

Run the Race

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[0 : 00] Well, our theme for this morning is running the race. And it's about long distance, hardcore, endurance running. The Christian life is like a marathon.

The way is hard. It requires tremendous discipline, focus, and commitment. The goal, the prize, is seeing the Lord. So if we just kept reading and read more of the context, glance down to verse 14. A couple of paragraphs beyond the verses that we're focusing on. Verse 14, the preacher says, Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

So that's the goal, seeing the Lord. Now, it may come as a surprise to many of you to hear that, in fact, I am not an expert in endurance running. I mean, how does he keep so trim?

But nonetheless, my mother's policy was never to run, except if we were running late to church. So we ran once a week. And I didn't quite inherit that attitude, but something close.

[1 : 02] I know nothing about running, but I'm going to give you some advice about running from this passage. Okay. And we're just going to walk through it. Now, the first thing you need to know about running is it really helps to have supporters.

It helps to have supporters. And that's exactly what the author of Hebrews describes in verse 1. He says we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. In other words, we're meant to imagine a vast and mighty host of people.

This word is used of kind of hordes of locusts and things like that. You know, a massive cloud of people cheering us on. Imagine a stadium full of people like we're going to see, I guess, at the Olympics.

And all the people in the stadium have already been listed for us back in chapter 11. That's what chapter 11 is sort of about, these faces in the crowd. People like Abel, he's cheering us on. People like Jephthah. Chapter 11 is all these Old Testament heroes of the faith who have run the race before us and now surround us in this cloud, cheering us on.

[2 : 08] Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses. They're all witnesses surrounding us. And what they're witnessing to, of course, is God's faithfulness, that God is worth trusting by their faith.

They witness to God's faithfulness, that he is worth clinging to through thick and thin, that his promises are sure, that hoping in him will not disappoint us, that we should press on in faith. So the first thing you need to know if you want to run well through the Christian life, if you want to make it to the goal of seeing the Lord and enjoying him forever, is pay attention to the crowd. Listen to the voice of the witnesses roaring you on.

Hear the voices of the faithful. Abraham says, Press on to the city whose designer and builder is God. And that's chapter 11, verse 10. Press on to the heavenly country, verse 16.

Moses says, I would rather bear the reproach of Christ and enjoy all the treasures of Egypt. For I know that God has greater treasures waiting for me. That's chapter 11, verse 26.

[3 : 09] Rahab says, My whole city was utterly destroyed. My family and I were the only survivors because we trusted in the Lord and joined ourselves to his people. That's chapter 11, verse 31.

Press on. Wisdom is to join yourself to the Lord. So listen to the witnesses of the faithful. The second thing you need to know about running, though, is that it's important to be wearing the right gear. Yeah?

You've got to get your active wear on. It's got to be streamlined. It's got to be flexible. You don't want anything too heavy or restrictive. You've got to be able to run unencumbered.

Right? If you're going to run a marathon, you want to run free. Nothing that's going to weigh you down or trip you up. So verse 1 says, Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

Now, notice there are two things that you're to lay aside. There are two things in this verse that could slow you down or trip you up. There's sin which clings to us, entangles us. And I guess that's to be expected.

[4 : 11] We'll come to that. There's no surprise, is it, that sin is not going to help in the Christian race. Again, just thinking about verse 14, we need to strive for holiness if we're going to see the Lord.

But notice there are also other weights. Weights and sins. There are other weights that we need to lay aside that are not sin. They're just sort of neutral things.

Perhaps even good things that can slow us down or hinder us from reaching our goal. And because I think this is slightly more surprising for us, let's just have a think about this for a minute.

Are there things in your life that might actually be a burden to your Christian life that really you need to let go of and lay aside, even though they might be perfectly good things or neutral things, they're not sins.

things that are sapping your energy, occupying your time, captivating your heart, stealing your money from God.

[5 : 15] For instance, that big house you own or co-own with the bank. Is that really necessary? And is it helping you to run the Christian life?

Or is it actually distracting you from running straight with Jesus, like a millstone around your neck? It's taking all your time and energy and money just to keep up with the payments. You don't have anything left to serve the Lord, to love your neighbor, your daily devotions, whatever it is.

I mention wealth because, remember, Jesus in the parable of the sower talks about the seed that was sown among the thorns. And it's a different image, but he's getting at the same thing, isn't he? This is Mark chapter 4. He says, The seed that's sown among the thorns, they are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

The desire for other things, it seems so bland, and yet Jesus says it can choke our faith. There's nothing really intrinsically bad about the world or riches or other things, but Jesus says cares of the world, like worldly concerns, the deceitfulness of riches, the way riches can trick us, and the desire, just the desire for other things.

[6 : 45] They can all choke our Christian faith. They can keep it weak and stunted and shriveled. You know, you're not getting enough oxygen to the blood when you're in this race if you're being choked. Not to mention how our wealth pulls on our heartstrings, doesn't it?

So again, to quote from the Lord Jesus, remember in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust, uh, rust, where moth, that was harder to say than I thought, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Don't invest in earthly things, that's what he's saying. And friends, I hate to state the obvious, but if your treasure is vulnerable to a moth, it's not a very smart investment.

Why are we so obsessed with things that we know won't last? Jim Elliot, the famous missionary and martyr, hits the nail on the head, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.

And that is smart investing, you see, that's what he's talking about. But do you remember the rich young ruler Jesus met, in Mark chapter 10? Such a good man he was, Jesus asked him, whether he'd kept the ten commandments, he said, teacher, all these I've kept from my youth, and Jesus didn't correct him.

[8 : 15] Jesus looking at him, loved him, and said to him, you lack one thing, go sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me.

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

What a tragic encounter, you see. When you accumulate for yourselves, treasures on earth, your heart begins to gravitate, to these earthly things, your treasures like heavy weight, keep tugging, vying for your attention, pulling your eyes down to earth.

I don't have time for evangelism, I've got to invest in higher, and higher education, I don't have time for prayer, I've got properties to look after, I don't have time for Bible reading, and meditation, I've got games to play, concerts to go to, places to see, holidays and health spas, and endless

trivialities.

Jesus says, don't be so ridiculous, don't be so foolish, and it's not because these things are bad, you see, but because they're unimportant. Come follow me, and you will have treasure in heaven. These things, are like weights, on our Christian life, and we need to divest ourselves of them. The rich young ruler wouldn't even start the race, because he couldn't give up his wealth.

[9 : 30] Other people who do get started, often have the word of God choked out of their lives, because they refuse to cut loose these weights, or clear away the thorns. Dear friends, nothing is so good, or so important, that it can be allowed, to slow us down, as we strive towards seeing the Lord, fighting for holiness, enjoying him forever.

I have picked on wealth, because it's sort of pervasive in the scriptures, that this will be a stumbling block for us. But it might be other things for you, it might be your job, that you're addicted to. You love the status that comes with it, the sense of importance, lay it aside. Go and work at Coles. It might be your hobbies. For me, I think about the many, many hours I waste, watching YouTube, mindless entertainment, just YouTube clips, podcasts, Netflix, playing computer games.

For some reason, I'm trying to conquer civilizations, that are really just pixels. And, I don't know what it is, but there is this psychological silliness, about it as well. Where the more time, and money you've put into something, the more time you feel, that you owe it.

Is that the sunk cost fallacy, or something like that? It's a kind of a weird feeling, now that I've invested so much, in this trivial pursuit, now that I'm paying for this subscription, I feel like it would be, even more of a waste, if I didn't waste my time on it.

[11 : 03] I'm quite sure that logic is flawed, but there you have it, that's what's going on in my head. So brothers and sisters, we need to act decisively, and lay aside these things, if they are not going to keep us, from running the race, with a singular focus, with a pure devotion.

Striving forward, towards my heavenly goal, constantly I guess, battling and cutting off these weights. Okay, but secondly notice, also we are to lay aside sin. Sin that clings so closely. Now this could mean, laying aside, some particular, besetting sin. Right, here people talk about, besetting sins. These kinds of sins, that particularly, easily entangle us.

So for instance, you might say, the besetting sin of our age, is materialism. Or the besetting sin, of the professional, is arrogance. Or the besetting sin, of the young man, is his hot temper, or his lust. The besetting sin, of the old man, is his grumpiness. You get the idea. These kinds of, classic things, that trip us up, at different stages, or depending on who we are. It could be saying, lay aside those sins.

[12 : 13] Lay aside those sins, that we are particularly, prone to, vulnerable to. Make sure you get rid of them. I suspect more likely though, it's just a more general, statement about sin. Not about the nature of sin.

That this is what sin is like. It, it clings to us. It entangles us. Literally, it kind of puts around us well. Okay, or it, it wraps around us, so easily.

And once it gets on, it's hard to get rid of. It sticks to us. Its grip, on us, seems to just get stronger, and stronger. We become like flies, wriggling in a spider's web.

The sin in our lives, entangles us, until death, devours us. So lay aside, every sin. As soon as you spot it, get rid of it.

Get it off you. Or it'll start to tighten, and tighten, and tighten. Now you see the image, we're being given here then. Burden down with weights, and tied up hand and foot.

[13 : 11] Not even one of those, super athlete, born to run, cross country champions, could finish a marathon, in this condition. If we're going to make it, to the end of the race, the first thing we need to do, is to strip down, into our running gear.

We need to throw away, every weight we're carrying. We need to cut ourselves free of sin, which easily entangles us. Do you want to finish this race, or not? And then, let us run.

Okay, now this is the main verb, at the heart of the passage. Let us run. Not meander. Right? Not jogging. We're running, we're striving, with some urgency, with dedication. But this is not a sprint. No flash in the pan, one hit wonders, we'll make it. It's not merely about, kind of bubbly, enthusiasm, or temporary exuberance. Right? Which is probably how, all of my runs start.

Right? No, you've got to get your head, in the game. Okay? To go more than 100 meters. This is a marathon. So let us run. And then, with endurance, the course set before us.

[14 : 18] The course set before us. Let's talk about the course. Perhaps, for some of us here, we'll be running, for the next 60 or 70 years. And that's a lot of running, isn't it?

Over the course of your life. And I know some of us, have already been at it, that long. It takes endurance, doesn't it? And our aim, brothers and sisters, is to make sure, that we're firing, on all cylinders, even when we hit the tape.

Now in any, long race, there'll be moments, on the downhill. Cruisy moments, easy, easy tracks. But what about, those off-road, uphill, dark, and difficult moments?

There are going to be, some of those along the way too, aren't there? There are going to be, moments of persecution, where you'll be tempted, to give up. There are going to be, moments of seduction, where you'll be tempted, to give in.

You know, marathon runners, talk about, breaking through, the pain barrier. Or that feeling, that you've, you've hit a wall. But you know, in your Christian life, sometimes, it's going to feel like that too.

[15 : 25] And maybe you'll feel like, you can't go on. It's too hard, it hurts too much. Friends, in those moments, endurance is about, putting one foot, in front of another.

It doesn't have to look good. But we don't expect, the Christian life, to be a walk in the park, do we? Sometimes, you've just got to, grit your teeth.

It's going to be, ugly, sweaty, and you've just got to keep going. That's certainly, how it was, for the original hearers, of this letter. Just flick back, to chapter 10, with me for a moment.

Check out verse 32. Our preacher says, but recall the former days, when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle, with sufferings.

Sometimes being publicly exposed, to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners, with those so treated. For you had compassion, on those in prison. And you joyfully accepted, the plundering of your property, since you knew, that you yourselves, had a better possession, and an abiding one.

[16 : 30] Therefore, do not throw away, your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need, of endurance, so that when you have done, the will of God, you may receive, what is promised.

For yet a little while, and the coming one will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one, shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not, of those who shrink back, and are destroyed, but of those who have faith, and preserve their souls.

Friends, lots of people start, but not everyone finishes. We have need, of endurance. Do not throw away, your confidence. You have a great reward, coming. But we mustn't shrink back.

We need to keep going, and we will receive, what is promised. Well, how are we going to make it, to the end, and make sure that we finish?

How are we going to make sure, we go the distance? The next thing the Hebrew, the author of the Hebrews, tells us, is that we need to focus, on Jesus. So, the cloud is kind of, behind us, and around us, as it were, shouting in our ears, but Jesus, is in front of us, and we are to keep our eyes, transfixed on him.

[17 : 44] This is not a case, of looking inside yourself, to find the strength, that you need. Or thinking like Nike, that you can just do it, or something.

No, you are looking to him, for your strength. You look to him, as your inspiration, and example. He is, 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, six quick things then, to focus on, about Jesus. First of all, he is the founder, of our faith. That is, he is the author, the source. Some translations, go with pioneer.

I think there are, at least two aspects, to this description. First of all, of course, he is the founder, of our faith, in the sense that, without him, and without his, high priestly work, for us, there could be, no Christian faith.

There could be, no Christian faith. God's promises, would be null and void. We would have, no way of knowing God, or calling upon him, etc. So, he is the founder, in that sense. But, he is also the founder, and pioneer, probably captures this, quite well.

[18 : 54] He is the founder, in the sense, that he was a man, who put his faith, in God, throughout his life, and particularly, in his death, and resurrection, he is the example, for us, of faith.

So, having come to the, sort of, end of the list, of heroes, in chapter 11, you see, Jesus is the ultimate, hero of the faith, which we strive, to emulate. And secondly, Jesus is also, described here, as the perfecter, of our faith.

Right? So, he is the completer, the finisher. And once again, I take it, there are two aspects, to this. One external, and one internal, if you like. On the one hand, Jesus is the perfecter, of our faith, in the sense that, one day, he will return, to complete, our faith.

He will return, kind of, to fully accomplish, our salvation, his work of saving us. There is a sense, in which he hasn't, finished his work yet, has he? We're still waiting, for him to come back, and perfect, the kingdom.

And this passage, is assuring us, that he will certainly, do that. But secondly, I take it, that Jesus perfects, our faith, in that, he is the one, who will nourish, and sustain our faith, in our hearts.

[20 : 02] He will bring, us to maturity. He will perfect us, bring us to our goal. Our faith, will be perfected, through Christ, so that we will not, fail to reach, the inheritance, that we're looking forward to.

Third, notice why Christ suffered. It was for the joy, set before him. For the joy, that's what kept him going. Think of the athlete again, who endures the agony, of the race, to win the prize.

The crown of glory, that awaits. Jesus endured, because he had his eyes, fixed on the pure elation, of eternity, set before him. He had his eyes, fixed on the heavenly seat, we're going to come to in a minute.

And we have a prize, set before us too. Remember again, that's what the original readers, were reminded of, back in chapter 10. They joyfully accepted, the plundering of their property, knowing that they had, a better possession, and an abiding one, to look forward to.

So whatever property, you lose, remember you have, better possessions, waiting for you. Whatever thirst you endure, when you hit the tape, you will be satisfied. If your community, rejects, you, remember you will belong, to the heavenly city.

[21 : 16] It's worth it. You will stroll, through streets of gold, with Abel, and Abraham, and all of us. We have a prize, set before us. Brothers and sisters, keep going, for the joy, that is soon to be yours.

And then fourthly, consider, what Christ endured, the cross. The cross, was an instrument, of immense torture, and barbarity. Jesus would have been, in excruciating physical pain.

But actually, when the cross is talked about, in the New Testament, the main thing, that's emphasized, is shame. And the cross, is primarily about shame.

It's the symbol, of humiliation, of social rejection. Jesus was hung up, bloodied, battered, and bruised, naked, and exposed to the public. So that people, who walked past, could scoff at him, and pile on, a kind of barrage, of mockery.

The passers-by, rejected him. He was despised, and rejected by men. And we too, before we enter, into eternal joy, must endure shame, and disgrace.

[22 : 26] Just flick over the page with me, to Hebrews chapter 13, for a moment. Verse 12. So Jesus also suffered, outside the gate, in order to sanctify the people, through his own blood.

Therefore, let us go to him, outside the camp, and bear the reproach, he endured. For here, we have no lasting city, but we seek the city, that is to come.

You see, when Jesus suffered, he suffered, outside the gate, as an outcast. He bore shame, and disgrace. He was rejected by men, we all know this.

But the challenge, of Hebrews chapter 13, verse 13, is that Christians too, are commanded, to go outside the camp, bearing his disgrace, with him. You know, are we going to be like Peter, sort of denying, that we know him?

Or are we going to go, outside the camp, where he is? We don't have, an enduring city here.

Instead, we seek the one to come. In other words, friends, we ought to accept, and even embrace, deliberately embrace, community rejection, since it testifies, to the fact, that we belong, to a different community, a heavenly one.

[23 : 49] And only those, who have left the city, that is, who have been redeemed, out of the city, and gone outside the gate, to the Lord Jesus, will survive, the downfall of the city, when Jesus returns, in judgment.

See, we do not have, an enduring city here. If we're going to run, this race properly, to the end, if we're going to endure, we need to look, to the Lord Jesus, who endured, the shame of the cross,

and who calls us, to come to him, and bear his disgrace, with him.

All right, back to chapter 12. What did Jesus, think of the shame? He despised it. That is, he thought nothing of it. He considered it, not important enough, to be of concern.

They despised him, they thought nothing of him. He disregarded their scorn. One commentator writes, they were not worthy, of being taken into account, when it was a question, of his obedience, to the will of God.

God, I'm reminded of, Romans chapter 8, Paul says, I consider the sufferings, of this present time, not worth comparing, with the glory, that is to be revealed to us.

[24 : 56] You see, it's just not in the same league. The shame, and disgrace, and the pain, that we bear now, it's just not even worth, considering giving up, to avoid that kind of, small, petty, affliction, when you consider, the great weight, of glory, that we would be missing out on.

The spectacular prize, that awaits us. And so finally, we see, Jesus was exalted, and he sat down. Finally, he received the joy, he had longed for, the glorious future, that had sustained him, when he sat down, at the right hand, of the throne of God.

He'd been running, of course, for so long, he'd been running, and finally, he gets to sit down. And this might sound strange, but the Greek verb there, for sitting down, is particularly emphatic.

This is the climactic event, in the passage. And of course, it's because, of the seat, that Jesus sat down upon. This was not just, any seat. At the end of his race, Jesus sat down, on a throne.

At the right hand, of the throne of God. The seat of power. The seat of honor. The seat of glory.

Much of Hebrews, has been an exposition, of Psalm 110, verse 1.

[26 : 10] A Psalm of David, where, David says, the Lord says, to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies, your footstool.

Right, so in Psalm 110, David is telling us, of a conversation, he's sort of, overheard, between, his Lord, that is the coming Messiah, and, the Lord, which is capital, L-O-R-D, Yahweh, meaning God.

So, and in this conversation, David hears, God, say to the Messiah, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies, your footstool. Well, you see, in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2, we are meant to understand, that Jesus, the descendant of David, the crucified, rejected, despised, Jesus of Nazareth, is actually, the promised Messiah, the Messiah, David looked forward to.

David's, Lord. And now, he has sat down, at God's right hand, he has been enthroned, above all things. He is watching, as God brings his enemies, into submission.

Here is the joy, that was set before him, for which he endured, shame and death. It is the prize, that came to him, at the end of his race. And for us, of course, his exaltation, is the guarantee, of his powerful help, for us, as we run our race.

[27 : 38] And also, it is the hope, that we look forward, to ourselves, that one day, we will see him, face to face, on his throne, and we will reign, with him. Jesus is the first, among many brothers, the new humanity, that all of his followers, are destined to be.

So, brothers and sisters, let me wrap up, this morning. I know we've only covered, a couple of verses, but there's a fair bit, in there, isn't there? The punchline is this, let us run.

Let us run. The Christian life, is a marathon. There's no promises, that it will be easy, in fact, just the opposite. We are promised, the opposite. But the prize, is worth it.

So run, with endurance, with the great cloud, of witnesses, surrounding us. Listen to the voices, of the crowd. Lay aside, every weight, even those things, in your life, that are not bad things, but that are keeping you, from running, with wholehearted, and pure devotion, towards glory.

And lay aside, sin, which so easily, entangles us. We've got to be, cutthroat about this, brothers and sisters, if you don't be, killing sin, sin will be, killing you.

[28 : 57] And whatever you do, keep looking to Jesus, 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.

Let's pray. loving father, write your words, upon our hearts, this morning, give us strength, and courage, to run the race, to act decisively, and wisely, to run with endurance, fill us with encouragement, and hope, as we listen, to the voices, of the faithful, and keep looking, to Jesus, for help, and inspiration, for we ask all these things, in Jesus name.

Amen.