

RUNNING THE RACE

PHILLIPIANS 3, 1 CORINTHIANS 9 & HEBREWS 12

The Holy Spirit uses all kinds of illustrations in the scripture to help us understand what the Christian life is like and how we are to live it. There is one illustration in particular that I want us to look at today, and it is that of a runner. Last week brother Travis preached to us about the condition of our hearts. And that is a much-needed message because many professing Christians today are not spiritually healthy. Now listen, that's not meant to be insulting or hateful, that comes out of a deep concern for the church and a deep concern for those who are without Christ. You see when the church is not healthy, the light we are supposed to shine dims and the world isn't drawn to us. And we have less and less impact we have on the world around us. As a matter of fact the more unhealthy the church becomes, the more the world begins to influence us and the more sick we become.

- Most of you in here are familiar with the seven churches in revelation. You know some believe that those seven churches represent seven church ages and that we are in the last church age.
- That would mean that we are in the age of the Laodicean church. If you remember that church it would be described as the church that was sick but didn't know it. (deceived)
 - o You remember this was the church that was lukewarm, that the Lord said He would vomit out of His mouth.
 - o This was the church that thought they were rich, and in need of nothing but their true condition was wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.
 - o This was the church that needed eye salve so they might see the truth.
 - o This church was like the man who feels fine, but he doesn't realize that inside of him, he has cancer and he is dying.
 - o And this is the church that Jesus was standing outside knocking. And if anyone would hear His voice and open the door, He would come in and dine with them.
- Church, we don't want to be deceived. We don't want to not be able to see the truth. We don't want to be sick and not even realize it.
 - o So we need to hear preaching about our hearts.
 - o We need to hear preaching that causes us to examine ourselves.
 - o We need to hear preaching that challenges us. A brother told me the other day, that he had never been challenged to live and grow in his Christian walk in any other church like he has here. I consider that to be a great compliment.
- These kind of "hard" messages they aren't meant to beat you down, I want to encourage you today. I want us to see the truth, to hear it and examine ourselves against it. I want us to be inspired and challenged but I want more than a challenge, I want the word of God and the Spirit of God to change us.
- Listen, its not impossible to be a healthy Christian in this age we are living in, you just have to be one of the ones who hears the knock and opens the door and dines with Jesus.

You have to be willing to go with Him and let me tell you in no uncertain terms, the path you will have to run on is the straight path. It is the path of faith, the path of repentance, the path of obedience. You get access to this path by the narrow gate. Jesus is the only gate by which anyone can enter the race.

You see some of you may be sitting in here and you aren't even really in the Christian race because you have never come to Christ in faith believing. You have never repented of your sin and trusted in Christ to save you. You are still on the broad path. Beware friend, the broad path leads to destruction. But if you will turn your eyes to Christ and go through the narrow gate of trusting in Him then by grace your feet will be turned to the narrow path which leads to life everlasting!

Alright, before I get too sidetracked this morning let me get back to the message at hand. I have a few sections of scripture I want to show you this morning and let's begin by just reading all three. Let's start in 1 Corinthians 9, if you want to turn there you can. We will read in 1 Corinthians 9, Hebrews 12 and Philippians 3. Listen, one of the best ways to get healthy and stay healthy is to start running. And so I think its no coincidence that the Holy Spirit uses running as one of those great illustrations of the Christian life. Alright 1 Corinthians 9 if you are ready.

- **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** - *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*
- Now let's look at **Hebrews 12:1-2** - *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, 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*
- **Philippians 3:12-15** - *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I **press on** that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and **reaching forward** to those things which are ahead, **I press** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus! Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.*

Church, we are to run out our Christian life. When you began the Christian life, you entered into a race, a marathon if you will. And at the finish line Christ Himself is waiting for us. We have eternal life with Him, a New Heaven and a New Earth awaits. We have the promise that God Himself will dwell with us. That He will wipe all our tears away. That all pain, all sorrow, all death, all crying will cease. As the bible says, we have been given many exceedingly great and precious promises. At the finish line there awaits for us an imperishable crown. This is the destination of the runner, but to get to the destination we must run the race.

We cannot let ourselves get lazy. The bible is full of warnings against laziness, against apathy, against letting ourselves get spiritually sleepy and comfortable. We must realize as Christians this morning, we cannot allow ourselves to get in that kind of lazy condition.

Brothers and Sisters, this doesn't mean that you can't enjoy your life. It doesn't mean that you have to be miserable but what it does mean is that you can't let yourself stop pressing forward to the goal. You

can't let yourself get distracted. You can't stop running the race! *(And I'm going to be really honest with you, if serving the Lord makes you miserable, if you find no joy in obeying Christ, something is desperately wrong in your life.)*

- As a Christian, you are to keep growing in your relationship with Jesus Christ.
- You are to keep maturing in your faith. You are to keep growing in your knowledge and understanding of God.
- You are not to allow yourselves to become complacent and satisfied.
- Every Christian needs to understand that their race is not finished until the Lord calls them home to be with Him and as long as you have life you must press on, you must run.

I want you to hear me this morning, every power of Hell is against you. The enemy will throw every obstacle in front of you. I picture it as if we are running through this long, narrow corridor, and on one side are prison cells and they are filled with people and they all have their arms through the bars and they are trying to grab you, to stop you, to slow you down. But you must run through them. While you run, you proclaim the gospel, you preach Jesus. And on the other side is doors with all kinds of pleasures written above them. Riches, entertainment, relaxation, hobbies, career, and from behind the doors you hear your name being called, come in, come in, come and rest from your running. But you must not stop running!

I want to show you some things in these scriptures today that I pray will help you run hard and run strong. First I want to show you the mentality or the mindset of the runner.

THE DRIVE OF THE RUNNER

Let's get honest this morning, we know people or maybe even some of us have stopped pressing forward, stopped running, stopped pressing for the goal. We have gotten comfortable right where we are but church, Paul had a mindset and it was not one of comfort and ease, he refused to let himself get comfortable or lazy.

- Listen, at what he said there in **Philippians 3:12** - I have not already attained, I am not already perfected. **Vs 13** - I do not count myself to have apprehended.
- Church, there is power in those words this morning. Power to inspire you, power to get you up out of your pew. To wake you up. To get you growing again.

Listen, aren't you sick of being sick. I want to see fire in God's church again. I want to see hearts on fire for Jesus. I want to see people praising Him, worshipping Him, loving Him, thanking Him, serving Him, spreading His gospel, building His kingdom, doing His work.

I want to see Christians striving to learn more about Him. Striving to grow in Him to mature in Him. I want to see men so filled with the Spirit they want to preach His gospel. I want to see women so filled with the Spirit, that they are like Lydia, Priscilla and Dorcas in the scriptures, laboring for the Lord, worshipping God, full of good works and charitable deeds. Serving the Lord with gladness of heart.

- I want to see families restored to what God intended them to be. I want to see husbands and wives fulfilling their God ordained roles in the home and in life. I want to see children learning about Christ and growing in Him.

- I want to see our Sunday school classrooms filled every Sunday morning with little hearts and minds that are coming to know who God is.
- I want to see our pews filled again on Sunday's and Wednesdays because we are hungry to hear the word of God taught to us, so that we may know Him.
- I want to see people worshipping God and testifying about His greatness. Giving thanks to Him.
- I want to hear voices singing loud and see hands in the air and tears in people eyes.
- I want to see the altars full again and hear the cries of desire from God's people for God to move.
- I want to see unashamed Christians witnessing boldly in the world. Spreading the gospel and trusting in Christ.
- You can't tell me that we can't have it again. I know we can have it but we won't experience it until we get this mindset. Until we stop being satisfied with so little of God and start pressing onward and forward towards the goal.

I'm going to tell you if you want to get motivated, you have to renew your mind. This is where your battle begins. You have to get this mindset. Just like before Paul said, I don't count myself to have apprehended, in other words I don't let myself start thinking I'm where I need to be, I don't really need the church, I don't really need to hear the word of God taught and preached, I've got what I need. Remember, that's what that sick Laodicean church thought, we are good, we are rich, we have need of nothing. But inwardly they were sick. Christians wake up, wake up.

- The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed
- Can't you hear the call of the Savior, behold I come quickly and my reward is with Me.

You got to get in the right mindset. You got to realize that there is more of Christ, more work to do for Him, more to learn about Him and more to experience in Him. You can't let yourself get lazy.

- Oh brothers and sisters. Some of you have such a mighty work ethic. You accomplish much in your business, in your career, in your hobbies and in other areas of your life. You do so much but so much of what you are doing has no eternal significance. So much of your life is being wasted and you don't even see it.
- God give us eye salve this morning. Please God help us to see.

How we need that mindset that we must run on. We must press, we have not attained, we have not apprehended. We have not finished our course. Paul said therefore I run, not with uncertainty. Church, you have to make up your mind about what you believe and let the promises of God fuel you to keep running and we must keep running!

That's the mentality of the runner. Now let's look at the discipline of the runner.

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE RUNNER

Look back again in **1 Corinthians 9:27** - Paul said *"But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."*

Look at those two key words, discipline, and subjection. Paul said he disciplined his body and brought it into subjection. In other words, Paul was saying that he was not going to allow the desires of his flesh and cares of this life to keep Him from reaching the finish line or even worse to cause him to become disqualified from the race.

- So many Christians today have stopped running because they have walked through one of those other doors of pleasures.
- They are chasing a career, they are chasing a comfortable life, they are chasing retirement, they are chasing popularity, they are chasing riches, they are chasing hobbies and they are now in pursuit of these things of this world.
- They have stopped pressing towards the goal, stopped running towards the finish line.
- Jesus warned us of this very thing. Listen to the words of our Lord in **Luke 21:34-36** - *"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. 35 For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

I was thinking the other morning. I wonder how many in Noah's day, heard Noah's preaching of a coming flood and they thought to themselves. Well even if that did happen, we won't wonder to far from the ark, if it does start to rain or to flood, we can always run back to the ark and get on board then.

- They thought they could take the easy way out. They thought they could have both the pleasures of life and the ark of safety.
- But they never realized until that Day that the door of the ark would be closed when the rain started.
- I think many lost people and some professing Christians are living like that. They think when they get older they will have time to run this race but right now this is more important or that is more important.

I think many Christians don't realize how distracted they have become. How little they read their bible, how little they pray, how little they know about God, how little they worship God, how little they thank God.

I've tried for years to figure out the best way to preach and explain this to you but I just don't know how to say it any more plainly than this.

- Some people have never really come to understand the freedom that is in Christ. You see you've been set free to obey. What I mean is you've been set free from the world. No longer does the world have control over you. You don't have to worry about living to the world's standards.
 - o You don't have to worry if you are popular, you are free from that worry
 - o You don't have to worry if you having more stuff, you are free from that worry in Christ
 - o You don't have to worry about being rich, you are free from that in Christ.

- Instead, you can focus on seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and let God add into your life all that He wants you to have.
- I tell you this morning that some of the richest men that walked the face of this earth have been poor in the worlds eyes. But they were rich in Christ. They had life more abundantly.

The runner disciplines themselves that they may not become distracted by this world. And its not a loss to them for they count those things of the world as dung, as worthless, as rubbish that they may gain Christ.

- **Philippians 3:8** - *Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*
- Is that they way you are living your life? Does that verse describe you. If it doesn't, you need to start running!

Thank you for your patience with me this morning! We've looked at the destination of the runner, the drive of the runner, the discipline of the runner and now let's look at one more thing from these verses and then we will finish up for today.

THE DETERMINATION OF THE RUNNER

Let me take you back to Hebrews 12 for just a moment. **Hebrews 12:1-2** - *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, 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*

This race takes endurance. Endurance is defined as the ability to suffer pain or difficulty patiently without giving way.

As I read that I thought about how many people I've known over the years who made a profession in Christ but when the way got difficult, they gave way. They quit. They were not determined to make it.

Lest I be found guilty or preaching a false gospel, I stand before you to tell you that the Christian life is filled with obstacles, difficulties, trials, tribulations, sacrifices and even suffering at times. I tell you this not to discourage you but to prepare you. For yet a little while we must suffer but the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Brothers and sisters, running this race is not easy. It takes endurance, it takes determination, but I'm encouraged by this scripture because it says that we are surrounded by so great a could of witnesses.

I used to think that meant that those heroes of faith were watching us run our race but that's not what it means. No we have their lives as witness as a testimony to us that we can endure whatever comes our way in this race.

- The life of Moses shows us, that even if we don't think we are able, God can make us able.
 - o When there is a red sea in front of us, we know that it can be parted

- If there is a dessert path to walk for 40 years, we know it can be walked
- We can forsake the pleasures of Egypt and walk with God.
- Noah's life shows us that in the flood, we have nothing to fear if we trust God and obey Him. He will keep us!
- Abraham's life shows us that when we are told to leave behind our comforts, we can pack our bags and go because we have a city whose builder and maker is God
 - He also shows us that when God calls us to sacrifice things we want to keep, He is faithful to provide something better.
- Sarah shows us that even in our old age, God can use us to accomplish His will.
- Rahab the Harlot witnesses to us that God still use us even if we have a past we are ashamed of
- Others were tortured, scourged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, slain with the swords, burnt at stakes, crucified, afflicted and tormented, so that we would understand that even in the most difficult situations, even in death, CHRIST HAS GIVEN US THE VICTORY.

These witnesses show us that we can endure the race. Are you telling me today, that a person can be sawn in two for Christ and you can't endure what you are facing. We have people today quitting the race because they don't like the other runners. Are you kidding me? Tell that to the guy that was sawn in two.

I'm telling you today these witnesses stand as memorials to us that we can and we must run the race with endurance.

Hear what the scripture says, it tells us what we must do if we want to run this race. We must lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us.

- Now pay close attention here because I want you to see what it says. It says every weight and sin.
- There are some things in your life that are weights, they may not be sins but they are weights.
- They are keeping you from running this race well. They are slowing you down. They are pulling you down. They are getting in the way of your running.

John Piper says – Don't just ask if something is a sin, that's the lowest question a Christian can ask, instead ask yourself, is it keeping me from running or does it help me run!

Church, I'm preaching for your life this morning. Some of you are too distracted, your too caught up, you're so full from the table of the world, you've lost your appetite for God. You are not hungry for God anymore. Don't live your life in that condition. Don't be a miserable, sluggish Christian.

- Make up your mind! Right now! Commit your life unto the Lord, commit yourself to Him.
- Put on joy, put on love, put on peace, put on faithfulness, put on Christ!
- It doesn't matter who else is running and who isn't, are you willing to run.
- Are you willing to lay aside the weights and sins that are slowing you down.

Are you willing to change your mindset, to discipline your body, to run with endurance, to reach the destination. Oh friend, wipe the sleep from your eyes, rise to your feet, stretch your legs and begin to run. Run to Christ, run to the finish line, run to eternity, run and don't stop. AS WE STAND!