glory of God was uppermost in his thinking, in his writing, in his life. But it's very obvious when you look at the life of David that his weakness was women.

Not simply our love for women or our friendship with women, but our lust for women. And the most dangerous time is when Satan will tempt and where there's desire and there's opportunity.

These three is the perfect storm of desire, temptation and opportunity. It's what exactly happened in David's life. There was the desire, the temptation and the opportunity with Bathsheba.

[12 : 34] And we know of how the aftermath of that and the grief, and we have the psalms that came as a result of that. But you see, there are weaknesses.

And again, it's in the line. Solomon, it was exactly the same. The Lord had said with regard to that they weren't to multiply wives. And Solomon did that.

And it's very interesting that Solomon, more so even than David, in 2 Kings it tells us, Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh.

And there's a list of things. And then it says, Solomon clung to those in love.

He had 700 wives, princesses and 300 concubines. And then I have a really sad word. And his wives turned away his heart.

[13 : 41] For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods. And his heart was not holly through to the Lord, his God.

It wasn't that Solomon had stopped worshipping the Lord. Solomon was still involved in all that was called upon. And Solomon had been a great servant of the Lord.

But this was a sin which so easily beset him. And he was living in disobedience to the Lord. And the further he went over the edge, the worse it got.

And the result was what God said would happen. Your heart would be turned away from the Lord.

And that's exactly what happened. So sad in the latter part of Solomon's life.

And so this sin which so easily besets us is dangerous. Dangerous for you and it's dangerous for me. And it hinders and it hampers our running, this race that is set before us.

[14 : 44] Paul tells us not to be entangled again with the sins that we've been delivered from. And so if we don't lay aside, then it's like trying to run a race.

When you look at athletics, when you look at, say, for instance, the Olympic Games today, and you look whether it's in the field of athletics or you go to the pool where all the swimming and diving takes place or whether it's on the cycling tracks, everything is so streamlined.

And it's made so that every athlete in whatever field they're going, the clothing, whatever they wear, the bikes, everything is geared for maximum efficiency.

Nothing to come in the way. And it would be like going to run at a race like that and all the other athletes have all the proper gear and you come with long flowing robes and all sort of things.

There's no point even competing because you'd be entangled with them. That's what Paul is saying. It's like trying to run a race with all kinds of loose clothing flapping all over and you're getting entangled.

[15 : 57] So that's the first, the main thing that, well, it's not the main thing. It's one of the things he tells us. But the key to running this race, and very, very, very briefly, is looking to Jesus.

Let us run with endurance. That is, keep going. This race, it's a marathon. It's not a sprint. Let us run with endurance. The race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

That's what it is. The founder and the perfecter of our faith. He found us in the first place. He's the one who found us and found our faith.

It's in him and through him alone. And we run this race looking to him. We wouldn't be running the race if we weren't looking to him.

As we sang in Psalm 34, they look to him and lightened where. And when his light came into our heart, it opened up a new world.

[17:01] And it opened up a running track, a race track in front of us that finishes in glory. And we're running, looking to him. If we're taking our eyes off, we're in trouble.

And the great example which we use over and over again, but it is so biblical, it is so correct, is Peter walking on the water. Remember, how did Peter walk on the water?

Looking to Jesus. He heard the voice of Jesus. He went over the side and he fixed his eyes on Jesus. And as he did that, he walked. And then it tells us when he heard and when he saw.

When he heard the roar of the wind and when he saw the surge of the sea, what happened? He began to sink. And so it will be for you and for me. If we take our eyes off Jesus and we see the pull of the world and hear the noise of the world and get pulled by it, we'll begin to sink too.

So it's imperative that our eyes are fixed upon Jesus. And when our eyes are fixed upon Jesus, it will help us deal with the weights. It will help us deal with the sin.

[18:07] It will help us. This is the key to running. And when we look at him, we see the one who endured. For our sakes, remember, he ran a race.

He ran the race that the Father gave him. He ran it with perfect obedience. And he finished the course for the Father and for us. That's the wonder of it.

And you remember how when you look at Jesus, he was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He suffered. He endured. He went through everything for us.

He is the founder, as we say, and the perfecter of our faith. So let us all ask the Lord to help us to run, to run this race that is set before us.

I'm conscious of the time because there is a wake tonight following on from the meeting. So let us conclude with a word of prayer.

[19:06] O Lord, our God, we pray to bless us.