

# 'Running The Race'

Paul Smith, 29/01/2012

## Intro


- Good morning! Please turn with me to Hebrews 12
- Such a privilege to be down here in P.E!
- Thank Neil & Noel for inviting Jax and I down – struck up a great friendship in a short space of time
- *Share about 42km with Neil*
- Share about falling in love with running
  
- 1<sup>st</sup> of January marked 13yrs for me having made the decision to become a disciple
- In the time that I've been a Christian I've seen men & women come and go
- Those of you who've been around longer have experienced it more – the loss of close friends in the gospel; some having left the church, others having passed from this life to the next
- I have a new found conviction that the longer you are around the more pain and suffering you will experience, but equally; you can choose to experience more happiness and joy as well
- Today I wanted to talk about running the race – the Christian race

## Message

### **Heb 12:1-11**

- Before we dig into this passage I want to give a bit of a background or context to the book of Hebrews
- *Share about DBA!*
- It's widely agreed that Paul could not have been the author – Apollos and Barnabus are those most often suggested
- The audience was likely Jewish Christians who'd been thinking of giving up their faith in Jesus and returning to Judaism
- The themes through the book deal with Jesus superior revelation (1:1-4), Jesus superiority over the angels (1:5-2:18), Jesus superiority over Moses & Joshua (3:1-4:13), Jesus superiority over the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood (4:14-7:28) as well as Christ's superior sacrifice (8:1-10:39), the importance of continuing in faith (11;1-12;29) and closes with final appeals and conclusions (13:1-25).
- The purpose of the letter was to encourage, rebuke and inspire Jewish Christians to persevere in their faith to the finish
- I have 3 points that I want to make this morning from our theme passage of scripture:
  - 1) Start the race.
  - 2) Race toward the goal.
  - 3) Race with perseverance.

### **1) Start The Race**


 **Heb 12:1 (NIV)** *<sup>1</sup>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...*

- Vs. 1: Surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. Greek: 'A numberless multitude above us' image is from race/games in ancient Greek times.
- *Paint the picture:* an athlete walking out in front of a crowd in a stadium too full to count.
- Many of us get kicks out of watching sport – how many of us have ever played or performed in front of such a large crowd?
- EP Rugby – Kings? I'm a proud Lions supporter: Won Currie Cup last year

 *Illustration – 1993 Curtain raiser for Quarter final Super 10: Ellis Park*

- Spiritually the Christian race is just like that
- When you make the decision to become a disciple of Jesus, and are baptised for the forgiveness of sins, it's like you're stepping out onto that field or starting a great race.
- All that happened to bring you to this point has been for a purpose
- You aren't on your own you've tens of thousands cheering you on – you are not alone!
  
- Problem with modern day view of Christianity is: It's my race – my Christianity is between me and Jesus... this couldn't be further from the truth!
- Christianity is a team faith – you can't go it on your own.
- I know that there are some of you in this hall this morning who stepped out onto the playing field a long time ago but you're trying to go at this on your own.
- My advice to you is STOP – you will not finish.
- *Share – Run yesterday with Neil: wouldn't leave me...even when I said he should!*
  
- Spiritually it's the same - you and I need fellow Christians in our lives that will speak the truth in love. Who will not tolerate 'Sunday Christianity' *Elaborate.*
- You and I need fellow Christians who will not tolerate unconfessed sin, half-hearted commitment to the body of Christ, on-going character sin etc
- I'm grateful for men in my life who help me to be like Jesus.
- I need them & you do too, if you are going to want to finish the race.
- Let me not detract here too much from my point which is to Start the Race.
  
- *Vs. 1b: 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...'*
- *'...throw off everything that hinders...'* Note: not gently take off some stuff. Throw off!
- This is a positive approach to anything that might be stopping you from following Jesus.
- Throw it off!
- What pet sin are you nurturing this morning that you know is holding you back from giving your heart fully?
- Is it a relationship; work colleague, family member, who is a bad influence?
- Maybe it's sexual sin? Internet pornography, an affair?
- Is it greed? You want success more in the world than you do for Gods kingdom.
- What do you need to throw off this morning that is hindering you or entangling you so that you can run this Christian race?
- Advice: Throw it off! We're all waiting for you...get in the race!
- *Share from personal life – had to throw off a lack of discipline*

## **2) Race Toward The Goal**

 **Heb 12:2-3 (NIV)** <sup>2</sup>*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* <sup>3</sup> *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

- The writer of Hebrews gives us some critical advice as to how we need to run the Christian race: <sup>2</sup>*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith*
- Updated NIV (2011) says *'fixing our eyes on Jesus the **pioneer** and perfecter of our faith...'*
- A pioneer is someone who has gone first, who has already marked out a trail for us to follow.
- It's not like we need to re-invent the wheel when it comes to Christianity – Jesus has already paved the way for us and shown us how to do it.
- When we take our eyes off of Jesus and place them on people. That's when we can stray off the path – people will always disappoint; Jesus won't.
  
- ❖ *I wanted to share how as recently as the middle of last year, I took my eyes off Jesus and where it got me*
- ❖ *The Full-time Ministry after 11 yrs, had become for me about solving other people's problems & not changing the world*

- ❖ *I was tired and wanted to resign.*
  - ❖ *All of this took place after I came back from Comrades after having to bail at the 65km mark.*
  - ❖ *Then a close friend and colleague of mine was appointed an Evangelist! Expand*
- When we take our eyes off of Jesus and place them on people or situations around us, that's when we can get into trouble spiritually.
  - Yet what does the bible say in vs. 2-3 of Hebrews 12? *'Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that we will not grow weary and lose heart...'*
  - *Expand on the word Consider – that is to ponder, to deliberate over.*
  - *Only NT instance of this verb; conveys the idea of comparison as well as considering*
  - We need to compare our current struggles to that which Jesus faced when he went to the cross
  - When you consider what Jesus went through for you and me it's amazing how our priorities are set straight.
  - Our challenges pale in comparison to what Jesus had to go through on the cross.
  - Kingdom Focus vs. Worldly
- Whenever I've prayed to God to make it clear whether or not he still wants me in the ministry – the answer to date still comes back the same: YES
  - What helps me to have perspective on where I'm at and where I'm going is the cross.
  - I need to make character changes to become who I need to become as a disciple of Jesus.
  - Not for a title or position! But because I want to be like Jesus in every way.
  - And I'm not saying I'm there yet either; what I'm saying is that what Jesus went through needs to be our motivation to run the Christian race.
- Note in vs. 2: *'For the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of God'*
  - What was the Joy set before Jesus that motivated him to endure the cross?
  - Maybe it was the joy of his resurrection, that humanity couldn't kill his soul?
  - What about the joy of being re-united with his Father in heaven again?
  - Maybe the joy set before him was the belief in us being completely forgiven by his blood shed on the cross so that we could have a relationship with his Father?
  - My pt is: Jesus had Joy set before him that enabled him to endure pain & suffering.
  - WE NEED JOY SET BEFORE US!!
- What Joy do we have set before us that we can set our eyes upon finishing the Christian race?
  - Salvation – our sins won't be counted against us on judgment day: Rom 8
  - Heaven – in all its splendour: Rev 4
  - Fellowship with the Saints
  - The presence of God: Isaiah
  - Church we have nothing but Joy set before us in the Christian race. This has to motivate us to finish strong.
  - All that we have to look forward to makes everything else that we're going through almost insignificant.
  - You and I have to maintain this spiritual outlook or it will be very difficult for us to finish the race.
  - *Share – 2010 Comrades: 'For the Joy Set before Me' Do you want to walk or do you want the medal ?*

### **3) Race With Perseverance**

#### **Heb 12:4-12**

- It's easy to run the Christian race when everything is going well; it's another thing altogether when you go through hardships.
- When we face hardship the bible says we need to endure it as discipline from God.
- The writer then goes on to contrast discipline from our fathers with discipline from God.
- Discipline from God is for our eternal benefit so that we can share in God's Holiness.
- It's never pleasant but always works toward our good

- ✚ Endurance and perseverance are necessary key ingredients to finishing the Christian race.  
Endurance is the measure of a person's stamina or persistence – I didn't have any past the 27km mark yesterday  
Perseverance is continuing in a course of action without regard to discouragement, opposition or previous failure this is what helped me get to the 39km mark yesterday!

❖ *Illustration – Comrades*

- ❖ *Earlier I shared how last year May I ran the Comrades and had to bail at 65km in.*
- ❖ *What I didn't share was why. Share blister story from Cowies onwards.*
- ❖ *Shoe size too big!*
- ❖ *My Comrades experience last year compared to 2010 turned out a lot more different to what I expected!*

- This can also be true of the Christian race.
- What we expect turns out to be very different from what we experience.
- When we were fresh out of the waters of baptism we felt like nothing could stop us – we wanted to change the world!
- We were ready to confess sin and repent at every turn, we were committed to the body of Christ – midweeks Sundays, family group; we couldn't get enough of the fellowship.
- We were bursting with enthusiasm to help the poor, study the bible with people and change in our characters.
- We openly invited correction and readily got advice on anything & everything
- Then people hurt us or disappointed us.
- The hardships of life began to steal our joy and choke our faith.
- You've been at this a couple of years but right now you feel like you want to bail.
- If you've reached this point in the Christian race – you need to persevere!
- God is either testing you or disciplining you.
- Either way it's for your and my wellbeing – so that we can be mature and complete in our characters.

❖ *Illustration – Parachute & flight to the States*

- ❖ *Parachute is uncomfortable on an 18hr journey it's even unpleasant!*
- ❖ *Spiritually, the plane is our lives – without Jesus we're going down*
- ❖ *The parachute is Christianity; it guarantees our safety*
- ❖ *Even if it's uncomfortable or unpleasant you're still going to wear it right?*
- ❖ *Same thing with Christianity; it was never intended to be comfortable*

- You see God has an eternal perspective in our life's situation, when we have a very temporary one:
- When we are facing financial pressures God could be training us to trust in him and have more faith in him or be more disciplined.
- When we are facing relational hardship, he could be training us to always trust, hope and persevere.
- When we are facing health issues that could potentially be life threatening, he could be training us to help us sift our priorities
- At every turn God is working for the good of those who love him.
- An area I believe we can constantly improve on is persevering in PRAYER
- *Share – Isabella: Mama mama, Dada Dada*
- That's how we need to be in prayer

### Conclusion

- I hope that you've been inspired this morning to finish the Christian race.
- We looked at 3 key ingredients to finishing:
- Start the race: *Encourage visitors*
- Race toward the goal: Goal is the Joy set before us
- Race with perseverance.