

Runners in the Race

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

Psalter: 388: 1 - 5

Psalter: 384: 1, 2, 5

Read: Hebrews 12

Psalter: 421: 3, 4

Psalter: 73: 3, 5, 6

Psalter: 422: 5, 6

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. **Their Encouragements**
2. **Their Hindrances**
3. **Their Comforts**

1. Their Encouragements

Paul takes an example out of the world of sport. Should he be doing that? Is he promoting that lifestyle, a lifestyle that is all about honor, fame, and performance? No, Paul is not using this example to promote sport. 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, javelin, wrestling, and so on.

Paul is writing his letters to the early 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 does not say that the first Christians were unaware 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. 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 to the race track. The runners stand at the start line. All the spectators

are sitting in the stands or standing on the sideline. Everyone is intently focused on the young athletes who are straining to sprint forth, being 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 racetrack. They have trained intensively, and are now ready to run the race. They move to their starting positions, eagerly anticipating the moment that the rope will be pulled away. It will all come down to whoever crosses the finish line first.

What led Paul to write about this? In Hebrews 10:38 Paul wrote, *"Now the just shall live by faith."* This begs the question: What is that faith? Paul explains what that faith is 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 about the necessity of this faith. There are people who, through regenerating grace, have received this faith in their souls by the working of the Holy Spirit. It is this faith that Paul is writing about; it is this faith which guides their life; it is this faith that 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 the mentioned old testament saints accomplished through this true saving faith! And in chapter 12, you could say that Paul makes 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 writes 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 especially focuses here on God's children, with a particular 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.

These Hebrews are entangled in all the laws and regulations that 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 a lot about the Old Testament priestly worship service. We see how often Paul refers to the Old Testament, which these Hebrews are well acquainted with.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Paul uses 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 that leads to destruction. The broad way that ends in hell. We are all on a journey that will end in the never-ending eternity. Therefore it is so necessary that you will be taken off the broad way and placed on the narrow way by grace. Luke 13:24 says - *“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 into it, and along it. 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 may seem so nice, but it ends 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 must be born again. God’s children are on the way to eternal glory. Are you one of them?

Paul goes further with the illustration of the participants on the racetrack. If we were to look closely at the racetrack in that stadium, we would see the runners running with their chests pushed forward. They would be shimmering with sweat. They would be running their absolute fastest, and we would see many spectators watching, and cheering them on. Wherever we would look there would be more spectators. We could say there was a cloud of witnesses in that stadium. 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 hung so low that it was as if you were travelling right through them? Then it is as if you were totally surrounded by cloud. This is a picture of how these young athletes were surrounded by a crowd of people. These people were witnesses to everything that was happening, and to 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 poor pilgrims today? What is he saying to despondent strugglers? What is he saying to the 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 an issue from personal experience. They are people who have seen and heard. When we read the words *“a good report”* in the language of the Bible, this includes 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, Samson: 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 much about it, but their lives made a deep impression. It is written here, 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 in the stands as spectators have never run a race in their lives. But spiritually, it is different. The Church Triumphant testifies, "We also were given opportunity to run that race. At times we also thought that we would not be able to finish, but now we stand above the strife. We have finished the race, and now we would like to encourage you as you continue on that spiritual race. Take courage!"

That cloud of witnesses above exhort 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 given to you to overcome as well? Therefore 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, to show forbearance. The runners in this spiritual race need all of this because sometimes they find no courage in themselves at all. When they look to themselves and to the circumstances around them, they lose all hope. They are then 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 that you can just casually commit to. Oh no! A lot of training is involved. And this is also the case with the spiritual race. You cannot just casually commit to it, and you cannot continue it in your own strength either. 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 learn to know these as Fatherly chastisements. At times they may say, "Oh Lord, we know all things come from Thee."

These spiritual runners need 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 their flesh comes between, there is no submission. But 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 maintains His own work and stirs up His people to continue 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 focused on reaching the finish line first? Why did they persevere to the end? Firstly, because that was the purpose of their training. How is this in the spiritual race? We read in God's Word that the Apostle Paul said to the 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 even if it seems we have nothing, and everything 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 who are purified through suffering. They may say, "Lord, it was good that I was afflicted."

It will soon be seen if an athlete has not trained. If they have missed their training sessions a few times, it will become obvious. Dedicated training is essential! This is also true for God's children: that is the focus of this chapter. Oh, they can sometimes be so lukewarm! They can be so like a withering plant which is lacking water. The Lord urges His people on in the way of sanctification, to make their calling and election sure, so that they will never stumble again. That is why Paul uses the word *patience*. God's children are exercised in the way of sanctification.

What else must the runners do? They must be willing to abstain, which is also included in the word patience. Athletes hoping to participate in the race were required to take an oath ten months before the event. They had to promise to live soberly according to certain restrictions, and 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 and self-restraint, are 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 proceed in the tender fear of the Lord. They are not to ask, "How far can I go before I have sinned too much?" Oh no, far rather they must desire to stay as far away from all sin as possible.

"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? On the track that is laid out before them! And away they go! The track is set apart and closed off from all other purposes. They can see exactly where they need to 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 they encourage others by saying 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. Their Hindrances

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. Of all the runners, there will be only one winner, and the temptation to slow down and pick up money would be a hindrance to becoming that winner. Even gold bars were thrown onto the track. So we can see that there were many obstacles and stumbling blocks tempting these runners. There was only one reason so many things were thrown onto the track: to make it more difficult for the runners to win! 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, runners are brought into the spiritual race, Satan will do everything 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?" 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, because 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. As we look at the runners, we see they wear light clothing. They take nothing else along. Boys and girls, this makes sense, doesn't it? If you run a race carrying a heavy pack on your back, or dragging a suitcase along, you certainly will not be first. All hindrances must be laid aside; otherwise, there is no 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 read of sin in the second part of the phrase where we read, *“and the sin which doth so easily beset us.”* What is meant here in particular by the word *weight* is everything that distances oneself from God and from serving Him. This could be sport, or some other idol that we have. 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? Think about this question and answer it honestly. 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 only spent your given time 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 hear 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 not only asked of the spiritual runners, but also of every one who has 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 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, because 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 Who He is. Because of the sin of unbelief we fell away from God in Paradise. Oh, the sin of unbelief, by which I declare God to be a liar. Others say that 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. However, 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 that they are on the spiritual way, but who must yet 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 that 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”*? To *lay aside* every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us. It is as if the Lord urges us to break with sin, to cut it off, to renounce it, to 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, but rather to forsake it, and flee from it.

Everyone, young and old, 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 everything in it. It is not easy when, for instance, your comrades at work talk about something, and you must say you know nothing about it. To also say that you don't care about it either, that it doesn't interest you in the least. You tell them there is something much more important 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. Yet that is something I wholeheartedly wish for you. It will become evident in your life that you have begun 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 I will always

need 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 the iniquities that can so easily beset us, is to pray, as we will now sing of in Psalter 73: 3, 5, 6.

Runners in the Race. Their encouragements, and their hindrances, but we will now also consider:

3. Their Comforts

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 the young athletes to continually look into the grandstand, or to keep glancing behind them. 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 alludes to when he writes, "*looking unto Jesus*". The word looking does not mean to just occasionally take a quick glance. Oh no, it 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 Spirit of Pentecost to dwell in our hearts. 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 look into our corrupt hearts? A mighty stream of foul transgressions, a swamp of iniquity, a plague of sin and corruption that is impossible to carry. Then I become the guilty one before God and must confess, "Lord, Thou art righteous; Thou art holy 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 creator and provider. 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 Creator. He also became the Surety for His people. He was also placed on the race track. He was on this track for thirty-three years. He ran 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 through suffering, though 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 and Provider of true saving faith. He is the One Who through His Holy Spirit brings His Church into the spiritual way. He is the One Who plants faith into the heart of His people at the moment of regeneration. Hence, He is the first: and He is 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 – the author, but also the Omega – the finisher. We read that He is Jesus, the Author and 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 it not that of which the cloud of witnesses testifies? Why will the Church persevere to the end? Why will the Church share in the victory? Because their Surety has gone before them. He persevered to the end. He finished the race and entered into glory. He 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 spat 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 undergo three hours of solitary darkness, three hours of 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 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. And 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! Therefore, 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 just some 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 as it was either held by the referee or displayed high on a pole. The runners were running for the prize, for 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. Yes, they will receive a 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 perfectly. His ultimate joy was that His Father would receive the honor. What else was His joy? The Lord Jesus was humiliated but also exalted on high. This was also the joy that was set before Him. He would be able to say, “Father, now I may be with Thee, now I may sit at Thy 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: the Lord Jesus has joy in loving 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 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 will 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 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 endured. Think about it, when everything 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 prepared for His Son! He is crowned with honor and glory. He has received rest from His labor. That is why His people may also rest, just like 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, there 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 look away from the enemies along the way, to avoid the obstacles in the way, to look away from self, and far rather 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 received so much insight into this. He wrote a thick volume about looking unto Jesus, looking unto the King in His beauty. Oh that gives such joy!

Congregation, there are two ways. On which path are you traveling? Young and old? On the path of the world, or on the path of this King? Or are you trying to walk along both? Then you are surely not on the narrow way, you are outside it. There are only 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 run the fastest, jump the highest, throw the furthest, or come first in some other way. 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 unworthy before God. They are those who have learned they are not worthy of a crown as they have sinned it all away. However, they will be presented with the prize. In the Olympics, only one person receives

first prize. But in the spiritual kingdom it will be a number that no man can count. No, they will not receive a consolation prize, but the first prize that Jesus has merited for them.

Who are the winners? They are those who can do nothing of themselves, such as Mephibosheth. He would not get very far 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 streaming 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? Because God is faithful! He will never permit the downfall of His chosen ones.

Congregation, at the end of such an event at the race track, there is much cheering and applause. 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 and no applause for Mephibosheth, oh no. All those crippled and lame ones will point up and say only one thing: “Though thee, though thee alone.” 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 an urgent demand for workers for His Kingdom. The Lord Jesus is calling to young people, “*Come unto Me.*” The world with all its deceitful pleasures is also looking for young people. Perhaps this is what you are putting all your energy and resources into. Maybe you have gone so far in your sinful ways that you are completely exhausted, have no more energy, and, like the prodigal son, have wasted all your substance on riotous living. But listen, the Lord calls to you today, “Stop with it all, and come unto Me!”

The world is passing away. There is still room 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. Samson, Rahab, and David are mentioned amongst all the witnesses. Would not be possible for you?

Amen