

From 7-30-17
RUNNING THE RACE OF LIFE

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II Timothy 4:6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

II Timothy 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

II Timothy 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

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Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

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Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

Intro:

The Bible likens this life to a race. The clock is ticking away and there is only a certain time to finish our course. Paul, the greatest New Testament Christian that ever lived, said he sought to run that race well. Solomon, the wisest O.T. Saint, said in the book of Ecclesiastes:

Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

The end of this mortal race is at your funeral, then you will face your creator and will receive the commendation or condemnation according to how you ran that race.

Solomon warns that it is not wise to get your eyes off of this goal of running the race that God has set before you.

Brother Vucish confided in me one time. He said he hated preaching at weddings. He said, "At a wedding everyone is trying so hard to make things right, and let everyone have a good time." He said, "I would rather do a funeral. It is easier to preach at a funeral than a wedding. At a funeral the people are already half way to the mourners bench."

Amazing how many lives have been changed at funerals but so few at weddings. In fact, more lives have been destroyed at weddings. If you marry the wrong person that wedding could be your funeral.

So the Bible likens this short life of ours to that of a race and we are charged by God himself to run that race with all diligence.

In light of this truth let us this morning consider some aspects of this race of life.

First of all:

I. CONSIDER THE PURPOSE OF THIS RACE.

WHY DO WE RUN THIS RACE?

II Timothy 2:4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

The goal that we should have in this life is to please our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

1. It is only reasonable that we should seek to please Him:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Why is it only reasonable:

I Corinthians 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

I Corinthians 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

I Corinthians 7:23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

We owe Him a great debt, and it is our supreme duty to please Him. We are bought with a price, a price that exceeds all monetary value. We are indebted to Christ and we should with all our hearts seek to please Him.

It never ceases to amaze me how so many Christians live their lives to please themselves. They live for themselves, they serve themselves. They make decisions in their life with little regard for what Christ has said in His word..

II Timothy 2:4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

Paul also said,

Romans 15:1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Romans 15:2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

Romans 15:3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

Why did Jesus come to planet earth, was it to take a vacation?

Did he come for his own benefit?

Did he make any decisions in this life for His own welfare?

Our supreme purpose in this life is to please Him and not ourselves.

Why then, do we envy and try to emulate people in this world who live only for themselves?

Why are we here in this life? Is it to please ourselves?

2. THE WAY WE RUN THIS RACE TO PLEASE HIM IS TO KEEP FOCUSED ON THE GOAL HE HAS FOR US.

II Timothy 2:4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

Note: It says, that we should not entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life. How do we do this?

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

This is the definition of not entangling yourself with the world.

There are some things we as Christians cannot do.

We have to work in this world, but we need to be careful that whatever we do in the world doesn't entangle us in the world.

We are in the world but we should never be part of the world.

I am a bi-vocational Pastor, I run a business but I always have to be careful that my business affairs do not entangle me so I cannot please the Lord first.

Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, said. It is good to go to the house of mourning to remind yourself THIS IS THE END OF THE RACE FOR ME. WHAT WILL I HAVE WHEN THAT RACE IS OVER?

The clock is ticking away and you are in a race to finish this life and make the most of the limited time available. What will you do with this gift that is given to you?

Will you live to please yourself?

Will you live to please others?

Will you live to get gain?

Will you live to be loved of the world or loved of Christ?

Will you live to please Him, your creator?

Will you live to please yourself?

3. THE WAY WE RUN THIS RACE IS THAT WE NEED TO BE FOCUSED ON WINNING THIS RACE.

Is there anything else you can really be doing when your running a race?

As Christians we need to be consumed with the mission God has given us to please Him.

Who do we serve?

The whole concept of being a servant is so alienated from our 21st century minds that I do not believe we really comprehend what it means.

Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ,

Today we claim liberation we are all free men. What many people mean is they are free to sin.

Romans 6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Romans 6:17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Romans 6:18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

Free we think. In our day this freedom has led to bondage of sin.

Sexual revolution promised freedom and all it has produced is bondage.

Homes are destroyed marriages ruined. Is this the freedom they have?

Woman think they are free to abort their children. It has led us to a lopsided population. The Hippies of the 60's have no children to speak of, and mark it down this is all headed to euthanasia!

Two times in a persons life they are most vulnerable.

THE VERY YOUNG.

THE VERY OLD.

So this is the liberty we have in our nation today. Yet everyone at one time was young. Most everyone at one time will be part of the aged crowd!

II. CONSIDER THE RULES OF THE RACE.

II Timothy 2:5 And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

In the Olympic games there were rules for the competitions. An athlete will be disqualified if he breaks the rules!

What are the rules of the spiritual race? Are they not to run the race of our life according to the directives of God?

We must strive and run according the rules of the great judge.

I have many people claiming to be in the race for God, but they could care less about how God has told them to run. Some people's religion is all for show and success and they think that in the end how much they accomplished is more important to God than how they accomplished it.

This is the end justifies the means mentality.

God is going to be pleased with me because I have accomplished so much for Him, it doesn't matter that I lied to do it, or broke the law, or manipulated people, or hurt others. Look at what I accomplished for God.

Truth is, such a person didn't do it for God, because he should know that God is not impressed with crowds or buildings, or anything like that. The only thing that impresses God is that you are doing your best to obey Him in your life and run that race with all your might.

BUT REMEMBER WE MUST STRIVE LAWFULLY!!!

The race of this life is filled with obstacles, and difficulties. With each obstacle comes directions from God. Do thus and so, do this or that, obey the directives of God. So many are running but their are not running lawfully.

The Lord told Saul:

I Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

I Samuel 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

So many people are serving the Lord with sacrifices of rebellion, and self will. The end justifies the means. Does God care about building edifices, church buildings? Is He impressed with crowds? Today it seems that the mentality is just get it done, it does not matter how you do it!

A friend of mine went to visit a famous southern Baptist preacher who was known for his sound preaching and standards of godliness. When he went to visit the man changed all his standards. Started preaching from a different Bible. After the service he went and questioned the man about the changes, and he turned and said, did you see the crowds, did you see the offerings? In other words, IT WORKS.

An unsaved, man visited the church one time. We were meeting downstairs. He said to me, "You know you could pack this place out if you just got a keg of beer and played some music down here... "

In this race there are rules and we need to abide by the rules that Christ has given to us.

III. CONSIDER THE END OF OUR RACE .

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The time of Paul's departure was the end of his race.

We need to run to the end of the race to win.
Too many people quit short and their life ends in a disaster.

Consider Paul, a great example of a person who finished his life well:
If only we could be faithful till the end like Paul:
HIS LAST WORDS TO THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS ILLUSTRATES HIS FAITHFULNESS:

LOOK AT HIS LAST WORDS AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT IT IS TO FINISH YOUR COURSE WELL:

Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.
Acts 20:18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,
Acts 20:19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:
Acts 20:20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,
Acts 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.
Acts 20:22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:
Acts 20:23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.
Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

1. NOTE HOW HE MAINTAINED A GOOD TESTIMONY BEFORE ALL.

Acts 20:18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

There are a lot of people are seasonal Christians. Paul was consistent in every season.

SPRING
SUMMER
FALL
WINTER

2. HE SERVED THE LORD WITH A HUMBLE MIND.

Acts 20:19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

HIS LIFE WAS WRAPPED UP IN HUMILITY. Philippians 2: he had the mind of Christ.

3. Paul was consistent in witnessing and preaching and teaching Christ.

Acts 20:20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,

Acts 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. *Paul did not let the suffering of the ministry keep him from obeying Christ.*

Acts 20:22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

Acts 20:23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

5. *Paul viewed the hardships of this life as part of the course that God had him on in his pathway of service.*

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

CONCLUSION:

We need to constantly remind ourselves about the goal of this life to finish our course.

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We need to be reminded that we should run this race to the end.

The house of mourning is a reminder that this is the end of the race, and at the end of that race when you stand before God you are not going to take with you any buildings, or crowds, or cars, houses, you will stand there alone just you and God and you will be judged on the basis of your obedience. Nothing else.

Some Christians that served in obscurity, in obedience to God, are going to receive greater reward in that day than some well known preachers who manipulated and conned people and built large buildings all with the ends justifies the means mentality. God is not impressed, and in that day and the end of your race, Solomon said,

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

THE ONLY THING YOU CAN TAKE WITH YOU IN THAT DAY IS YOUR LIFE OF OBEDIENCE.

Have you lived to please yourself or others, or did you run that race to please God? The person who has run to please God will probably never impress people because he will appear to be like that foolish tortoise, who with purpose and direction just keeps moving forward at a slow and steady pace. God wants us to finish our course. The jack rabbits of this world are running a crooked path in disobedience to Christ's rules. We need to run this course lawfully as the Apostle Paul wrote.

When we thinking of Christians who run their race in this life for God, there is that great illustration of the Olympic Runner Eric Lidell.

Eric was a devout Christian who was chosen to represent England in the 100 meter competition in Paris in the 1924 Olympics. He was the son of missionaries in China. He refused to compete in the 100 meter race because the race was scheduled for Sunday. Being a Christian he refused to compete on a Sunday. Instead he competed in the 400 Meter race and won it and broke the world record.

The greatest race that Eric ran was not that Olympic race of 1924 but was his Christian race as a missionary.

Eric Liddell returned to China as a missionary in 1925. In 1941, the advancing Japanese army pressed Liddell and his family to flee to a rural mission station. Liddell was kept very busy dealing with the stream of locals who came to the station for medical treatment and food.

In 1943, the Japanese reached the mission station and Liddell was interned. Aggravated by the shortage of food and medical treatment, Liddell developed a brain tumor and died five months before liberation.

In fact Eric had an opportunity to be released from prison as part of a prison exchange, but instead chose to allow a pregnant woman to take his place.

What a great testimony for the Lord.

How will you end your race for God?