

Coach House Church BEACONS

RUN TO WIN

29TH JULY 2020

One aspect of the lock-down that some of you may have noticed has been the lack of competitive sport of television, or indeed for people to go and watch in person. This has meant that on TV and online we have had a surfeit of re-runs of great sporting moments, one of which which reminded me of a passage in the bible. We will come to the event in a moment but lets start with some words from the bible written by the apostle Paul to some friends in Corinth to encourage them in their faith.

"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs but only one person gets the prize? So run to win. All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize"

Later, writing to his friend Timothy Paul wrote " I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful."

Now if you have ever run a race, especially a longer distance race you will know that it gets harder towards the end. I can certainly remember from my training in the Air Force that the longer a training session went on the more it hurt. And so it is in life, as we get older more things seem to go wrong. We spend more and more time at the doctors and things hurt more. As a result of this we spend less and less time doing the things we enjoy. All of this can affect us in our faith. Paul knew this and he was trying to encourage his friends that the prize, eternal life, was far better than the pain of this life. Pain is temporary, the prize is for ever.

Paul also knew the importance of being ready for those difficult times. A top athlete will spend 6 or more hours a day training for their event. They do so in such a way as to be in peak condition on the day of the most important race. For example the Olympic games only come round every 4 years. For most competitors

they will really only be at their peak for one games. A few athletes get to compete in 2 or 3 games but for most it is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

So back to the story I mentioned at the start. Back in 1992 the Olympics were in Barcelona. Many British athletes were there just to compete without a real hope of winning but there were a few British athletes who were expected to do well. At the time we had several top class 400 metre runners, in fact the previous year they had beaten the Americans in the relay race and one of these, Derek Redmond, had a real chance of a medal in the individual event. He had posted the fastest time in the qualifying rounds and was now in the semi-finals. He went off really quickly but half way down the back straight disaster struck. One of his muscles tore, and he fell down in agony. Waving away the medics who came on he decided that no matter what he was going to finish the race. So he got up and started hopping around the track. As he rounded the bend his father had seen the problem, and despite officials trying to stop him, he went to his son. For the last 100 meters Derek leaned on his father for support and eventually crossed the line to a standing ovation from the crowd. I have no idea who won the race, or even who took the medals in the final, all I can remember is the determination of Derek to finish the race no matter what the cost.

You see this is just like the message that the apostle Paul was sharing with his friends. Paul was using the analogy of the athletes training regime and the race to teach us something about our journey through life. In our story we see that Derek had already trained hard for 10 years just to get into that race. He had not just trained physically, but mentally as well. Without that training he would not have had the determination to carry on. In the apostle Paul's first letter to his friends in Corinth he wrote "I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified"

When an athlete wakes up at 5am and sees that it is raining he might want to just give up and go back to bed. But discipline prevents that, as it ensures that the training program is not cast aside so lightly. So too for us in our walk with God, we must maintain a discipline in our training. In our case that means reading the word and spending time in prayer. Being disciplined, when you are young and well, will mean that when you are older, or ill, it will not be so easy to cast it aside.

Jesus' own brother James reminded us that "For examples of patience in suffering we should look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We give great honour to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a

man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy”

In another example, when speaking about God’s people, the prophet Isaiah wrote that “In all their sufferings, he also suffered, and he personally rescued them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them through all the years” And also “He will carry the lambs in his arms”.

Thinking back to our story, Derek was in trouble, he wasn’t going to finish the race in that condition and his father, Jim, knew it. He had to get to his son to help him get him over the line. And so it is with us, God will do everything He can to get you over the line.

Be encouraged that your training will be enough to finish the race well and that when the going gets tough the Father will come to your side to get you over the line.

One last thought, again written by the apostle Paul, he says “I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from the God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord”

Amen



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