

# I WANT TO RUN A GOOD RACE

TEXT: HEBREWS 12: 1-6

SERMON NOTES FROM A MESSAGE PRESENTED BY REV. ARTHUR W. RICH  
AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, LAKELAND FLORIDA  
SEPTEMBER 6, 1959, P.M. SERVICE

In the Bible there are many figures of speech to describe the Christian life and experience. We are compared to little children born of God expected to grow into maturity. We are the sheep of God's pasture with the Lord Jesus Christ as our great shepherd. We are compared to a building, with Christ as the cornerstone, or as trees, and we are expected to bring forth fruit.

One of my favorite figures is the believer as an athlete, as a runner. Running was very popular in the time of Paul. Thousands of spectators would gather for running events and would cheer contestants on. In our Scripture I want us to see three things:  
**THE SPECTATORS, THE CONTESTANTS, AND THE GOAL OR PRIZE**

## I. THE SPECTATORS

There are many interpretations regarding who in Paul's story would be the spectators, and all have a measure of truth. We are being watched by the world. That is true. Other Christians are watching us, and that is true. But young Christians, both in physical age and spiritual age, are also watching us.

But I believe the Spectators Paul speaks of are those who have finished their course. They are actually in heaven. He begins by saying "wherefore". Whenever I scripture you find a wherefore, you have a suggestion of a therefore. So look back to Chapter 11. Here we find what has been called the roll call of the heroes of faith. These are the ones who have already completed their life here on earth.

The Greek word, translated as witnesses speaks of those who have paid the price. When Jesus told about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. He said there was joy in the presence of the angels. Not just the angels, but also the presence of angels. The presence of angels must include those saints who have "gone on ahead." They know of the hardships of life, they know of the testing and the trials that we must endure here on earth.

## II. THE CONTESTANTS.

These are the Believers who are running the race.

Dr. DeHaan tells of a preacher who many years ago preached on subject: "Ah So Run." That preacher had three points to his sermon. First, You had to run if you were going to get to heaven. His second point was that you had to run fast if you were going to get to heaven. His third point was: You've got to keep on running if you want to get to heaven.

Dr. DeHaan pointed out that this preacher's sincerity was good but his theology was bad. If he had used the word Reward instead of the word Heaven, his theology would have been O.K. You have to run to get a reward, have to run fast to get a reward, and you have to keep on running to get a reward. We don't run to get to heaven. We don't work in order to get salvation. Salvation is by grace. But there is more to salvation than just escaping hell and going to heaven. We have been saved for a purpose and that purpose is to run a race. Our reward in heaven will depend on how well we run the race.

These contestants that Paul uses for his illustration had to go into training and make great sacrifices in order to win the race. If you were going to set out to win the Boston marathon, you would not just show up for the race. You would spend months, even years in great self discipline, eating right, drinking right, sleeping right, and setting new goals for yourself every day, and committing to reach those goals. You would also have to dress right for the race.

**You must lay aside weights.** A runner doesn't run the race wearing a regular suit of clothes. We must separate ourselves from whatever impedes us. People say: "Why can't I do this. What's wrong with it?" If it impedes you in your race, it is wrong.

One commentary says the weight means excess fat. Let us go into training and get rid of excess weight or fat. I appreciate Mrs. Rich's will power when she really wants to diet. She will say no to some things that she may long for, but she knows they will put on pounds. What is weight? Weight is excess fat. Excess is the key word here. There are a lot of things that, in themselves, are not wrong, but it is the excess that is wrong. Water is good for us, and most of us do not drink enough of it. But we also know that water in excess, beyond that which the body is designed to handle, can kill us just like dehydration can.

I love fishing as a sport, for relaxation and as a pastime. There is nothing wrong with it in itself. But I know men who spend every spare moment of their time on a stream. They neglect their families, even their spiritual life. Fishing for such a person is a weight. I love golf. I wish I had time for it. But some people are so obsessed with golf that, they spend all of their available time on the golf course. They can't even, come to church, and they are no good to Christ or Church but their only desire is to boast that they broke 80. They spend more money in a year on golf clubs and golf balls than they give to church or to help another person.

Our example is Christ. He did not take the easy way. He did not do what he wanted to do. In the Garden, as he agonized in prayer to the Father, knowing the pain he was to suffer, he said: *"Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done."* (Luke 22:42) He did that which would please the, Father, no matter what the cost.

Jesus ran the whole race. He didn't leave out one detail. When he hung on the cross. He ran over the whole gamut of prophecies. When he was just about to say: It is finished, he remembered that prophet said he would be given vinegar to drink. Jesus said: I thirst to give them a chance to fulfill Scripture. When he was crucified and buried, the race was still not over. As his body lay there in the grave, his spirit knew "I must rise." Hallelujah, he arose. The race was not complete until the seal of death was broken. As the apostle Paul said: *"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"* (1 Cor. 15:55) And still, his mission continues. Jesus said: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (1 John 14:2-3)

If I am going to run a good race I must look unto Jesus. Remember that he ran well for the joy that could be fulfilled only by doing Father's will.

, In a real sense every purposeful action is done for the joy set before us, the satisfaction of an objective reached, a purpose accomplished. Aristotle once said that the key to a man's character is that in which he takes joy.

In verses 3-11, we find our need of discipline. Too much of our education system has underrated place of discipline. The world says, "Do as we please." No simple deed was ever performed without ignoring a thousand allurements. I never write a letter without an effort. I never read a book without an effort. You never cooked a meal without ignoring other allurements. If you want to see the uninhibited life, where people obey their impulses without hindrance, look at patients in an institution for the feeble of mind. There is undisciplined life par excellence.

Said a wise man who was a great administrator: Every man is as lazy as he dares to be. The only difference that makes some of us work harder is that we are gifted with imagination to look farther ahead and see doom catching up with us. If you run a good race, you will have to realize that without suffering we tend to settle back into our easy nests.

### **III. THE REWARDS**

Too many Christians are so occupied with their "good standing" in Christ, that they haven't moved a foot in the race since they were saved. We preach so much about the grace of God but we haven't preached enough on the responsibilities of the grace of God.

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul says: So run, that ye may obtain. Not for salvation but for reward. Running the race takes effort. Paul says, "I am not shadowboxing." Look at verse 26. He says *"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:* Then he says he gives his body a kyo. I knock it out he says. Look at verse 27 *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

When Paul said: "Lest by any means I myself should be a castaway," he didn't mean that he was afraid he would lose his salvation. He also said: *"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day"* (2 Tim. 1:12) I repeat. He wasn't fearful that he might lose his salvation. He was fearful that God might put him on shelf because God couldn't use him.

Our challenge is found verse in John's second Epistle verse 8 *"Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.* When you accepted the gift of eternal life that Christ provided for you, you were guaranteed eternal life. But the things we have done for Christ, that's where we see our reward. Oh that we may all be able to lie on our deathbed uttering the words of Paul: *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* (2 Timothy 4:6-8)