

The Finish Line - Acts 20:17-39, 2 Timothy 4:6-8
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

OK, gonna be honest, I hate to run. Always have. Doesn't mean I haven't done it before, as an athlete running for the purpose of conditioning was a big part of my development as an athlete. Yet, just because I had to do it doesn't mean I had to like it. To add insult to energy, I was always one of the slowest guys on any team. My feet acted like they were in quicksand when I started and all I could muster up was short choppy running steps I didn't like running then, and don't like running now. Doesn't help that at this stage of life even a short run will leave my back out of whack and knees crying out for mercy. The idea of running a marathon, or even a 5k sounds like a whole lot of effort. So I choose not to run (some of you can hear the voice of Jerry Seinfeld there). On the other hand, running the race that is the Christian life is a must, and I must keep on running.

As we come to the end of Paul's third missionary journey, he has called the Ephesian elders together to give his parting words to them. This is a band of brothers he has had for three years, and together with them they have done the hard work of planting the church, pastoring the people, preaching the Gospel, and raising up disciples. He loves these men, yet he knows he will never see them this side of glory, so he encourages them to keep going by reminding them of his goal. So Paul uses an athletic metaphor to describe his life's purpose. It is his desire to "finish my course." This phrase would draw their attention to a runner in an athletic contest such as the Olympics being held in the stadium in Ephesus. The runner's goal is to prepare his body and mind for the race so that he can run all the way through the finish line without giving up or giving in. There are multiple places in Scripture that describe the life of the believer as a race or athletic contest (Isaiah 40:29-31, I Corinthians 9:27, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 Timothy 4:8). In doing this the Bible is putting the essence of our discipleship simply, "Run Forrest, Run!"

Not sure Paul had a life verse, but his words in Acts 20:24 have been important to a lot of people. Paul states his life goal simply, he wants to run his race well and make it to the finish line, wherever that might be. He does not consider his own mortal life of great value, what is more important to him is staying in the race and completing his ministry that was given to him by Jesus. Central to this ministry is testifying to the Gospel of the grace of God. In other words, the reason he runs is so that people can hear of the God who saves people by the grace of God because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This mission now requires Paul to enter a new stage in his journey, taking funds from an offering that has been collected to Jerusalem for the believers. It could be so easy for Paul to hand these funds over to someone else and keep running, but in the other direction. But the Holy Spirit has bound him to this journey, his race at this point in time is toward Jerusalem. He does this because a few decades earlier Jesus too was led by the Spirit on a journey that took Him to Jerusalem, and for our Savior this journey led Him to the cross. Jesus knew what awaited Him, Paul does not, and still, the Spirit has warned him that the trip will involve persecution, imprisonment, and could even mean his death. So, in faith and obedience, Paul runs and his leg of the race is going to take him to Jerusalem. That is his race, it may not be ours. Yet, we need to know that whatever course the Spirit sets before us, our aim and goal should be the same. We run, lifting the legs of faith in Jesus and obedience to the Word and Spirit, and we keep running. At any point where we value our own lives and desires more than faithfully running we put the goal in jeopardy. It should be our desire to make it to the finish line, to finish the race.

Paul ran his race well. In Jerusalem Paul will be arrested by the Romans and almost killed by the Jews. He will end up in jail in northern Israel for a couple years then sent to Rome to await a trial for a couple more. He doesn't die the first time he is in Rome and both while in prison and after his release Paul keeps running. After a few other mission trips Paul is again arrested and for a second time is awaiting word of his fate from the Roman Emperor.

From this imprisonment Paul writes what is believed to be his final letter, 2 Timothy. Much like his parting words to the Ephesian Elders, Paul challenges Timothy to follow Paul's model of life, to keep running and faithfully proclaiming Jesus and pastoring the church in Ephesus. If Acts 20:24 is Paul's life verse, 2 Timothy 4:6-8 is his closing words to all of us. Here he tells us that he has finished his race, the tape is right before him, and the crown of righteousness awaits him. The image again is of the athletic contest, but this time Paul is not thinking about the race, he excited about the medal stand, where Christ the Judge will award him this crown. In ancient games the runners were given a crown woven of flowers and other plants when they won the race. Now Paul is ready to be crowned with final righteousness as the crown for running the race of discipleship. But this crown is not just for Paul, it is for all of us who love the appearing of Jesus. Those who love the fact that Jesus came into history to be our substitute and Savior. And who love the promise of His second coming which will bring all races to their end. So believer in Jesus, "Run Forrest, Run!"

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Psalm 49	Psalm 50	Psalm 51	Psalm 52	Psalm 53	Psalm 54	Psalm 55

Reading from this past week: Acts 20:22-24, 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Romans 5:1-11

Family Worship

Song - *Day by Day*

<https://youtu.be/8jb5N-9zsbq>

Gospel Project

Unit: Into Captivity

Story: God's people were taken captive.

Big Picture Question: What makes people special?

Answer: People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 36

New City Catechism

Question #47: Does the Lord's Supper add anything to Christ's atoning work?

Answer: No, Christ died once for all.

Verse: 1 Peter 3:18

Scripture

Acts 20:22-24, 2 Timothy 4:6-8

- What does Paul say the goal is for his life in Acts 20:24? How does his words in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 connect with his words in Acts 20?
- How is the idea of an athletic contest or race a good metaphor for the life of a disciple of Jesus?
- What is most hindering your ability to run your leg of this race well right now?
- What is promised for us when we run to the finish? How do we get there?

Prayer

*Spend time this week giving thanks for God's salvation and the gifts of His grace in you.

*Pray that God would give you the strength to run your race well and sustain you to the finish line.