



Monday, April 8, 2024 - Run the Race

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

This summer, people from all over the world will focus their attention on Paris for the 2024 Summer Olympics. When I think about the Olympics, what comes to mind first and foremost is track and field. I'm not sure what it is about these events, but they are captivating to me. There is a balance of speed, strength, and endurance. Think about this, especially for those who are in short distance races (think 100m, 200m, 400m). Four years of their lives are dedicated to something that is over in between 10 seconds and one minute. There are hours of training that are poured into seconds of performance. Every athlete is competing for something, a gold disk that is placed around their neck and then placed on a shelf. Paul reminds us that we, too, are runners in a race, but one that has far greater consequences and rewards.

Paul encourages us to run the race of faith in such a way that we obtain the prize. The prize for us is not the end, though our heavenly reward is truly amazing, but the race itself. There is great reward in living a life in relationship with God. May we not neglect the glory of relationship with God for the glory of heaven. If we only focus on the reward that is to come, we neglect the reward that is present now, namely our relationship with God made possible solely through Jesus. The rewards we receive along the way and in the end are of the imperishable nature. They will not wilt or wither nor tarnish or turn. To that end, may we run the race of the Christian life with the aim and focus of purpose. Run so as to win. Winning takes discipline, just look at the Olympic champion. They do not merely show up on race day to run. Race day is the culmination of hundreds of hours of practice. In the same way, may we be disciplined in our spiritual life so that we will obtain the imperishable crown of righteousness.

Take some time today to think about the spiritual race you are running. Think about it in these terms - in the starting block, starting strong, hitting my stride, lagging behind, or finishing strong. Which of these terms seems to accurately describe your spiritual race? If one of these terms does not describe your race, then what terms would you use? What changes if any do you need to make to your race strategy to ensure endurance and perseverance to the end?

Tuesday, April 9, 2024 - Encourage One Another

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

We all need encouragement. As we continue looking at this theme of running the race, while the distance runner runs the race, there is a team of people who serve as support. It could be those who have worked pacing runs in pre-race preparation. It is those who offer sustenance along the way. It is those who are found along the course shouting words of encouragement. Most importantly are the fellow runners who encourage one another to just keep going. Encouragement is something that is absolutely necessary in the Christian life as well. Many Christians struggle to 'keep the pace' because they do not have anyone who is encouraging them to just keep running the race of faith. Paul encourages us to encourage one another, especially as we see the day of the Lord approaching.

Those who are running this race of faith have been set on this path because of their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Because we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, the path and trajectory of our lives are forever changed. One of the things that is so important for us to remember and to remind one another as fellow followers of Christ is that we live with Him. There is power in the word "with." No matter where we are or are going, Jesus is WITH us. When we are on the mountain tops of spiritual victory, Jesus is WITH us. When we are in the valley of despair, Jesus is WITH us. May we be encouraged by the presence of the Lord Jesus with us each and every day. Even more so, may we encourage those who are in Christ that Jesus is WITH them as well, regardless of their circumstance. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians, as well as us, to encourage one another with these words. YES! Be encouraged that Jesus is WITH you today and all days. As you remember that truth, may it fuel you toward greater endurance and perseverance in the faith.

What does it mean to you that Jesus is WITH you? How can you encourage others as you remind them that Jesus is WITH them? Who can you pray for who needs Jesus WITH them? Take some time to pray for yourself and others regarding a relationship with the Lord through Jesus. Make sure to take some time to praise the Lord that He is WITH you.

Wednesday, April 10, 2024 - Loving Discipline

Revelation 3:19

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Have you ever thought about the relationship between love and discipline? Those are usually two words that we think are polar opposites of one another. How can some one who loves you discipline you? How can discipline be loving? Those are the thoughts that often run through our head when we hear love and discipline mentioned in the same sentence. Maybe you hear these words ring in your head - this is going to hurt me more than it does you (I've heard those words more than I care to mention, by the way).

Today, we consider the words of Jesus to the church of Laodicea as He shares the unique relationship between love and discipline.

The church of Laodicea is one that most Christians have at least heard of. They were warned by the Lord to be either hot or cold rather than just lukewarm or tepid. It is into this context that Jesus speaks these words about love and discipline. Because he loved the church of Laodicea, He disciplined them to move them out of lukewarmness to a burning hot passion for Him and the gospel. What we need to come to understand is that discipline is one of the most loving things God can do for you. Discipline is corrective, not punitive, when it comes to the Lord. He is not punishing us through discipline. Rather, He is seeking our good by disciplining us with correction toward greater righteousness and holiness. If the Lord did not love you, He would not care about you being lukewarm in your faith. However, we know that He loves us by the ways that He reprovcs and disciplines us. Our response to God's discipline is two-fold. One is that it causes us to repent, that is to recognize the error of our behavior and confess and turn away from it. Second is that we become zealous and passionate for righteousness and holiness. The result of God's discipline is a deeper desire for righteousness and holiness in the life of the disciple.

Take some time today to consider your spiritual temperature. Are you hot, cold, or lukewarm? What steps do you see that are necessary to raise your spiritual temperature? What steps will you take as a result? Spend some time today seeking the Lord's perspective and direction regarding your spiritual temperature.

Thursday, April 11, 2024 - Be Holy, Part 1

I Peter 1:14-16

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

You are called to be holy. In fact, insofar as you are in a relationship with Jesus, you are holy. What does it mean to be holy? Very simply, it means to be set apart and dedicated for God's purpose and use. When you are saved, you are made holy by Jesus. From that point in time forward you are set apart for God's use and purpose. This means that we must be available for God's use whenever He is ready to use us. Over the next two days, we are going to consider holiness and what it means to be holy.

Peter helps us to see the relationship between obedience to God and holiness. We obey the Lord because He has made us holy. Our holiness fundamentally changes our allegiance to God. No longer do we seek our will, but the Lord's. When you commit your life to follow Jesus, you become a son or daughter of God. Therefore, as His children, who walk in obedience to Him, we are to leave behind the passions of our former life. Before Jesus we sought to be happy. When Jesus enters your life, you seek to be holy. God is more concerned with your holiness than your happiness. We are to be holy because God, the one who called us out of the world, is holy. Think about that. God expects those who are His to have the same character as He does. That is quite a lofty assignment, only because of

grace. Peter reminds us that we are to be holy in all of our conduct. This means every word, thought, and action of our lives is to exemplify the holiness of God. Peter, next, references Leviticus 11:44 - You shall be holy, for I am holy. The Lord lays down the expectation for all who follow Him. The expectation of every believer is holiness - holy heads, holy hearts, holy hands.

How do you define holiness? How does your definition of holiness align with how Scripture defines holiness? How does your conduct reflect the holiness of God? What, if any, changes do you need to make to ensure that your conduct more accurately reflects God's holiness in you?

Friday, April 12, 2024 - Be Holy, Part 2

Revelation 22:11

11 Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

This week we have focused, especially toward the beginning of the week, on the need for endurance in this race that we call the Christian life. Where there is endurance, so also is there a need for perseverance. Where all of these things come together is in the pursuit of holiness. If you desire to be holy as the Lord is holy, then you must persevere and endure. The world does not want you to be holy. However, we know that if those who follow Christ do not live holy lives then the world will not see Christ and His power to save. Let's turn our attention to the last chapter of the Scriptures, Revelation 22, and John's final observations in the last days.

Holiness in the life of a Christ follower must not only persevere, it must also persist. We must be persistent in holiness. The picture that John draws for us in verse 11 is simply this - ungodly people will continue doing ungodly things; therefore, godly people must do godly things. Those who do evil will continue doing evil in the last days. The immoral will continue in immorality. These things will continue until the time of Christ's return and the establishment of the new heaven and new earth. However, we must not neglect the second part of this verse. Those who are righteous must still continue doing right. Those who are holy must still continue in holiness. Righteousness and holiness are hallmarks of a person redeemed by Jesus' blood and living in relationship with God. Those who live righteously and holy lives give evidence of a life redeemed by Christ. To that end, from now until the time Christ returns, may those who follow Jesus live lives that exemplify righteousness and holiness even as evil and immorality persist in this world, and even more so.

How does your life exemplify righteousness and holiness? Why does living a righteous and holy life now matter even more? How does living a righteous and holy life impact the world of evil and immorality? Take some time today and ask the Lord to strengthen you to endure, persevere, and be persistent in your striving toward a righteous and holy life.

*This week's devotions were prepared for you by Troy Allen.