

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Sit, Stand, Walk and Run: Running

This morning we come to the fourth and final talk in our series "Sit, Stand, Walk and Run". We have come from a place of rest; that of sitting in our first talk, to this final energetic activity of running. As a young lad. I was fairly fast over short distances but was no good at long distance running! I dodged a lot when we had to go on cross country runs at school. A few weeks ago, I made the most awful discovery when out with some of the family. Playing tag with two of my grandchildren, Megan and Isaac, I realised that my 10 year old granddaughter could run faster than me even on short distances!

My scripture for this morning is from the book of Hebrews. "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, 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" Hebrews 12:1-2.

The thought of running in this scripture is different to playing tag with my grandchildren. The writer of the book of Hebrews is using the illustration of running to highlight the whole of the Christian life. As we consider the teaching of the above verses we will do so from the point of view of a competitor in athletics.

### On-lookers from the past

Some years ago Eric Liddle was brought to public attention in the film "Chariots of Fire". Eric was an athlete of tremendous ability and he was also a Christian. It was his faith in God that made him stand out from other athletes, especially when he announced that he would not run on a Sunday even in the Olympic Games. There are many others who have been examples to young athletes such as Roger Gilbert Bannister, a former English athlete best known as the first man in history to run the mile in less than 4 minutes. In athletics there are short, middle and long distance runners. The Christian race is definitely long distance; in fact it is a life marathon.

Let us read again the first clause of verse 1, "Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses". There is a pause implied with the word "*Therefore*". The writer wants his readers to consider what has just been stated in the previous chapter. A vast number of believers, some named and others unnamed, who have remained faithful through all of life's circumstances are listed here. Some are presented as living a positive life of faith, seemingly without difficulties. Others, that are listed near the end of chapter 11, are reported as going through horrendous times, even losing their lives. For the Christian these past fellow believers are for our encouragement. They reached the finishing line and all of them were winners. For us, it is not whether we can run a mile in less than four minutes. It is, "Will we run this race every day as winners?" As we go down through these verses we will see how it is possible, not only to win, but to be winners every day.

### On-lookers today

There are two sets of "On-lookers" today, Christian and non-Christian. All Christians are expected to be in the faith race but they are also spectators voicing encouragement to other believers. As fellow team competitors we work with, not against, each other. Paul, writing to the Philippians, acknowledges their help and support in the work of the gospel; "Your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" Philippians 1:5.

However, there are other "On-lookers" who are non-Christian. They watch, and, in some cases, want us to fail and fall out beside the race track. But our testimony, as we live out the Christian race is itself a Gospel message to the lost. They see our reaction to circumstances, the hurdles of life. They observe our joy in spite of the difficulties. Our difference is observed. These things and much more that come out of the "winner's" life style can draw some to Christ. This is part of the purpose of the race.

## Our running kit

Every athlete is aware of the need for the correct running kit. The right kind of running shoes, shorts and vest. The wrong kind of kit will hinder progress and make our efforts less effective.

The second clause in verse 1 states, "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us". This statement may seem obvious for athletes, but what does it mean for the Christian? Are we clothed with weights and sins? Whether running in school races or the Olympic Games we do not want anything to hinder our running. Two groups of hindrances are identified, weights and sins. What are weights? Weights are not sins but are things we can well do without, things that are unnecessary.

Sad to say but some Christians do not think it is necessary to both read the Bible and seek sound godly instruction from Bible teachers. Hebrews 5:12 states, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." One priority of Christians must be to read the Bible, seek to understand it, put it into practice in our lives and then use what we have gained to instruct others. If we do not know how to run the race, then we will not be winners!

Hebrews 6:12 states, "Do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." The word 'sluggish' could be translated 'lazy or stupid'. These are not helpful characteristics for an athlete. Training is vital for an athlete. A sluggish attitude shows that a person does not value the whole range of Christian blessing and has totally missed the point of what their life is all about. Sadly such an attitude does not commend Christ to anyone, whereas our lifestyle should attract people to Christ.

Therefore, we need to meet together frequently for training sessions. Hebrews 10:25 states, "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." The writer seeks to encourage his readers to meet together. Apparently there were some who had given up on practical fellowship, possibly like so many in our churches and fellowships who only come for special events or only see that their Christian duty is confined to one hour or so a week. Such believers are not at the training sessions, learning the skills necessary to become an effective athlete. Let us challenge ourselves. How involved are we? How often on our school reports the comment was made "Could do better". Is this the kind of comment our Lord Jesus Christ has written across our lives today?

The other hindrance is sin. Leftovers from pre-conversion days! Old sinful practices which we continue with or maybe sadly new sins picked up since conversion! One such sin is found in Hebrews 3:12, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." As Christians, a basic fundamental feature of our lives is that we believe God; we do not doubt Him. We believed for salvation once and now that same trust is to be applied to all areas of our life.

In Romans 13:9 we have some of the ten commandments stated, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, [all are] summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." These are all things that damage relationships with other people. They also damage the Christian testimony. How often do we hear, "How can a Christian do that?", or "I thought that person was a Christian". These and other similar comments come from unbelievers causing them to mock us and Christianity as a whole and therefore Christ Himself!

However, it need not be a "major" sin, if we can use such an expression. It might simply be an uncontrolled temper or foul language which marked us in pre-conversion days. How necessary it is to examine our lives carefully to make sure we honour God and our Lord Jesus Christ in every situation.

I recently came across this poem,

*Get rid of your burden, you've carried it long,  
Take it to Jesus, He's loving and strong.  
He will remove it, sorrow will cease,  
And He will give you heavenly peace.*

## The race route

"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us", Hebrews 12:1. Who has set the race for us? It is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 4:15, we read, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." We learn from this verse that the Lord Jesus Christ, when in this world, followed the same route that we are expected to take. Although He did it without sin, yet He still experienced the difficulty of living in this world for God. So He understands the route of the race that we are

expected to run. He understands the difficulties that we experience. But above all, He has the experience to help us overcome the hurdles of life that we might continue the race as winners.

The word translated in the above verse as 'endurance' has the combined meaning of 'endurance, constancy, patience and continuance'. It is these qualities that help us to continue and at the same time encourage our fellow believers. In the Christian race we are all seeking to achieve what Christ wants us to do. It is these features that should mark all Christians from the moment of trusting Christ as Saviour until we reach the Father's house.

As we observe fellow believers we may see that their race appears to be slightly different. We each meet with different circumstances, have different opportunities and yet the same Person is before us at the end of the race.

### **Commitment to the race**

"Looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith" Hebrews 12:2, (JN Darby Translation). The King James (Authorised) Version reads "Looking unto Jesus". The above translation seeks to emphasise the word "looking", as "looking steadfastly". The thought is to never take our eyes off the glorious Man in heaven. If we take our eyes off Jesus we are likely to stray as something else will become the object before us. Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." In other words, do not look at Paul: look at the Person Paul is looking at. So this steadfast looking means, looking away from everything around and by faith fix our constant unwavering eyes on Jesus where He is. It is not that we ignore the world in which we live but Jesus becomes the prime focus of living and determines our response to every situation. That response must be, "How would Jesus want me to live?"

By drawing our attention to the personal name of Jesus, the verse again reminds us that this is the Person who lived in this world. It is the name that was given at His birth in the town of Bethlehem. Also this same Jesus is "leader and completer of faith". Jesus has been this way and we are expected to follow on. In a similar way Jesus is the completer of faith. Jesus walked in triumph the whole path of faith from the cattle shed to Calvary. If we need a model or example to guide us in the race, then we can have no better role model than Jesus Himself.

### **Refreshment on the way**

If you have ever watched athletes in a marathon you will probably have noticed the refreshment stalls along the route. Bottled water is provided for the athletes. Running in a race naturally means expending energy and perspiring. It is essential for runners to maintain fluid in their bodies so they do not become dehydrated. So we read of Jesus saying in John 7:37, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." We see how necessary it is to come to the Lord Jesus Christ through the Scriptures and drink in the words of life. The Bible is the only true source of refreshment for a Christian and so necessary for running the race.

### **The finishing line**

"Who, in view of the joy lying before him, endured the cross, having despised the shame", Hebrews 12:2 (JN Darby Translation). So what was the joy that Jesus had before Himself as He journeyed from the manger to the cross? This is probably beyond my ability to give a comprehensive answer to such a question. However, it may be sufficient to bring before our attention the following:

- Part of that joy would surely be the anticipation of His glory with the Father in heaven (see John 17:5).
- Another part of that joy would be the formation of that redeemed company to be presented to Himself as an all glorious assembly of believers (see Ephesians 5:27).

It was this and much more that led Jesus to endure the cross. Let us remember the depths to which Jesus went that resulted in the cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Mark 15:34. But if Jesus endured the cross, He also "despised the shame", that shame that was attached to being crucified. All this brought Jesus down to the very lowest depths but He had a joy before Him which far exceeded all the suffering. What a glorious Saviour who did such a thing for you and me!

Considering the experience of what Jesus went through, are we motivated to run the race having this adorable Saviour as the object and prize at the end of the race?

Paul looked at the finishing line in this way from Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." There was every advantage for him when he crossed the finishing line and arrived in glory to be with his Saviour. Have we the same joyous anticipation?

### Our trainer and example

Where is Jesus now? The end of verse 2 states the location of our Lord Jesus Christ, “has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The work of the cross is finished. Resurrection and ascension have become realities and the Lord is on the throne of God.

What do we understand from this clause? The Lord Jesus has taken a place of power and authority as indicated by the throne. It is the throne of God and the Lord Jesus has every right to sit there because He is the Son of God. When you sit down, it usually indicates that some task has been completed. If we think of the preceding statements in verses 1 and 2 we can readily understand what the Lord Jesus has just accomplished. The work of redemption is a mighty work which only a person as great as Jesus could complete.

This gives tremendous comfort to Christians, when we know our sins are forgiven and the entitlement to heaven is based on a completed work. No small print to check in case there is a loophole somewhere! Just as Jesus is there in that heavenly scene, so will Christians be. In Revelation 3:21 we read, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

Therefore, Christians can focus upon their Lord and Saviour, but also upon the place to which they are going. What an encouragement that Jesus has indeed gone to prepare a place for us!

### To conclude

The only real guide and help in the Christian pathway is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He has been through this world and has ascended to the throne of God. He is our example for life. The more we live like Him the more others will see Jesus reflected in how we live, what we say and what we do. This is running the Christian race! Let it not be said of us as it was said to the Galatian believers, “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” Galatians 5:7. When we take our eyes off Jesus then we stop speaking of Him, we stop living for Him and we stop doing those things that honour Him. It becomes a vicious downward spiral. If the world, energised by Satan, can distract you away from Jesus then this will be the outcome.

The world thinks we are strange because they know we are different as we live for our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter in his writings recognised this and said, “They think it strange that ye run not with them to the same sink of corruption, speaking injuriously of you” 1 Peter 4:4 (JN Darby Translation). To my mind Peter has captured what the world’s moral condition is like, “a sink of corruption”. However, this may lead to verbal abuse and sometimes much more.

So let us take heart that others went before and became triumphal overcomers. They give us the encouragement to race forward and to be like them – winners.

I will close with a few verses of a hymn by KB Wilkinson (1859-1928)

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour  
Live in me from day to day,  
By His love and power controlling  
All I do and say.*

*May the word of God dwell richly  
In my heart from hour to hour,  
So that all may see I triumph  
Only through His power.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me,  
As the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self abasing,  
This is victory.*

*May I run the race before me,  
Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus  
As I onward go.*

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