Hebrews 12:1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 October 1995

Preacher: Donald Macleod

`[0:00]` In the words at the close of the opening verse, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

! Hebrews 12 verse 1, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.!
The kindness of the Christian life and its many demands. Sometimes we are compared to boxers pummeling our bodies.
Sometimes to soldiers putting on their armour. Sometimes to athletes struggling to win the prize. And sometimes, as in this passage, we are compared to runners running a race. Let us run with patience the race marked out for us.
The words remind us that Christians are literally running for their lives. And I want for a moment to explore this theme with you. I want to do so because there is a very real risk of overreacting to hyper-orthodoxy.
`[1:30]` Overreacting to hyper-orthodoxy and hyper-judgementalness by lapsing into indiscipline and softness and lassitude on our own part.

That's why it's so important to remind ourselves of God's own view of the Christian life.
may of our own choosing, not in the lanes that we have selected, but we are to run the race that God has appointed for us. Often we wish that we had another race, another course, or at least another lane, but no, it is the race that has been appointed or marked out for us.
You go back to the previous chapter, this great story of the exploits of those Old Testament believers. Those men and women didn't choose their own race, didn't determine their own course. Moses wouldn't have gone by Mount Moriah and the sacrifice of Isaac's son. Jacob wouldn't have chosen the terrible loss of Joseph on that journey down into Egypt. Moses would never have chosen the role of a prophet. He said to God, Lord, I'm no speaker, I'm no communicator, I'm not eloquent. And yet, in all those instances, God said, you run the race that I appoint. Abraham, you go by Mount Moriah. Jacob, you go down to Egypt. Moses, you'll be one of my great communicators.
`[4:22]` That's what God said. You see Daniel serving God in the bondage and alien culture of Babylon. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego serving God in the fiery furnace. You see all the tortuous, tragic problems that beset a man like David that wasn't of his chosen. Isaiah put to death because he spoke for God. Jeremiah, his heart broken over the misfortunes of his old beloved Judah. You look at the Lord Jesus himself.

Father, could this cup not pass from me? Could the course, could it not be different? Could there not be something else? All those early Christian martyrs, all those modern martyrs, John Calvin, pleading with God, pleading with God, Lord, don't send me to Geneva.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer called again to serve God on a path that he himself would never have chosen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And there are many of us here tonight. And all the same principle operating in an old experience, running the course that God has chosen and God has built for us.
Sometimes we say to God, Lord, couldn't things be just a little different? Lord, I would choose different responsibilities.
[6:27] And I would choose different temptations. And I would have chosen, Lord, and I would have chosen, Lord, and a different kind of pain. But God says, run the race that is appointed.

Sometimes we look enviously at the course, appointed for others. And sometimes we at least want to change lanes.
But God is saying to us, no, this is the course. And this is the lane. These are your duties. And these are your temptations.
And these are your trials. And so you run with perseverance the race that is marked out for you. Of course. And we need to know, you and I, that there is no greater course builder than God. No one could have done it better.
[7:37] And we need to know that at last we will stand at the end of the course, stand at that great finishing line and say, it's been goodness and mercy all the days.

But if tonight it's hard for you, and if tonight you look enviously at those on a different course, or somebody in a different lane, then you grasp this principle.
You are to run the race on the course that's been marked out for you. And at last, you know, it's one of the great lessons of life.
That you learn not to envy. Sometimes, from the outside, and sometimes, for a moment, the lanes in which others are asked to run looks far more attractive and far more easier.
But what do we know of the inside? And what do we know of their tomorrows? And so we learn, stay on your own course, and stay in your own lane, and run with perseverance the race that is marked out for you.
[9:04] Of course, you say to God, Lord, why are we going this way? And why is this obstacle in the lives of this band?

Why this incline? I ask all of these questions. Lord, why could it not have been different? We simply say, we can only say, we run the race, Murdart Forest.
On this road, I glorify God. On this road, and in this lane, I enjoy God. Because this is the course marked out for me.
In every life before me tonight, there are disadvantages, and limitations, and there are frustrations, and there are sorrows, and then our heart breaks.
And there is often a great deal of anguish. And yet, we have no choice but to run the race marked out for us.
[10:23] And then you see, secondly, this. This is a great endurance race. In fact, the Greek puts it this way, Let us run the agony set before us.

Let us run the agony set before us. Let us run the agony set before us. Let us do it with perseverance.
Because whatever course you're on, whatever lane you're running, the race requires stamina and durability.
It's no sprint. This is a great marathon. Perhaps a great steeplechase.
Perhaps a demanding cross-country run. Over all those obstacles, those jumps.
[11:36] Enter those dreaded water jumps. Over those great hills. That's the way God wants us to go.

This course which sucks uttered energy. This course which makes such demands upon our faith, makes such demands upon our spiritual durability.
But that's what God says it is. Let's run with perseverance, with stamina, the agony that is set before us.
Why is it so? It is so sometimes because of the crushing and relentless burden of responsibility in all our various spheres.
It is so sometimes because of the buffetings of Satan, that thorn in the flesh of which Paul spoke.
[12:49] I said to God, Lord, and it weren't for these buffetings, for this thorn, for those distractions, for this terrible pain.

I'd be such a great preacher, such a great missionary, but I'm just finding it so hard to cope because of all these buffetings.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And yet God says only, my grace is enough. Not a word about it, not a word more. I never want to hear any more about it.
Just so you get on with the race, despite all those buffetings. Sometimes it's because of the jeering spectators.
Sometimes because of the terrible cost to those close to us. Sometimes it's because of the bodies of those who have fallen apostate around us, who have quit the race and yet are somehow in the way.
[13:56] I'm just wanting you to know that God's being so blunt about it, and God's being so utterly frank about it. He says, I do the course.

And he says, it's an agony. And by the time you reach that finishing tape, you're going to be spent. You've given it all you've got because it will demand every ounce of physical strength, every atom of faith, every single resource of patience and courage and calmness and self-control.
Because unless we have stamina, unless we have perseverance, we'll never make it to that great finishing post. And so he says to us, it's God who sets the course.
And he says to us, it's a great test of our endurance. And he says to us again, we have to strip for action.
[15:21] Let us, he says, throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us.

If it is an agony, if it's going to make such incredible and such long-term demands upon us, then we must lay aside every encumbrance, we must strip for action.
And I put it to you, that that's one of the great problems today. That we aren't really fit to run this race.
Can you imagine someone turning up for a steeplechase, wearing an overcoat and a pair of army boots, coming with this Walkman personal stereo, carrying perhaps a book, a box of chocolates and four cans of beer and saying, I'm going to run this steeplechase.
There surely is no credibility there. No, he says, we must strip for action. We must lay aside every encumbrance, everything that impedes other tenders, other tolls us back.
[16:57] Of course, it doesn't mean at all that we are to become monks and go to the desert and become totally cut off from human life and become ascetics.

It doesn't mean that we give up on culture and commerce and reading and music and all those other things.
You remember the great model, the Lord Jesus Christ. He ran this race not in some monastery. He ran this race not in some isolation. But he ran this race on the plains of Galilee, Galilee, in the streets of Nazareth, in Jerusalem.
He was there running this race that God had set before him. I mean all the squalor, and all the pain, and all the poverty, and all the immorality, and all the temptations of human existence.
[18:06] And you and I too. We must run the race in the world. We run the race in the city.

We have to be fit to run it where there are temptations, and where there are destructions, and where there are pressures.
So it's not saying, cut yourself off from the world, and run this race in the privacy of the study, and contract your life until there is nothing in it but religion, Bible study, prayer, meditation.
No, we run the race in the world. And yet, we are to strip. We must, he says, lay aside the sin that entangles us.
It's no particular sin. It's just your sin. Somehow it's there, hobbling you, as if your feet were tied together.
[19:23] It's there, getting you all tangled up in knots, and a mess, enmeshed in the net of sin. All that matters is that you yourself know it, and that I know it.

That sin, that fills you with guilt and remorse, that takes away your boldness before God, takes away your assurance, takes away that Christian joy, which is the lubricant of all our obedience, that sin which mars our fellowship with God, and hinders the free flow of His grace.
And maybe tonight, the only symptom for you is some gnawing pain, some chronic despondency, sadness that never goes away, because we're entangled in sin.
God is asking how we're serious. Let's lay aside the sin that entangles. I'm not saying, not speaking, of what the world calls sin, of what the church calls sin.
I'm speaking of what you know to be sin, of what your conscience knows to be sin. I'm saying, let's lay aside the sin in which we are enmeshed, the sin that entangles us.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[21:30] If you're serious about running this steeplechase, then you lay aside the sin that entangles. But then he says, it's not only that, but everything that hinders.

There are things that aren't sin, that hinder. How many great careers in sport have been destroyed, not by indulgence in sin, but by refusing to be aside those things that hinder?
The athlete has to make sacrifices. The runner must go on a diet, must control his or her social life. You think for a moment, that incredible Scottish athlete, Liz McColgan. All the miles she runs in a week.
All the sacrifices in the area of diet, in the area of pleasure, in the area of social life.
[23:03] All because her life is so sharply focused. And I'm asking whether, as Christians, we have that same kind of focus that makes us willing to give up, to lay aside not only what is sinful, but those things that leave us unfit, those things which distract, those things that leave us soft and flabby.

And I'm saying to you again, you know them. Some hobby, some habit, some habit, or perhaps it's personal, secular, and commercial, and worldly ambition.
But there it is, you see, and you say to yourself, well, it's perfectly lawful. And it's perfectly lawful for Liz McColgan to eat all that she wants.
And yet she makes this choice. She has a race to run. And if they the price of efficiency and of success is this incredible self-discipline and this iron resolution, then she will pay that price because the race matters.
It has nothing to do with what is lawful. It has to do with the sharpness of her focus, with the fanaticism of her dedication, with her determination to reach that winning post that she has proposed to herself.
[25:07] And so we run with stamina and perseverance, the race set before us. But to run it, we must rip.

We'll aside every sin. We'll aside all that hinders us. may its taboos and perhaps they were sorely tempted to overreact to forestism by losing all discipline by eliminating all self-denial by abandoning all rules and if I'm not mistaken that mood is widely prevalent in the church today we are surrounded by hyper orthodoxy by men and women who argue for great strictness in religion people sometimes of fanatical religious intensity people who want to forbid this I want to prescribe that none of it in the word of God and it is very very tempting for us to overreact to overreact to too many rules by having no rules to discipline by having no discipline we have discovered the great principle of Christian Liberty that God alone is Lord of the conscience and that to him alone we answer we're discovered that man-made taboos and regulations have no authority we have discovered that much that church members thought unlawful is in fact perfectly lawful and I'm not sure but we are drunk on the wine of Christian freedom as if we wanted to cram into our lives everything that's lawful as if we were going to say there is no taboo on drink and so we'll drink there is no taboo on cinema and so we'll go to cinema there is no taboo on this and that or the next and so we'll do them all and indulge them all and I want those who are not censorious and I want those who are not judgmental and I want those who are not legalistic and I want those who know the glory of Christian liberty and I want those who are not
I want those who are not judgmental and I want those who are not judgmental and I want those who are not legalistic and I want those who know the glory of Christian liberty I want them to show greater discipline than the Pharisees greater self-control than the bigot and the fanatic I want them to show the self-control the self-discipline of love of lives lived for others lives lived for God I want such a lifestyle that we are always able to give a reason to those who ask us for the hope that is in

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

us always available to be a witness always available to others others it would pay me beyond measure those who know the freedom of the gospel of Jesus Christ were less unworldly and less pleasure oriented than the legalist let us try to show not less that more self-discipline just because we know the glory of Christian freedom in actual fact the very point of Christian liberty is that we are called to the maturity of self-discipline let us excel in Bible study let us excel in prayer let us excel in consecration to God let us excel no not in conformity to God not in conformity to man-made taboos and church-made regulations but let us excel in the great grace of self-denial that's what we are called to that's what Liz McColgan practices because she has an end a finishing post in view let us strip for action let's may away to run your Christians.

There is this great need to strip, to run without encumbrance. And there is this last great exhortation, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

Not on what's behind us, not on what's around us, not on those who are running with us, not on our own running, not on what we have given up, as we think, for the gospel of Jesus Christ, but let us fix our eyes on Jesus and notice these things, notice the obstacles that he overcame, the course that God marked out for him, the lane in which he had to run, the jumps, the hills, the mountain he had to climb.

[33:42] Let us see what he endured, and let us see how he endured, the author and finisher of our faith, not by some supernatural aid that came to him from heaven, but by the practice of faith, by the searching of God's word, by prayer to God, by faith in the promises of God, by strong crying and tears.

That's how he triumphed in Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary. That's how he was able to cover all those horrendous obstacles in his course, because he had faith, and see where he is now, seated at the right hand of the majesty.

No matter as it is, because at the end, as men and women imagined, it seemed so unlikely that his terminus or finishing post would be glory.

Did it not seem as if that last great obstacle had destroyed him, destroyed there by the forces of hell on the cross of Calvary?

But you, Luke, this great, great principle we keep coming back to of the word before the last, the penultimate word, that penultimate word which may all the world's criteria is the ultimate word, the word before the last which you think tonight is the last word.

[36:09] I want you to cling to the possibility and lead by faith to the reality that where you are tonight, having fallen and become so despondent at some particular obstacle.

I want you to think that's the word before the last. I want you to think that joy comes with the morning.

I want you to know that there is a word beyond the penultimate word. There was nothing in the whole of human history more definitive and more final than the cross of Calvary.

even the Lord himself said, it is finished. And yet, it wasn't final and it wasn't finished.

and where you are tonight is not final and where you are tonight you're not finished, are you?

[37:46] It was a very poignant moment in the cemetery in Agnish last Thursday when the turf was rolled over the grave of the Reverend Murdo Alec MacLeod.

And that was it. It had been a long harrowing week and a long harrowing day and it was over.

His voice was silent and his bubbling energy extinct and it was all over and it was the last word and yet it wasn't the last word anymore than the cross was the last word.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And when you look to Jesus when you turn your eyes towards him that's one of the great things that you know the darkness of the second last word the darkness of the word that pretends to be the last word that masquerades as the last word and yet which in the providence of God is not the last word the last word is the word of life and resurrection.
I want to ask two questions as I close one are you serious are you an earnest are you as serious as the Pharisee the legalist the hyper-orthodox are you as serious as Liz McColgan and two are you a mere spectator the spectator never wins surprise never reaches the finishing post are we content tonight to be mere spectators of Christian runners or shall we decide at this point to enter the race will you strip for action may God bless his word let us pray oh Lord we ask that thou wouldst bless thy word to us use it to effect rededication in the hearts of all who know thee and to enlist in this great race those who hitherto have been mere spectators
[41:45] Lord there are those here tonight who are exhausted who are going through the pain barrier whose morale is low whose mental toughness has been eroded by what's happened in their own lives hang on to them and out of thy known energy give them the strength to stay and to stick the course so that at last there may be acclamation and joy in heaven when they reach the finishing line hear us for Jesus sake amen we close the singing in psalm 107 at verse 25 that shown as Torwood, for he commands and forth in haste the stormy tempest flies.

Psalm 107, verse 25 to verse 30, to God's praise. For he commands and forth in haste the stormy tempest flies, with thanks that he with holy wings are locked to swell and rise.
They mount to heaven and to the depths they do go down again.
Their soul now faint and held away with the whole land within.
They feel us that the light won't run at their wisdom and they be.
[44:39] Then lead to God in the whole pride through them from space and free.

The storm is changed into the calm and is called and will.
So thou thou hast which raised before now thou are quiet, tough, and still.
Then I pray that he was addressed and why e'er thou have they be.
So to the heaven be their praise, which they desire to see.
[45:57] May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God eternal, be upon each one of us now and everlastingly.

may may

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host