

# RUNNING WITH ENDURANCE

## Table of Contents

Sunday AM Bible Class	Pg. 3	Tuesday	Pg. 20
The Race that is Set Before Us		Pressing Toward the Prize	
Dennis Pierce		Keith Hovis	
Sunday AM Worship	Pg. 11	Wednesday	Pg. 22
Hindrances to Our Race		Finishing the Race	
Todd Houston		Jim Roberts	
Sunday PM Worship	Pg. 14	Thursday	Pg. 24
Running with Purpose		Looking to Jesus	
Eddy Craft		Roby Ellis	
Monday	Pg. 17		
The Cheering Crowd			
Phil Blevins			

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## THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US

*Dennis Pierce*

Text: *Hebrews 12:1*

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*

### Introduction

- I. There are a number of events that clearly indicate people have an interest in racing of various kinds.
  - A. The last six Boston Marathons, prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, have had more than 30,000 participants each year.
  - B. Motor sport race tracks continue to attract large crowds.
  - C. There is often amazement at how fast someone can run 100 meters but also who can win the 2200 mile long, Tour de France or the nearly 800 mile long, Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in Alaska.
  - D. Why do people run marathons?
    1. Some have said that the most obvious reasons why people run them are the positive health and mental wellbeing effects.
    2. Others point to a feeling of accomplishments or being able to rise above physical limitations.
    3. Regardless of the motivation, marathon runners have a strong will to make it to the finish line.
      - a. Out of the average 30,000 entries each year in the Boston Marathon, 97% finish the race.
- II. Our theme for this year's lectureship is, "Running With Endurance."
  - A. *Hebrews 11-12:4, Galatians 5:7, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Philippians 3:12-14* and *2 Timothy 4:6-8* are scriptures that have been assigned to each speaker for this series of lessons.
    1. These texts bring to our attention the image of a physical race that we might make an application to our

Christian life.

2. Jesus, the master teacher, so often gave us parables illustrating from earthly experiences biblical truths.
  3. The Prodigal Son leaving and returning home (*Luke 15*), the sowing of seed (*Matthew 13*) and the Good Samaritan (*Luke 10*) all provide images that become imbedded in our hearts, stimulating more faithfulness to Christ.
- B. Children, after learning to walk, are soon running almost all the time.
1. They're so excited about life and you have probably noticed they run everywhere they go.
  2. These little people can run from one room to another all day long.
  3. If your child needs to get something in the other room, they don't walk, they run! They need to get everywhere in a hurry.
  4. It isn't long before they become competitive with each other.
- C. Whether we remember it or not, more than likely we adults were doing the same thing.
1. Somewhere along the way we changed and I'm thankful we did.
  2. *1 Cor. 13:11*, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."
  3. Imagine adults chasing each other all over the house from room to room.
- III. Running at a young age and exposure to athletic events involving a race or a struggle make it easy to see the similarities in our everyday lives of following Christ.
- A. Our focus for this lesson is from the last few words in *Hebrews 12:1*, "the race that is set before us."
- B. We will consider, "The Race," "The Race That Is Set" and The Race That is Set Before Us."

## Discussion

### I. The Race

#### A. The context

1. We are not given the name of the author of the Book of Hebrews, nor to whom it was written.
2. However, the book is entitled, “Hebrews,” because the content clearly indicates the intended audience was Hebrew Christians.
3. The writer’s concern is that these Christians could drift away and neglect the great salvation (2:1-4).
4. For this reason, the book emphasizes the superiority of Christ over angels, Moses, the old priesthood, the old sacrificial system and the old covenant.
5. The author is aware of the persecutions these Christians had faced and the effect this could have on their faith (10:32-39).
6. We can see the theme of our lectureship, “**Running with Endurance**,” developing throughout the book but especially in 10:35-36, “<sup>35</sup>*Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.* <sup>36</sup>*For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.*”
7. The warning is, “DO NOT GO BACK!”
8. “*But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul*” (10:39).
9. These words of encouragement and the great examples of faith in chapter 11 bring us to “*the race that is set before us.*”

#### B. Understanding the word, “race”

1. Webster’s definition:
  - a. “a competition between people, animals, vehicles, etc., to determine which one is the fastest : a contest of speed”
  - b. “a person's progression through life or through a period in life”
2. The word translated race in *Hebrews 12:1* is from the Greek word “agon,” meaning effort, conflict, contention, fight or

race.

3. In addition to *Heb. 12:1*, the word occurs in the following verses:
  - a. *Phil. 1:30*: "Having the same conflict which you saw in me,"
  - b. *Col. 2:1*: "I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you, and those in Laodicea,"
  - c. *1 Thess. 2:2*: "we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict."
  - d. *1 Tim. 6:12*: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life,"
  - e. *2 Tim. 4:7*: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."
4. The word, "agony," has its origin here.
  - a. Agony means intense pain of mind or body.
  - b. It is the struggle that precedes death or a violent struggle or contest.
  - c. *Luke 22:44*, "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."
5. Therefore, the Christian race is one of conflict and is to be expected (*Eph. 6:12*).
6. Someone may say, "If that is Christianity, then I want no part of it."
  - a. Words like struggle, conflict, fight, effort and endurance can be intimidating, but remember *1 Cor. 10:13*, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."
  - b. Life itself is a struggle and do not be deceived, life without Christ will not be without struggle and pain.
  - c. Plato said, "Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."
  - d. Abraham Lincoln said it like this, "In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and to the young, it comes with

bitterest agony because it takes them unawares. I have had experience enough to know what I say.”

7. Through our struggles with conflict, pain, disappointment, etc. we are working out our salvation (*Phil. 2:12*).
  - a. It has been said, “You learn more from ten days of agony than from ten years of contentment.”
8. Every Christian is in this race and the struggles pale into insignificance compared to what is waiting at the finish line (*Rom. 8:18*).

## II. The Race That is Set

- A. A race that is set means it is a particular kind of race.
  1. This race is one that must be accompanied by endurance or the ability to sustain a prolonged stressful effort or activity.
  2. Therefore, this race is best described as a marathon and not a 100-meter sprint.
  3. You will not make the distance in a marathon without proper training and preparation and the same is true in the Christian race.
  4. *1 Cor. 9:27a*, “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection,*” (NKJV); “*But I discipline my body and keep it under control,*” (ESV); “*Instead I subdue my body and make it my slave,*” (NET).
  5. Jesus said in *Matt. 16:24*, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”
- B. Everything about this race has been set by God.
  1. *Isaiah 46:9-10*, “<sup>9</sup>*Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, <sup>10</sup>Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,*”
  2. All races have a start and a finish line and the same is true for the race that has been set before us. (Start and finish are set

- by God.)
3. This race begins with faith, *Heb. 11:6*, “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*”
  4. This race ends with faith, *Rom. 1:17*, “*from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’*”
    - a. *Revelation 2:10*, “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*”
  5. Baptism into Christ for remission of sins (*Acts 2:38*) starts us running and obedience to His will keeps us in the race.
  6. The runners in this race are from all walks of life for there is no respect of person with God (*Rom. 2:11*).
  7. They are all one in Christ (*Gal. 3:28*) and are looking out for the best interest of each other (*Phil. 2:4*).

### III. The Race that is set Before Us

- A. Notice the word “us” in *Heb. 12:1*, “*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us** lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares **us**, and **let us** run with endurance the race that is set before **us**,*”
- B. “Let us,” statements occur often in the book of Hebrews.
  1. Let us fear, *4:1*.
  2. Let us be diligent, *4:11*.
  3. Let us hold fast our confession, *4:14*.
  4. Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, *4:16*.
  5. Let us go on to perfection, *6:1*.
  6. Let us draw near with a true heart, *10:22*.
  7. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope, *10:23*.
  8. Let us consider one another, *10:24*.
  9. Let us have grace, *12:28*.
  10. Let us go forth to Him, *13:13*.
- C. This race is ours to run together.
  1. The Bible is clear that each of us will be responsible for our individual obedience to Christ.

2. *Galatians 6:4-5* states it this way, “<sup>4</sup>*But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. <sup>5</sup>For each one shall bear his own load.*”
  3. But there is great comfort and strength in knowing others are in the same race.
  4. This is the significance of the “let us,” statement in *Hebrews 10:24-25*, “<sup>24</sup>*And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, <sup>25</sup>not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*”
  5. The story of Derek Redmond’s 400-meter race in the Barcelona 1992 Olympics is a tremendous illustration of the help we can receive from one another but especially from our heavenly father.
    - a. There are several videos of this event on youtube and you may want to see them.
    - b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-Yn4b9iClE>
    - c. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSL0BjJWUR8>
    - d. You can also simply google, Derek Redmond.
- D. The race that is “set before us” should be accepted with joy.
1. That is how Jesus viewed the task that was “set before Him.”
  2. *Hebrews 12:2*, “*looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*”
  3. A joyful acceptance of “The Race” will make an amazing difference as you press on.

## Conclusion

- I. To be a winner in this race we don’t have to be the fastest, the strongest or the one with the most talent.



II. Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection from the grave we can run knowing we are going to win.

## HINDRANCES TO OUR RACE

*Todd Houston*

Text: *Galatians 5:7; Hebrews 12:1*

### Introduction:

- I. Every endeavor faces obstacles and setbacks, and the Christian race is no exception.
- II. Sometimes we face obstacles and hindrances from outside sources.
- III. Other times, our hindrances come from within.
- IV. In this lesson, we seek to "...lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us..." in order that we may finish our race and receive the crown.

### Discussion:

#### **I. Why We Need to Identify and Remove Hindrances**

- A. The book of Hebrews was written to persuade a group of Hebrew Christians not to quit the race they had begun (*Heb. 2:1-3; 3:12-13; 6:4-8; 10:23, 35-39; 12:1*).
- B. Paul stressed the need for consistent discipline to win the race because the reward for victory and the cost for failure is too great (*1 Cor. 9:24-27; Rev. 2:10*).

#### **II. Identifying External Hindrances**

- A. Jesus knew some would cast stumbling blocks (*Lk. 17:3*).
- B. Paul quizzed the Galatians as to who hindered their obedience despite their having run well previously (*Gal. 5:7*).
- C. Satan is at the root of all hindrances, but he uses various means to try and trip us up along the way (*Gen. 3:1-6; 1 Th. 3:5*).
  1. Paul warned that bad company can be a hindrance (*1 Cor. 15:33*).
  2. An ungodly spouse may be a hindrance (*Gen. 3:6; Deut. 7:3-4*).

3. Ungodly parents may be a hindrance (*Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21*).
  4. Government officials may be a hindrance (*2 Sam. 11:1-5; 1 Kgs. 12:25-33*).
  5. Unfaithful religious leaders may be a hindrance (*Jer. 5:30 31; Mal. 2:7-8; Acts 20:28-32*).
  6. False teachers may likewise cause a runner to stumble (*Mt. 7:15-20; Gal. 1:6-9; 5:1-9; 2 Pt. 2-3*).
- D. This is a small sample of potential external hindrances of which we must beware.

### III. Identifying Internal Hindrances

- A. These external hindrances are powerless without our internal consent (*Jn. 10:27-29*).
  1. Sin is what ultimately ensnares us in our race (*Heb. 12:1*).
  2. James 1:13-15 proves our internal response to Satan's external stumbling blocks determines the outcome of our race.
- B. Each of us likely has different internal hindrances: greed, anger, lust, fear, laziness, dishonesty, distrust, doubt, impure language, etc.
- C. What do we do now that we have identified some hindrances?

### IV. Laying Aside Every Hindrance

- A. *Hebrews 11* is not history for history's sake, but it is an encouragement to finish the race just as this great cloud of witnesses had done so (*Heb. 12:1*).
- B. Therefore, all that hinders or causes us to stumble must be cast aside.
- C. Keys to laying aside our hindrances and running with endurance:
  1. Develop our spiritual senses to recognize the things that cause us to stumble (*Eph. 5:15-17; 2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:11 14*).
  2. Know our hindrances are common and the race is winnable (*Heb. 11; 1 Cor. 9:24; 10:13; 2 Tim. 4:6-8*).

3. Realize the prize for victory is worth the strain (*1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 3:12-14; Jas. 1:12*).
4. Value the eternal and spiritual over the temporal and fleshly (*Mt. 6:19-21; 10:34-37; Phil. 3:7-11; Heb. 11:24-27; 12:3*).
5. Fixate on Jesus and His will (*Heb. 12:2-3; Gal. 5:10; Phil. 4:8-9*).

### Conclusion:

- I. Every child of God is in a race for their lives.
- II. The stakes are too high not to finish this race.
- III. Satan will use every tool at his disposal to thwart our pursuit.
- IV. We must lay aside every encumbrance and sin to win our race.
- V. If we learn to never take our eyes off of Jesus, He will supply our every need to deliver us to victory!

## RUNNING WITH PURPOSE

*Eddy Craft*

Text: *I Corinthians 9:24-27*

### Introduction

- I. In our text, “Christianity” is compared to a race and a fight.
- II. Paul is telling Christians to look at what it takes to become a champion in human endeavors and copy this in the race for heaven; in a physical race only one could win the prize but in the Christian race we all can win.
- III. Those who run in physical races spend long hours in training, giving up a lot of social time.
- IV. One must spend much time in studying and applying the gospel to his life; for this reason, we must run this race with purpose.
- V. Paul’s purpose in running and fighting was to keep from losing his reward, as we shall see a little later; this must be our purpose as well; a real goal is to be gained; there is a real enemy to battle, and he can be defeated.
- VI. In our lesson we will notice three points from our text . . .
  - A. The Race.
  - B. The Fight.
  - C. The Finish.

### Discussion

#### **I. The Race**

- A. Their race was physical, but ours is spiritual.
- B. They obtained a physical crown, but we obtain an eternal crown (*2 Tim. 4:8; Rom. 8:18; Jam. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 21:8*).
- C. We are told why we should run in *verse 24*: “*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*”
- D. The race demands temperance (self-control).

E. Paul concluded that we should run (*verse 26a*).

## II. The Fight

- A. *Verse 26* says, “*I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*”
- B. The Christian race is also a fight; we have a choice to become a Christian or not, but if you choose to become a Christian you don’t have a choice whether to fight or not; the Christian life is a warfare.
- C. When we run the race with purpose, we will have a fight on our hands. We must fight . . .
  - 1. The devil and his angels (*Eph. 6:12; 1 Pet. 5:8*).
  - 2. The world (*Jam. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17*).
  - 3. Fleshly lust (*Rom. 7:18; Gal. 6:8*).
- D. The Good Fight consists of . . .
  - 1. A good cause (*John 18:36-37; Heb. 9:15*).
  - 2. A stand for right (*2 Tim. 4:2; Eph. 5:11*).
  - 3. Glorifying God and defeating Satan (*Mat. 5:16; Jam. 4:7*).

## III. The Finish

- A. Here, Paul gives the real purpose for running; he buffeted his body.
- B. He buffeted his body to avoid being a castaway (reprobate); the word “castaway” is the same word translated as “reprobate” in other passages (*cf. Rom. 1:28; 2 Cor. 13:5-7; 1 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:16*).
- C. “It is thus crystal clear that the apostle Paul, even after the world-shaking ministry of the word of God which characterized his life, considered it possible that he himself could become reprobate and lose the eternal reward; it was for the purpose of avoiding that possibility that he buffeted his body, walked in the strictest discipline, and devoted every possible effort to the service of the Lord” (Coffman, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p.142).
- D. Nothing could be sadder than once a person has been saved

from his past sins to then return to sin and be overcome in the pollution of world (*2 Pet. 2:20-22*).

## Conclusion

- I. In our race as Christians, we must . . .
  - A. Prepare.
  - B. Be patient.
  - C. Run with purpose.
  - D. Keep our eyes focused solely on Jesus Christ!
- II. Remember that all who enter this spiritual race and endure till the end will receive the prize, but it all begins with our obedience to the gospel!

## THE CHEERING CROWD

*Phil Blevins*

Text: *Hebrews 11; 12:1*

### Introduction

- I. The great men and women of faith listed in *Hebrews 11* were given the task of running the race. They faced seemingly formidable odds but were victorious by the power of God. Without the great faith they nurtured and developed their success would have been impossible.
- II. We similarly are called to run a race for God which the Bible describes as a war (*2 Cor. 10:3; 1 Tim. 1:18*). These faithful servants of God serve as an example to us today (*Hebrews 12:1*). We take courage from their lives and their faith as they in many ways cheer us on in our race and our fight against the devil and his forces. We will look at some of these great people of faith and make application to us today.

### Discussion

- I. They encourage us to finish the race even when the circumstances are unpleasant.**
  - A. Joseph - He finished the race even though he faced repeated injustices. (*Hebrews 11:22; Genesis 37-41*)
    1. His brothers hated him
    2. He was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife
    3. He was imprisoned falsely
    4. He was forgotten in prison
    5. However, he saved the nation that God would use to bring the savior into the world from starvation.
  - B. Noah – He finished the race when the world was overwhelmingly wicked. (*Hebrews 11:7; Genesis 6-8*)
    1. Every imagination of the people was evil



2. Only his family was saved
3. However, he remained a faithful preacher of righteousness and became the father of all nations. (*2 Peter 2:5*)

**II. They encourage us to finish the race against overwhelming odds  
Gideon – He finished the race when the victory looked impossible. (*Hebrews 11: 32; Judges 6-8*)**

- A. He had to stand against his father's religion
- B. He had to stand against his neighbors
- C. He had to defeat an army that outnumbered his army by at least 400:1
- D. However, he delivered God's people from the Midianites.

**III. They encourage us finish the race under extreme pressure to conform to the world.**

- A. Daniel
  1. As a teenager he refused to conform to the idolatry of Babylon. (*Daniel 1&2*)
  2. As an old man he refused to conform to the idolatry of the Medes and Persians. (*Hebrews 11:33; Daniel 6*)
- B. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow knowing they would lose their lives. (*Hebrews 11:34; Daniel 3*)

**IV. They encourage us to finish the race even when we make mistakes.**

- A. Samson made many mistakes, but he finished strong. (*Hebrews 11:32; Judges 13-16*)
- B. Abraham made many mistakes but became known as the friend of God. (*Hebrews 11:8-19; Genesis 12-24*)
- C. David made many mistakes but was known as a man after God's own heart. (*Hebrews 11:32; 1 Samuel 16 – 1 Kings 2*)

**V. They encourage us to finish the race because we can believe God can do what was beyond the possibility of man.**

- A. The birth of Isaac. (*Hebrews 11:19; Romans 4:17-21*)

- B. The crossing of the Red Sea. (*Hebrews 11:29*)
- C. The victory over Jericho. (*Hebrews 11:30; Joshua 6*)

## Conclusion

- I. We too can finish the race if we follow the example of these giants of faith.
- II. We must endure when the circumstances are unpleasant, when the odds are overwhelming, regardless of where we came from, regardless of the mistakes we make, and regardless of how impossible the task may seem because God has promised us he will be with us till we reach the finish line.

## **PRESSING TOWARD THE PRIZE**

*Keith Hovis*

Text: *Philippians 3:12-16*

### Introduction

- I. The Christian who quits...
- II. *Philippians 3:12*
- III. Resolve: To decide firmly on a course of action.
- IV. As Paul pressed towards the prize, what did he resolve?

### Discussion

#### **I. He Resolved: Maximum Effort (v. 12)**

- A. Paul had a proper perspective.
- B. He had not attained, and he understood that.
- C. Maximum effort requires close attention.
  1. He was serving The Christ.
  2. He belonged to Christ.
  3. To live was Christ.
- D. What are we paying attention to? (*Hebrews 2:1-3*)
- E. Is our effort maximum?
- F. Imagine if it's not...

#### **II. He Resolved: A Focused Mind (v. 13)**

- A. He pressed – not always easy – sometimes it is a strain.
- B. “This one thing I do”.
- C. What’s our mindset as we run?
  1. The past
  2. The clutter of the present
  3. The future – The prize (*John 14:1-4*)
- D. What if we were successful in the past and forget the importance of the present?
- E. What’s our why?

- F. “We must look at culture through the eyes of the Bible, and not look at the Bible through the eyes of culture”.

### **III. He Resolved: To Reach for The Prize (v. 14)**

- A. It is not always convenient or easy.
- B. He understood what it was and who was there.
- C. Eden was paradise because God was there.
- D. We shall see Him as He is. (*1 Jn. 3:2*)
- E. Understand, we are to be reaching NOW!
  - 1. What about our study? (*2 Timothy 2:15*)
  - 2. What about our prayer life? (*James 5:16*)
  - 3. What about our parental responsibilities? (*Proverbs 22:6*)
  - 4. What about our worship? (*John 4:24*)
- F. Some say, “I can’t find my purpose in life”. (*Ecclesiastes 12:13*)

### **IV. He Resolved: Mature Thinking (vs. 15-16)**

- A. How do mature people think? (*vs. 7-8*)
- B. Perfect is completeness. It is to run with endurance as we reach for the prize.
- C. “Otherwise minded”
- D. Lack of mature thinking (*Hebrews 5:12-14*)
- E. Maturity takes effort.

### Conclusion

- I. A Maximum Effort, A Focused Mind, Proper Reaching, A Mature Mind
- II. Is this a description of our race? If not, why not?
- III. To run with endurance, I must be properly pressing towards the prize!
- IV. The tragedy of missing the prize...

## FINISHING THE RACE

*Jim Roberts*

Text: *2 Timothy 4:6-8*

### Introduction

- I. The race to Heaven is a race that we must enter to be saved.
- II. It is also essential that we finish this race!
- III. In our text, Paul's dying words must be heard.

### Discussion

#### **I. Paul Is Facing Death (vs.6).**

- A. "Poured out as a drink offering" (*Gen. 35:14; Num. 15:1-10; Phil. 2:17*).
- B. "The time of my departure is at hand".
- C. We too will face the hour of death (*Heb. 9:27*).

#### **II. Paul Is Facing Death With Confidence (vs.7).**

- A. "I have fought the good fight" (*1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3-4; 1 Cor. 9:26*).
- B. "I have finished the race" (*2 Tim. 2:5; Acts 13:25; 20:22-24*).
- C. "I have kept the faith" (*1 Tim. 4:1*).
- D. There is comfort in dying with confidence!

#### **III. Paul Is Facing Death With Expectation (vs.8).**

- A. "There awaits for me a crown of righteousness".
- B. The Lord is a righteous judge in contrast with the Jewish & Roman courts & his enemies.
- C. Such reward is for all who love His appearing!

### Conclusion

- I. Paul is a good example for us all to finish what we start.

- II. Likewise, Jesus shows us the importance of finishing the race (*Jn. 17:4; 19:30*).
- III. “The end of a thing is better than its beginning...” *Eccl. 7:8*.

## LOOKING TO JESUS

*Roby Ellis*

Text: *Hebrews 12:1-2*

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

### Introduction

- I. Proper focus is always important.
  - A. It is important for the batter to keep his eye on the ball.
  - B. At quarterback, you need to keep your eyes downfield.
  - C. Behind the wheel, you need to keep your eyes on the road.
- II. It is so easy to divert our attention.
  - A. Athletes often get caught up in the emotion of the game, the roar of the crowds, the attention, the money, and so many other things.
  - B. Distracted drivers are a danger to themselves and everyone else on the road.
- III. There is no shortage of distractions out there to pull our attention away from the things that matter most in this life.

### Discussion

- I. **We are always tempted to focus on the wrong thing.**
  - A. We are tempted to look back.
    1. Paul could have allowed himself to become distracted by the things he had done in the past, both bad and good (*Php. 3:12-14*).

2. Peter warned of the dangers of returning to the sins that we once left behind when we came to Jesus (*2 Pet. 2:20-22*).
  3. This was one of the chief dangers facing the Hebrews in the latter part of the first century (*Heb. 10:23-39*). Was Jesus ever really coming back?
  4. Jesus said, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (*Luke 9:62*).
- B. We are tempted to look down.
1. When God was about to bring Israel into the promised land, He told them not to adopt the ways of the people they were to displace (*Deut. 12:29-32*).
  2. The fulfillment that we all seek is not going to be found in the ways of the world, although the world will make abundant promises of such (*2 Pet. 2:19*).
  3. The wise son of David sought it in everything he could find—in possessions, in pleasure, in human understanding—but he did not find anything there but vanity and striving for the wind (*Ecc. 1:14*).
- C. We are tempted to look around.
1. This was Peter’s mistake when he attempted to walk out to the Lord on the surface of the Galilee (*Matt. 14:30*).
  2. The temptation to compare ourselves with one another is by no means a new problem (*Matt. 18:1*), but it might be more of a problem now than ever.
  3. Too many Christians have given up the contest at a moment when they were poised for victory, all because they allowed the enemy to convince them that they would never be able to measure up to someone else’s success.
- D. We need to learn to look ahead.
1. Paul tells us to fix our sights and our desires on things



that are above, for that is where Christ, our life, is (*Col. 3:1-2*).

2. Instead of allowing ourselves to become entangled in the snares of sin, we need to set our eyes firmly upon Jesus and the prize waiting for us at the end of our earthly race (*Heb. 12:1-2*).

E. Where is the focal point of your life?

## **II. As Christians we are called to focus on something that we cannot even see.**

A. How can we keep our focus on something that is invisible?

1. How do we keep our eyes on Jesus or heaven when there is not a person alive today who has ever seen either?
2. Faith is “the evidence of things not seen” (*Heb. 11:1*).
3. Just as a runner does not have to be able to see the finish line until the very end of a race, we can run our race with full assurance of the prize at the end.

B. This is something that all the great examples of faith shared in common.

1. Noah had his eyes set on something “not yet seen” when he built the ark, and his family was saved from destruction (*Heb. 11:7*).
2. Abraham had his sights set on a country he had never seen, “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (*v. 10*), and he found it.
3. Moses “forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (*v. 27*).
4. These men of faith saw the promises afar off, and although they never laid their eyes upon them in this life, they embraced them just the same (*v. 13*).

C. What is it going to take for us to reach the goal?

1. We need to remember the faithfulness of God (*Heb. 10:23*).
  2. We must continue to assemble and to encourage one another (*vv. 24-25*).
  3. We need to run with endurance (*vv. 35-36*).
  4. We must never draw back out of fear or fatigue (*vv 37 39; 12:3*).
- D. Through the eyes of faith, we can see the victory for right here.
1. David could see the head of Goliath in his hand before the battle even started.
  2. Moses could tell the Israelites to stand firmly where they were and “see the salvation of the LORD” (*Ex. 14:13*).
  3. When all of Judah’s enemies joined forces against them, Jehoshaphat the king cried out to God, “Our eyes are upon You” (*2 Chr. 20:12*), and God gave them the unlikeliest of victories.
  4. In his final imprisonment, Paul did not know how much time he had left, but he could still say, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (*2 Tim. 1:12*).

## Conclusion

- I. In heaven all the focus is on God alone.
  - A. John paints for us a scene of God sitting alone on His throne in the middle of a company of nameless kings who cast down their thrones at His feet and offer no praise to any but Him who is “holy, holy, holy” (*Rev. 4:1-8*).
  - B. When we learn to put our focus on God more in our homes and in the church, we are sure to find our homes and the

church becoming more and more like heaven.

- II. We have come too far to surrender to the enemy now.
  - A. Our Jewish brothers and sisters had sacrificed and suffered greatly for the cause of Christ, but some were beginning to wonder if it was worth it.
  - B. Had they been deceived? If Jesus had already won, why had He not returned? Why had they yet to see all things placed under His feet (*Heb. 2:8-18*)?
  - C. Let's never forget that it has often been at our lowest points and our weakest moments when God has done His greatest work.
  - D. Because He lives, our labor is never in vain in the Lord (*1 Cor. 15:58*).
- III. Even (and especially) in the midst of troubled waters, we need to keep our eyes fixed firmly on Jesus!

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