

Running the Race

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith's sermon emphasizes the importance of running the Christian race with faith, patience, and focus on Jesus as we enter a new year.

Duration: 38:17

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 25:24-30, Hebrews 12:1-2

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Christian Perseverance"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in the Lord, laying aside burdens and sins, and running the race of life with patience while keeping our focus on Jesus. It encourages believers to seek God's guidance, prioritize His kingdom, and give their best in serving Him, knowing that He will sustain them through any challenges they may face in the coming year.

Transcript

Now let's turn in our Bibles to Psalm 25 for our scripture reading today. I'll read the first in the odd-numbered verses and Pastor Brian will lead the congregation in the reading of the even-numbered verses so we stand as we read Psalm 25. Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

O my God, I trust in thee. Let me not be ashamed. Let not my enemies triumph over me.

Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed. Let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. Show me thy ways, O Lord.

Teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth and teach me. For thou art the God of my salvation.

On thee do I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving kindnesses for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgressions but according to thy mercy remember thou me for in thy goodness sake, O Lord.

Good and upright is the Lord. Therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment and the meek will he teach his way.

All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth. Unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. For thy namesake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity for it is great.

What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him and he will show them his covenant.

Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord for he shall pluck my feet out of the net. Turn thee unto me and have mercy upon me for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged.

O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain and forgive all my sins. Consider mine enemies for they are many.

For they hate me with cruel hatred. O keep my soul and deliver me. Let me not be ashamed for I put my trust in thee.

Let integrity and uprightness preserve me for I wait on thee. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles. Let's pray.

Father, as the psalmist talks about his distresses, his afflictions, and his pain, his suffering, we realize, Lord, that none of us are immune from these things, but we thank you that you've promised that you would be with us no matter what the circumstances were. Lord, as we face a new year, we don't know what the new year might hold as far as afflictions and problems, but again, Lord, we know you and we know that you will be with us and that you will help us and sustain us no matter what we might face in this coming year. So teach us, Lord, to trust in you and to look to you, Lord, for all that we need to survive and to just make it through the coming year.

So we ask your blessing, Lord, upon the time that we now share together in the Word. Open our hearts, speak to us through the Word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

You may be seated. Tonight, Pastor Skip will be leading us in our study through the Word as we continue in Jeremiah chapters 24 and 25. This morning I'm going to digress a little bit.

We usually take our text out of the passage that we are studying for the week, but in as much as we are going to be entering into the new year before the week is over, I thought I would bring a message that sort of dealt with the new year and how we should face the new year. And thus my text is found in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, where the writer said, Wherefore, seeing we also are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. Come to the end, 2004.

Looking forward now to the beginning of a new year, as I said before, the week is over. Some of you have already been setting your goals for 2005. The things that you hope to achieve or attain in the coming year.

Some of you have probably already set some of your resolutions. Areas where you hope to improve from 2004. Things that I hope will be better.

I hope that I will be able to lose some weight in 2005. I don't have much hope in that, but because I hope that for 2004 it didn't happen. But at any rate, we sort of like the idea of a new beginning.

We sort of like the idea of having a chance to start over again and hopefully to improve with the new beginning. The Bible often likens the Christian life to running a race and sort of running a race on an oval track. We come to that place where we started on the oval track and we begin a new lap.

Well, we will soon be finishing lap 2004 and we will start lap 2005 before the week is over. In running the race, Paul tells us that only one receives the prize. So run that you might obtain.

Encouraging us to put everything that we've got into this race. That we might win the race. He tells how in his own life he pressed towards the mark that is the goal.

The high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Seeking the prize of that high calling of God. So here again we have the picture of a runner.

And the first thing that the author mentions is this great cloud of witnesses. Now in talking of the great cloud of witnesses, he's talking about the previous chapter. Chapter 11.

The chapter that tells us of the men of faith, the women of faith in the Old Testament. All of the accomplishments. All of the achievements that they wrought by faith.

He started out talking about individuals, but then he realized that there were so many examples, so many witnesses, that he finally just sort of summarizes the things that were accomplished. He said, Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong. They waxed valiant in fight.

They turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. These, all of them, witnessed to us of the faithfulness of God.

And so this cloud of witnesses, those from the Old Testament, witnessing to us that if you will put your trust in God, God will see you through. God will work in your behalf. You will come forth victors in life.

He speaks to us about the preparation for the race. Let us lay aside every weight. What if you went to a track meet, and as the racers were setting themselves in their blocks, preparing for the race, some fellow came out with heavy hiking boots on, baggy pants.

As you looked at him setting himself in the blocks, there would be one thing in your mind. That guy's never going to win this race. As the other guys are all trimmed down, wearing light track shoes and all, you realize that with all of that extra baggage, he's never going to win.

He's no doubt going to come in last, because he's carrying too much extra weight. I look at our lives, and I see how much baggage we can accumulate. Unnecessary things that hinder us in our running this race.

Things that keep us from winning the race. Of course, the author goes on to say, laying aside every weight and sin, which doth so easily beset us. And it is that sin that hinders us from being champions, from winning the race.

Some of us have just too much baggage, and we need to get rid of a lot of baggage. He and I have been planning sort of to move right after the first of the year. We're going to hopefully size down.

Going to call all the kids in and say, go through the house, take whatever you want. And then when they're through, call Goodwill and say, take the rest, and size down into a smaller place. We have boxes that are full of stuff that we moved to the house that we're presently in 16 years ago.

It's still in boxes. It's still stored there in my garage. Now, doesn't reason tell you that if it's been in a box for 16 years you haven't opened the box that you don't need it anymore? Why is it that we have such a difficult time getting rid of excess baggage? Oh, but I might need that somehow.

No, we won't, honey. Throw it away. But oh, how many of us running the race are just burdened down with extra baggage that we don't really need.

Lay aside every weight and sin which doth so easily beset us, that we might run, he said, with patience the race that is set before us. Now, if you are in a race of any distance, patience is a very important part of that race. We need to wait upon God for the strength that we need to run the race.

The Bible exhorts us in Hebrews to patience on several occasions. Back in chapter 6 verse 12, He said, Don't be lazy, but follow them who through faith and patience inherited the promises of God. Back in chapters 10-36, He said, And you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God you might obtain the promise.

Quite often there is a gap of time between doing all that I need to do and the actual fulfillment of that promise from God. I've prayed about it. I've put my trust in God's promises, and now I wait for God to fulfill that promise.

And sometimes in this waiting period, we make the mistake of thinking, well, I gave God a chance to do it, and so I better take over and do it myself. And it's amazing what a mess that we can make out of things when we come to that foolish conclusion, I need to do it myself. It looks like God isn't going to work.

It's in this time of waiting that faith is actually tested. And this is a test that we so often fail. Throughout the Bible we are told, wait on the Lord, rest also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.

Seems like a very easy kind of a command, but it is so hard to just wait on God. But we are exhorted to run with patience the race that is set before us. Many people in starting the race start off too fast.

At the beginning of the race they just go full steam ahead. But it isn't more than a lap or so until they are so tired, so exhausted, that they're dropping out. They don't have the strength to finish.

They started too fast. There are many who start too slowly, and they get so far behind that as you approach the finish line, there's no chance of catching up. Important to sort of pace ourselves.

There's a term among ministers, it's called ministerial burnout. And there are a lot of men who've begun the ministry, and they are so gung-ho, they put everything into it, and they are into this program, that program, and they're just wear themselves down, and ultimately drop out of the ministry as a result of ministerial burnout. They just didn't pace themselves.

Be patient. Run with patience the race that is set before you. And then the key to running any race is to keep your eye upon the goal, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

It's so easy to become distracted, to get our eyes off of Jesus, to get our eyes on maybe the competition, to get our eyes on the circumstances, to get our eyes upon the problems or the difficulties, and our eyes

are off of Jesus. I was listening to a man who held for many years the record for the mile, and he was talking about this one race in the Coliseum in Los Angeles in which he was running the mile, and he was expected to set a new record. And he said as he was running the final lap that he was wondering just how far he was ahead of the men that were behind him, and he turned his head seeking to see from peripheral vision just how far back the next runner was, and in so doing he said he lost his stride, and he lost the race.

So many times we can get our eyes on others, and we lose sight of the goal, and we lose the race. One day Jesus was talking with Peter, and he was sharing with Peter how that Peter would be martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ. And when Jesus spoke to Peter about being martyred, Peter said, but what about him pointing over to John? And basically Jesus said, John is none of your business.

You follow me. What Jesus said was, if I will that John lives until I come again, what's that to you? Follow me. John's not your business, Peter.

And so many times we are saying, but Lord what about John? And the Lord is saying, don't worry about him. He's not your problem. You're your problem.

I'm talking to you. This is what's going to happen to you, and you just keep your eyes on me. You follow me.

It's so important to keep our eyes upon Jesus Christ as we run this race of life. If we get our eyes upon man, man can disappoint us. If we get our eyes upon man, man can fail you.

But Jesus will never disappoint you, and Jesus will never fail you. The psalmist said, better to put your trust in the Lord than your confidence in man. This morning we sang Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus.

That third stanza declares, stand in His strength alone. The arm of flesh will fail you. If you're trusting in man, the arm of flesh, that can fail.

It says, you dare not trust your own. Keep your eyes upon Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. I was taking courses years ago in a secular college, and the professor delighted in speaking negative things about Christianity.

And he would bring up things of church history that are ugly. Atrocities that were committed in history by Christian fanatics. Horrible things that were done.

And would make fun of the Christian history, and the history of the church. And I would declare to him, I have no excuse, nor no defense for church history. I acknowledge that the things that have been done in the name of Christ are shameful.

Many things that were done in the name of Christ are horrible. I have no defense for that. But I will defend the teaching of Jesus Christ to my dying breath.

There's nothing wrong with what Jesus taught. Oh it's true, people have done horrible things in the name of Jesus, but they were not following the teaching of Jesus. For Jesus taught we were to love our enemies.

We were to do good to those who despitefully use us. That we were to be merciful. That we were to be forgiving.

That we were to be kind. And I said, I have no argument with what Jesus taught. I will defend what he taught as right, and what we should be and should do.

But I will not defend what people have done in the name of Jesus, because that is not right in so many cases. When we talk about the war in Iraq. When we read about the Muslim fanatics, as they kidnap innocent people, and as they behead them, or execute them.

And these horrible atrocities. The killing of children and all in the name of Allah. And if you speak about that, they'll say, well, but look, history of the Christian churches, you know, just as bad.

There are atrocities, you know, done in the name of Christ. And so, you know, how can you condemn Islam, because they do these things in the name of Allah. Well, the Quran teaches that they were to kill the infidels.

Jesus never taught that. The Quran or Muhammad himself was married a six-year-old girl. Began to have sex with her when she was nine.

Jesus never did anything like that. Jesus taught purity, holiness, righteousness. And thus, you go to the core, the basic teaching itself.

I will defend the teaching of, I could not defend the teaching of the Quran, because it does teach violence and things of this nature. But far from the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, we're looking unto Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of our faith.

That is, He began that work in us of believing. The author of our faith. The Bible says that God has given to every man a measure of faith.

What you do with it is important to you. If you exercise that faith to believe and trust in Jesus Christ, the Lord will then increase that faith. And He will finish that faith for you.

Paul wrote to the Philippians saying, I'm confident of this thing, that He that has begun a good work in you will continue to perform until the day of Jesus Christ. I've committed my life to Jesus. I have that confidence He is able to finish the job He started in my life.

We look to Jesus, not only for the goal, but for inspiration to achieve the goal. We're told that looking unto Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, though He despised the shame. It's interesting that Jesus never sends us into battle.

He'll always lead us. He goes before us. He is our example as we face the frightening uncertainties of the future.

What will the year 2005 bring to the world? We know that there are many, many problems. The problems with North Korea and their development weapons of mass destruction. The problems with Iran developing weapons of mass destruction.

What's 2005 going to bring to the world? We don't know. There's uncertainty, and there's a certain fear that accompanies the uncertainty of the future. But that uncertainty is dispelled as we keep our eyes on Jesus, because we know that He is there.

He will be with us no matter what we might face of international, national, or personal tragedies in the year 2005. The Lord will always be there with me, to help me, to sustain me. There may be hard, difficult days ahead, but I have my trust in Jesus, and He will see me through those hard, difficult days.

I don't know what pain, what suffering might be in store for me in the year 2005, but Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, though He despised the shame. So, I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future, and He holds me, and I thus face the future with great confidence. I might not win the race, but if I give it my best, that's all the Lord requires of me.

He doesn't really require my winning. He just requires my doing my best. And as you run in a race, especially marathon type races, there comes that time when you feel that you cannot take another step.

Your feet are aching. There are blisters that are developing. Your lungs are aching because you've been drawing your breath, your panting so hard, and you think, I just can't go on.

But then there comes what we term a second wind. Somehow there's a rejuvenation. Somehow you get that second wind, and you just can seemingly go forever.

You have to work through the pain. You don't stop because of the pain. You work through the pain until you get that new burst of energy and strength that carries you to the finish.

It's not making the finish line that really concerns me. I'm confident of that. But my concern today is for those that are running, but not giving it their best.

Those who seem to take a careless attitude towards spiritual things. They sort of take a take it or leave it kind of an attitude. I worry about those who do not take full advantage of the things that God has given to them to use them for the kingdom of God.

They've more or less tried to hide the investment that God has made in their lives, so that when they stand before Him, they will be able to present to Him the investment unused. Jesus gave a parable about this. And knowing the parable that Jesus gave causes me great worry and concern for those who are only half-heartedly running the race.

In Matthew 25 verse 24, Jesus taught, Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I know that you are a hard man. You reap where you have not sown. You gather where you have not scattered seed.

So I was afraid and I hid your talent in the earth. And now I return to you that which is yours. And his Lord answered and said unto him, You wicked and lazy servant.

You knew that I reaped where I had not sown, and I gathered where I had not scattered. You should therefore have put my money at least in the bank. And then when I came, I would have received my own with interest.

Take therefore the talent from him. Give it unto him which has the ten talents. For unto every one that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance.

But from him that has not, it shall be taken away, even that which he has. And he ordered, Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And that's what worries me. Those that are doing nothing but just coasting. Those who have not really committed themselves to run this race and give it their best.

Jesus expects us to use whatever he has given to us for his glory. And his message is, Use it or lose it. Now as we face 2005, there are three passages of Scripture that I would like to give to you that they might be sort of guides for entering 2005.

First is Proverbs 3 verses 4 and 5. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not to your own understanding. I guess it's 5 and 6. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path.

It's a command with a promise. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean to your own understanding.

Acknowledge him. In every situation bring it to him. Seek his guidance.

Seek his wisdom. And the promise, he will direct your path. The second is found in Matthew 6:33.

Jesus said, Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And the promise, all of these other things will be taken care of. Get the priorities right.

First things first. The other things will fall in order. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Everything else will then fall in line. And then our text. Lay aside every weight and sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us, as we look unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

If we do that, there's nothing to worry about in 2005. We're going to come out victors through him. Father, we thank you for that hope that we have in Christ Jesus, that having begun a good work in us, he will continue until he finishes, until we stand before him and receive the rewards for the race, for how we have run the race.

Lord, we pray for those that are living quite dangerously from a spiritual standpoint, not using the things that you have given to them for your glory, squandering the talents on themselves. O Lord, we pray that you would speak to them this day and cause them to realize, Lord, that it's a real battle. It's a real hard race, and we've got to give it our best.

May we give of our best to You, dear Lord, as we run with patience this race that You've set before us. Guide us, Lord, with your counsel. Lead us in your ways.

And may we enter and finish, Lord, with victory through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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