

The Pursuit of Holiness (Part 3)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 January 2011

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] Hebrews chapter 12 is where we've been and will be for some time and if you might introduce the subject one more time.

! I would say to you that this chapter, the theme of the chapter that runs through it is holiness. And not holiness in the sense of our position before God. Because every one of us, that is every one of us that name the name of Christ, who are born again believers, have been placed by God in a position of righteousness before Him.

We didn't deserve that. We didn't earn it. We didn't have to go through some initiation stage and some formula, some 10 step type of thing to reach that place.

We were placed there by God. And it was His act. Gracious act of God. And so that's not the subject here. Rather, it is that aspect of holiness where we participate with God.

But we actually pursue to live wholly before Him. And so that's the subject throughout this chapter. And Paul is using a certain metaphor here at the beginning of the chapter.

[1:30] And this is where we've been focusing the last couple of weeks. And the metaphor is that of running a race. And it's a pretty good one. Because we can identify with that. Even if some of us have never been athletes here, we can identify with that kind of, you know, that metaphor of the race.

We understand that. And then we're not going to, we're going to finish that up tonight. Then Paul's going to shift to another metaphor. That of a family. And we can identify with that.

So I've chosen just to kind of finish up with the race motif. And then we'll wait until next time and we'll get into the next one.

Now let me just remind you where we've been. I did provide for you really just the last part of the outline for this particular section. So if you've got the whole outline there before you, that's fine. If you don't, maybe next week I'll have some copies. There may even be some. In fact, there are. So if you don't have the whole thing, I've got a couple of them up here. And you can pick that up.

[2:48] But just to remind you where we've been, talking about a race, that's what Paul is using here to convey the truth of Scripture. We talked about the determination to run this race.

We've already talked about the motivation for running this race. And then we got to the opposition to run the race.

And we talked about laying aside the weights, the encumbrances. And we also talked about laying aside sin, so the opposition to run. And then the concentration to run. And that's where we ended last week.

And tonight, we're going to get into number five here, which is, you can fill in your blank there, the ambition to run. Actually, I wanted to use the word aspiration.

I think that's maybe more descriptive of it, but I don't know, aspiration. You can put aspiration in there, or you can put ambition. I'll just give you the option. See, you have power. You've been empowered.

[3:58] Write whatever word you want. In fact, if you can think of another one, just go right ahead. The idea here is, why run? Why run?

What's the ambition for it? Well, verse 2 of Hebrews chapter 12. Now, we got into this with the last one, the concentration.

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. But now notice the rest of that verse. Who, that is Jesus, 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.

Now, I'm suggesting to you that that is the right ambition for running. And the focus here is the finish line.

That's your ambition for running, to get to that finish line, but not just to finish the race, but to achieve or to receive what's at the end of that finish line.

[5:05] And what is at the end has everything to do with the ambition for running the race right now because of what's at the end.

That's the idea here. Because, you know, usually, I guess, you know, there's where all illustrations kind of break down, but generally speaking, no one runs a race without some expectation.

This is part of your outline. No one runs a race without some expectation of a reward at the end of the race. Now, grant you, there are some who would run just because running a race is exciting and exhilarating.

Anybody here like that? All right, maybe. Some might run a race, you know, just for sport.

All right? Some might run for exercise. There'll be some in here that do that. I don't know. Matthew over here for sure. Or maybe we could say exercise slash lose weight.

[6:18] You know, that kind of goes together. I still don't see, you know, a whole lot of folks saying, Yeah, yeah, that's me. Some might run a race just because to them it's fun.

Is that you? All right. I'm not just talking about getting out and running and jogging. I'm talking about running a race, you know, whether it's the hundred yard dash or whatever it is. But with that in mind, we need to remember, getting back to Paul's illustration, that the race here in Paul's illustration is the *agone*.

Remember I mentioned that Greek word that Paul used, the *agone*, from which we get our word *agonize*. And so we're not talking about just a little sprint or a short little race.

We're talking about a marathon primarily or certainly a long distance race. It's the agonizing race.

Now, for some of us, a hundred yard dash would be agonizing.

So whatever applies, you know, to you. But the point is this. No one runs that kind of race, the agonizing kind of race, without having something important, something significant to look forward to at the end of the race.

[7:37] And without that, few people, if any, would start the race and fewer still would finish it. If there was no ambition, I mean, there's no looking out to the end and this is what I'm running for and it's some great prize at the end.

Now, let's also remember that Jesus is the example here. Now, because obviously we're not talking, even though Paul's using an illustration of running a race, we're not talking about running a physical race.

So let's make sure we keep this, keep in mind and keep this connected to the spiritual application and truth taught here. Jesus is our example. Jesus ran the race before us.

And He's the one who places us in the race. And Jesus ran and finished the race. And so we then can run and finish the race.

This race, this race of life, this pursuit of holiness. We can do all of that because Jesus, remember, this is what Paul said in the first part of verse 2. He's the author and finisher of our race.

[8:46] Let's keep that in our minds. But now having said that, Jesus did not run for personal pleasure. He didn't run for personal pleasure.

He did not endure, as is highlighted right here in verse 2, He did not endure all of the suffering and the shame and the pain for a few moments of pleasure while He was here on this earth.

In fact, Jesus had a few moments of personal pleasure, as we would define pleasure. Now, He had those. I think one that comes to my mind is when the children come.

And He says, suffer not to let the children come to Me. And He's surrounded by these children. I think that was a very pleasurable moment for Him. And other things like that.

But primarily, He had a life of suffering. So Jesus didn't run the race for personal pleasure. You know, it was what was at the end of the race.

[9:46] I'm talking about Jesus now. Then we're going to apply that to ourselves. It was what was at the end of the race that motivated Jesus to leave heaven and to suffer and die on this earth.

And so, according to your outline, you can fill this in, Jesus ran His race for two reasons. And I really have kind of had second thoughts about it.

There's not really two separate reasons. These come together to form the primary reason. But we'll leave it at that. The two reasons that we draw from the text is the joy that was set before Him.

And the exaltation of God the Father. Or if you want, you can use the word glorification. To exalt, glorify God the Father.

Paul said to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God the Father. Those are the two reasons that Jesus ran. But they're not two separate reasons, one and two. It's really that they go together. [10:51] To simplify it, we would put it this way. He ran for the joy of exaltation. To exalt the Father. To glorify the Father. In John chapter 17, we'll look there real quickly.

John 17 and verse 4. They're part of Jesus' high priestly prayer. Tremendous chapter in the Gospel of John. And He said, I have, this is Jesus speaking, I have glorified you on the earth.

I've finished the work which you have given me to do. And now, O Father, glorify me together with yourself with the glory which I had with you before the world was.

That's the idea, see. Now, what is the finish line to which you and I are running? What's the prize? Is it heaven?

Be careful. Is it heaven? You know, the pearly gates and streets of gold and the crystal sea and other things that are described in the Bible.

[12:05] Are we running the race for heaven? I'm not just talking about the heaven, running the race for heaven because of all the wonderful things there. I mean, let's put it a different way. Are we running for salvation?

Eternal life? The answer is no. We're not running the race for that. Because we already have that. And I'll use heaven again.

We're not running the race so that we can gain heaven. It's already ours. That became ours at the moment of salvation. And all that's in it there.

Eternal life is ours. Salvation is ours. We're not running in hopes of winning salvation. Like I've put it this way a number of times and you probably have already heard it.

We're not going to run and get to heaven and get inside the door and they shut the door and say, whew, I made it. You know, I made it.

[13:07] Not that. So if not that, then why are we running? Well, what's that? I said we're running for the throne. For His, well, in a sense, yeah, we're running the same way for the same price that Jesus ran.

And I've already given that to you. And we achieve it in the same way Jesus did. By glorifying God the Father here through our race.

Glorifying Him on this earth. And that, you see, is what our pursuit of holiness all boils down to. Exaltation or glorification of God the Father.

And how do we do that? Well, we do it the same way Jesus did. We run for His glory by obeying Him in everything. Number one.

And by allowing His character, His nature to shine through our lives. Let me say that again because you may have missed it.

[14:13] The question is how do we glorify God the Father in our race the same way Jesus did. We run our race to glorify God by obeying Him in everything.

Isn't that what Jesus did? He always obeyed the Father in everything. Our pursuit of holiness, our progressive sanctification that's taking place, if we might not put it in more theological terms, involves a life of obedience.

Obeying Him. Discovering what He says in His Word and the laws He's given us and living those laws out. Obeying Him. But not just that.

By allowing His character, the character of Christ, to shine through us. That brings glory to God the Father.

Now, for us, the Bible speaks of this exaltation or glorification in terms of rewards. treasures or crowns maybe would be the better word.

[15:33] And so our ultimate reward is at the finish of the race. Our ultimate reward. Because you see, we do not run for earthly reward, do we?

Well, we shouldn't. That's not our ambition. To run for a prize here. Many of God's choicest saints have lived the life of Christ, obeyed Him, and allowed His character, His nature to flourish in their lives, and they never received a single thing in this life.

In fact, they received the opposite. Terrible things. Hard things. The reward's not here.

It's at the end of the race. Or if we want to use the word crown. It's at the end. That's why we're running. That's the ambition. For the reward at the end. So we're not running here for the reward now.

We're also not running so that we might receive something from the hand of God right now in this present world. God does bless us. And He provides for us. Certainly He does.

[16:50] We need for Him to do. And He's gracious to do that. But that's not why we run. We're not doing it for that reason. We're not making deals with God.

You know, saying, well, you know, God, I'll run if You'll bless and answer my prayers. I'll run this race and pursue holiness, life of Christ, you know, flourishing and shining through my life.

I'll do that as long as You bless me, as long as You answer my prayers, as long as You meet my needs. See, that's what sometimes we do as Christians. We have wrong thinking.

We try to, maybe not in so many words, but in our hearts and in our thoughts, we try to make deals with God. So we obey Him because we think that's the way that God is then duty-bound to bless us and answer all of our prayers.

And He might, and certainly obedience does bring blessing. The Bible does give that promise. But that blessing may be there and not here.

[17:56] And we're running for there, not for here, or any blessing here. I remember when I was in high school and I told you when we started this study that I played football but also ran in track and field.

And I remember we were having practice and the coach had invited one of the running backs with Kansas City Chiefs to come and speak to us.

I don't even remember his name now. But he was a tremendous athlete and very fast, one of the fastest men in the world. And he was just kind of sharing with us and motivating us.

You know how they'll do. And after it was over, he was kind of talking to some of the guys. And one of our sprinters asked him if he would, you know, he challenged him to a race there.

See, you know, just put him to the test. And I'll never forget what he said. He said, I don't run for fun. I just dash for cash. And so, see, we're not running for cash.

[19:02] You know, we're not living this life and obeying God so that somehow we are manipulating God into blessing our lives.

Now, God's gracious to bless our lives. And God does answer prayers. Don't misunderstand me.

We're talking about our ambition for running. And our ambition for running is for the finish.

And Jesus is at the finish. We run for Him whether we get anything, whether or not we get anything in this life. That's hard for us to think in those terms.

But because most of us, you know, in our culture, when we don't get blessed, we think we've either sinned tremendously or God's being unfair, you know, with us.

Because we're used to blessing, you know, in this culture. We're not used to suffering. But we're running a race.

[19:56] And we're running for the finish. That's our ambition. Now, the rewards, then, or what we're running for, the Bible describes as a crown.

We're running for crowns. And that's at the finish. And that we're running for a crown that's incorruptible. And, you know, that might make us think that sounds a little self-centered, you know, that we'd be running for some personal crown.

But it's not because you might remember the Bible says in Revelation 4.10, and I'll just kind of paraphrase it here, that we will ultimately all fall down before the throne of Jesus.

And worship Him, the one who liveth forever, the Bible says. And we will cast our crowns before His throne.

So there's where the crowns go. And we're running for the crown, but not for ourselves so that we can wear it. We're running so that when we receive it, we can give it to Jesus.

[21:00] We can cast it before Him and say, as Revelation 4.10 says, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power. And so we run the race in pursuit of holiness in anticipation of a crown of righteousness.

Which is at the finish of the race. And we're doing that so that we'll have the blessed honor of casting that crown at the feet of Jesus. Because He is the one who deserves it.

He eternally loves us. And He alone is worthy of our crown. Alright, now, one more. We'll conclude this part of the text in whatever time it is.

We're going to get done a little bit earlier this time. Wonder of wonders. There still are miracles that take place from time to time. Alright, so we've seen the determination to run, the motivation, the opposition, the concentration, the ambition to run.

And then there's one more. The inspiration to run. The inspiration. Look at, back at our text, verses 3 and 4.

[22:11] For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself. Lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

You've not yet resisted to bloodshed striving against sin. What's our inspiration for running? A lot of these kind of run together.

But our inspiration is the one who ran the race before us. Consider Him. And what did it say about Him? He endured such hostility from sinners against Himself.

He ran the race and finished the race. And He endured such hostility from sinners against Himself.

And so, the inspiration is to consider Him lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

I guarantee you, no matter what hardships we may face, they will never compare to the hostility and what Jesus had to endure in this life for us.

[23:20] They'll never compare to that. You know, what He endured. So, when we consider Him, if He, you know, it's kind of the old adage, if He can do it and did it for me, then I'll do it too.

You know, it inspires us. And nothing that might threaten to put you or me out of the race cannot be conquered also by faith.

And that's really the idea here. Although the word faith does not appear here, considering Him, the idea is placing our faith in Him.

And nothing that we would endure here cannot be conquered by faith. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith.

You can put all this together. In fact, Paul does this in Galatians 2. And verse 20, let me read it to you. He said, I have been crucified with Christ.

[24:25] And it's no longer I who live. We might just insert the word run. It's not only I who run. Runs this race.

But Christ runs in me. Or lives in me. And so the life which I live now, that I'm running right now in the flesh, that is in this body.

He's not talking about in the flesh, in the evil or simple sense. But the life or this race that I'm running, in this body, right now, in this life, I live by faith.

By faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. That really puts it all together here. And helps us understand, or really ought to produce in us an inspiration to pursue holiness in this life for this purpose.

To glorify the Father in our race and to win the crown at the finish line a crown that we can cast at Jesus' feet and say, Thou art worthy.

[25:42] We receive glory and honor and power. Wouldn't that be a wonderful day? When we can sing that to him directly. Thou art worthy.

Thank you.