

SERMON INTRODUCTION

Title: Clearing the Clutter

Opening: Almost all of us have participated in some kind of sport—whether it was a track meet, a marathon, a baseball game, a football game, a basketball game, or a volleyball match.¹ You are a spiritual athlete. The metaphor of a race to describe the Christian journey: This is not a sprint, but a marathon, requiring not just physical stamina but mental and spiritual resilience.

Illustration: Michael Kruger, Seminary president, and others have reminded me of a running story I love so well. Now if you don't know the name Eric Liddell, you probably know the movie that made him famous, which is the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*, because Liddell was an Olympic sprinter for Scotland who ran in the 1924 Olympics. If you've seen the film, you know the story. It's a rather remarkable one because that was the moment when England had hoped to capture again some of its former glory. Back in the 1920s, the British Empire was still the British Empire, and in many ways wanting to solidify their place in the world and there is no place better to do it than the Olympic games, and there is no one better to do it than Eric Liddell, who was the most famed sprinter in the world, running the most famous event, the 100 meter,

surely he would go, he would win the gold, he would win glory for England, and all would be right in the world. But of course, you know the story. It doesn't go like that because as soon as Eric Liddell, a committed Christian, a Scottish Presbyterian, in fact, found out that the heats for the 100 meters were on a Sunday, he informed the Olympic committee that he would not run. Instead, he decided he would run a different event, namely the 400, which ran on a different day. Now of course you don't have to be an Olympic athlete to know how remarkable that is. You trained your whole life, all that energy and all that effort into one particular athletic event, and then in the last moment you switch events. Nobody does that with any hope of winning, and of course the Olympic committee knew this. Although we look back on Eric Liddell as a hero now, what you may not know and what the film never really dived into, which is that Eric Liddell quickly became the most hated man in Great Britain. He was despised, he was ridiculed, he was mocked. There are even stories, if you read the books about sort of quasi-mobs forming outside his door in protest, how dare this man put the glory of England at stake for some piddly, religious conviction.

Of course, people were baffled by Liddell's decision, and of course they were baffled by his decision because at the

¹ Swindoll, Charles R. *Hebrews*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2017. Print. Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary.

end of the day, they actually were not aware of what race Eric was really running. In their mind, the only race that he was really concerned to run was the Olympic one, but in Eric Liddell's own mind there was a much greater, much bigger race that he was running and that was not the race of the Olympics, it was the race of the Christian life. It was that race that Eric Liddell was absolutely determined to finish, and to finish well. Now that captures very much what is present in this passage today, we just read in the book of Hebrews.

Background: They were starting to doubt what they believe. They started to wonder whether this Christianity thing was all it seemed cracked up to be. They were having second thoughts about whether Jesus is really better than Moses, or better than Joshua, or whether the new covenant was really better than the old covenant, and they were pondering the idea of quitting the race of the Christian life altogether. Our author steps on the scene with these wonderful verses and says, no, no, no, keep on running. If you're discouraged, tired, or weary, the **Book of Hebrews** is a great book. Following Christ has cost some of them and they want to quit. Some had lost property; some had lost their freedom (imprisoned); some of their friends had lost their lives. They're wondering if it's worth it and if there's a way to cope with the brutal

realities of life. The writer wants to bring us to a place of resolve: Jesus is truth and I will live for God's glory.

Question: So how's our author going to do that today? What is he going to lay out before us in this passage to help us run? Here's what's fascinating. Our author does something very interesting here. He pulls into his discussion imagery from the Greco-Roman world of athletics. He actually paints a picture here, a picture he knows his audience would resonate with, saying just like in the earthly world of physical running you need certain things to succeed, so in the spiritual life and the spiritual world of running you need certain things to succeed.

Proposition: First you need fans and fellow athletes to cheer you on, second you need freedom from entanglements, third you need focus on Your Champion, and then fourthly you need a finish line to run to. Fans, freedom, focus, finish line. He points out all the runners in **Hebrews 11**. The spiritual athletes showcased in **chapter 11** are ushered off the track and into the grandstands for **chapter 12**, where the author of Hebrews pictures them cheering us on as we take our places in the race.² In **Hebrews 12**, the writer gives the baton to us. It's your race now. How will you run?

² Swindoll, Charles R. *Hebrews*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2017. Print. Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary.

Recitation: Hebrews 12:1-3 **1** 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, **2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

EXPOSITION

Fans and Fellow Athletes

Explanation: **1** Therefore, since we [I'm in this contest, just like you] are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, [All the people from **Hebrews 11**. He summarizes the list this way (**11:32**) ... through faith some of them "*quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight ... others (however) suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword.*"

³ Greear, J. D. [“The 4 Helps to Faith: Hebrews 12:1–13.”](#) *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive*. Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017. Heb 12:1–13. Print.

⁴ Greear, J. D. [“The 4 Helps to Faith: Hebrews 12:1–13.”](#) *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive*. Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017. Heb 12:1–13. Print.

(**11:32–40**)³ While the believers are in the arena (in the stadium) these Old Testament saints are sitting in the bleachers like rows of spectators. Not only do they have an interest in the contest, but they are there witnessing to those engaged in the battle. They are witnessing that, by the exercise of faith and patient endurance, the race can be won. **They stand there saying**, “I know it doesn’t make sense now. It didn’t to us either! But you can see now that in all our trials God was working even when we didn’t understand, bringing something out of us far beyond what we could see—He was bringing Christ to earth through us! (We couldn’t see it, but you can see it now) We stand as witnesses to you that God is working in your pain, now, just like He was in ours, bringing to pass a greater plan than we realize!”⁴

Illustration: The presence of notable witnesses is motivating, whatever one’s activity may happen to be.⁵ If you look over and see a star on the sidelines, that motivates! If you’re playing basketball and MJ is sitting on your bench; if you’re playing golf and Tiger Woods joined your group; if you’re playing football and Patrick Mahomes is watching – you elevate your game. Imagine what it

⁵ Hughes, R. Kent. [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#). Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993. Print. Preaching the Word.

would mean for a runner in the great race looking up and seeing Jesse Owens, Carl Lewis, Michael Johnson, and Usain Bolt all giving encouragement and advice.⁶ That's the effect that the Hebrews writer wants to have on his readers. Everywhere one looks in the vast arena, there is a kind face nodding encouragement, saying, "I did it, and so can you. You can do it." Moses strokes his long beard and smiles. Rahab gives a royal wave. Gideon holds up a light. Noah is doing the Charger rumble.⁷

Explanation: Our author is saying in that scenario, what runners need is that crowd, that crowd of witnesses all around them cheering them on. If it's like that in the physical world of running, so it is in the spiritual world. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Samson, David, on and on the list goes in a great amount of detail. Almost a history of the entire Old Testament of sorts and our author steps on the scene and says, "That is the crowd that surrounds you when you run." And they're there for you to check in with from time to time. The Hall of Faith is not so much about how great the saints are, but how great God is at bringing to completion what He starts in people. How great God is in bringing us across the finish line. How great God's grace is that when He begins a work in someone, He brings it to completion.

⁶ Osborne, Grant R., and George H. Guthrie. *Hebrews: Verse by Verse*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021. Print. Osborne New Testament Commentaries.

Observation: The people you have cheering you on can affect how you perform. You know there's a big difference, playing at home and playing away. See, when you're playing away, everybody is against you. When you're playing away, everybody is booing you. Even when you're doing good, if you're playing away, nobody is supporting you, because you're on the enemy's field. And if you spend all of your time looking in the stands, and you're away, don't expect to get any encouragement. But if you're at the home field, you got folks jumping up and down, you got folks excited, you got folks supporting you, you have folks encouraging you, you got witnesses.

Application: The author of Hebrews says you may feel like you're an away team. But remember, you've got a group of die-hard fans who follow you and believe in what you can do and who you can be. And you've got previous competitors in the contest – people who played on the team you're playing for – and some of their jersey's and championship banners are hanging from the Biblical rafters. Spend time with the ones who can be a witness to

⁷ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*. Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993. Print. Preaching the Word.

what believing God can do.⁸ Piggyback on their accomplishments and let it energize you in the present contest. So this first “F” is critical as an antidote to apostasy, to look back and realize you don’t run alone.

Freedom from Entanglements

let us throw off everything that hinders [What are the “weights” that we should remove so that we might win the race? Everything that hinders our progress. They might even be “good things” in the eyes of others. Weights might well be ambition, anxieties, hobbies, wealth or fame. Each runner must honestly judge what hinders faith for him or her and resolutely lay it aside, even though others seem to be unhindered by the same thing.⁹] **and the sin** [Singular. The writer has one big sin in mind. I’ll oversimplify it and tell you what this one big sin is: “I quit.” Contextually, that means “I quit Jesus; I’ll just go back to Judaism.” For us, it means “I quit Jesus and I’ll go back to my old life.” We give up (for whatever reason – hostility that we face, fatigue that takes over, distraction that pulls us away) and we end up living for the shallow, the non-essential. We cave in, stop believing, and bog down.] **that so easily entangles.** [(*euperistaton*, “ambushes or encircles”)¹⁰. So if you see someone trying to win a race with a 45lb weight above their head, what’s your first

thought? It has to be a Crossfitter... You’d yell, “If you want to win, drop the weight!” And this is exactly what the writer is telling us: throw off anything and everything that hinders you from running as fast as you possibly can toward Christ.]

Explanation: He’s not saying that if you’re a sinner you’re not going to finish the race, because that includes all of us. All of us sin, all of us are sinners. What he’s getting at is the kind of thing that will stop you from finishing the race. It’s something that you keep so close to you that it trips you up and tangles you up. Sin that you’re, in one sense, unrepentant about. Sin that you’re grabbing ahold of and won’t let go. Sin that you feel like is close to your life and you won’t relinquish it. Sin that perhaps you began to do and won’t stop, sin that you have gained affection for over time, and slowly you find that your affection for that sin grows so much that at the end of the day you would rather serve it than serve Christ. That ends up causing people to stop the race.

Observation: People can start clinging to sins and they cling to them so much that it starts changing what they believe. In fact, as you cling to certain behaviors, if you won’t let go of them, it can start affecting what you’re

⁸ Evans, Tony. [“The Focus of Faith.”](#) *Tony Evans Sermon Archive*. Tony Evans, 2015. Heb 12:1–2. Print.

⁹ Stedman, Ray C. [Hebrews](#). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1992. Print. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series.

¹⁰ Hodges, Zane C. [“Hebrews.”](#) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck. Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985. 809. Print.

willing to believe and what you will embrace, and you can find that your beliefs start to change as a result of the behaviors that you're engaged in. "You know, I don't know if I believe Christianity anymore. I don't know if I really want to go to church anymore. I'm not sure I want to follow Jesus anymore." Almost inevitably, as you bore down into that sort of series of doubts, you find that a person sometimes is clinging to a sin they won't let go of and the clinging to that sin has led them to doubt the truth of the Gospel.

Application: Our author is saying if that's you today, if you have a sin you know you need to get rid of and cut away, you can't have it wrapped around you. You're going to trip and fall and knock you out of the race. You need to let it go. Just like they set things aside, we can set things aside, clear clutter, and run freely. It becomes less about "what do I have to give up because it is sin?" and "what best enables me to please Jesus and complete the mission?"¹¹ There are places that if you go there - it can hold you back. There are people if you hang out with them - it can hold you back. There are iPhone routines if I continue them - they can hold me back. Places, people, routines - not all of them are bad - but if they don't push me forward toward the finish line, the Hebrew writers says

¹¹ Greear, J. D. "[The 4 Helps to Faith: Hebrews 12:1-13.](#)" *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive*. Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017. Heb 12:1-13. Print.

to discard it. It's not helping me any. It's cluttering my life up. He doesn't want anyone regressing.

Question: Do you have anything you're carrying around with you that can slow you down, trip you up when you run? even if it's not in and of itself sinful, lay it aside so you can run more effectively. People ask, "Is this certain thing allowed?" when we should be asking the question, "Is this certain thing going to help me run?" and those are not the same things. If there's something in your life, even if it's inherently not sinful, if it's causing you to stumble, slow you down, our author is saying get rid of it so you can run. A winning athlete does not choose between the good and the bad; he chooses between the better and the best. Some things are good but they are a distraction to a bigger goal. Some things that are not wrong in themselves hinder us in putting forward our best effort. So the writer tells us to get rid of them.

Is it best?
Will it bind?
Can it build?
Does it bless?

Illustration: If you want to hike the Grand Canyon, there are park rangers there giving warnings to people before

they depart. "Do you realize how many people every year we have to rescue from the Grand Canyon? Before you go down this trail, you need to recognize something that's unique about the Grand Canyon that's unlike any other hike you're ever going to go on, and here's what's interesting about it: This hike, as opposed to most hikes, you start by going down first, and then up second, whereas most other hikes you start by going up first and down second." You start off going down and you think it's easy. People get far too deep into the canyon and they can't get out. What he says is that people don't realize now only is it easy to get far too down, but it's hotter down there than it is on the rim. So it's hotter, you're down, and then you start coming back out, and he says all the time people are carrying a pack full of supplies and on the way back out they realize they cannot both make it out and take their backpacks with them. So the ranger says it's not unusual every year to just walk down the trail and see supplies on the side of the trail. There will be a tent and there will be pots and pans and there'll be other things, there'll be a backpack. People ditch this stuff on the side of the trail because they realize they get stuck down there and they can't get out and they realize it's either a choice between ditching these things or not make it out, and they'd rather make it out alive. They're good things, they're not bad things. They're things that are probably expensive things and wonderful things. Probably cost them a lot of money. But when you have a choice between survival and those good things, you're ditching the good

things. It's almost like our author is saying that about the Christian life. Sometimes you walk around with a backpack on, filled with things that aren't bad in and of themselves, but if it keeps you from running, then leave them on the side of the trail. Freedom from entanglements is what we need more than anything else.

Focus

And let us run [not meander; This command does not come out of the blue. This is the point of the whole book. Endure, persevere, run, fight, be alert, be strengthened, don't drift, don't neglect, don't be sluggish. Don't stroll, don't meander, don't wander about aimlessly. Don't get bogged down with clutter. Run as in a race with a finish line and with everything hanging on it.] **with perseverance the race marked out for us**, [contestants cannot choose their own race. The word *race* is the Greek word *agon*, from which we get our word *agony*. That was a word they used to refer to the pentathlon, and that might have been what Paul was thinking about here. The pentathlon was a 5-event sporting match that ended with a Greco-Roman boxing match. After you ran and swam and a few other things, you'd square off in the ring. The fighters wore these leather gloves that would protect their hands but

disfigure the other's face. It was an *agonizing* event.¹² Life, according to this verse, is an agonizing struggle. It is a regimen of difficulties. This command does not come out of the blue. This is the point of the whole book. Endure, persevere, run, fight, be alert, be strengthened, don't drift, don't neglect, don't be sluggish...¹³]

Application: The path is before us. We don't know where it will lead, how long it will go, whether it will be uphill or downhill, smooth or rocky, wet or dry. Some races are relatively straight, some are all turns, some seem all uphill, some are a flat hiking path. All are long, but some are longer. But the glory is, each of us (no exceptions!) can finish the race "marked out for us."¹⁴ Faith is trusting God during the uncharted course, knowing that He has set before us the path that will best contribute to our growth toward spiritual maturity.¹⁵ Not everyone will run the same race. We're not trying to outrun each other. The world, the flesh, the Devil come against God's purposes and this is our battle.

¹² Greear, J. D. "[The 4 Helps to Faith: Hebrews 12:1–13.](#)" *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive*. Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017. Heb 12:1–13. Print.

¹³ Piper, John. [Sermons from John Piper \(1990–1999\)](#). Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007. Print.

¹⁴ Hughes, R. Kent. [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#). Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993. Print. Preaching the Word.

Finish Line

Exposition: [The course has been set. The weights and obstructions stripped off. The race is under way. We have the encouragement of others who have run before us. But beyond all that, there is one example to whom we look. Those of you who have run competitively know that you have to keep your eyes ahead of you. You can't run effectively looking at your feet.¹⁶] **2 fixing our eyes on Jesus**, [implies a definite looking away from others and directing one's gaze towards Jesus trusting in Him all the way. We talk about priorities. A priority is a first thing, something that is #1 above everything else. I'm not even sure that "priorities" in the plural makes sense. How is it possible to have multiple first things (a thought from **Essentialism** book)? Eyes only for Jesus. What the writer is saying is, "You are sinking because of what you're looking at. Stop looking at that and look at this. You are sinking because of what you have fixed your mind on."] **the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him** [which suggests that it took precedence over everything else.¹⁷ What this means is Jesus looked at the

¹⁵ Swindoll, Charles R. [Hebrews](#). Tyndale House Publishers, 2017. Print. Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary.

¹⁶ MacArthur, John F., Jr. [John MacArthur Sermon Archive](#). Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2014. Print.

¹⁷ Guthrie, Donald. [Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary](#). Vol. 15. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983. Print. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries.

big picture. He knew the ultimate outcome of his suffering would be joy for us and even joy for him, but that's way down at the end of the race. In the meantime, it was going to be tremendously difficult, so what he was doing was refusing to look narrowly. He was refusing to look right here and now. He stood back far enough and said, "I know ultimately what God is out for is my good and the good of his people."¹⁸ **he endured the cross, scorning its shame,** [The crucified person suffered painfully and publicly. His naked body was exposed to the whole world. He was ridiculed and ostracized from society.¹⁹] **and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** [Athletes were well-known if they were champions. After the games, the winner was granted the honor of sitting with royalty. This is how the author describes Christ at the end of his race.²⁰ Isn't there something comforting about Jesus being seated at the right hand of God? He's not pacing. He's not anxious. He's not worried. *The joy set before him* included two things: (1) He would sit at the right hand of the Father and be restored to glory (**Jn. 17:5**); and, (2) He would accomplish the salvation of the lost (**Is. 53:11**). Because He had this goal as His finish line, He therefore patiently endured everything in-between, which included *the cross*.] **3 Consider him** [compare and weigh this out] **who endured**

¹⁸ Keller, Timothy J. [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#). New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013. Print.

¹⁹ Cockerill, Gareth L. [Hebrews: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition](#). Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1998. Print.

such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. [Jesus was the ultimate runner. Evidently the writer knew that there was a tendency for his readers to lose heart, not in a single moment but over a period of time, with a gradual slackening of resolve.]

Explanation: The Hebrews writer is creating a visual thing, that when you run, you're going to have a stadium around you. When you run, you're going to take off these robes or things that could entangle your feet, and when you run, you're looking at something. That's what runners do. Here again he's appealing to the Greco-Roman world. When you run, there's a finish line. You're aiming for something. You have a goal. It's as if to say, the most sure way to make sure you don't finish is to not have a finish line. Or one of the most sure ways to distract yourself when you run and to be discouraged is to not even know where the finish line is.

Observation: Here's where we come to, I think, the crescendo of the passage for lots of reasons, because as soon as you realize that Jesus is the finish line, that changes the whole nature of the race. For one way it changes it is it changes your motive. If Jesus is the finish

²⁰ Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. [Exalting Jesus in Hebrews](#). Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017. Print.

line, you're running because of Him, through His power, by His grace, for His glory. This is a Christ-centered race. So it affects your motive. Here's the other thing it does when you realize Christ is the finish line. It also changes the perception of what your reward is. In the Greco-Roman world, the trophy would be at the finish line. That's where the crown would be, or whatever reward they had. When you run in the Christian life, what are you seeing at the finish line? Jesus Christ. Here's what I want you see this morning, this is what our writer wants us to see: Jesus Himself is our reward. There's no greater reward than Christ Himself.

Application: We're not to look down at our feet, around at our surroundings, or behind at our accomplishments or failures²¹ Using this vivid athletic imagery, the author tells his readers what they must reject, how they must run and where they must look.²² Christ has run this race and opened the finish line for us. He has opened the finish line by His High Priesthood and atoning self-sacrifice.²³ There are other things that we may be looking at or focusing on today. When your schedule is full, when your prospects are thin, when your hope is low, when people disappoint,

²¹ Swindoll, Charles R. *Hebrews*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2017. Print. Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary.

²² Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988. Print. The Bible Speaks Today.

when events turn against you, when dreams die, when the walls close in, when the prognosis seems grim, when your heart breaks "consider Him..." "fix your eyes on him" A coach is someone who guides, instructs, and encourages. They are someone who sees the potential in their athletes and pushes them to reach it. They are someone who is there during the victories and the losses, offering wisdom and support. They are someone who knows the game inside and out, and who uses that knowledge to help their athletes succeed.

APPLICATION

ILLUSTRATION

You know, returning to the story of Eric Liddell, what's fascinating, of course, and you know how this goes, is that he ended up running the 400 in the Olympic event in 1924. Before the event happened, it's curious. All the pundits were convinced he was going to lose. The reason they were convinced he was going to lose is because sprinters can't run the 400 because they can't pace themselves. They come out of the blocks too fast and they're gassed out by the last turn and there's no way he could possibly

²³ Cockerill, Gareth L. *Hebrews: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1998. Print.

win. In fact, in the race was the world record holder, Jackson Schultz, who was a United States runner, you know, Jackson Schultz has the world record in the 400, you're running an event you haven't trained for, you're wired as a sprinter, you're going to come out of the blocks too fast, there's no way you're going to win this race.

Actually, things got worse for Eric Liddell, because it turns out the day of the event he drew the outside lane. If you know anything about the 400, the outside lane is not the lane you want because the lanes are staggered, right? So the outside lane is actually the very front lane, or the very front spot, so when you run, you can't see any other runners. When you run, you have no one to pace yourself with. You're the person that's way out in front. They were convinced, okay, it's over now. The best shot he had was pacing himself with the other runners, now he's surely not going to work because he can't see any other runners, he's sunk.

Before the race began, someone ran up to Eric Liddell and gave him a little slip of paper. That paper had a passage of Scripture from it, [1 Samuel 2:30](#): Him that honors Me, I will honor. So the gun went off, out of the blocks they all went, and of course Eric Liddell did what everyone thought he would do, he started like a sprinter. Bolted out of that with all his might. Later, newspapers as they discussed it said that they were sure that he was going to be caught on the last lap. He never was. Even Jackson Schultz, the

world record holder, was several steps behind him and Liddell went on to win the gold medal. What's remarkable about it all is I think that drawing the last lane was his best thing, because what that allowed Eric Liddell to do was to run when the only thing he could see was the finish line. No other runners, nothing else to watch, just the finish line. Which, of course, in the 1924 Olympics was that piece of tape, but I think in Eric's mind it was more than that. It was no doubt the finish line of Christ Himself. He ran for the glory of Christ.

May that be the way we run. May we run today with fans all around us cheering us on, putting aside all the entanglements, but most of all running with Christ as our great reward.

CONCLUSION

Invitation: Now, the question is, how can you have joy, when you have to endure something? When you're going through something, and you don't know when it's going to end and it hurts while you're at it, how can you possibly have joy? He says, **"For the joy set before Him."** Because He believed God, when God said Friday's going to be a bad day; Friday you're going to be hurting and bleeding and nailed to a cross, and spit on and bruised and people won't even be able to recognize you; you're going to be so messed up. Friday is going to be a bad day. But early on Sunday morning I am going to raise you up out of the grave. And when I raise you up, Son, here's how

the deal's going to work. **"At the name of Jesus every knee will bow,"** at the name of Jesus **"every tongue will confess."** At the name of Jesus everything under the earth, over the earth, on the earth, above the earth will say, **"Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** And **Hebrews 12:2** says, and so He is now at the right hand of the Father in heaven, sitting as King.

Exhortation: Don't leave too soon, I know you want to run away, I know you want to throw in the towel, I know you want to quit, but **"for the joy."** What's the joy? The joy is He is not doing this for nothing. He's not sending you this for no reason at all. He's not letting you go through this for no reason. The Bible says, **"Count it all joy."** because He's doing something. Thank you Lord for what you're doing. I hate how it feels, but I thank you for what you're doing. Count it all joy.²⁴ He will get you to the finish line.

Conclusion: The spiritual athletes showcased in **chapter 11** are ushered off the track and into the grandstands for **chapter 12**, where the author of Hebrews pictures them cheering us on as we take our places in the race.²⁵ In **Hebrews 12**, the writer gives the baton to us. It's your race now. How will you run?

²⁴ Evans, Tony. ["The Focus of Faith."](#) *Tony Evans Sermon Archive*. Tony Evans, 2015. Heb 12:1–2. Print.

²⁵ Swindoll, Charles R. [Hebrews](#). Tyndale House Publishers, 2017. Print. Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary.