



Run The Race

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Introduction:

On the bulletin cover from last Sunday, was a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson. “What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.

This morning I want to share the word of God with you about the race that is set before us. None of us knows what this year holds. We have great promise and assurance that no matter what happens to us individually, or what God does among us as a fellowship, He is in charge and will not leave us.

I want to cheer you on in your race this morning. We are going to make it. We are going to see Jesus face to face if we press on in Him. He will give you strength to complete what you have started.

Let me point out to you some observations this morning. A race has contestants. A race has a start and finish. A race has definite boundaries. When one makes a decision to be involved in the race, there is a commitment to that event. The race becomes a priority. Completing the race becomes important to those involved.

Take a look at our text with me this morning.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

When we look at the context of this chapter in Hebrews we see just before it wonderful accounts of men and women of faith, who God used but who were just like you and me. These individuals all ran the race that was set before them.

Hebrews 12:1 – there was a great cloud of witnesses who participated and completed the race before us. They have had to deal with the challenges of the race. These witnesses give testimony that it is possible to

complete the race. It is possible to deal successfully with the things that would hinder one from running and completing the race. They are watching our progress from the grandstands of heaven, and they are cheering us on. Go! Press on! You can MAKE IT! Run! Stay the course! Come on. It’s worth it to finish!

The Goal of the race is Jesus Christ. He is the one where we start and end. It’s all about Him. He is the prize for which we run.

I. Throw off that which would entangle or slow down, or hinder your progress.

All too often in life we hold on to things that slow down our progress. Past hurts, disappointments, frustrations, things that anger us, things we have no control over, and those things do impede our forward movement in the race for the prize. If we

hold onto these things they will cause us to fall, they will keep us bound to the past and not looking ahead.

With any race, and any running, there is forward movement.

Paul writes and says “whatever it is that hinders your race, set it aside.” You can not make everything right. There are things that you can change. I think of the serenity prayer. God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

There are distractions, there are temptations, and there are conditions. There are things we do not have control over. There are things we don’t understand. *We do* have control over the decision to be involved in running the race. *We do* have control over what we focus on while running, and the goal. *We do* have control over the pace we run. *We have control* over what we throw off and what we cling to.

Lay aside every weight and the things that so easily entangle us.

What are some of the things that weigh us down?

- A. Weight of worry – it will distract you from keeping your focus. Worry about what you might face later today, or tomorrow.

Matthew 6:25-33

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His king-

dom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

- B. Weight of failures in the past – weigh your down.

Phil. 3:13-14

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. but one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

- C. Weight of self-importance – thinking of yourself more highly than you ought.

Romans 12:3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

- D. Weight of discontent – There are times when we become frustrated and not content at all with what God has given us and blessed us with. This weight will become a snare to us. We can not change our circumstances, but we can ask God to help us adapt to our circumstances.

1 Tim. 6:8

But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

We are what our weakest point is. Just like a link in a chain, if sin is being kept out of our lives at the weakest point, then we are gaining in this race. If we continually are weak there, and do not overcome, we are losing, and the enemy of our soul is gaining ground. It is by watchfulness, prayer and effort that the places of sin which easily beset us, become places of victory and the strength of our God. If that is truly happening, then we may rejoice, if we perpetually fall in one area, then let us be sure that is the true index to our character.

II. Sin that easily besets us

A. Sin of making other things more important than God

Each of us has certain things we struggle with as far as self is concerned. You know the things that tangle you up. Set them aside. Do not let them have power or control over your life. They have no place in the race.

The competition is not with others, but with self. The competition is to overcome sin and the way it hinders us, and the way it tangles us. Christ wants us to be victorious. Jesus came to make us overcomers and to finish the race.

You may say – it's too hard to lay something aside. What did Jesus do to run the race as a man? He laid down His glory in heaven. He allowed Himself to be tempted in every point like we are tempted, yet He was without sin. He set aside everything that was comfortable to Him, so He become like us and laid down His life to forgive us and pay the penalty for our sin.

III. Run with patience

There are times all of us have felt tempted to quit. The race is long. The challenges are there, and the course just doesn't seem fair. But keep on running. Run with patience. Run the race to win. There are boundaries to a race. Getting off the track will slow you down. Stay on the track, stay in the race, and keep to the boundaries that are laid out.

1 Cor. 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to

get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

This act of laying aside the weight is an act of our will - a decision we make. You may be saying, but I've had to struggle with that weight all through my life. It is impossible in one act of my will to set it aside so it's not a deterrent to me for the rest of my life. Let me remind you that with God all things are possible to them that believe.

IV. Fix your eyes on Jesus. When you lay something down like this it is once and for all. Don't go back and pick it up again. By an act of our will, we focus our attention on Him. Looking unto Jesus...

When we look to Jesus we see the character that He displayed. We see how He responded and reacted to evil, to temptation, to sin, to fame. Looking to Him gives us a pattern for our life. It helps us to resist all evil.

He is the author and finisher of our faith - the start and end. He is the prize for which we press on in the race. Faith is that which is dependent on God. Faith is in the relationship that brings us close to God. Faith is the assured confidence in an unseen future.

Consider Jesus then. He is the focus as the author and finisher of our faith.

Conclusion:

This morning, we have opportunity to strengthen our resolve to complete the race. We have opportunity to lay aside weights, to put aside sins that entangle us and beset us and return our focus to Jesus. We have a new year before us. We have the example of Christ. We have the power of the Spirit and the strength of His word along with a great cloud of witnesses cheering us on. You can make it. God assures us of that. It's a matter of our will.