

Mark 8: 34-38 and Hebrews 1: 1-4; “Running the Race with Endurance”,
Sermon # 66 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered
by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 17th, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.

We have now left the house of Christian Discipleship and have entered into the World of Christian Discipleship. There is a wide world outside of the church, outside of the family, and outside of ourselves, which as a Christian, you are to “run through” in order to reach heaven. This race involves fighting the good fight of faith and learning to run in the way of God’s commandments. Its purpose is that each Christian might learn to come to the place where they will show love to others from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and a sincere faith. In other words, your immediate object in running will be to glorify God by the way that you run. Your ultimate object in running the race of the Christian life is to win the prize. This prize is the crown of righteousness which will be given to you, and to everyone who faithfully lives out the truth of the Word of God. It will be given to you by Christ Himself. He gives this prize to all those who are counted worthy to stand before Him in heaven, at the end of the race. There they shall hear His commendation of them saying: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In order to run this race with endurance and glorify God in the way that you run, there are 4 things that you should remember to do. 1st of all – You should remember to run according to the rules. 2nd – You should remember to lay aside every weight and sin. 3rd – You should remember to fix your eyes upon Jesus.

1st of all – You should remember that the race of living the Christian life should be run according to the rules.

Turn with me over to 2nd Timothy Chapter 2, verses 1-5. “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” The King James says: “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” What are the rules of running the Christian race? Well, Paul begins by exhorting Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ. He states this as a command; not just good advice. You can’t run this race in your own strength and by your own wisdom. You need Christ’s strengthening power. Then, 2nd, Timothy was to remember the word of God which Paul had spoken to him. And, third, he was not to give up, but when hardship came, he was to endure it as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. He was to persevere. These are the rules; remember Christ’s grace, remember the truth of the gospel and the word. And remember not to give up when hardships come. You see, the race of the Christian life is a race which also involves a battle. It is as a soldier of Christ Jesus that you run, whether you are minister or not. The minister does not have time to “entangle himself in the affairs of this life”. Rather his goal is to fight the good fight; run the race, and in all things please His Lord; the One who enlisted him as a soldier, to preach and help in the building of Christ’s church.

But I want you to see that a regular Christian is also one of the regulars in Christ’s army. He is a soldier in Christ’s kingdom, and one who is fighting for truth of the gospel, and for righteousness to be established in world today, as well. Therefore you find Paul speaking about any Christian man’s striving in athletics, and any who might engage in warfare, being put together here. He says in verse 5 - “If anyone competes in athletics”, he must compete according to the rules. So what are some of the particulars of “running according to the rules? Do you remember 1st Corinthians Chapter 9, and 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.” When it says that only one obtains the

prize, it does not mean that you as a Christian are competing against other Christians, and only one of you is going to receive the prize. Everyone who competes according to the rules, to the glory of God, will obtain the prize. Paul is talking about running the race with endurance. What does this mean? Paul is trying to convey to us that we should run the race of the Christian life in such a way that we would obtain it; that we would compete (that we would do battle) against all those evil and worldly forces which would attempt to overcome us and drag us down so that we cannot bring glory to Christ in all that we say and do for Him. If these forces were to overcome you, they would keep you from entering heaven and winning Christ. But because of the reality of your strengthening yourself in the grace of Christ, this shall not happen.

As I have said before, it is not as though salvation is by your works, even the best of them. Your whole salvation, if you have received Christ by faith, rests upon Him and His finished work; His having run His race perfectly on your behalf; and His dying for you upon the cross. This running of the race and winning the prize; this winning of Christ and heaven, is rather your proving the reality of Christ in you; Christ who is the hope of glory. The competition is not with other Christians; to outdo them in your obedience. That would be pride and seeking your own glory. This race is rather a picture of how you will live your life; whether for Christ or for yourself. It is true that there are other people in this race of how you will live your Christian life, and they can either hinder you or help you, depending on what their motives are, in relation to you and to Christ. But ultimately they cannot harm you, for God has purposed that all things shall work together for good to those who love Him. Therefore any competition with other people is only in the realm of whether you will compete with them in a holy way, for the promotion of His kingdom and His glory.

So let me repeat, the true competition of which we are speaking this morning, is found in the race of your overcoming all those forces which would prove your confession of faith in Christ to be a false one, were they to prevail. The true competition is to realize that you are in a race to promote Christ's glory and not your own. The true race will be for those who want to become most like Christ in the time that God has allotted to them. Paul says in verse 25 of Chapter 9 of 1st Corinthians, "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things." "Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown." "Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty." "Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air." "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." Is it really possible that an apostle like Paul could have been disqualified at the last from entering heaven and receiving this prize; this crown? No, not from the standpoint of God's election. But you will not come to know your election except by your faith being in exercise as a living faith which runs the race with endurance. When you know the reality of the grace of Christ in your life, you really will live, and you really will run. You really will lose your old life of sin and selfishness, that you might find your new life in Christ.

But 2nd – If you would run the race with endurance you must lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets you.

Turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 12, 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..." This is set in the context of the holy competition which you engage in, in regard to people who have lived and run in the past. These witnesses who went before you; they laid the aside weights and the sin; and even so; you too, if you are wise, you will do the same, by the grace of Christ. You should take notice of the faith of those people who went before you; this cloud of witnesses, and then run like they ran, seeing what you can do for the glory of God and Christ and His kingdom. In our last sermon we looked at Noah. We saw that he didn't have any good examples to follow in his generation. He alone found grace, and he alone was righteous. There were only eight persons who were saved from that whole world of people. Noah and his wife; and their three sons, and their wives. That was it. The truth that you should understand from his life, is this: When you run your race, make sure that you lay aside the weight of worldly peer pressure.

Your object in running the race is to win God's approval; not man's. You want to learn to run Christ's way, and not the way of people who do not want to honor God. Your real competition is with the holy saints who have gone before you, and not with people of the World who are perishing now, and who will perish eternally in their sins, unless they are brought to repentance. Many a professed Christian in our generation is trying hard to see how worldly they can be, and still be a Christian. This is utter folly, and it holds eternal danger.

If a person lives this way, they have real reason to question whether they are running the race at all. In 1st John 2, verse 15 it says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world." "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." John is saying that the one who loves the world does not have the love of the Father in him, so as to love Him enough to keep His commandments. 1st John 2: 5 says, "Whoever keeps His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him." This true love of God is born in your heart when you believe in Jesus Christ. Then this love of God is poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit. But where true love exists in the heart of a person, it will compete with, and overcome, the love of the world. That is how it is perfected. That is how a Christian runs. Many professed Christians are competing with their worldly neighbors to see how many of this world's possessions and how many of this world's entertainments they can have and hold and enjoy, and still make it to heaven. Christ's spiritual joys, which He will most certainly give to them, when they seek for Him every day, they are strangers to these. When a person lives for the World, my brethren, he is not really promoting the glory of God and Christ. How can a person be found to be a true Christian in the final analysis if they are more worldly-minded than heavenly-minded?

The running of the worldly wise man is not the running of the Christian. The running of the worldly wise man is his trying to collect material wealth, and holding to his own self-sufficiency and self-righteousness instead of Christ. Instead of letting the World overcome you, you ought to receive the words of wisdom personified in Proverbs 8: 12 – "I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion." "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate." "Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength." "By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice." "By me, princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth." "I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me." "Riches and honor are with me, enduring riches and righteousness." "My fruit is better than gold, yes than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver." "I traverse the way of righteousness." (I run over the whole ground in the way of righteousness), in the midst of the paths of justice, that I (wisdom) may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries." This is not material wealth that is being spoken of here; it is the true riches; the spiritual riches of grace and truth. A Christian, then, when they begin to run, is not seeking for worldly wisdom and riches, or popularity with their peers. They are seeking for godly wisdom and the true riches which Christ gives.

In Proverbs 8: 32, it says, "Now therefore, listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways." "Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it." "Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." "For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord; but he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; and those who hate me love death." That is true running. Standing at the gate before Christ, kneeling down at the line in prayer, and waiting for His instruction every day; His Word coming to you with power, like a gun which is fired, sets you to running. This is running the race; when you are seeking for the approval that only God can give to you as you run. It says in Colossians 2: 3 that in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". You will need both wisdom and knowledge to run so as to obtain the prize. It will be much better for you who believe in Christ, if you will take the holy saints of old as your models, and learn from them how they ran the race. They trusted in the promises of God and so should you. You find a sample of these promises in Hebrews 13: 5 – "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have." "For He himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" "So we may boldly say:

“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear.” “What can man do to me?” The holy saints of old in the Bible, and the holy saints in all past generations, learned to separate themselves from the sinful worldly influences and in this way they overcame them so that they could win the race. You too, must learn to do this in order that you might overcome.

Remember the word that Jesus said, that is it more blessed to be poor if being poor will take your heart off of the cares of the world, the pleasures of the world, and the riches of the world. Jesus says in Luke 21: 34 – “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.” “For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.” “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Some persons may lay great stress in their thinking, that these verses refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and thus they miss the point. The point of running the race is that at the end of it you may stand before the Son of Man and not be ashamed. You cannot run the race if you are lazy. You cannot run it if you are sensual. You cannot run it if you are proud, or covetous, or worldly. The Lord would have you to get all of these ideas of earthly wealth, fame, and glory out of your mind. You must shuck them as things which will weigh you down. There are many weights and many sins bound up in living for the World and for your flesh.

And so, you must understand that repentance is a duty for every day of the Christian life; just as holiness is a duty for every day of the Christian life. It is not just a matter of changing your mind once, about the way that you have lived in the past, and then not doing something more about it. Rather, it is confessing your sins to God and to Christ where you see them in your life. But it is more than that. It is learning to forsake them. Christ has died for your sins, and so you are forgiven of them if you have trusted in His atonement on the cross for them. They are washed away by His blood. They are covered so that God does not see them to punish them. But Christ did not save you so that you would continue on practicing them. He did not come to save you in your sins; He came to save you from your sins. He died so that He might give you grace which will keep you from going back to practice them again. He suffered so that you would not love them anymore. “He who covers his sins will not prosper,” it says in Proverbs 28: 13, “but whoever confesses and forsakes them will find mercy”.

Now we need very much to see that this is a duty to be regularly engaged in, in running the race each day. Each day you must lay aside those things which will weigh you down. Each day you must deal with the sins that you will find in your heart, your thoughts, and sometimes even in your words and actions. The actions to be taken are found listed in verses such as James 1: 21 – “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.” And 1 Peter 2, verse 1, where Peter says, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Peter is saying that these kinds of sins will not allow you to run for the glory of God. These are sins of the heart; sins that break out against other people in the way that you think of them. Instead of loving them and praying for them; you only focus upon the things that they have said and done which disqualify them from your considering them in a loving way, any further. These kind of heart attitudes will lay you in the ditch in terms of your being able to run the race.

In running the race there are things that you must put off, and there are things that you must put on. Look with me at Colossians Chapter 3, verse 8 – “But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.” “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the Old Man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him....” Ask yourself now whether you are indeed doing what this verse is describing? Are you putting off anger, and thinking badly of people around you? Are you putting away the hard and malicious thoughts of God; your making Him out to be in some way different from the way that He is described in the

Bible; a God greatly to be feared and revered in the assembly of His saints? Do you take His name in vain, or do you hallow it in prayer? Are you using good language or coarse language when you speak? This is how you may tell if you are laying aside the sins which so easily beset you.

The 3rd way that you run the race with endurance is to fix your eyes on Jesus.

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and Perfector of our faith...” So says the New American Standard Translation. “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”, it says in the King James and New King James. You need to fix your eyes on the Lord Jesus in terms of the gospel that you have believed so that you will be able to run for Him, and with Him. He is the author of your faith. He is the author of the true gospel. You can only run if you have true knowledge. Some people do not understand that Jesus Christ is the author of their faith. They think of their Christianity as something that they make up their own mind on. But no one can be a disciple without the Word of God which tells them what Jesus is like. To take the good word of God and to run with it every day, this is putting on the New Man. We must look to Jesus to do this. The way that we look to Jesus is two-fold. We look to see what the Word teaches us about Jesus. And then we look to our Living Lord in prayer that He might give us the strength to run the race. In John Chapter 8 Jesus said, “If you abide in My Word you are truly disciples of mine.” “And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free, and you shall be free indeed.” The people to whom Jesus was speaking were those Jews who had thought they had believed in Jesus with a saving faith. But He confronted them over their bondage to sin. They said to Him in John 8: 33 – “We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone.” “How can you say, ‘you will be made free?’” “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.’” “And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.” “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

When Jesus frees you, He frees you from the dominating power of sin, and He frees you to run the race. He gives you the faith to believe in Him. He gives you a new heart to love Him, new lips to speak of Him; new feet to walk in his commandments, and run the race of doing all to the glory of God. The Apostle Paul was a man who did not know that he was in bondage to sin until the Lord struck him down with light and grace on the road to Damascus. He was running, but He was running the wrong direction. He was persecuting Christians. His was running the race of a proud self-righteousness Pharisee. His was full of sinful self-confidence in his own ability to keep the law. But the Lord became the author of Paul's faith. Paul knew that he could not possibly have believed in Christ, had Christ not humbled him greatly and changed his heart in the New Birth. Paul knew that he could not have even begun to run the race unless the Lord had given him abundant grace, and had commissioned him to do the work that he would do for Him as a preacher, an Apostle, and a teacher. But from that moment on, Paul preached free grace. He always remembered who it was who had set Him free to run.

Listen to what he says toward the end of his life. Acts Chapter 20, and verse 17 – “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.” “And when they had come to him, he said to them: ‘You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jew; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’” “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.” “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.” You can see from the way that Paul expressed this, that the more that he personally suffered loss, the more that He rejoiced, because he knew that he was running his race well all the way to the finish line of his death.

You need to understand that Paul's message and his preaching were according to the truth which had been revealed to him personally by the Lord; but it was also truth that was confirmed by the other Apostles. He knew that he needed to run with true knowledge and wisdom in relation to the doctrines that he preached. He thought that he had, but he needed this confirmed. So he says in Galatians 2: 1 – "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me." "And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain." Paul's running had to be according to the true knowledge of what the gospel was. If his preaching was not the truth which could be confirmed by the other Apostles; his running, his preaching of what he thought was the truth, would have been in vain. You, too, need to check out the gospel that you have believed. Is it the Biblical gospel of salvation? Or is it something that you or some other man has made up? If it is not the true gospel, you are running in vain. It was because the believers in the churches of Galatia did not know and understand the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ, that they were hindered in their running.

In Galatians 5, verse 7, Paul says to them, "You ran well." "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" To run is to obey the truth of the word of God; that word which is Apostolic teaching. They had been hindered by those of their friends and the peers who thought that they were teachers; those false teachers who thought that the ceremony of circumcision was what was essential to a person's being saved. But Paul says in verse 1 of Chapter 5, "Stand fast therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made you free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." What a weight some of these young believers had. They would never be able to run if they had continued to attempt to be justified by the law. Paul says to them in verse 4, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." "For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." That is how you begin to run. The weight of the false doctrine of justification by works and justification by the law has to be laid aside. You walk, and you run, by faith working through love in Christ in the Christian life. By the Spirit's power you pray for the righteousness of Christ to be developed in your life by trusting in His precious promises, and running in the way of His commandments; so that as you run, you are obeying the truth of God's word; you are loving and serving others; you are not running as one who is being condemned for your attempts to live righteously to His glory. You are running toward the realization of the full hope of righteousness; that which is more and more becoming a reality in your life. You are becoming more like Christ, and you know because of the promise of His word, that you will become perfectly righteous when you see Him face to face. Do you have this vision of Christ as the Perfect One, the Holy One? Do you see Him as the author and Perfecter of your faith? Are you fixing your eyes upon Him as you run? If you do have your eyes upon Him, you will be able to run the race with endurance.