

## "Running Like A Winner"

Confirmation Sunday

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Grace, peace, mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN!

As we all know thru out the Bible, the prophets, evangelist, apostles and Jesus, used worldly examples to explain heavenly things. We hear of shepherds and sheep, sowers and seeds, fishermen and fishing, masters and slaves. Today, as we continue our study on Philippians, Paul uses one of my personal favorite comparisons. Paul compares our faith, our life to running a race, an athletic event. Paul uses this comparison quite a bit actually. Paul would have been familiar with the Olympic Games that were held every 4 years and probably more familiar with the Isthmian Games. The Isthmian Games were held every other year and were second only to the Olympic Games plus they were held very close to Paul's beloved Corinth.

There's a couple reasons why I like this comparison so much. First, I'm a fan of sports and have always been very athletic. Most of you know, I'm an avid gym rat. I love lifting weights and have for many years. Second, I think living a life of faith is quite a bit like training or running a race.

In our Epistle lesson today, Paul uses phrases like "pressing on toward the goal" and "winning the prize." Again, he does this often in other places in his letter to the ancient churches. So today, I want to look at our life in this way.

Who can remember a time in their life when they were picked for a team? Maybe it was a P.E. class...I always dreaded P.E. class personally or maybe it was a game of street ball in the neighborhood with some friends. But have you ever had the experience of being one of the last people chosen for a team? One of the reasons I always dreaded PE was because I was short, skinny and not very good at the two games we always seemed to play, dodge ball or kick ball! I tell you what, it'll make you feel like a loser to be one of the last ones picked..every time. Even if you didn't have that experience, I think we have all had times when we felt like a loser right? And I want to say that's awesome.

Let me explain why I would say that. Let's look at a key phrase I want to focus on this morning where Paul said, "I press on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took of hold of me." Did you catch that last part? "Christ Jesus took hold of me." This is what being a Christian is all about!

The reason I said it was awesome that we all had felt like a loser is because it's a vital part understanding that you need a Savior. I hope you've felt worthless at one time or another. That you've experienced a time when you were far off in your spiritual life...a time where you felt far away from the Lord. I know this sounds harsh or weird for a Pastor to say but stay with me.

Listen to this, Jesus comes to save the hopeless, the worthless, the sinners and guess what? He makes them winners! Let's remember, Jesus said, "I have come to call the sinners, not the righteous;" "I have come for those who need a physician." He has come for the losers. He came for the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the criminals, and he also came for you and me!

I have very little doubt that you've never been told by any coach that it's okay to be a loser. Am I correct? The problem and challenge to all of our faith journey's is when we think we are winning...when we have it all together...when we are in control. When we get into this way of thinking, when we get complacent, we take our eyes off the prize and we start to think we don't need a Savior. Martin Luther once said that the ultimate proof of a man's sinfulness is for a man to refuse to recognize he is a sinner. We all have times in our lives when we fall into this way of thinking.

This is why I said it's awesome that you have felt like a loser. It's a reminder that we so desperately need saving. And the good news is Jesus wants you on His team! Jesus comes to the losers and makes them winners. Let's just take a quick look at our Bible see that it's full of losers. Look at Moses, remember he did commit murder; King David who committed adultery and murder; Peter, the rock, denied Jesus; and Paul the writer of our Epistle this morning, was a zealous persecutor of the Christians. And these are just a few examples there are many more in our Bible.

It should give you great comfort to know you are in such good company when you feel worthless or unworthy. See each of these examples knew that feeling...they knew they were loser. They each knew what it felt like to feel unworthy and far from God. And that's when the Lord took hold of them and as Paul says and made them winners. And that is the only way you and I can truly become winners, is if the Lord takes hold of us. We are completely incapable of doing it on our own. As much as we often try to do it on our own, we just continue to fail...to lose. We need the Lord to take hold of us and change us.

My friends...Jesus does want us on His team. He reminds of this in our Gospel lesson this morning when He says, "you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.." Those are the Words of our Lord and Savior telling us that He has chosen us. What comfort that should give each one of us.

Not only are we chosen, but we are to go bear fruit...I've said it many times, being a Christian is not a spectator sport. Jesus didn't call us to be bench warmers...or pew sitters. He has us on his team for a purpose. No one on God's team sits on the sidelines and watches. We are all chosen to run the race before us. Think of it this way, when Jesus takes hold of us, that's the starting gun sounding & we take off.

Paul speaks to this in his Epistle letter to the Philippians when he wrote, "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal." God wants us to be runners, looking ahead, not behind. We don't have to say anymore, "I'm a loser. I'm no good". We leave that behind us now.

See, Jesus gave us the victory already with His death and resurrection. He took away our failure, our sin, our emptiness, our death, our worthlessness & He brought forgiveness into our lives. He brought His love into our lives. He has given us a peace that passes all understanding. He has given us life...He gave us His victory! He made us winners, He took hold of us and made us winners. And we are to run like Winners.

First thing we need to do to run like winners is to really let go of what is behind us. Even though we know this, there are still times when we still have a tendency to look back. There are those sins that are hurdles in our lives...could be anger, addiction, resentment...they are there haunting us, making

us feel like a loser. They don't have to do that! Again, thru Christ, you are forgiven and He forgets those sins. When you turn your will and your life over to Christ and profess those sins, they are taken from you. They can't weigh you down, they are no longer hurdles. Let them go! Forget what is behind you and strain toward what is ahead, press on toward that goal to receive the prize that has already been won for you!

The second point on how to run like a winner is pressing on toward the goal. Our goal is to one day join our Lord and those that have gone before us in Heaven. To claim our "joy and crown" as Paul puts it. Again we are called to keep going, to keep running towards that most beautiful finish line. Again, we are not spectators, we are active participants in this race. God doesn't want us to become pew sitters or comfortable Christians. Comfortable Christians get lazy, out of shape and can fall out of the race.

Let me put it this way, you can't just jump out of bed and one day run a marathon without any training. I know many marathon runners and in order for them to be prepared for a marathon takes weeks if not months of training to prepare. They also tend to train in groups so that they can encourage each other...to help push each other to achieve their goals. And that's what we as Christians need to do at well. We must train for this race we are on.

How exactly do we train for our faith race? First, it's a daily routine. When we start each day off setting our hearts and minds on our Lord thru prayer and meditation, we will start each day off on the right foot so to speak. Speaking personally, this is my favorite part of the day...taking time to talk to my God and prepare myself for the day ahead of me. There are days I don't do this and I generally start off more anxious, more stressed about all the things I have to do that day.

Second part of our training, is to take time to study His Word both in bible study and in worship. Doing this is as vital as a runner making sure they stay hydrated! The Word replenishes our soul and strengthens our faith. As Jesus tells us in John 6:63, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and THEY ARE LIFE.*" Thru the Word we give our faith continual nutrition. Keeping us strong and focused so we can endure the race we are on. And any runner will tell how vital fueling the body is for a long race!

Lastly, like marathon runners, we are to fellowship with one another, we are to encourage one another. As Jesus commands us in our Gospel Lesson, "love one another." There's many biblical principles, but one that amazes me every time when I apply it is: "give and it will be given to you." Luke 6:38. There is no better way to push thru a tough time than by serving and encouraging other in your faith. By doing so you not only take your thoughts off your self, but you can witness God working thru you. There is no greater feeling than when the Holy Spirit is working thru you...it not only strengthens the one you are sharing with but it also strengthens you!

Okay, let's review. You my friends are chosen and we are on God's team! And when Jesus takes a hold of your lives, YOU are WINNERS! And we have the power to press on board the goal & face anything that this life throws at us...not a pandemic, not death, we can press on and keep running right thru it. There is no need to look back, no need to feel like a loser because the final victory has been won! AMEN