

Sermon Notes

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11-6-11



## Reflections

If you're a fan of racing, you are familiar with the checkered flag that signals the end of the race and establishes the winner. Many of the participants never see that flag because they do not finish the race. Mechanical breakdowns, crashes, engine failures, tire failures, and many other events rob them of the finish line. Paul in his writings frequently uses a race as the defining metaphor of his life and ministry. When he addressed the elders from Ephesus, he described the trials and challenges that he had already faced in ministry and alluded to the certainty of additional persecution, imprisonment, and other tribulations. As he did so, he then declared: *"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24 NKJ)* He clearly understood that he was to find no freedom from persecution in this life, yet he also knew that he was to embrace such difficulty with the joy of the Lord.

When he later told Timothy that he must also be prepared to endure afflictions, but to do so with preparation, adherence to the Word, and with the joy of the Lord, he once again, described his life as a race. He was looking for the finish line. *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2Timothy 4:6-8 NKJ)* Paul was looking forward to the presence of the Lord that would become the eternal reward for a race well run.

For us in this present age, we also are in a race, or contest, to see if we will walk faithfully in Christ as we live out our salvation. The best challenge for us to consider as we walk with the Lord is found in the book of Hebrews. *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, <sup>2</sup> 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. (Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJ)* The writer of Hebrews had just reviewed, in the previous chapter, the examples of

many of those who had lived in faith under great persecution, and even martyrdom, for the calling of God on their life. They had run their race with great confidence in what God had promised, and even though they had lives fraught with suffering and difficulty they were certain that God's Word was true and embraced their trials with the Joy that only God can give to His faithful children. It is in the face of these "witnesses" that he offers his challenge to believers to run the race with endurance.

As with those who race cars, motorcycles, and other machines that rely on mechanical systems for their success, we too may find that our "race" is filled with failures and unexpected problems. When a race car "breaks" the race is usually over. When a crash occurs, the race is over for those involved. Some, however, are able to "limp" across the line to finish the course in spite of mechanical problems. In our life's race we may face trials of various sorts. Illness, accident, failures in personal relationships, loss of a loved one, unexpected tribulations, all may be part of our life. In many cases, even our faith in Christ may waver when the unpleasant circumstances of our lives become difficult to understand and deal with as we struggle with the pain of trial. That's when we can turn to the Word for encouragement. James tells us to face such things with a resolve to view them from the growth and benefit caused by testing. *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4 NKJ)*

Running a race always involves the courage to continue even when it hurts. The body begins to call for more energy, oxygen, and may even begin to work on your resolve to continue. As the race proceeds on however, the body begins to adjust to the stresses put on it and the runner gets his "second wind" and the pain is quieted for a while as he sets his mind to go for the finish line. All the preparation and work that was put into conditioning the body now sustains the runner until the finish line comes into view. It is then that the runner redoubles his or her effort to not only finish, but to finish well. In our spiritual walk, with the promises of Jesus resounding in our hearts, we too can look not only to finish, but to finish well. Let's place our faith in Him and look to Him who is the author **and finisher** of our faith and our race.

**Pastor Doug**