

THE RAT RACE OR THE RIGHT RACE

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(Heb 12:1 KJV) 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,

(Heb 12:2 KJV) 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.

(Heb 12:3 KJV) For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Nearly 150 years ago, Henry David Thoreau wrote, in his classic book, *Walden*, these words: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” We look at the mass of mankind today, so much worse off than in Thoreau’s day, and the mess that modern man has made of his life and we are forced back to the *Bible* for answers.

Hebrews 12:1-3 gives us the answer. And it says quite clearly that we can overcome the Rat Race by being a participant in the Right Race. Thoreau was correct in his assessment of humanity in his day, I suspect, and the *Bible* still tells us that same truth: Man’s life is a rat race, but with God it is the Real Race. With God it doesn’t have to be a life ‘of quiet desperation.’

The expression Rat Race is defined by the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* as “an endless, self-defeating or pointless pursuit, conjuring up the image of the futile efforts of a lab rat trying to escape whilst running around a maze or in a wheel.” That is a pretty good picture of modern man, is it not? Then the encyclopedia tells us that man tries to escape the maze by moving to a rural area, by retirement, by working from home, by becoming financially independent, by becoming a hobo or hippie, or by simpler living, as Thoreau did. Faith in God, however, is not mentioned.

When the *Bible* speaks about the great Marathon race, started by the Greeks to commemorate the victory of Greece against the Persians, when Pheidippides ran 22 miles to Athens to tell them of their victory, it is describing race, a metaphor of the Christian life.

There is a strong contrast between these two metaphors, the rat race and the Right Race.

I. THE RIGHT RACE.

A. RUN BY BELIEVERS ONLY. Many times Christians get caught up in the ‘rat race.’ To some degree, at different times in their lives, all human beings run the rat race. However, only Christians can run the Right Race; for they alone have been born again. You remember the story of Nicodemus. One night he came to this new rabbi who was stirring up so much trouble, and the first thing Jesus told him was, “You must be born again.” Like us, Nicodemus wanted to know what Jesus was talking about. So Jesus told this rich, powerful, educated, religious man that he needed a spiritual birth, that he needed forgiveness of sins and an infilling of the Spirit of God, that his goodness and

his wealth and his power and his status could never make him happy, give him joy, and fill him with love. He said to Nicodemus, “I know what you need—you need God.” All mankind needs God. When Rudyard Kipling was aboard a ship to America he came down with an agonizing fever and was so sick he could hardly speak. His nurse was by his side as he was trying to murmur something, and someone asked what he was saying. The nurse leaned down and put her ear very close to his parched lips and heard him say, “I need God.” All of us need God.

Again and again the *Bible* bluntly reminds us that we are all sinners. The *Bible* says, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” To enter the Right Race we must be Right with God. To be right with God you must confess your sins and receive Jesus as your only Savior. (John 14:6 KJV) Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Are you in the Rat Race or the Right Race. Lily Tomlin, the comedian, said it best: “The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you’re still a rat.” That same applies to an unrepentant sinner—he may be enormously successful in life and die a sinner. “What would it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

B. THIS RACE MUST BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY BELIEVERS. No one should enter the Christian Race, the Right Race, without a winning attitude. When I became a Christian I remember telling Jesus that if He would save me I would do whatever He wanted me to do. It was that submission of my will to His will that got me saved in the first place. But in my salvation there was that seriousness, that determination to keep on keeping on whatever came my way. I’m sure that many people make decisions based on emotion and are not really sincere. When we enter the great arena of the Christian faith we are to be sure and to be utterly sincere. We are not dealing with man, but with God, and “Our God is a consuming fire.” This great race, this Life in Christ with all its joy and pain is ‘set before us.’ Once we were saved we were taken out of the miry clay of the world, and set on a race track. We have no choice, we have no option. We either run or get run over by those who are willing and eager to run the race.

C. WE MUST RUN TO WIN. Not only should our attitude be a winning attitude, our lifestyle should reflect our determination to win. As Christian runners in this race we must lay aside the weight of the world. In a word, we must quit the rat race to run the right race. (1) We must first lay aside every weight. A.T. Robertson calls these weights “handicaps like doubt, pride, and sloth.” He translates the Greek *ogkon pantas* as “a swelling of superfluous flesh.” Wuest the Greek scholar says, “Only by running does he know what the weights are. So long as he stands he does not feel that they are burdensome or hampering.” (2) Next to run to win, we must lay aside ‘the sin that doth so easily beset us.’ Literally that means *surrounding sin, or encircling sin*. Again Robertson reminds us these are like ‘trailing garments’ that would hinder or trip one. The Bible tells us that we are to put away our sins. We are to lay them aside. We are to refrain from them. Each of us has our own favorite, our own pet sins. God knows what they are; and Satan uses them to tempt us into more deep sins. **Ezekiel 18:31** says, “Cast away from you all your transgression whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for while will ye die, o house of Israel?” **James 1:21** says “Wherefore, lay

apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

II. THE RIGHT RACE IS RUN WITH THE RIGHT PACE.

A. WE MUST RUN. William Barclay writes: “The Christian life is a race along a course that is set before us. The Christian is not an unconcerned stroller along the byways of life; he is a wayfarer on the high road. He is not a tourist, who returns each night to the place from which he started; he is a pilgrim who is for ever on the way.” I mentioned before that we must Run in this race. We are not admonished by God’s word to sit and rest; and here we are not even told to walk. We are in a race and races are usually events in which people and horses run. God uses verbs to show us His will. At the graveside of Lazarus in Bethany, Jesus commanded, “Roll back the stone!” The Risen Christ commanded His army, “Go!” “Forward March!” And they went into all the world preaching His message! That has always been God’s way. He is the great commander! He says to Abraham, “Go!” And Abraham went. God always speaks in active verbs.

B. THE VERB RUN MEANS KEEP ON RUNNING. (Trechomen-pre.act. subj. of trecho) I have known numerous Christians who have fought the good fight for a while and then stopped. Why? Who knows? Perhaps some bitter disappointment. Perhaps some sinful habit? Perhaps some sinful liason with another person. One cannot but be troubled by some friend or family member that they saw start on the Right Race, and who ran well for a while. Paul saw this in the Galatian Christians and he wrote, (Gal 5:7 KJV) “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” If it was troubling to Paul it should be troubling to us. Robert Browning has the right answer. He said that the reason men fail is that they are **unwilling to pay the price.**

C. RUN WITH PATIENCE. One of the most important things for the Christian to remember is this: **WE ARE RUNNING IN A MARATHON RACE, NOT IN A 40 YARD DASH.** We are not like caged rats in a labyrinth running to and fro and bumping against everything as we go, yet going nowhere. We are in the right race, and we must run at the right pace. Therefore the Right Pace for this Right Race is Patience. When we hear the word patience we are apt to think of something passive; but the word patience in Greek is hupomone. Barclay writes, “The word is hupomone which does not mean the patience which sits down and accepts things but the patience which masters them. It is not some romantic thing which lends us wings to fly over the difficulties and the hard places. It is a determination, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on and refuses to be deflected. Obstacles do not daunt it and discouragements do not take its hope away. It is the stedfast endurance which carries on until in the end it gets there.” For the Christian patience means persevering to the end until we can cry out with Paul, (2 Tim 4:7 KJV) “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:”(2 Tim 4:8 KJV) “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” When Winston Churchill gave a speech in America, he gave this advice to the youth who were listening: “Never give in, never give

in, never, never, never give in!” My dear brothers and sisters, if we follow the *Bible* and run as we should we will never be a part of the Rat Race of this world, but will win heaven in the right race.

III. I HAVE SPOKEN OF THE RIGHT RACE, AND THE RIGHT PACE. NOW I WANT TO ADDRESS THE RIGHT FACE.

A. NOT THE FACE OF OTHER CHRISTIANS. I look out at you and I believe that you are some of the best Christians I have ever known.. When I see your faces, I see the shine and the glory of the Almighty God in Christ Jesus in you. I think of my dear Christian Father, the best man I ever knew, and I see his strong, gentle, determined, patient, smiling, Christian face. I think of other Christians I know and I love to see their faces. The face reveals very much; and the older that face becomes the more it reveals about the man and the woman. If that person has been in the rat race the troubling lines and wrinkles are all there. But I must not look to your faces; I must not gaze upon you. You are merely human beings, and in some cases marvelous human beings, but if I gaze long enough I will see your sin, I will behold your weaknesses, and you will invariably disappoint, even as I will do if you gaze upon me. *Martin Luther married the nun Katherine von Bora. When a daughter arrived, he wrote to a prospective godmother: Dear lady, God has produced from me and my wife Katie a little heathen. We hope you will be willing to become her spiritual mother and help make her a Christian.* Luther well knew that the precious face of a child that we gaze so fondly upon is not the face that we should be always gazing upon.

We are not even to gaze upon ourselves. Augustine of Carthage wrote: “You took me from behind my own back, where I had put myself all the time that I preferred not to see myself, and you set me before my face that I might see how vile I was...and I saw myself and was horrified.” There is none righteous, no not one.

B. WE ARE NOT TO GAZE UPON THE GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES. Neither do they have the right face or faces. We have no patron saints, present or past. These great saints in Hebrews 11 are examples to us, to be sure, and we are to regard them highly, for they have already run their race and won the prize. But the implication of the author is that we are to look to them, not to gaze at them. One commentator wrote: *“They are not there to watch us, to see if we win. They are there to cheer us on, to inspire us, to strengthen us for the race.”* Wuest says of them that they are *“Heroes of the faith...testifying to the efficacy of the faith way of salvation and victory.”*

Thank God for the heroes of the faith who have trod the path before us and who are now in heaven, examples to cheer us on. But I will not, I must not fix my gaze upon them.

C. I MUST INSTEAD GAZE UPON THE FACE OF JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND THE FINISHER OF MY FAITH. The right face in the right race is Jesus Christ our Lord. I said before, *“There is none righteous, no not one.”* I want to revise that. *“There was one righteous, only One.”* In one of our hymns we sing, *“Trust*

not the Lord by feeble sense.” A little child was singing that song, and he sang, “Trust not the Lord by feeble saints.” That is just why we must look upon the Right Face as we run our race, we must turn our eyes from others to Jesus. **“Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.”** Barclay writes—“An actor would act with double intensity if he knew that some famous dramatic master was sitting in the stalls watching him; an athlete would strive with double effort if he knew that a stadium of famous Olympic Athletes was watching him.”

I am happy this morning that many wonderful saints are looking down upon us today. They have struggled in life, most of them, and faced suffering and pain and even martyrdom. I am thankful to God that they did not grumble and feel sorry for themselves, but gave all the glory to God. They even thanked Him for the pain.

They suffered for themselves and for the faith. What greater thing could one suffer for? But they could not do one thing. They could not suffer for the sins of the whole world. Listen once more unto these words, and let me add another verse: (Heb 12:2 KJV) 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.

(Heb 12:3 KJV) For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

(Heb 12:4 KJV) Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

The right face is the face of Him who endured the cross, despising the shame, rose from the dead, ascended to God’s right hand, sent down the Holy Spirit to His orphaned children, and now intercedes before the Father for us sinners. Thank God for Jesus! Hallelujah!

As we gaze upon His face we know that we cannot complain. He endured great shame at the hands of sinners in order to save sinners. He resisted unto blood, striving against sin. (Dear Lord, shut our mouths to our own temptation to grumble!) In the face of Christ Jesus we can only rejoice.

He it is who is with us here today. When I was in Southern Seminary I heard Dr. Duke McCall, one of the great Southern Baptist preachers, and president of Southern Seminary, preach and give his testimony. He said that when he had finished seminary he was preaching in a large church of which he and his family were members. A delegation had been sent there from an important church to hear him preach, and to perhaps call him to be pastor of their church. Dr. McCall said he was in the study ready to come out and preach a mighty sermon when his lawyer-father knocked on the door and came in. He looked at Duke and said, “Duke, there’s a very important person out there in the congregation wanting to hear you preach.” Duke answered, and mentioned some of the names of these outstanding people who were on the pulpit committee to hear him, and asked his father which of these he meant. His father spoke very calmly and said, “Duke, the important person in the congregation that I am referring to is Jesus Christ. He wants to hear you preach His Gospel.” Duke said that took all the starch and the pride from his heart and, and he went out humbly and preached the Christ of the Cross and Resurrection.

Let us quit the foolishness, and idolatry of gazing upon people and start looking at the prize at the end of the race. His is the right face in this race that must be run with

patience. Keep your eyes on Him. Keep your eyes on the prize, until in this life you start looking like Him in your inner man, and you will be like Him.

You are in the Right Race. Run it with the Right Pace. And always look upon the Right Face. (2 Cor 3:17 KJV) Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.(2 Cor 3:18 KJV) But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

If you don't know Jesus as your Personal Savior, get out of the Rat Race and into the Right Race. Remember Lily Tomlin's words, "The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat." Without Christ you cannot win; with Christ you cannot lose.