

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Run for Your Life**

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-4

Code: 1635

We're coming to Hebrews chapter 12 tonight in our study, and I encourage you, if you would, to turn to that chapter. We're going to be looking at it for a time together. Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 through 3, really, and 4 just kind of touching the last two verses. The Holy Spirit apparently was well aware of the fact that good teaching, teaching where there is learning going on, boils down to effective use of figures of speech. We need to have illustrations and figures of speech to help us understand what somebody's communicating; and so in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit very frequently makes use of multiple figures of speech; and, in particular, there are many, many of them incorporated into the subject of the Christian life.

For example, the Christian life is pictured as warfare in 2 Timothy 2 verse 3. It talks about enduring hardness as a good soldier; and in Ephesians 6, it talks about the armor. And then the Holy Spirit speaks of the Christian life like a wrestling match. Ephesians 6, we wrestle not against flesh and blood but principalities and powers and so forth. And even the Holy Spirit speaks of the Christian life like a boxing match, as if it were a prizefight. Paul says, "I fight not as one who beats the air," and he pictures the boxing there in 2 Timothy 4 verse 7—7 may perhaps also have the same reference.

Then the New Testament also speaks of the Christian life as a kind of slavery in, for example, the Book of Romans, Paul says that we are slaves to Christ in Romans 6. In Galatians chapter 6 in verse 17, the Christian life is seen as slavery; and then in 2 Timothy 2:6, the Holy Spirit speaks of the Christian life like a farming operation. There must be diligence and toil in the cultivation in order to see the harvest. In Romans 7, the Holy Spirit speaks of the Christian life in the figure of a marriage, how that we have by death been separated from our former husband, no longer married to sin, but remarried to Jesus Christ; and then many places in the New Testament, the figure of speech of a son and a father relationship is spoken of as we see God the Father, and we His children, who are to be obedient children.

Now, all of these figures of speech are different aspects of the Christian life, but there is one other figure of speech that appears repeatedly in the New Testament; and that figure of speech is the figure of a race. The Christian life is seen as a race. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 to 27, and we'll look up these later. In Galatians 5:7, in Philippians 3:13 and 14, and 2 Timothy 4:7, we have the indication that the Christian life is seen in the figure of a race; and that figure is what brings us to our text, Hebrews chapter 12, the Christian race or run for your life. And in order to break the passage down, we're going to consider several aspects of the Christian race.

As we look at this particular passage, we see that the first few verses break up very easily into different features of the race. First of all, we have the event itself; then we have the encouragement to run; then we have the encumbrances which hinder us; then we have the example to which we focus our attention; then we have the end or the prize for which we run; and then we have a closing exhortation. All of this composite becomes the picture of the race for Hebrews chapter 12, the first four verses.

First of all, let's look at the event, beginning in verse 1; and we'll tie it into the former chapters as we go. The event is a race. Beginning in verse 1 we read this: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Now, that last phrase is the key to our first point. This is a race that is set before us.

Now, you'll notice to begin with, there is a little phrase, "let us." Now, that little phrase, "let us" gives us an indication of to whom this passage is written. Remembering that the Book of Hebrews was written to a community of Jews, we also must remember that there were two groups of Jews which we repeated over and over again. First of all, there were some Jews who were not born again. They were not saved. They were only intellectually convinced. They had come up to the edge of Christianity. They were hanging on the edge. They had some faith, but not saving faith; and they were beginning to drift back and to fall back into apostasy. The second group were the truly saved ones.

Now, as we look at the phrase "let us," we wanna be reminded of how the phrase is used elsewhere in the Book of Hebrews, so that we can see to whom he's talking right here. The book is written mainly, and in the main sweep of the book, to the genuinely saved Jews; and as I shall show you in a moment, I think this passage does relate to them, as well. But it was mainly written, the dominate character of the book is to these Jews who were saved. They were recognizing their Messiah; but, for some reason, they didn't feel the new covenant was fully sufficient; and so they're kind of drifting back to Judaism; and so there is encouragement all through the Book of Hebrews that they put all their stock in Judaism, put all their faith in Jesus Christ and His perfect sacrifice, and let Judaism go.

But then, periodically in the Book of Hebrews, there come these warnings to the group that is intellectually convinced, but never been saved; and very often those warnings are begun by the phrase "let us." Lemme show you what I mean by that, and we're gonna study that for just a brief moment.

Hebrews 4, and I wanna show you just a couple of things. Hebrews 4:1 starts out, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left of us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Now that, I believe, is a warning to unbelievers who are intellectually convinced. "Let us." Verse

14, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that has passed into the Heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession." Again, he is saying to those who are intellectually convinced, "Come all the way. Make the full commitment. Hold on." Verse 16, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need." And, again, I think that has primary reference to those unbelievers on the edge.

Chapter 6 verse 1, "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Messiah...which are Old Testament things...let us go on to perfection." Perfection in Hebrews, I believe, means salvation. So, again, he's talking to the intellectually convinced. Chapter 10, we find similarly in verse 22, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." And, again, if we study that context, we find that he is talking to those intellectually convinced unbelievers. Verse 23, "Let us hold fast the profession of faith." Verse 24, Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works."

Now that may, of course, that last "let us" may go either way; but the...the "let us," as a phrase, has primary significance to the intellectually convinced Jew who has come all the way to the edge and not yet come to Christ; and each of those "let us" that we read followed a doctrinal teaching passage where he would teach them the importance of a commitment to Christ and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Then he would say "Let us respond by moving into this."

Now when we come to chapter 12, it is no different. "Wherefore," and then jumping to the bottom of the verse, "let us run." What is the wherefore there for? The wherefore takes you back. The wherefore takes you clear back to 10:38, "The just shall live by faith," and from there on, he explains faith and how it works all the way through chapter 11. Then he says, "Because this is how God's standard is set, that you live by faith, let us get into the race. Let us run the race."

So I think, to begin with, that "let us" here is used in a primary sense to the intellectually convinced Jews; and what he's really saying is, "The race is the Christian life. Get in the race. Come on. You're hanging onto Judaism. You're hanging onto works, but the just shall live by faith. So get in the race." And I think that's a primary consideration. The entrance to the race is the new birth; and if an individual knows Jesus Christ, if he invites Jesus Christ to come into his life, by that very act of faith, he himself enters into the race. Every Christian is in the race. As we shall see, not all of them are running, however, and that's the problem. Some of them are clogging up the track.

But to get in the race is to be born again. The race is really the Christian life. So the Holy Spirit, then, calls out to these intellectually convinced folks who have heard the Gospel, who know the facts, but are reluctant to let go of Judaism, reluctant because of persecution and the price they'll have to pay; and he's saying, "Run for your life, because the just shall live only by...what?...by faith, so you've gotta get into the race of faith and get off the kick of works." So to begin with then, he is calling out to those who need to come to Jesus Christ.

Secondarily, I think the injunction is important also to Christians. He says, "Let us run with patience the race," and the word patience, hoopamoanay, is endurance. Some Christians are in the race, but they're not running the race. So I think we can safely say that the term "let us" used in the primary sense that it's used in the Book of Hebrews is used for the intellectually convinced, but it also has direct implication to the believer in at least one other passage, and, very likely, we would say it does here, as well.

So what he's saying then is two things. All that to say this. If you're not a Christian, get in the race, because there's only one way to live, and that's by faith; and if you are a Christian and you're in the race, run the race with endurance. So, really, the statement is general. Now it's sad to say that most Christians aren't running. A few are jogging. We'll admit that. Some are trotting. A lot of 'em are walking. Most of 'em are crawling or sitting, going nowhere; and some of them are going backwards; but the Christian life is not a trot. The Christian life is not your morning constitutional. The Christian life is not a loaf. The Christian life is a race. There it is. Look at it. "Let us run with patience the race."

The Greek word for race, agone, from which we agony. This is a race where you've gotta put out a little bit. It's...it's not even a sprint, either. It's...it's not a dash. It's a marathon kind of race. It is to be run with endurance; and like any good runner must train and follow rigid kind of standards if he's gonna effectively run, so must the Christian. To effectively run, there must be self-denial, discipline, tremendous exertion. The Christian life is not a...a thing of passive luxury.

Had a good illustration of that from a racing standpoint on Saturday when I was up at the field day where my little boy goes to school; and all the fathers had to run in the events; and I can remember when I used to run track; and I was religiously devoted to training; but I soon found out that you're not too good when you just sit around a lot and you get into the race. There must be rigid discipline to be effective in running. We are not called upon as Christians to lie around in flowery beds of ease; but we are to run in a race that is strenuous, that is self-sacrificing, that is hard training, and that is disciplined. Putting forth every ounce of energy that we have.

I think of the charge, you know, that...that God brought against Israel through the old prophet Amos in chapter 6 verse 1. He said, "Woe to them that are at ease." This is one army when the command never comes at ease. This is a race that demands commitment, and to stand still or go backwards is to forfeit the prize. Worst yet, if you're still in the bleachers and haven't gotten in the race, you're forfeiting eternal heaven. And so what he's saying then is get into the race. The Christian life is a struggle. It's a battle against Satan, as we saw this morning. It's a struggle against all kinds of odds. It's a struggle against the system that is the world. You've gotta be different. You've gotta be able to butt your head against what's going on in the world, and you've gotta be able to go right through, and you've gotta do it with...look at the word...patience. The word is hoopamoanay. This is a long race.

I'll never forget when I was in high school, the first time I ever ran in a...in a race longer than the...than the 100-yard dash, which was always my race, and I was put into a long race. I can't remember, I think it was an 880, which is two laps, which is a horrifying experience for a guy who's never run further than a 100 yards. I'll never forget, I was leading by a mile at the 100-yard mark. I came in dead last at the 880 mark. My legs were wobbling so bad. I had such terrible cotton mouth, I couldn't see the finish line, and I collapsed on it and fell out in a faint. I did really well for a little while. I was worthless for approximately 780 yards.

You know, that's a... that's a kind of a classic description of many Christians who have such a hot beginning, who really fire outta the blocks like something that's gonna tear up the world, and they get just around the bend and, all of a sudden, you notice their legs begin to wobble. They start panting. Their chest begins to heave. They've lost their stride. They've lost the correct movement of their arms; and by the time the race is over, they're flopped somewhere in the middle of the track.

This is a marathon, and it is to be run with endurance. It is not that God is necessarily pleased with somebody who comes along in short spurts. God wants ya...God wants us a sustained kind of running. There will always be obstacles, and there will always be problems, and we will get weary, and we will get tired, but we must endure and run to win. The racetrack, unfortunately, is just loaded with short-spurt Christians.

Now, when we use the word hoopamoanay, which is translated here patience or endurance, it is not the kind of endurance that sits down and accept every...accepts everything. "Well, I'm patient. I can take everything." It's not that. It's the kind of word that means you master everything, you see? It means you go through everything on top. It doesn't mean you sit there and take everything. It's determination. It's...it's unrelenting and, yet, it's unhurried. It's steady, and it's refusing to be deflected. It's like the tortoise and the hare, you know. That's the difference. It's that continuous, persistent, enduring attitude that keeps going that finally wins.

Now, I think this is the key word for the Hebrew Christians, patience, endurance; because, you see, they had started off good. They had heard of Christ. In fact, they heard from the apostles, chapter 2 says. They had seen miracles, signs, and wonders to confirm the Word. They were thrilled about what they had been really involved in in the founding of the church, and they started off running, and they hit an obstacle, and the first obstacle that sucked all the breath out of 'em, they ran outta gas, was persecution. You see? All of a sudden, the Jewish community started persecuting them; and when that began to happen, they stopped running. You see? And so what the writer is saying, you must run the race with endurance. You can't fall apart at the first obstacle. Walk off your lane and sorta sit down. Sure they got some flack, and they got some persecution from the Jews, and they couldn't take it, and they stopped running. In fact, some of them were beginning to go backwards, backsliding in the Old Testament definition.

This is an effort, but I promise you one thing. The prize is worth it, and I'll tell you what the prize is at the end. So you guys stick around. Philippians 2:15, listen to this. "That you may be blameless and harmless, children of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...Listen...holding forth the Word of Life, that I may rejoice in the Day of Christ that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do you joy and rejoice with me."

Paul says, "Nothing stops me. I shall pursue this thing to the end. I will run that I might win, and I will not labor in vain. I'm not gonna bide my time, and if it costs me my life, I'll run right through every obstacle." That's what he's saying. Now, Paul was a winner, and I like a winner. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, he said this, verse 24, "Know ye not that they who run in a race run all." You're in it to run. If you didn't wanna run, you wouldn't be in it. "But one receives the prize?" Then what he says, "So run, that you may obtain." Run to win. Nothing worse than a guy who's in a race who doesn't want to win.

"Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." So he says, "I run not uncertainly. I fight not as one that beats the air. I keep my body under, and I bring it into subjection." You see, Paul wanted to win. He was committed to victory, and that's basic, and he's saying, you know, the athletes in the Isthmian games would train just like athletes do today, with severe training, maximum effort; and they did it to obtain a corruptible crown. How much more should we run with endurance to obtain an incorruptible crown?

The Apostle Paul says in that 1 Corinthians chapter 9 that, "In order to do this, we must be temperate in all things." You know what temperate means? Temperate means that we never indulge our self in anything that hinders us in the race. We don't break the training rules. We detach our self from anything that would cause us to lose. He's not talking about running a race with spasmodic, minimal effort or with some kind of partial abstinence; but he's talking about total commitment to win; and the guy who really commits himself to win, totally and fully, is the guy who wins.

Then he says this, not only temperate, but he says, "I run not as uncertainly." An uncertain person runs as if he doesn't care if he wins; and, you know, I think that's the basic problem of most Christian, if you get right down to it; and I talked about this in our study of Ephesians chapter 6. I think the basic problem with Christians is that they don't care about victory just that much. I mean they're happy to just be saved, and "Oh, well, I'll die and go to heaven anyway, and it's no big deal." Now, whether they would say that or not, I'm not sure; but I think that's the problem; and that's why the armor of the Christian begins with a belt of truthfulness, which is sincerity. If you don't care about winning the battle, you're not gonna win. You're not gonna win. Above all, in any kind of conflict, must be the

total desire to win.

Now, Paul knew this, and he had this kind of determination. He never pursued comfort. He never pursued learning. He never pursued money. He never pursued popularity, respect, position, lust of his flesh. He pursued to win for God at all costs; and he says, 'I even beat my body into subjection. I discipline my body. I restrict it from those things that are going to hinder my running, and I run that I might win.' And I think, beloved, that that's somewhere along the line is what Christian commitment is all about. When you care more about winning the prize, when you care more about running the race to win for the cause of Jesus Christ than you do about anything else in existence, then you're gonna win; and when you don't, you won't. When you're, Christian life is all in all.

Had a fella ask me a couple of weeks ago, he said, "When you become a Christian, does that take away your competitive spirit?" Doesn't take away mine. Not at all. I have a tremendous drive for victory. So there's a race.

Back to Hebrews chapter 12, and...and it's to be run; and it's to be run with endurance. If you're not a Christian, you've never come to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit says to you tonight, "Get in the race. Get in the race." If you're a Christian and you're in the race, the Holy Spirit says, "Run with endurance. Pursue the prize." It's the worst paradox in the world, the hardest to understand is a Christian who's in the race and not running. Why anybody or how anybody could be satisfied with being a dingaling in God's plan, I never can understand. When there's a prize to win, and there's a goal to get there, why doesn't everybody wanna win? Now may...maybe that's just my structure. I...I like to win. I always have wanted to win. I always have been competitive.

The interesting thing about the Christian life is I'm competing against Satan; and I'm competing against the lust of the flesh; and I'm battling all of these things along the way. I'm not competing against other Christians to be better respected than they are. I'm only competing against that which stifles my running. So, really, it's a battle that I fight within myself, a la Romans chapter 7; and I know where the victory lies, and so do you - in the energy of the Spirit of God as I yield to Him. So I wanna win, because I wanna glorify my Lord. So Christians were in a race. Just that simple. The Christian life is a commitment to victory if it's going to be there.

Second thing, we've seen the event. Let's look at the encouragement, and I think we're typically creatures of motivation, and we need something to motivate us. Why should I...why should I wanna pursue the life of faith? Incidentally, it's a race of faith, and the Christian life is lived by faith. It's just that simple. As you exercise faith, you do not sin. Did you hear that? The only time a Christian ever sins is when he fails to believe God. That's why the Bible says that, if you wanna halt...halt the arrows of Satan, you simply put up the shield of...what?...faith, which is able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked. As long as you believe God, you can't sin. God tells you what to do. God says it'll be well with you if you do it. God says, "Trust Me, believe Me, and if you keep doing that, Satan has no

entrance." As soon as Satan starts saying to you, "Do this, do that, do the other, and you'll get away with it," or hath God said, as He said to Eve, and you do it, you have failed to believe God and, therefore, sin enters in. As long as you believe God, sin has no way to enter into you.

So it's a race of faith, and he's saying, "Keep believing God. When the crisis comes, just believe God and keep running." Don't collapse and think your world is coming to an end. Trust God and go right through.

All right, there is an encouragement in this race. Here it comes. "Wherefore...verse 1 again...seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." Now, there's a motivation. We oughta run this race because of the testimony of the great men of the past. Old Testament saints ran the race of faith, didn't they, with endurance. You've been with us for Hebrews chapter 11? They ran with faith, and they ran with endurance. They...he started out with Abel and the life of faith, and then we saw how we moved from there to Enoch and the walk of faith, and then we came to Noah and the work of faith, and Abraham and really the whole life of faith, and Isaac, Jacob, Joseph facing death with faith, and Moses, the choices of faith, and then those great heroes when we saw the courage of faith, and we saw all those people who lived by faith, and they endured unbelievable things.

Why, we went through that stuff last week that was absolutely tremendous. Verse 33, "They wrought righteousness. They obtained promises. They stopped the mouths of lions. They quenched the violence of the sword, the fire. They escaped the edge of the sword. Out of weakness, they were made strong. They were valiant in fight. They turned to flight the enemies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others had trial of cruel mocking and scourging, bonds, imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn asunder. They were tested. They were slain with the sword. They wandered in sheepskins and goatskins. They were destitute, afflicted, and tormented. They wandered in deserts and in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth." And they went through it all, and they endured as believing God that He would deliver 'em.

You see, the Hebrews have already folded up and stopped running just because they got a little flack from some of their contemporaries. The first obstacle they met, they fell apart. So he says, "Hey, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let's run." I mean these people have all lived by faith. They ran the race of faith. They came out victorious, see?

Now, I don't think...I often hear the view in this passage of a big stadium, and the big stadium is loaded with all these saints who are sitting up there watching all of us run. Now, that might be motivation. I mean if I realized that Moses and Abraham right now were hanging over the edge of heaven watching John MacArthur operate, that would be some sort of motivation. I mean I, but it'd be a lot more frustration than motivation. Paul and all those guys were hanging over the edge looking at me, they got too much to do being preoccupied with Jesus, frankly, to care about me.



But the idea here, I don't think is that at all. That isn't the picture of a bunch of saints sitting in a stadium staring down at a bunch of Christians running around. They don't wanna be involved in that necessarily. There's nothing in the Scripture to indicate that they are; but what it's saying here is, "We are compassed about with so great a cloud of people who have given testimony to the fact that the life of faith is a winning way to go. You see? That's what it's saying. Seeing that you've seen all these people who have said, "We went by faith, and we won the victory," man, how could we live any other way, right?

"The just shall live by faith," he started it out. Then he showed you a string of just men all through chapter 11, and says, "See, they lived by faith, and look what happened." And then he says, "See, you've got all those people to testify to the life of faith. Now you get in it, and you run." That's what he's saying. These people have proven by their testimony that the life of faith is the only life. They ran the faith race, and they're witnesses to victory. That whole big nethalay, that whole big mass or...or cloud of witnesses, they all say to us loud and clear, "Live by faith. We did it, and it works."

The saddest thing that ever enters into the Christian's life is unbelief, the lack of faith. Their stories in Scripture, their lives that they have lived are witnesses to us to run the race of faith with endurance, and God will reward. Old Lot decided he'd pitch his tent towards Sodom, and Abraham said, "No, I'm not gonna get sucked into the system of the world. I'm looking for a city whose...what?...whose builder and maker is God." And old Abraham lived by faith and went charging on through, and Lot had a disaster...

What are we saying here? That...lemme just give you the picture. It is not...the picture of verse 1 is not them looking at us in a stadium. It is us looking at them as living testimonials to the fact that the life of faith really wins. They left us a history of victory. They proved that the victory that overcomes the world is even our faith.

You know something? I just think about that. That really motivates me. That really...if I had a whole bunch of people just staring down at me, looking at me, that would scare me more than anything else. That would frustrate me, make me feel inadequate. But when I look back, and I say, "Look at those guys. Here I am, little old John MacArthur putting around in the little race that I'm in, and I'm moving ahead, and I'm saying to myself, 'I'm weak and I'm frail and I'm a pilgrim and a stranger,' but you know what? I am one other guy added to the cloud of witnesses who can say to the world, 'I lived by faith with endurance, and it's a winner.'"

And you know what that does? That puts me right in that group with them. Now I haven't endured many of the things that they've endured, but I'll tell you one thing. I'm glad to be a part of the team of the people who ran the race of faith with endurance and who are the winners. That's encouraging, and the same God that was their God is my God. The God of yesterday is the God of today. He gets

to that in the 13th chapter, doesn't he, in verse 8. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever."...They're my encouragement.

I just have to look at those guys, and I see they faced things. I've never been in a lion's den. I never had a bunch of hungry lions staring at me, licking their chops. I don't know how long my faith would've lasted and how fast I would've been running up and down the walls...I've never been through a crisis situation where I've been tied to a stake to be burned. Nobody's ever threatened to chop my head off with a sword, at least not really meaning it...I've never been through cruel mockings and scourgings. I've never been in prison for Jesus Christ. Man, I haven't even gotten close to what those guys went through. I'm not even dead yet. I haven't even been martyred. That's what he says down in verse 4. "Oh, you should worry. You haven't even resisted unto blood yet." I haven't lost a drop of blood for the cause of Christ. My faith should peter out at this point? I haven't even been where those guys have been.

Man, if their faith in God took them through that, I wanna be a part of that kinda life. Don't you?...That's encouragement. What a testimony. We lived by faith and, in the face of unbelievable problems, God vindicated His promise to come to the aid of those who trust Him. That's my encouragement.

So the event and the encouragement. Thirdly, encumbrances. Now one of the things you gotta do in a...in a race is get rid of the weight. I couldn't help but read in the newspapers recently when they had the invitational track meet at the Forum. They invited the Russian sprinter who won the gold medal in the 100-meter dash in Munich; and he was the world's fastest human; and he came over here; and there was a skinny guy by the name of Herb Washington who looked like a...a wisp; and you always worry about those guys. I remember I used to agin' 'em, against those guy, and I was always kind of on the heavy side, and I always didn't like those thin, little, lithe guys, because I always only saw the back of 'em, you know?

But I...I...I turned on my television, and I wanted to watch that race; and, of course, they had some preliminary heat races to eliminate; and the great Russian sprinter, who was the world's fastest human and the winner of the gold medal was eliminated by a couple of also-rans in a heat. Never even got to the finals, and thin, little, wispy Herb Washington flew through that thing, and in a fantastic time and was the winner. And they interviewed this man through an interpreter afterwards, and he gave a simple explanation. He said, "I am overweight." A failure to discipline himself in training had resulted in him carrying too much weight and, consequently, when you're talking about flying down 60 yards in six seconds flat, that little difference of five to ten pounds makes a difference of couple tenths of a second, and it's all over.

And so, if we are to run this thing, we can't be burdened down unnecessarily. Now look at the middle of verse 12. "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Now, if we're

gonna run this thing, we're gonna have to get rid of some stuff that's in our life. There...there's an interesting comparison here with 1 Peter 2:1 where Peter says, "You've got to strip off akakeya," which is malice or all general evil, "guile, deceit, hypocrisies, and evil-speaking." All those things have to go. Strip 'em off. Then, "As a babe, desire the sincere milk of the Word," and he uses the word apastaysti, which means like you're stripping off old clothes and just chucking 'em in all directions.

In order to...to really get into the Word even, Peter says, "Get rid of some junk. Loosen up. Get rid of the dead weight that's gonna hinder your understanding of Scripture." The same thing's true in the race. We've gotta get rid of things. Now, the first thing we have to get rid of is every weight, and this is an interesting thing. The word weight is orakon which means bulk. Bulk or mass, superfluous flesh, and the word mass and bulk, pictures a big blob is what it pictures in my mind, and that's what it's meant to say.

Now you know that a guy who comes out to run a race, you don't expect him to take off his sweat suit and see a giant potbelly hanging over his trunks. You just don't expect to see that, and I daresay you don't see that...The first thing that a runner must do is discipline himself in the matter of weight. One of the things we had to do in college in track and in football, as well, and in all our other sports, was weigh in every single day; and if you overweight...you were overweight, there were certain disciplinary things that happened to you. This is true today in all kinds of athletics. A reduction of excess body weight is necessary for proper functioning in any kind of race; and once you've lost it, you've gotta train to keep it off.

Then, not only that, when a guy gets to the race, he wears these bulky sweat suits, and he doesn't leave them on when he runs. He doesn't go down there with all of that stuff blowing in the breeze. He gets rid of that, and he finally gets down to a pair of very thin and very baggy shorts. They look the guy across the street when he comes out to get the paper at 6:00 in the morning; and you wonder what he's doing with 'em on at all; but, anyway, that's about it; and then they wear a little, tiny, thin shirt, and they used to tell us if you've got a white one, always wear a white one, 'cause if you come in a dead heat at the finish line, the white one will stand out from a darker one, and you might get the win...

He gets down to everything, so that there's only minimal hindrance; and so, in the race that we're living as Christians, we're gonna have to get rid of some stuff. Now, you say, "Well, John, what's he talking about?" Well, all kinds of commentators say all kinds of things, and I read about everything I could read to find out what this weight was, and I didn't come up with anything that satisfied my mind, so I just started studying it on my own; and the Scripture doesn't say right here, but I'd like to venture an educated guess...

What was the biggest weight encumbering these Christians to whom this was written? Pretty simple, isn't it? What was it? Legalism. Hanging onto Judaism. This is the hang-up they had. They were trying to run, but they were dragging these weights. Have you ever seen a guy who works out, and they tie these ankle weights around him; and, very often, they even have a belt weight that he runs with that, and when the races comes, he takes all that stuff off. Of course, he feels much lighter on his feet. Well, here they were trying to run this race of faith with weights of legalism hanging all over them. Still being attached to the temple. Still being hung up on...on the ritual of the...of the ceremonious...ceremonialism of Judaism. Still being attached to the priesthood, and all this kinda stuff. They were trying to run a race of faith dragging weights like a guy trying to run down the track with a ball and chain on both feet. Dead works is dead weight, folks. They were trying to run with dead works, legalism.

Now, our Lord calls 'em to a life of faith, and all they are is a whole lotta great, big, fat blobs with super sweat suits on and weights all over their feet trying to run a race; and he says, "Get rid of all that legalism. Strip down."...It's amazing what had happened to them. They were so big and blobby with so much bulk and so much weight that they ran a step and collapsed in a pile of legalistic sweat...panting to death...hanging onto Judaism, wouldn't let go. You can't run the race of faith weighted down by self-righteousness. Did you know that? You can't run the race of faith weighted down and bogged down by your own works trying to please God and earn His favor. That's just like dead weight.

The race is run, beloved, by faith plus nothing. Just believe in God, and He'll produce the fruits of that faith within you. Works as a way to please God don't speed you up. They slow you down. "Well, I'm gonna do some works for God, and work for God, and that'll please Him, and that'll please Him," and all it does is drag you down. Unload Judaism, drop all the old covenant stuff, and go.

Then he says a second thing you gotta get rid of. "The sin that says...that doth so easily beset us." The word beset is interesting. It's very graphic. I'm not gonna tell you the word, 'cause it's kind of a complicated word. It doesn't really matter anyway, but it comes from a verb that means...that means to surround, karistomay. It means to...to surround or stand around, and this is the...this is the picture of a guy running the race in a Harris tweed overcoat. See? Just some huge, big thing, and he's flopping along in it. Something that just surrounds him, and it is "the sin which doth so easily surround us and encumber us." Now, that's not too...perhaps it's...it's a general thought. Perhaps he's talking about any sin; and sin is certainly a hindrance; but I think he's talking about something specific. He says here, "The sin which doth so easily beset us."

Now, if you're trying to run, watch this, a race of faith, what would be the biggest hindrance? Unbelief. Unbelief. I think that's obviously implied right there. They...the thing that they were running into was doubting God, you see? Doubting God combine...combine that thing, get the fat man running in his sweat suit, and then put an overcoat on him, and you've got the picture of them trying to

run the...the race; and they're just sitting there, big blobs in the middle of the track.

You know, there's a lotta Christians like that today? As I say, you know, the people who are moving have got to also be hurdlers, because they've gotta keep jumping over all of the... all of the piles of people who are sitting in the track...Believe me, that's true, friends. I mean in the body of Christ, if the body doesn't function, we've gotta jump over the nonfunctioning members...and they're often in the way, believe me. I think it's the sin of unbelief.

Lemme show you why I think that from Galatians. This is the whole thing. Galatians is trying to tell us live by faith. Galatians 2:20, you remember that one, don't ya? "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by...faith, the faith of the Son of God." His faith that He gave me when He died. Faith is a gift of God, isn't it? I live by faith. That's how I'm to live; and, of course, this message to the Galatians was so important; cause they were hung up on legalism.

Now go over to chapter 3 of Galatians verse 1. "Oh, you stupid Galatians!...he says. It's a free translation....Who bewitched you? Who confused you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been openly set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you: Received you the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? What are you doing with legalism?" he says to the Galatians. "What are you doing? Did you get saved by legalism or by faith? Are you so stupid, having begun in the Spirit? Are you made perfect by the flesh?" See? What had happened was they got saved, and then they started putting all the weights on, piling all the weights on, and they just kept getting overweight. "It's terrible," he said.

Over to verse 24, "Wherefore the law was only our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." The schoolmaster was just to point a few things out to you. Schoolmaster used to carry a little stick; and, if you didn't shape up, he slapped your hands. That's what the law did; but once you learned the lessons of faith and obedience, you didn't need any slaps on the hands anymore. It was a whole different thing. The law only was to teach you something. When the lesson was learned, you were free from there. You were justified by faith. Forget the schoolmaster. You're no longer under him after faith has come, so live by faith.

Chapter 4 verse 9, "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God...listen to this...how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements unto which you desire again to be in bondage?" Why would you put yourself back under the unbelief of legalism?...And then in verse 10, "You observe law, days and months and times and years." He says, "You're back in that old rut again." That's not enough, chapter 5 verse 1, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty with which Christ has made you free, and don't be entangled again with the yoke of bondage." That's law. And verse 5, "For we, through the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither

circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith works by love. You did run well." Ohhhhh, we're in a race again. "Who did hinder you?" Somebody came into these Galatians and unloaded on them a whole system of legalism that left them in unbelief, and they thought they had to go back to that.

He says, "Don't you know, all you have to do is believe God?" So the weight is legalism, and the sin is unbelief in the freedom of faith as a way of life. I really believe we need to live by faith, and that's the only way to take a spiritual diet and get off your sweat suit, is start believing God. As soon as you start living by faith, you just start shedding the spiritual pounds, and you strip down. You're ready for action. You unload your overcoat, your sweat suit, and you're ready to go; and it all happens by faith. Don't be that kind of overweight, bulky thing in the middle of the track. Go on a spiritual diet. Trim down. A spiritual diet is simply understanding to live by faith. Eliminate all unbelief and self-righteousness, and then you're stripped down, ready to run.

All right, we see the event, the encouragement, and the encumbrances. Now the example. This is beautiful. Verse 2. Now, you know, you always gotta keep your eyes somewhere when you're running. This is the best place in this race. "Looking unto...whom?...Jesus, the arkegoss, and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Okay, the course has been set. The weights and obstructions have been stripped off. The race is underway. We have the encouragement of all those who live by faith and came out on top. We're running the race, but we've gotta have a pattern for the race. We've gotta have somebody who shows us how we are best able to run it, and here's our example. "Looking unto Jesus." The literal...interesting...the literal Greek is looking away to Jesus. One of the most dangerous things that ever occurs in a Christian's life is when that Christian becomes preoccupied with looking at himself.

You know, even in the Scripture, the Bible doesn't tell us to look at the Holy Spirit. Some Christians just look at what the Holy Spirit's doing. That's wrong, too. You focus on Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and the Holy Spirit will change you into His image; but you need to be looking at Christ. Always, always, always focusing on Christ. That's why Paul could always be content, even in the worst circumstances; because he's always content with Christ. You see? Kept looking at Christ.

The placement of your eyes in athletics is important. In baseball, from the time you grew up playing baseball, the coach always said, "Keep your eye on the ball. That's the key. Keep your eye on the ball." Remember one time in high school playing baseball, I was a shortstop in high school; and I got a hot groundball; and the guy was going on to second base; and so I took my eye off the ball. I look at second base and hit me in the mouth. Cut my lip up in the top and my lip on the bottom; and, you know, they used to talk about getting ball shy, and I was from then on; and so the coach, after about three days, developed a plan where every day at practice, I had to wear a catcher's mask at shortstop

until I learned to get my face on the ground and watch the ball.

And in the Christian life, it's no different. There needs to be...our eyes need to be focused on something very specific. In football, as a pass receiver, we always say a guy was finished when he started looking away at the pitter-patter of little feet instead of watching the ball, see. When you start hearing footsteps, you're done. It's when your career is over.

Coach used to say, "When you're gonna tackle, keep your eye on the belt buckle. If you watch his eyes, he'll fake you with his eyes. If you watch his head, he'll fake you with his head. You watch his shoulders, the same thing. Watch his \_\_\_\_\_ his knees and ankles, the same thing. Watch the belt buckle. That's one thing he can't move very far."...So it was very important when you were in athletics to focus.

In golf, keep your head down. Keep your eye on the ball. Very important in any kind of athletic endeavor and especially in a race. You say, "Well, I didn't think it was important to watch anything in a race." Listen, you try running sometime at full speed watching your feet. Just try it. You'll run into everybody on the track, trip over the guardrail, fall all over the place. You can't run...run watching your feet. You try running watching the grandstand. Never forget, we had a guy in high school. This comes back to me. Oh, it was funny. This guy finally got into a football game. He was about fourth string, and he finally got in. We were ahead, you know, 50 to nothing or something, and finally put him in, and he...he went through a big huge hole. We opened a hole in the line you could've driven a Mack truck through, you know, and he went in for the touchdown. He was so excited. He was running full speed, went across the goal line, and he...he turned to get his moment of glory into the crowd, and ran right in the goal post, you know. I'll never forget it, because the ball went about 10 yards in the air, and he split his helmet right down the top. Was disastrous. Well, it was quite a day for him. Say, it was about the only time he got in, and he made it lasting.

But, you know, that's...in...in running any kind of a race or in any kind of participation, you cannot look around and see, "Well, look, they're all watching me. Boy, am I spiritual. Man, I'll bet they're pleased with me." Nor could I look at myself, "I wonder how I'm running. Is this foot going right? Is that foot going right? Oh, I wonder if the Lord's moving this foot. Oh, is that the Holy Spirit? No, that's the Holy Spirit over there. Oh, is this the flesh?" You know, where you get all bogged down in what's going on in you, see. That's disastrous. That's disastrous.

The other problem is, "Hey, I'm ahead of Joe. He's back there. I'm ahead of Bill. He's back there." See, that's another way some Christians run. They're only content in relation to others who are behind them; but the point of the Christian life is that he...you can't run your Christian life saying, "Well, I'm not too bad. I'm more spiritual than Bill." Looking unto whom? Jesus. Now you keep looking unto Jesus, and you're gonna keep your eyes off what other people think. You're gonna keep your eyes off of whether you're ahead or behind, because you're always behind, because you're

always having to look away to Him, and you're running to Christ likeness. Did you get that? The goal of the race is Christ likeness...

I wanna run. Here's heaven, and when I get there, I'm gonna be like Him, but I wanna get as close to that spot before I get to heaven, so that it's not such a big change when I arrive. That's what I'm running in. I'm running. I'm looking at Him and running to be like Him; and as long as I look at Him, the Spirit of God has got something to change me into His image. When I start sticking...looking at myself or at this guy or that guy or the crowd and thinking, "Boy, they think I'm something. Look how spiritual." Then it's disastrous, He said. So I look at Him. Christ consciousness. Like the old Indian, I always remember who said, "Came to church a half an hour early." They said, "Why do you do it?" He said, "Me come early. Me sit down. Me think Jesus." That's good. Practical. Christ conscious. Looking to Jesus.

So the Christian focuses on Him. You say, "Why do I wanna look at Him? Why would I look at Jesus?" Listen, here's why. "The author and finisher of...there's no our in the original...the author and finisher of faith." You know what that means? That means something very important. That means that Jesus Christ is the supreme example of what faith is, and we need to look to Him. We need to look to Him. You can't win looking around at everybody else. It can't be done.

Remember when they ran the first sub-four-minute mile, Roger Bannister and John Landy, and then they had a race. I'll never forget the day that John Landy was ahead in Canada; and, at a fatal moment, he looked back; and Bannister went by him on the right. You can't be staring around at everybody else. You can't be looking at your own feet. You look at Jesus, because He is the supreme example of faith. That's what this means.

Now the word author, arkegoss, or pioneer, one who takes the lead in anything, it could mean that He's the originator of faith; and I'm sure He is. I'm positive of that. I'm sure that Jesus Christ is a pioneer of faith. I'm sure that the faith of Adam and the faith of Abel was really a product of the work of the Son of God in their lives. And I...in 1 Corinthians 10 is a good indication that the Son of God was working in this way long before His incarnation, incidentally. He didn't just come to be when that was. He even says in verse 4, "The Rock was Christ," you see. In the wilderness the Rock was Christ. He was active in...in the wilderness, see. So all faith is a product of the work of the Son as of the Trinity; and He was there before His incarnation and after.

Interesting verse in Jude 5, "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, that the Lord...and with reference to Christ...having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believe not." Jesus was actually the one who got Israel out of Egypt, and He dealt with the faithful and destroyed the unfaithful. So He was operating on the principles of faith clear back in Egypt, and He was the Rock in the wilderness, too. Interesting verse that comes to my mind is Micah 5:2, which is always quoted in part and not in whole, and I think we miss a great



thought. Micah 5:2, listen. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth." The prophecy of Messiah.

Listen to this, "That is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." You wanna verse on the deity of Christ, there it is, and on His eternal character and life. He didn't just start in Bethlehem. He was from old and from everlasting; and so there is a sense in which he is the author in a primary sense of the concepts of faith in relation to men; but I don't think that's really the point of the word arkegossin in this verse. Arkegoss literally means the chief leader. It literally means the chief in preeminence; and I think it's saying this: The greatest example of faith that ever lived was Jesus Christ, and He is the one to Whom we look. You say, "You mean you think Jesus lived a life of faith?" Oh, did He ever. Why, when He was being tempted in the...in the mount of temptation, the devastation, the devil came to Him and said, "Why don't You turn that stone into bread?" And the implication was, "You're the Son of God. What are You doing 40 days with nothing to eat? What are You doing up here? The Father, has He forsaken You? Grab some satisfaction. Grab something. Make that stone into bread," and Jesus simply said, "No," He said, in effect, "I shall wait until My Father supplies. I'll trust Him for sustenance." And when it was over, He sent His angels to feed Him and care for Him.

Later on, Satan took Him up on a pinnacle of the temple and said, "Do a dive. Land on Your feet gently, and everybody'll say, 'Terrific, what a trick. You must be the Messiah,' and You'll have the homage you want." He said, "No, God's got another plan. I'll wait and do it His way." Satan said, "See the Kingdoms of the world? Worship me, and I'll give 'em to You." He said, "No, God's got another plan. I'll do it His way." He always believed God. In the Garden, He said, "Not My will...what?...Thine be done." He inevitably believed God. You know what the scoffers and the mockers and the crucifiers said on the cross? He was up there, and He said...they said to Him, "He trusted Him. Let Him deliver Him now." You know the one thing those people got out of the life of Jesus was that He trusted God? It was obvious that He lived by faith. Even the blatant mockers who killed Him knew that. He trusted Him. They knew the characteristic of Jesus was that He lived by faith in God.

Now, it's a supernatural kind of faith; but, nevertheless, it's the example that we are given; and that puts it where it oughta be, my friends, because you can't say, "Well, I've got more faith than Bill, which makes me some kinda Christian." You've got less faith than Jesus, which makes you retarded...from God's normal standard. You see, don't...that's what everybody does. We always set ourselves against some lower standard, you know. Whenever your husband gives you a bad time, you always say, "Well, Martha, you could be married to that guy down the street who drinks every night and beats his wife."

See, we always like to...to pick some standard that's infinitely less than we are; but we don't do that. We look unto whom? Jesus, who is an absolute perfect example of faith, and we continue to strive to

be like Him. Finisher, tellayon, means to carry through to completion. He was the perfect one of faith. He was the absolute chief leader of faith, and He is the one who was the finisher of faith. What does that mean? That means He was faithful right on through to the epitome...right to the very end. He's hanging on that cross, bleeding, with a cloak of blood and flies and the spittle of those who had spit on Him and the blood coming down from the crown of thorns. He simply said this, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." That's faith, isn't it?

He took faith right to the tellayon. Right to its extreme...and, you see, that's what He means when He says in verses 3 and 4, "Boy, you guys really think you suffer, don't you? Oh, consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself." They spit on Him, and they mocked Him, and they said, "He trusted in Him. Let Him deliver Him now." And then, "Lest you be wearied and faint in your minds." Remember, you haven't resisted unto blood striving against sin like He did. He was on the cross bearing the sins of the world, and He was faithful to the very end. And so you get a little trickle of problems, and you collapse and start going back to unbelief.

Look at Jesus. You haven't begun to endure what He endured. He lived by perfect faith from the beginning to the end. He raised faith to its perfection. He set for us such a high example of faith that it becomes that to which every one of us is to rivet our eyes for as long as we live. My faith, unless it's like the faith of Jesus Christ, has a long way to go. I don't compare my faith by the faith of someone else. I compare it by the faith of Jesus Christ that was good right down to the bearing of the sins of the world on the cross; and, still, He trusted God when God turned His back on Him...and He knew it. He said, "Oh, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And still He trusted Him.

And so concentrate on Christ. He's the object. He's the example. He's the goal. So we see the event, the encouragement, the encumbrances, and the example. Now the end. What are we running for? I never want to be in a race that doesn't have a prize. I'm not interesting in just running for exercise. If I'm gonna train, and I'm gonna work, I wanna do it for some reason. There's gotta be a goal, even if the goal is my physical health. I'm gonna do it for a reason. What is the goal? Well, in those days, in the Isthmian games, there was a pedestal at the end of the finish line. Hanging on that pedestal was a wreath. First guy across the finish line got a...a wreath made outta leaves, olive branch stuck on his head.

You say, "Big deal." That's right. Big deal. That's what the world has to offer. We collect our little wreaths. In those days, they didn't last very long. Today we've got little, nice little trophies that last a long time. See. But it's all corruptible, isn't it? Boy, there's a lotta people who work awful hard for some corruptible prizes...

And you say, "Well, what are we running for, John? What's the prize?" Well, it's not heaven. No, it can't be heaven, because everybody's going to get that, right? I'm not running to win heaven. I've got that, right? I got that when I got saved. You say, "Well, what are you running to win?" Well, it's

not heaven. What is it? Look at verse 2. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus ran for two things. There it are...there...they're both right there. "Who for the...what?...joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of throne of God." He ran for joy and exaltation, reward. He ran for joy and reward; and the two are inextricably tied together...

He wanted joy, and He wanted reward. You say, "Well, what gave Him that joy and reward? What brought Him His triumph?" Listen to this. This is so good. John 17:4, listen. "I have glorified Thee on earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father, give Me My reward." What did He do? He glorified God. See? How do you glorify God? By totally...watch...by totally exhibiting His attributes. Did Jesus do that? Did He ever fail to do that? Never. Did He always reveal the attributes of God? Always, always, always, always. "I did it, Father, all the way down I revealed You"..

That is what brought Him His reward...You know, He was looking at God, and He was to be God manifest. We are looking at whom? Christ, and we are to manifest Christ. We are to reveal to the world in our lives all that Jesus Christ is. You see? And as we do that, then we will receive the reward which is joy...I should say, then we will receive the prize, which is joy and reward.

He was running to glorify God. That's the goal and, friends, we have a simple way to glorify God as Christians. That's to be like Jesus. When we're like Jesus, God gets glorified, because then His attributes shine through us. The glory of God is simply His attributes; and as they're shining through us, He gets the glory. The goal of every Christian, friends, is reward in the end in heaven, full reward and full joy. That's why we wanna run.

You know, I want joy in my life. Do you want joy in your life? You know how to get joy in your life? When you can anticipate heaven and the reward of faithful service. That brings present joy. Paul said to the...to the believers that he had led to Christ, he says, "You're my crown of rejoicing and my joy." See? The fact that he was gonna receive a crown indicated that there was joy presently because of future promise, and so you'll notice as a comparison here, we are to run the race that is set before us; and it says, "Christ ran for the joy that was set before Him." Now that parallel means that the very prize is this joy; and I think this, friends. I think what gives great joy in this life is the confidence of future...reward; and I'm not talking about, you know, crass kind of thing where you're, you know, like the Imperial Margarine ran...man, zing, there's another crown and I'll stack it in my cupboard. No.

What I'm talking about...what I'm talking about is you know what gives me joy right now? The anticipation, and I pray God I have not arrived, I am still running. I'm still pressing toward the mark. But you know what gives me joy in my heart at this point is the confidence that I can have in my heart

that if I am faithful to Jesus Christ, I will someday hear, "Well, done, good and faithful servant," and enter into the joy Thy Lord, and He will give me a crown which I can then, according to Revelation chapter 4 verses 10 and 11, cast at His feet in praise.

And you know something? When I think about someday hearing from Jesus Christ, "MacArthur, thank you for being faithful." Man, that's joyous to my heart, because the one thing I wanna do above everything in this world is I want Him to know I love Him, and I wanna serve Him with everything I have; and that fact alone gives me joy as I anticipate what may be mine. You know, Jesus went to the cross. He endured all that was there. He despised the shame. He accepted it willingly...and He did it because He knew He would be rewarded by the Father for faithful work; and that brought Him present joy in anticipation of future reward. You understand?...I'm running the race for a reward, a reward that I can give back to my Lord that proves to...to Him that I cared and I loved Him...and mine is not a corruptible. It's an incorruptible crown.

I wanna read you just a brief word or two from Philippians 3 verse 12. Paul says, "Not as though I had already attained. Neither were already perfect. I'm just running. I'm not there...he said...but I sure follow after. If that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Laid whole is the word he says. "God laid hold of me, and I wanna lay hold of others for His cause. I'm running for the glory of God...13...Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. I haven't gotten the prize yet. I haven't finished. I haven't accomplished it all, but this one thing I'm doing: forgetting those things which are behind. Don't get hung up on the past. It's the past. And reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the...what?... prize. I wanna win. God has given me a high calling in Christ Jesus, and there's a prize for being faithful to that calling, and I wanna win that prize."

There's nothing crass about that, beloved. That's only sensible. If you're in the race, you run it to do what? To win it. So Paul says, "The end of the race is future reward. Man, I've got a prize out there waiting for me; and you know what else? That prize gives me present joy."...

Summing up, I wanna be like Christ. That glorifies God. When God gets glorified, He rewards me. As I anticipate that reward, I have joy...So the event, the encouragement, the encumbrances, the example, and the end. Now the exhortation. Verse 3, and I'm just gonna read it to you. When you get weary in the race, beloved...when your faith runs out...and you think God's turned His back, and you think He can't get you outta that mess...and you'll never get over this hump, and no one in all the universe has ever endured what you've endured...just go to the Bible and read these two verses, will ya? "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your own minds. You haven't resisted unto blood striving against sin."

You haven't begun to do what Jesus did, and God took Him through, didn't He?...You know what this is? This is the culmination of the heroes of faith. We've seen some really wonderful ones in the Book

of Hebrews up to here, but here's the epitome. Here's the epitome. If I run the race and look at Abraham as my example, hummmmm, some failures. I run the race and look at Moses, ohhhhh, Moses blew it. Hit that rock. That wasn't too good. I run the race and look back and try to focus on those guys, I'm gonna find failure. If I run the race and focus on Jesus, I'm gonna find absolute total success. So where am I gonna focus? On Him, and as I focus on Him, I'll be like Him. As I'm like Him, I'll manifest His attributes. As I manifest His attributes, God gets glory. If God gets glory, I get a promised reward. As I think about a promised reward, I get happy, and that's what I want. The joy of knowing I please my Lord. Listen, the sinners contradicted Him. They railed against Him, and He stood fast...I pray God that we shall run the race of faith...Let's pray.

Our Father, we do thank You tonight, that You have spoken to our hearts in a very fresh and vital sense through this passage. You have revealed to us what You require. Oh, God, how thankful we are that these great men of the past have shown and proven again that we can live by faith. Father, help us, on the basis of what they have done...to look at them as encouragement, to lay aside legalism, and lay aside the sin. That sin of unbelief and doubt that tangles us up in the race. Help us to strip off all that stuff that makes us overweight and hinders our running, and help us to run with endurance, going right over and through the obstacles and always looking at Jesus, who is the perfect example of what faith is, who trusted God to the very end, and, when the world said, "He trusted Him, let Him deliver Him now," they didn't know how right they were. For, God, You did indeed deliver Him. He came out of that grave. Oh, God, how faithful You have been to everyone who ever trusted You. Thank You for that. Teach us to take the...the lessons of history culminating in Christ and know we can really believe You...We thank You in Christ's blessed name. Amen.

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