

Runners in the Race

Rev. S. W. Janse - Hebrews 12:1-2

Psalter: 388

Read: Hebrews 12

Psalter: 227

Psalter: 73: 3, 5, 6

Psalter: 242

Congregation, the words of our text to which we wish to draw your attention can be found in the portion of Scripture read to you, namely Hebrews 12, and there of the first two verses, where we read: *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed 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 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.”*

The theme for our text is: Runners in the Race.

We will consider three thoughts:

1. The encouragement to run
2. The hindrances in running
3. The consolation, or comfort

Paul is taking an example out of the world of sports. Should he be doing that? Is he promoting that lifestyle, which is all about honor, fame, and performance? No, Paul is not using this example to promote sports. Every four years the Olympic Games would take place in Greece. This was an important, well-known, and much-talked-about event. All sorts of games and competitions would take place, including the long jump, running races, the javelin throw, wrestling, and so on.

Paul is writing his letters to the first Christians. They would not participate in these events. You would not find them in the arena, in the theatre, or in the stadium. But that is not to say that the first Christians were not aware of what was going on in the world. Paul definitely knew what was going on in the world, which is exactly why he could use this example of the world of sports. When we read the letters of Paul, we hear him warning us not to be conformed to this world. Still, he wants to teach us by using this example of running a race.

Paul takes us in our thoughts to the race track. The participants in the race are positioned behind the start line. We see all the spectators sitting in the stands and standing on the sideline. Everyone is intently focused on the young athletes straining to sprint forth,

eager to be the first to cross the finish line. This is the example Paul is drawing our attention to.

Let's have a look at the runners standing on the race track. They have trained extensively and are now ready to run the marathon. They move to their starting positions, eagerly anticipating the second the rope will be pulled away. It will all come down to who will cross the finish line first.

What has led Paul to write about this? In Hebrews 10:38 Paul wrote, "*Now the just shall live by faith*". This raises the question: What is that faith? Paul explains this in chapter 11. In the first verse, he writes, "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*" True faith focuses on Christ. True faith relies on God's Word, even when things seem impossible. Paul writes of the necessity of this faith. There are people who have, through regenerating grace, received this faith in their souls through the working of the Holy Spirit. It is this faith that Paul is writing about. It is this faith which guides their life, which has unprecedented power. We read this in the last verse of chapter 10: "*But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*" In chapter 11 we read of what all those people mentioned have accomplished through this true saving faith! In chapter 12, you could say Paul is making the application. He begins verse 1 with: "*Wherefore seeing we also...*". Paul brings that word to each one of us personally, and may it please the Lord to bring His Word to our hearts in this worship service.

Paul is writing this letter to the Hebrews. They were people who were converted from Judaism to Christianity. This did not just happen by chance. No, from all eternity it pleased God the Father to bestow free grace on them. Consequently, however, they have a difficult life. They are an oppressed and afflicted people, threatened and scattered abroad.

Paul encourages them by taking up his pen and writing them a letter. He focuses here especially on God's children, with an eye to those who have become backsliders in the life of grace. They have become discouraged and wonder how it can ever end well. As a result, they have become careless in living their life.

These Hebrews are entangled in all the laws and regulations which they have taken along from the old way of Judaism. In writing to them, Paul refers to what they already know. In the book of Hebrews, we read much about the priestly worship service. We see just how many times Paul refers back to the Old Testament, which these Hebrews are well acquainted with.

"*Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*" Paul is using the example of running a race. Boys and girls, we are all running a race, but by nature, we are all running on the broad way. The broad way will end in hell. We are all on the way which will end in the

never-ending eternity. It is so necessary that by grace I am taken from the broad way and placed on the narrow way. Luke 13:24- *“Strive to enter in at the strait gate:”*

You can take nothing along as you travel on the narrow way. Entering through the narrow gate, you come as one begging, creeping, and bowed down. You must leave every burden and weight behind. This is the way appointed by the Lord, and He will lead His people. He leads them by saying, “Those who humbly fall at My feet, I will teach them My way. Forsake the evil way and live. Walk in the way of understanding.” The broad way seems to be so nice, but it will end in eternal death. Yes, the broad way is the wrong way, and that is why it is so necessary to be transferred to the narrow way. We must be regenerated. We need to be born again. God’s children are on the way to eternal glory.

Paul goes further with the illustration of the participants on the racetrack. If we were to look closely at the racetrack in that valley, we would see the runners running with their chests thrust forward. They would be shimmering with the sweat of their exertion. They would be running their absolute fastest, and we would see so many spectators watching. Wherever we would look there would be more spectators. We could say there was a cloud of witnesses in that valley. Compare that to what we read in verse 1 – *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses”*.

Boys and girls, have you ever experienced, as you are riding along in the car, that the clouds are hanging so low that it is as if you are driving right through them? Then it is as if you are totally surrounded by clouds. This is an example of how these young athletes were surrounded by a packed crowd of people. These people were witnesses of everything that was happening and of how it would turn out. You will understand that it would not be quiet in that stadium. There would be a lot of shouting and cheering. Spectators would encourage the runners to persevere and run faster. Let us look at this example in the spiritual sense. What is Paul saying to the poor pilgrims of today? What is he saying to despondent strugglers? What is he saying to those poor ones who strive against sin and realize they cannot overcome? Paul encourages them to look to the side, and what do they see? A cloud of witnesses. A cloud of witnesses! That is a lot!

In chapter 11:2 we also read of *“a good report”*. *“For by it the elders obtained a good report.”* And in verse 39 we read – *“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.”* Witnesses are people who can speak about something because they have experienced it. They are people who themselves have seen and heard. When we read the words *“a good report”* in the language of the Bible, this includes blood witnesses or martyrs. They are people who have striven unto death and paid with their blood. They are the righteous ones who have forsaken all. We can read of them in Hebrews 11, namely Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rahab, Gideon: a cloud of witnesses!

Church militant here on earth, look to those who have gone the way before you. That is the Church Triumphant. They have overcome. They have *“obtained a good report”*. Perhaps they did not speak too much about it, but their lives made a deep impression. It is written about here, where Scripture testifies of it. Indeed, the Holy Spirit testified in their souls that they had run the spiritual race.

In the example of running the race in the stadium, that is of course not the case. Most of the people sitting as spectators in the stands have never run a race in their lives. Most of the spectators watching a football game today have never been on a football field. But spiritually, it is different. The Church Triumphant testifies, *“We have also been given opportunity to run that race. We often thought we would not be able to finish, but now we stand above the strife. We have finished the race. Now we would like to encourage you, as you continue on that spiritual race. Take courage!”*

That cloud of witnesses above exhorts the people below who appear to succumb. We read in verse 12, *“Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees”*. Through God’s Word, this cloud of witnesses calls out to the pilgrims here below, *“If we have been given to overcome, shall it not be so with you as well? Run with patience the spiritual race set before you!”*

No, we do not read that the race must be run with passiveness, but rather to run the race with patience. Paul used this word earlier in chapter 10. In verse 36 we read, *“For ye have need of patience”*. The meaning of patience is to persevere, to take courage, to endure, or to show forbearance. The runners in this spiritual race need this because sometimes they find no courage in themselves at all. When they look to themselves and to the circumstances that they find themselves in, they lose all hope. They are tempted to quit the race because they are so oppressed.

But now the Apostle Paul encourages them to persevere, to keep running, to exercise patience. He encourages them to look up. In verse 4 we read, *“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood”*. You understand, of course, that they cannot persevere in their own strength. The spiritual race is by no means an easy way. Running a marathon is not something you can just casually commit to. Oh no! There is much training involved. And this is also the case with the spiritual race. You cannot just casually commit to it, and you cannot continue on it in your own strength. It is a narrow way. In this spiritual race, you will experience tribulation and adversity. You will endure the chastening of the Lord, for the Lord will not spare His children from the rod. But they know these are fatherly chastisements. By moments they can say, *“Oh Lord, we know all things come from Thee.”*

These spiritual runners are in need of patience. God’s children are often rebellious under the cross which the Lord has laid upon them. They often do not see that these ways

are for their benefit, as we have read. They often fail to notice that these ways will bind them to Christ, that His holiness will become precious to them, and that they may become holy as He is holy. When the flesh comes between, there is no submission. Then the Lord comes again to renew the desire to continue on the narrow way. What a wonder it is that the Lord is so long-suffering! He continues on with His own work and stirs up His people to continue on with patience and endurance and to bow under His ways.

Let's return to the stadium where the race is taking place. What is the purpose of this race? Why were the runners so committed to reaching the finish line? Why did they persevere to the end? In the first place, it is because this is what they have trained for. How is this in the spiritual race? We read in God's Word that the Apostle Paul said to young Timothy, *"Exercise thyself rather unto godliness."* [1 Timothy 4:7] It is as if the Lord, through Paul, encourages Timothy and His people to be exercised in the Word and to be much exercised in prayer life even if it seems we have nothing, and it all seems impossible. The Lord Himself will exercise His people, especially in the suffering. In Hebrews 12:11 we read, *"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."* There are people traveling on that spiritual way that are purified through suffering. They may say, "Lord, it was good that I was afflicted."

It will be noticeable if an athlete has not practiced. If they have missed their training sessions a few times, it will become obvious. Practice is needed. This is also true for God's children. It is what this chapter is about. Oh, they can sometimes be so lukewarm! They can be compared to a plant which is lacking water and is about to wither. The Lord urges His people on in the way of sanctification, to make their calling and election sure, for in so doing they will never again stumble on the way. That is why Paul uses the word patience. God's children are exercised in the way of sanctification.

What else must the runners in the marathon do? They must be willing to abstain, which is also included in the word patience. The athletes hoping to participate in the race were required to take an oath ten months before the Olympic Games would be held. They had to promise they would live soberly, according to certain restrictions, and that they would be sure to get enough sleep. This would be very beneficial to running a good race.

How can we compare this to spiritual travelers? Self-denial, or self-restraint, is necessary. In Colossians 3:5 we read, *"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth"*. If God's people live in sin, how will this appear to the world? How will they overcome the things of the world? In 2 Timothy 2:19, God's Word reads: *"Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."* The runners in the spiritual race must go forward in the tender fear of the Lord. They do not ask, "How far can I go before I have sinned too much?" Oh no, far rather they desire to stay as far away as possible from all sin.

“The race that is set before us.” We see the athletes in the race standing behind the start line. In which direction do they need to run? The track is laid out before them, and off they go! The way is set apart and is closed off for all other purposes. They can see exactly the direction in which they must run. They can see that the track is approximately 330 meters long and 30 meters wide. They must not run on another track, and definitely not on their own track. The Lord is also saying this to spiritual runners today. The spiritual race is explained in God’s Holy Word, where the Lord tells His people, “This is the way, walk ye in it. Do not venture off to the right or the left, but stay on the path of righteousness.” The Church is brought to realize that the way outlined in Scripture is the only way. Of this race, the spiritual runners who have overcome can testify that they have also run that race, that it is a righteous and blessed way, and encourage others that they will never be sorry if they run that race.

It is a way well-traveled throughout the ages. It is a race thought out in the stillness of eternity and revealed in time. The Lord makes this way known through the preaching of His Word. However, it is not an easy way. We will consider this in the second thought.

2. The hindrances on the way.

We read in verse 1: *“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us”*. As we go once again in our thoughts to the runners on the race track, we see all sorts of things happening. Spectators on the sideline throw flowers onto the racetrack. Some people throw money onto the track. Well, this does not exactly benefit the runners. Although the intentions are well-meant, this is a hindrance. Of all the runners, there will be only one winner, and the temptation to pick up the money would be a hindrance to becoming that winner. Even gold bars were thrown onto the track. So we can see there were many obstacles and stumbling blocks tempting these runners. There was only one reason why so many things were thrown onto the track, and that was to try to make it more difficult for the runners to win by slowing them down. This is also how it is spiritually. There are so many hindrances and stumbling blocks on the way to eternal salvation. This begins the moment one enters through the narrow gate, where everything must be left behind. Perhaps you are thinking, “Well, this is not very encouraging. Where then is the incentive to begin this race?” But this is according to Scripture. We can read the words spoken by Jesus in John 16:33, *“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”*

If, through sovereign grace, these runners are brought into the spiritual race, Satan will do all he can to prevent their progress. He will send allurements and temptations, sometimes with unprecedented power. It will be more than they expected. They will say, “Oh Lord, is this my sad condition? Am I so depraved? How is it possible that I still do these things now?” The Church does not receive a smooth journey. Oh no, it is not an easy way,

but they can expect a blessed arrival. They will go through storms and the depths of the ocean, for it is a life of dying to and breaking away from sin. It is a life of many disappointments. This is why it states here so earnestly, *“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.”*

Let us go back once again to the race at the stadium. As we look at the runners, we see they wear very light clothing. They take nothing else along. Boys and girls, this makes sense, doesn't it? If you run a race with a backpack on your back, or dragging a suitcase along, you will certainly not be the front runner. All hindrances must be laid aside; otherwise, there will not be a hope of winning. Let us look at this in a spiritual sense. We read, *“Let us lay aside every weight”*. What is meant by this? Perhaps we think immediately of sin. Sin is certainly a hindrance, that is true. But we will read of sin a little later where we read *“and the sin”*. What is meant here in particular by the word weight is everything that distances oneself from God and from serving Him. An example of this would be sports, such as football. But it can also be religion, such as, if I focus more on certain ministers, or who knows what all. These can be weights that come between God and my soul.

What is the most important thing in your life? What are you actually living for? Contemplate this question and try to answer it. What is the main objective of your life? What is the ultimate purpose of your life? Perhaps a mother is sitting here who doesn't even have time to think about this. Even as she is sitting in God's house, she feels the responsibility of her family weighing her down. She is very busy with taking care of her children. Yet the Lord also says to such a mother, *“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God”*. [Matthew 6:33] A father can be too consumed with his work, spending too much time and energy on his business. This can come between God and his soul. On the judgment day, God will say to him, *“Have you spent all your given time only on your business?”*

So we see that *“every weight”* is in and of itself not necessarily sinful. But these things can become sinful. Do you understand what I am saying? Anything which comes before God in my life is grievous to Him. *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* [Matthew 6:21] These weights can also be legalistic; touch not, taste not, handle not. These rules can also keep us very busy. Let each of us closely examine our own life. Do we know what our weights are? This question is asked not only of the spiritual runners, but also of anyone not yet entered into the spiritual race. What is hindering you?

There is more to read in our text. *“And the sin which doth so easily beset us”*. Let us go back once again to the race track. Perhaps you know, boys and girls, that in earlier days people wore long coats, so long that they touched the ground. Just imagine if the runners in the race would wear such a long coat. Of course, you can understand that this would not benefit them at all. That coat would *“easily beset”* them; they would stumble and fall. No,

they must take that coat off, for it would be too restrictive. This is the picture you must keep in mind when we read, *“and the sin which doth so easily beset us”*.

“The sin.” There have been many commentators who have written about what this sin is. The one will say it is the sin of unbelief. What a terrible sin it is not to believe God, to fail to acknowledge God for all He is. It is because of the sin of unbelief that we have fallen away from God in Paradise. Oh, the sin of unbelief, by which I have declared God a liar. Others say the word *“sin”* refers to a bosom sin. This may be a sin that no one else knows about. It is a sin into which I am immersed and cannot let go. Examine your own life, and see which sin entangles you. We agree with the commentators who say this text refers to sin in its entirety. Sin tramples on God. Sin, as it were, slaps God in the face. Sin is grieving to the Lord.

Are there people in our midst who cannot say they are on the spiritual way, but must confess they have come to see their life as total sin? They have come to realize they do not only sin in thoughts, words, and deeds, but they are completely immersed in sin. Some say *“sin”* refers to the sin of covetousness, because that is where it often begins. This was the first sin committed in Paradise. From seeing, to desiring, to sinning. Coveting awakens the desire to have what we don't have, whether it be a man, a woman, a particular car, or another person's house. Coveting is when we want for ourselves what belongs to someone else. *“The sin which doth so easily beset us”*.

What is now required of us when we are called to *“lay aside”*? It is as if the Lord urges us to break with sin, cut it off, renounce it, and separate ourselves from it. This is how the Lord encourages His people in the way of sanctification. However, the message to break with sin comes to everyone. The Lord emphatically urges us not to give in to sin.

Young people, I sincerely hope the Lord, so to speak, takes you out of the game. Then you will no longer be able to go along with the world and be infatuated with all things in it. It is not easy when, for instance, your comrades at work are talking about something, and you must say you know nothing about it. You also admit you don't care about it either, that it doesn't interest you in the least. You tell them there is something of much more importance in your life: that you must be regenerated by God and come to know the King of kings. Then you will be rejected and placed outside of their circles. That is something I wholeheartedly wish for you. It will become evident in your life that you will begin to crucify your old nature and walk in a new and godly life. That is what is meant by *“let us lay aside”*.

“To lay aside.” Then I will take refuge in the blood of the Mediator. Then every moment I will be in need of the pure and cleansing blood of the Mediator. Then I will say, *“Oh Lord, without Thee, I cannot go one step further.” “Let us lay aside”*. Here is a call, also by way of renewal, to lay everything to the side. But can we do this in our own strength? No,

for if we were required to do this on our own, we would soon realize how impossible it would be. But then how can this be attained?

Boys and girls, let us think of the example of a camel. When a camel wants to be rid of the burden on its back, it first bows down on its front legs and then lets its back legs fold to the ground. We would say the camel is on its knees. The best way to lay aside all our burdens and iniquities that so easily beset us is to pray, as we will now sing of in Psalter 73: 3, 5, 6.

Runners in the Race. The encouragement, and the hindrance, but we will now also consider:

3. The consolation, or comfort.

We read in verse 2, *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”*. Let’s look once again at the race track. It would be foolish for a young athlete to continually look into the grandstand, or to keep glancing behind him. No, they must keep focused on the finish line because that is their ultimate goal. What must the spiritual runners do? They must not look too much at what is going on around them, nor focus too much on the past, but they must look up. This is what the apostle points to when he writes, *“looking unto Jesus”*. The word looking does not mean to take a quick glance once in a while. Oh no, looking means a steadfast looking in faith. Who do they look to? The Object of their faith is Jesus! For this, our eyes need to be spiritually opened. Has it already become your prayer that the Lord will open your spiritually blind eyes?

It is impossible to do this for ourselves. We need the indwelling of the Spirit of Pentecost. Then our eyes will immediately be opened to see who we are by nature, and we will receive eyes to look up. Then we are immediately placed on the narrow way, on the spiritual path. What do we see when we are given eyes to see into our corrupt hearts? A mighty stream of foul transgressions, a swamp of iniquity, plagued with such a load of sin that is impossible to carry. Then I become the guilty one before God and must confess, *“Lord, Thou art righteous; Thou art just in all Thy ways.”*

At God’s time, we will receive eyes to look up. Even in the very beginning, we will receive eyes to see who God is in His goodness and righteousness. But also in God’s time, we will be given eyes to see outside of Him to the Mediator. We will see who He is in His beauty. That is the drawing power of faith. Everything here below loses its value, and we only look up.

“Looking unto Jesus the author.” The word author means to be the originator or creator. It also refers to being a leader or commander. For example, think of someone who is

the head of the fire department. He is the chief captain, and everyone must listen to his instructions. Or you could also think of a shepherd leading his sheep. The sheep follow the shepherd because he is their leader. In our text, Jesus the Savior is the Chief Shepherd, the Author, the Originator. He became the Surety for His people. He was also placed on the race track. He was on this track for thirty-three years. He has gone the way set before Him for His people. Which way was that? It was the way that led to His crucifixion. It was the way that went from suffering to glory. It was the way in which the Church says, *“if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”* Romans 8:17.

“The author”. We could also say, the Creator or the Originator of true and saving faith. He is the One Who through His Holy Spirit brings His Church in the spiritual way. He is the One Who plants faith into the heart of His people at the moment of regeneration. He is thus the first: faithful and trustworthy. All our expectations must be in Him alone. Oh, how this should encourage the fearful and trembling ones who have long since lost their way.

He is the Alpha, but also the Omega. We read that He is Jesus, the Finisher of our faith. He will finish what He has begun. The Lord ensures that everyone whom He has placed on that spiritual race track will persevere to the end. Is this not what that cloud of witnesses testifies of? Why will the Church persevere to the end? Why will the Church share in the victory? Because their Surety has gone before them. He has persevered to the end. He has finished the race and entered into glory. He has crawled in the dust as a worm and no man. *“Come with me,”* says the apostle, *“from Gethsemane to Gabbatha.”* We see the Lord Jesus standing before the judge, Pontius Pilate: beaten, smitten, and spit upon. From there He is taken to Golgotha, where He is crushed under the millstone of God’s holy justice. It is there that He must alone undergo three hours of darkness, three hours being forsaken by His Father. He has persevered to the end. He was crucified. He has finished the race. He has gone the way before His people. He bore the punishment due to them for their sins. He has said, *“It is finished.”* He is the Chief Guide and Leader. He is the Finisher of our faith.

It could be there are some here who do not know of this way. The Lord knows from eternity what He has begun. The Lord knows whom He has called from the power of darkness to His marvelous light of the gospel. Reverently speaking, the Lord cannot change His mind or reconsider. The Lord has loved His Church from all eternity, and He will never forsake the works of His own hands. The Church will never go lost because the Father has not forsaken His Son. Because the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit, by the will of the Father, proved to be the Finisher of faith. That gives courage! God-fearing flock, take courage and seek God in all your deep-felt grief. He is named Guide, Finisher, Jesus. We can summarize all these names into one name: Savior.

What do we read of Him and of His beloved Name? *“Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross”*. If we could ask the runners on the racetrack what their

desire is, they would answer, “If I would win first prize, I would be extremely happy!” Well, that prize was not even such a beautiful prize. It was not a gold cup, but laurel leaves braided into a wreath. This would be placed on the head of the winner of the race. The runners could see this wreath as they ran the race since it was either held by the referee or placed on a pole, visible to all. The runners were running for the prize, which was this wreath. The Church of God does not receive such a wreath, not even a gold cup. What do they receive? They will receive a crown of honor. We will sing of this later,

With blessing is the nation crowned
Whose people know the joyful sound;
They in the light, O Lord, shall live,
The light Thy face and favor give.

They will receive the crown of life out of God’s hands. That is an enduring, incorruptible, and everlasting crown of glory.

But what does the Lord Jesus receive? That is what this text is about. *“Who for the joy that was set before him...”*. What was that joy? Why did He go the way of the cross? His joy was to bring honor to the Father. His joy was to display the glorious virtues of His Father which have been violated by sin. His joy was to bring salvation to the Church. His joy was to fulfill the law of God, to obey His Father in perfect obedience. His ultimate joy was that His Father would receive the honor. What else was His joy? The Lord Jesus was humiliated but would be exalted on high. This was also the joy that was set before Him. It would become true what He would be able to say, “Father, now I may be with You, now I may sit at Your Right Hand.” His ascending to the right hand of the Father was the joy that was set before Him. Is there still more? Yes, there is, unbelievable really: that the Lord Jesus loves such an unworthy, doubting sinner, who maybe says with Heman in Psalm 88:16, *“Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off.”* They can scarcely believe that He has loved them. It is His good pleasure to save such unworthy, black sinners, to raise them up on high with Him on Ascension Day, to present them to the Father, and to give them eternal salvation. He would have His reward with Him in heaven. Can you understand this, people of the Lord? You are the joy that was set before Him!

And as we read further, the apostle goes still deeper into the truth. He *“endured the cross”*. The life of the Lord Jesus was a life of suffering from the crib to the cross. That He endured the cross has a deeper meaning than that He carried the cross. He has endured the hostility of sinners against Himself, as we read in verse 3, *“for consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself”*. When everyone was against Him, from Caiaphas, to Pilate, to His disciples who denied Him, He has endured. Think about it, when everything was against Him...He endured.

Further, we read, *“despising the shame”*. It is as if for Him the shame was not the most important thing. Was it not shameful that He hung naked on the cross between heaven and earth? Was it not shameful that He was forsaken by all, even His own disciples? Was it not shameful that He had to die the accursed death of the cross? “Come,” says the apostle, “look unto this Savior! Look up to Him, to the One Who has endured the Cross. He has despised the shame.”

We read further, *“and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* This is the reason He has run the race. He now sits next to His Father. He has come home to His Father, to be seated at His right hand. That was the purpose of everything, and the Church will give Him all the honor. What splendor, what glorious majesty God the Father has prepared for His Son! He has been crowned with honor and glory. He has received the place of rest from His labor. That is why His people may also rest, just as the runners at the end of the race. How tired they are when they have finished the race! It takes up so much energy. And now the Lord says to His weary ones, “At the end of your life you may come to where My Son already is; there you may rest, where He will always love you.”

“And is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” This is a place of rest, honor, and power. This is the reason why we are called to look unto Jesus! The apostle has very briefly touched on the humiliation and the exaltation of the Surety. Now in closing, he encourages pilgrims to not look to the enemies along the way, to not stumble on the obstacles in the way, to not look to themselves, but to look up to Him Whom they can trust. He will lead you away from wickedness. To those who are exhausted and worn out, the apostle says, *“look unto Jesus”*. It is his desire to encourage the Church. You can also read of this in the beautiful book written by Isaac Ambrose *Looking Unto Jesus*. Ambrose has received so much insight into this. He has written a whole book about looking unto Him, looking unto the King in His beauty. That gives such joy!

Congregation, there are two ways. On which path are you traveling, my young friends? On the path of the world, or on the path of this King? Or are you one of those runners who are running on the sidelines? Then you are surely not on the narrow way, but you are beside it. There are two ways and there is no middle ground. *“Choose you this day whom ye will serve.”* May it be, by God’s grace, that you may say with Joshua in Joshua 24:15, *“but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*

Boys and girls, do you know who the true winners are? In the Olympics, they are the athletes who have run the fastest. But in the Kingdom of God, they are the ones who have lost everything. Yes, you have heard that correctly. Those who have lost everything will be the winners. They are those who have lost all their rights. They are those who are not worthy before God. They are those who have learned they are not worthy of a crown and they must be overturned, overturned, overturned. They will be presented with the prize. In

the Olympics, only one person receives the prize. But in the spiritual kingdom it will be a number that cannot be counted. No, they will not receive a consolation prize, but the prize He Himself has paid for.

Who are the winners? They are those who can do nothing of themselves, such as Mephibosheth. He would not be able to travel very far at all on the race track. He was a cripple on both of his feet, and yet he was a winner. Is there perhaps such a one sitting here in church? Jacob was another man who would not get very far. The hollow of his thigh was out of joint. It was maybe easier for him to go backward than forward. And yet, he was also a winner. Can you think of anyone else? Oh yes, there was Peter. He betrayed His Master and wept bitterly. We see a trail of tears down his cheeks. But he also arrived! He has also received the crown of honor. In the kingdom of heaven, it is the unworthy ones who win the prize. That is why God's people will arrive safely home. Also David who fell so deeply into sin. Why is their arrival secure? The unfailing faithfulness of God will never permit the downfall of His chosen ones.

Congregation, at the end of such a competition at the race track, there is much cheering and applause. Rightfully so! But – and I say this with all reverence – in heaven we will hear, “Please, no applause.” It is sometimes written in the program of a musical event that there is to be no applause. In heaven there will be no applause for Peter or Mephibosheth, oh no. All those crippled and lame ones will point up and say only one thing: “It is through Thee alone, because of Thy eternal good pleasure.” And they will cast the crown from off their head and they will crown Him. Do you understand this, congregation?

Young people, athletes are still being sought for; not for the Olympics, but for the service of King Jesus. There is still a demand for workers for His Kingdom. The Lord Jesus is calling to young people, “*Come unto Me.*” The world of sports is also looking for young people. Perhaps this is what you are trying so hard to get into. Maybe you are so far gone in your sinful ways that you are completely tired out and have no more energy. The Lord says to you today, “Stop with it all!”

The world is passing by. There is still place on the spiritual racetrack. The Author of faith is still calling to you today. Who is He calling? People of whom we read in Hebrews 11; the greatest of sinners. Even Rahab is mentioned amongst all the witnesses. Would it then not be possible for you?

Amen

Closing Psalter 242