

Run and Finish the Race

Let us note some statements in the Bible about running and finishing the race.

Hebrew 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us

1 Timothy 4:7, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

1 Corinthians 9:24, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Acts 20:24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Galatians 2:2, I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.

We have witnessed some famous races and competitions:

Jesse Owens of the US received international acclaim by his performance in the 1936 Olympic Games at Berlin where he won 4 gold medals in track and field. In 1984 Carl Lewis also of the US, duplicated Owens feat by winning 4 gold medals in the relay, the 100 and 200 meter sprints and the long jump.

Miguel Indurain from Spain winning the Tour de France in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995.

Pete Sampras of the US winning the world tennis world championship in Wimbledon, England in 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997 and 1998.

There are thousands more sport heroes we cannot mention them all. I remember Emil Zatopek from Czechoslovakia. He won a gold medal in 10,000 m race at the 1948 Olympics and three gold medals in the 5,000 meter, 10,000 meter and the marathon at the 1952 Olympics. From 1948 to 1954 he was unbeaten in the 10,000 meter race. He was the fastest man on earth during those years.

These accomplishments can only happen with an unusual commitment and strict training,

We want to take a look at several statements found in the verses we just read in God's Word.

The race has been marked out for us by God. This is God's plan for your life.

Acts 20:24 *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

Actually the Apostle Paul was involved in other things. He had a tent making business. He was a writer. He was a sailor. He was a student of Law. He was a prisoner. He was a teacher. But he considered the main task in life to testify to the Gospel of God's grace. Why did he use the term "race". Perhaps because of the urgency of this task committed to him by God. People are traveling on life's road. Many do not really know why they here on earth. The end of life is death. After death heaven or hell. So the urgency of our task is to inform all people of the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Strict Training" for the Race

Any competition requires total commitment to strict training. There at least 50 professional sportsmen in our church and these men train every day for hours for the advancement of their career. To score one goal may take over 100 hours of training. So we also need training in order to testify effectively to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We need to have a good knowledge of the Gospel. We need to realize that the Gospel is the Good News of the Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer is another aspect of our training program. Reading God's Word, meditating and memorizing the Word of God are other aspects of our training program.

Studying communication skills is another vital part of our training. Then the actual field practice is an extremely important part of training. You never learn how to play soccer by watching the game on TV. You have to go out on the field and play the game. The more you play it the better you get.

Run with perseverance.

Never quit! You may make mistakes, have accidents, and injuries. But the key is **PERSEVERE**. Never quit! There are no quitters listed in the Sports Halls of Fames. Keep testifying the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Never stop even though people may laugh at you, mock you and make fun of you.

Throw off everything that hinders. Our soccer and basketball players wear light shoes and uniforms. They don't walk unto the fields wearing overcoats and heavy jungle boots.

Sin hinders our testimony for Jesus Christ. So we are called upon to repent

"But unless you repent, you too will all perish", said Jesus in Luke 13:3

Repent means to turn around 180 degrees. Leave the old life and old habits and follow Christ. Sportsmen stop habits that weaken their bodies such as drugs, smoking and drinking.

Only low ranking sports people, who are not serious about strict training discipline, may still hold on to habits that weaken and destroy their bodies.

Finish the race – Complete the task the Lord Jesus has given. Keep the faith

A living example of keeping the faith is Abdul Rahman who was denounced by his family for abandoning Islam and becoming a Christian 15 years ago, and is in jail right now in Afghanistan. The judge told Rahman he could face the death penalty if he refused to become a Muslim again. The Judge and the prosecutors are simply fulfilling their obligations under Sharia law. Rahman once lived in Germany and Edmund Stoiber, the conservative German

who runs the conservative and successful state of Bavaria, put his country's outrage bluntly. "A change of belief is supremely private", he said. "The State has nothing to do with it." So what, Germans are wondering, are their troops doing in this far away place, if a 41 year-old man who has not hurt a flea but prefers Christianity to Islam could face execution in accordance with the Shria? Americans, Canadians, Italians, Nederlanders and other western nations who have troops in Afghanistan should be wondering the same thing!

The western notion of a separation of Church and State, of religion and politics is anathema to Muslims who are obedient and faithful to the Koran. The Koran and other sacred texts provide a complete system of laws for societies and individuals. So today, over the fate of a Christian Afghan, the values of the West and the values of Islam fight each other. They are violently at odds; no ecumenical approach gets around that. The judge dealing with the case said last Thursday that Afghanistan's judiciary will not bow to outside pressure. "Afghanistan is an Islamic country and no other policy will be accepted apart from Islamic orders and what our Constitution says." Yet Abdul Rahman may be freed seeing the Afghan government is bowing down to pressure from the West because the aid from the West is needed for them to stay in power.

This is the same Sharia Islamic law that is being implemented in Aceh and in our own province of Banten. This Sharia law is considerate from Allah and will eventually take precedence of all secular laws such as Panca Sila in Indonesia, the "Grondwet" in Nederland, the US Constitution, whenever Islam takes over control either by force or by elections as we recently witnessed in Palestine, with terrorist Hamas winning and now forming a government.

Your family may abandon you or even take you to court as we see Abdul Rahman's family doing. But Abdul Rahman has not quit after 15 years of difficulties and that includes losing his children. He is still persevering even when facing the death sentence by a court holding on to a system put together by Mohammed in the 7th century and based upon Arabic tribal culture over 1300 years ago.

"Surrounded by witnesses" Rahman while holding a Bible told a preliminary hearing "I am not an apostate, I'm obedient to God but I'm a Christian, that's my choice." Recently he sought custody of his children from his parents, so family members reported his conversion. Now the whole world is witnessing the boldness and faithfulness of Abdul Rahman. We need to pray for him.

As we finish the race and complete the task of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ we are surrounded by witnesses. People are watching every move we make. People are watching our lives and behavior. People are watching where we go, with whom you associate and the language you speak and even what you eat. Christians everywhere are proud of Abdul Rahman holding up his Bible in front of the prosecutors, judges, and the world press and testifying of his faith in Jesus Christ.

It is possible to **run the race in vain?** Apparently so because this was the fear of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:2. Resigning, quitting, being unfaithful to the rules and regulations is running the race in vain. But Paul did not run the race in vain. He finished the race,

completed the task God has given him. Let us all finish the race, complete the task God has given us. We are no quitters. "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us."
Roman 8:37. PRAISE THE NAME OF JESUS!!