

Mark 8: 34-38 and Hebrews 12: 1, 2; “Running For God’s Pleasure”,
Sermon # 65 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 10th, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.

Last week, I took you downstairs in the House of Christian Discipleship, and I introduced you to the last of the rooms that we will study. It is the Exercise Room. The Exercise Room is the largest of the rooms. The exercise that I spoke to you about was primarily the exercise that you will do indoors; that is, the exercise unto godliness in your heart, and in relation to your devotion to Christ and obedience to the commands of His word, the Bible. If you would take seriously your Christianity, you must reject false realities and false doctrines and learn to separate the precious from the vile in your experience. Today I want to begin to speak to you about running the race of the Christian life. The reason that you exercise spiritually is so that you might run the race of living your life to the glory of God. Your running is a part of your taking up your cross and following Christ. You should not assume that because you have been saved, that you are necessarily making progress in doing God’s will. You may or you may not be making great progress as a true disciple. But if you are, it is because you have made it your highest aim to please God.

All true Christians over time, you should know, will make some progress in relation to their being fruitful for God. This is because of the faithfulness of God in supplying grace to every believer. But the goal in running is that you will please God and honor Christ. You will be seeking to run in such a way that you really will do righteous deeds and you really will seek to make progress in holiness. You will be attempting to love God first and foremostly, and you will be attempting to show love to other people around you in the process of doing God’s will. As you run, you will be looking to see how you can become more like your perfect Lord Jesus in the way that you react to things, and in way that you do things. And you will also be looking outside of yourself to the goal of what you will accomplish by your efforts in running. The goal is – that Christ’s cause of truth, meekness, and righteousness would be furthered in you and in other people around you.

Certainly if you are serious about being a Christian disciple you will run because you know that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. But most of all you will run the race because you want to bring glory and honor to God in all that you do for Christ’s kingdom. Let me give you some pointers as to your running. The 1st thing that you should do, as you begin to run, is to remember that there have been many godly people who have gone before you, and it will help you if you can study their lives. The 2nd thing that you should do is to lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares you. And the 3rd, and really the most important thing that you should do, is to fix your eyes on Jesus while you run. So, let’s see if we can run together in this race, in terms of the complying with these guidelines and instructions.

1st of all – You should remember that there have been many godly people who have gone before you, and it will help you if you can study their lives.

The object spiritually running is so that you will make swift progress in learning to do God’s will and that you will make it to heaven at last. You will want to run in such a way that you will win the prize. The Apostle Paul says in 1st Corinthians Chapter 9, verse 24, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?” “Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” The race of really living the Christian life has for its object the prize of being given a crown of righteousness. Listen to the Apostle Paul, again, in 2nd Timothy 4: 6 – “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.” “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” “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 those who have loved His appearing.” You can be sure, that all is well with you

eternally, if you have really found Christ; if you have come to know and understand that you have not been saved by your own good works or by your performance after you become a Christian. But you should also understand that the Lord would have you to run in order to prove the reality of His grace at work in yourself; and, in order to really be making progress in what is pleasing to Him, so that at the last when you die, you will hear the words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You need to ask yourself, at this point in time, whether you are running for this prize in your learning to live righteously; whether you are running pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart? This will determine whether you will end up winning the prize; whether you will receive a reward. When you do this; when you run the race by faith in Christ; then you can be sure that you will receive the prize that He will give to all who love His appearing. Let's think about this a little more in detail.

I want you to step out of the doors of the Exercise Room, now, and into the great outdoors of the World of Christian Discipleship. In Psalm 24: 1 it says: "The earth is the Lord's and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein." You are just as much a disciple of the Lord Jesus when you step outside of the House to run, as when you are inside the House participating in the activities related to church, family, and your own devotion to Christ privately. I want to show you some things that you need to do, so that you will run this race with endurance, and obtain the prize of heaven and the crown of righteousness. So turn with me, if you will, to the book of Hebrews, the 12th Chapter, verse 1. "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, 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."

I think that sometimes, when we think about these verses, we picture all the saints of old, those who have gone before us who are now up in heaven, that they are cheering us on as we run. That may be so, I do not know how much those who have died and gone before us can see of us who are still living upon the earth. I certainly do not believe that the Bible teaches that we are normally able to communicate with the departed saints or that they can hear us and interact with us. I think that many people delude themselves with this kind of thinking. But "the witnesses" that this verse is talking about are those who have run the race of faith before us; those who are mentioned in Chapter 11 of this book of Hebrews. We are surrounded by these witnesses and the witness of their life as we find it in the Bible. And I think that we can also safely include all the other saints from every generation in the history of the church; those who have demonstrated faithfulness to Christ by the way that they ran their race. It is those who have exercised faith in God, whose life of faith is commended to us here, that we should be encouraged by. We should be encouraged by their example so that we will begin and continue to persevere in our running the race as well.

Let's take one of the men who is mentioned here in Chapter 11 as an example. Verse 7 – "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." You need to remember that there really was a man named Noah, who alone in his generation believed the Word of God. He believed that judgment was coming, and that God was going to bring a flood over the whole earth because of the wickedness of the all the people around him, except for his own family. He alone was found to be righteous in his generation. This should be an incentive to you to run in our day. If he, a man surrounded by wicked people, people whose every imagination of their hearts was only evil continually, could be righteous by faith in God and His promise of Christ, so can you. There are many, many more godly people in the world today than in the world of that day.

You see that he very definitely did run the race, and he showed the people of his generation that he believed. He built an ark. This is how he ran. He believed God's word; that God was going to destroy the earth through the floodwaters that He would bring. He built the ark according to the

exact specifications which God had given to him. He ran quickly to keep God's commandments even though He may have never seen rain before. He "ran" and continued to "run" when his neighbors and others made fun of him because this ark was such a monstrosity. "Why spend a hundred and twenty years building something which would never be used?", they thought. He ran his course by preaching God's judgment which was coming. And he preached salvation which would be found in the ark. He "ran" with his mind and his heart filled with godly fear. He feared God more than the faces of men. He said to himself: By faith I must keep the commandment of the Lord to build this ark, or I will perish, my family will perish, and everyone around me will perish also, unless I do something to tell them of the judgment that is coming, and tell them how they can be saved by coming into this ark with me.

Genesis 6: 8 tells us how he did it. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." He had grace to run when no one believed but he and his family. It was grace that made Noah to differ from other men. And the reality of that grace brought about his ability to walk and then to run his race in the faith that he was doing the right thing. The next verse in Genesis 6: 9 says, "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations." "Noah walked with God." In verse 22 of the same chapter it says, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did." "Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Come into the ark, you all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.'" I say to you, that this is how you and I ought to walk and run as well. This is how we ought to live our lives. By faith we begin to run. Psalm 119, verse 32 says, "I will run in the way of your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart." You do understand, don't you, that Noah could have never done these things if he not found grace in the eyes of the Lord; if the Lord had not changed and enlarged his heart? You can never run the long marathon race of life unless you exercise. But as you spiritually exercise the grace that you have been given, the Lord enlarges your heart. It was because Noah found grace, that his heart was enlarged to run in the way of God's commandments. His building of the ark showed His faith in the promise of Christ. Enter in to the ark of Christ and be safe. You will rise above the flood waters and not perish eternally under the judgment of Almighty God. Enter in to Christ by faith and you will never perish eternally in the lake of fire under the eternal wrath of God. The gospel of what Christ has done, when believed, saves a person and then gives them a heart to run and the strength to run.

2nd – In order to run to the glory of God, you need to lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares you.

Hebrews 12: 1 – "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded with 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 with endurance the race that is set before us." You see here, that there are weights; things that weigh the Christian down as he would run the race to win the prize. One of the worst of those weights is being clothed in the confidence of your flesh; that is, you are clothed with a confidence in your natural qualifications or abilities which relate to your own righteousness. It is like a heavy coat, if you are wearing it. Surely you need to take off this garment if you would win the race and obtain the prize. I want you to turn with me now to the book of Philippians Chapter 3 and I will begin reading to you in verse 3. "For we are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh." "If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ."

I love the Old King James version of the Bible; there are many renderings of that good old translation that need to be pondered by every Christian who wants to be more godly. In the King

James it says, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” Now the question is this: Will you, now that you have believed in Christ, run to win Christ? Now that you have come to know Christ; do you realize that Christ expects you to run the race of living by faith in Him, and not trusting in any fleshly credentials that you might have to run? It may be a very beautiful coat, but it is very heavy to wear. If you have this coat on; this confidence in your fleshly credentials, it will act as a weight to your running so as to find and win Christ. Some people trust in the religious ceremonies that have been performed over them. Circumcision was a great stumbling block in the days of the early church. There were people that were saying that without circumcision a person could not be saved. Similarly in our day, some people believe and teach others that you have to be baptized and take the Lord’s Supper to be saved. These are the ordinances commanded by Christ, and they will do you spiritual good in every way to strengthen your faith, if you already have Christ. But they cannot create faith.

When you begin to run, after you have believed in Christ, you come to the place where you see the things that you used to put confidence in: what lineage you came from, whether you were English or Scotch or Dutch or Welsh, whether your father was a pastor, or whether you went to a Christian school growing up, whether you were taught in a seminary, or earned a PhD behind your name. These things may indeed be helpful if they are used for Christ, but if your confidence is in those credentials they will be weights when you run. You must ask yourself: What will I do for Christ as I live my life? What will I do to the glory of God? What is it that I will be remembered for by Christ when I see Him face to face? You don’t want to be trusting in your own righteousness as you run this race. You will say with Paul, “I want to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own which is from the law, but rather that which through faith in Christ.”

Some people trust in the strength of their natural abilities, not understanding that that will not be enough to glorify God. I have been going back this past week and looking at the movie, Chariots of Fire, to be able to better remember some of the things in it. I think that they will be for our edification. If you will remember, this (for the most part) true story is set back in the years of 1919-1924. There are two major characters who are followed in the movie, Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell. Abrahams went to school at Caius College, Cambridge from 1920 to 1924. He was a Jew and he believed strongly that he was being discriminated against by the those in authority over him. He thought that those people were hindering him from becoming great. Their halls and corridors of power were Christian. His object, he told his friend Aubrey Montague, was to “take them all on, one by one, and run them off their feet.” This he did by his own fleshly determination. He had never lost a race until in the pre-Olympic trials, he was beaten by Eric Liddell from Scotland. There was a real difference between the running of these two men. Abrahams was running to see himself and his Jewish race established. He was an Englishman but he was a Jewish Englishman trying to prove himself. Eric Liddell was running to please God.

Listen to the conversation that took place between Harold Abrahams and his girlfriend Sybil after he had lost to Eric. Sybil comes up to Harold who is sitting in the empty stands where the race took place. He is thinking back of what he did wrong and his losing. **Sybil** walks up and sits down next to him and sees that he won’t even look at her. She says to him, “Harold – This is a race you lost, not a relative.” “Snap out of it; you’re behaving like a child.” **Harold** – “I Lost!” **Sybil** – “I know; I was there watching you; you were marvelous; simply marvelous.” “He was more marvelous, that’s all.” “On the day, the best man won.” **Abrahams** says to Sybil – “I had to look for him....” “It’s absolutely fundamental that you never look....” **Sybil** – “He was ahead, there was nothing that you could have done; He won fair and square.” **Abrahams** – “Well, that’s that Abrahams....” **Sybil** – “Well if you can’t take a beating perhaps it’s for the best!” **Abrahams** – “I don’t run to take beatings!” “I run to win!” “If I can’t win, I won’t run....” **Sybil** – “If you don’t run, you can’t win.”

Then she turns to leave, and Harold grabs her arm and says, “Sybil don’t go.” “I just don’t know what to do.” “Try growing up,” she says. And then she leaves for a minute, and then comes running back. “Harold – You’re a great man,” she says. “You ran like a god.” “I was proud of you; don’t make me ashamed.” **Harold** – “It’s not the losing Syb; Eric Liddell is a fine man and a fine runner – It’s me!” “After all that work, and now God knows; what do I aim for...?” **Sybil** – Beating him the next time.” **Harold** – Sybil I can’t run any faster.” Then Sam Mussabini, a professional trainer who Abrahams wants to hire to help him, comes up, down below the stands, and says to him, “Mister Abrahams, I think that I can find you another 2 yards”. (The distance that Harold had needed to beat Eric Liddell.) Now, there are a number of good things that we can apply to what we are studying this morning. We are talking about laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us. You can understand when I say to you that Harold Abraham’s goals were born of his fleshly confidence, can’t you? It wasn’t a bad thing that he, as a Jew, wanted to do great things for his race, the Jews. It wasn’t wrong that he wanted to win. His problems were related to the idea that there was someone faster than he was, and he couldn’t beat him. He couldn’t take being beat at what he thought he was the best at. “I don’t run to take beatings!” “If I can’t win, then I won’t run,” he says.

Let me ask you if this is the way that you are, as a Christian? We have already said that the object of running the race is to win the prize. But the Christian’s running is not like the running of people in the world. They are running too, but it is for a different prize. A Christian isn’t running in the right way if his goal is to compete with other Christians so that he can see that he is doing better than other Christians, or other people. That is self-righteousness. Oh, I know that it is true that there is such a thing as “iron sharpening iron”, and one Christian sharpening the wits and thinking of another Christian, in a holy, competitive way. That is positively good and right. But that is not what I am talking about here. I am talking about comparing your level of attainments, or your obedience, to some other person’s and concluding that you are better than them, or that you are doing better than they are. You are striving to outdo them, so that you or other people around you are impressed with you. 2nd Corinthians Chapter 10, verse 12 says, “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves.” “But they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise.”

Sometimes, I am saying, Christian men can be like boys in a locker room; looking at each other’s muscles, looking at their build, looking to see how fast they run, to see who is the fastest, or the strongest. But God, how does He look at these things? Psalm 147: 10 – “He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.” In other words, He knows what He has placed in you, or in any man; and He is only pleased when you use it righteously; not in order to prove a point of how great you are. He can take those who are weak and make them strong, or He can take those who are strong and make them weak. “It is not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.” That the race is run; and that is also how it is won. You see, it takes something more than fleshly confidence to run the race of the Christian life so that you win the prize. The unbeliever is a person who is always looking for the professional trainer to help them to win in the game of life. They want someone to give them the extra 2 yards so that they can beat the Christian; the one who is trusting in the Lord, and puts no confidence in the flesh.

What did Harold Abrahams and Sam Mussabini do after Harold won his race in the 100 meters? They went out and spent all night in the bar and got drunk and made a toast to each other. Is that all that life really is; a toast to our own achievements and each other’s skills? Is it all to be done to our own glory? How sad! How very sad. You see, one of the real differences between being an unbeliever and being a Christian is that the Christian learns to lay aside this weight, of trusting in their flesh. They don’t mind taking a beating in this race if God wants to teach them something. When a true Christian takes a beating, he remembers that it is good for him to lose at times; if that losing teaches him something about God, His will, His ways, and how to glorify Him in this life. He doesn’t live looking forward to the time when he will be able to beat another

Christian in the race, or do something better than someone else, so that he can boast. No, Harold Abrahams was right when he said to Sybil that Eric Liddell was a fine man and fine runner, but really the issue is me! He knew that he had put a lot of work into becoming the best runner, and still someone had come along who was a better runner. The best man did win. Why did Eric Liddell win? Why was he the faster runner and why did he receive the prize? Well let me explain this to you in my third point.

3rd – Really, the most important thing that you should do, as you begin to run, is to fix your eyes on Jesus.

“Looking unto Jesus” (fixing your eyes upon Jesus), the author and finisher of your 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.” You see, with Eric Liddell, he had his eyes fixed on the Lord as he ran. In the movie, he would not look at any other man when he ran; he would keep his eyes looking straight forward. And then when he really needed to pour it on, when he was running, he would put his head back and look up and give it everything that he had by looking to the Lord. You remember the rule that Abrahams stated to Sybil: “I had to look for him...” “It’s absolutely fundamental that you never look...” It is absolutely fundamental in the Christian race, if you would win it, that you do not look to other men, to see where they are. To do so may cost you the entire race. No you must fix your eyes on Jesus. Your competition, ultimately, is not between you and other men; it is between you and yourself, as you look at Christ. It is between what your flesh would want to become and be, and what the New Man will become and be, if you win. It is a matter of perseverance and it is running to the glory of God.

There is a beautiful scene in the movie that I want to recount for you, in closing. Eric Liddell was deeply committed to Christ and the work of a mission in Edinburgh, Scotland. His sister Jenny was deeply committed to this work also, and she worried greatly that Eric would abandon the work in favor of running. She confronted him at a number of points about this. After the third time, or so, he took her outside of the city to have a talk with her. This is what he said: “Come on, Jen, let’s go for a walk.” After they had climbed to a high point, overlooking the city, Eric looked back at the fading sunset and he said, “That is a sight and half, isn’t it Jen?” “I’m going to miss it.” Then he turned to face her and as he held her in his outstretched arms, he said to her: “I’ve decided that I’m going back to China.” “The Missionary Society has accepted me.” Jenny was very excited about this news that she had hoped for, and so she says: “Oh, yes!” “I’m so pleased.” He says to her: “But I’ve got a lot of running to do first.” “She looks disappointed, and so he says to her: “Jenny, Jenny; you’ve got to understand.” “I believe that God has made me for a purpose; for China.” “But He also made me fast.” “And when I run, I feel His pleasure.” “To give it up would be to hold Him in contempt.”

“You were right, it’s not just fun.” “To win is to honor Him.” “Jenny, Jenny – I’ve got my degree to get yet.” “All that work.” “Then there’s Paris – the Olympic Games – there’s just not enough of me.” “I’m asking you to run the mission on your own till then.” “Will you do that for me?” And so she agreed to do it, and did do it. Now, I ask you in closing, who was running the race so as to win the prize here? Was it Eric, or was it Jenny? I would say to you that it was both of them. The earthly race of the 400 meters that Eric Liddell ran in the 1924 Olympics, and won, has long been remembered by men. But Eric’s decision to run to the glory of God, by faith in Christ, will be remembered for all of eternity by God, and by all those who were saved, because of his giving up the fading glory of the earthly race for the eternal glory of the race to heaven. His story after he ran in the Olympics was, that he returned to China where he had been born; the son of missionary parents. This was the work to which the Lord was calling him. This was the cross that Eric had to pick up to be Christ’s disciple. It is just as inspiring to the faith of the one who would run for Jesus, as the things that we spoke of this morning in relation to his running in the Olympic games. But I want you to see that both Eric and his sister Jenny were running for the prize. Jenny’s running the mission for Eric, when there was not enough of Eric to do both, will be also be

remembered for eternity. Everyone who runs, fixing their eyes on Jesus will also win the prize. When you run for the imperishable crown, then you too, will feel His pleasure, if you are a Christian.