

Running the Best Race By Looking to Jesus

Spring Conference 2021

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Brother, you left two of your four books. Before the day's out, I'm going to sell him another four. He doesn't know....

Well, that was a tremendous breakfast from the elders. Thank you so much. It was almost as good as my wife's breakfast.

We're going to read from Hebrews 11, spilling over into Hebrews 12. You recall that Hebrews 11 is this wonderful roll call of heroes of faith in the Old Testament and the author to the Hebrews is giving them this roll call to say, "You Hebrew Christians are discouraged because you're being persecuted, your pastors are being thrown in prison, you're not getting the jobs because you're a Christian that you'd ordinarily get, but don't be discouraged, the Old Testament saints persevered to the end, and here's a whole bunch of examples. Why are you hesitating? Why are you letting your hands hang down and your knees grow feeble?" So there's this long list and then in the opening verses of chapter 12, we have the practical imperative, the climax of the practical imperatives of the entire epistle.

So I'm just going to pick up at verse 37 in Hebrews 11 and read through Hebrews 12:3.

37 They were stoned [that is, the Old Testament saints], they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And these all [that is, all these Old Testament saints], having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses [that is, all these Old Testament saints are like a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, encouraging us], 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, 2 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. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Well, this morning I want to look at verses 1 and 2 with you in this first address, and then verse 3 in the second address, and the title of these two talks this morning is first, "Running the Best Race By Looking to Jesus," and then verse 3, "Coping with Suffering By Considering Jesus."

Let's pray.

Lord God, we thank thee so much for Jesus Christ, for how, as we've just heard in our brother's prayer, he is so many things to us, that he is everything indeed, all and in all. And as we look at Solus Christus under two more aspects this morning, the aspect of running the Christian race Christ-centeredly and then the aspect of coping with all our suffering Christ-centeredly, we pray that Solus Christus may be our all and in all in these two major areas of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, when someone asks you, "Tell me how you were converted," you probably tell them how you became a lost sinner before a holy God, how Christ was revealed to you through the word be it by some sermon or some fellowship group or just by reading the Bible or a combination of things, and you tell them how you found freedom in Christ and then you stop and really what you've told them is not so much your life of conversion, which is a whole lifestyle from the moment you're born again to the moment you die, what you've told them really is how you got regenerated, how you began the Christian life. So this word "conversion" is a little bit tricky because we use it for regeneration, how we got born again, and we also use it for living the entire Christian life, and what I wanted to say by way of introduction is that both uses of this term are really miracles. It's a miracle when you're born again but it's also a miracle when you persevere in the Christian faith all the way to the end.

When I was a teenager and came to my dad to tell him that the Lord had called me powerfully to the ministry, my dad began to give me lots of lessons, he was an elder in the church for 40 years, and one of the things he said to me that I never forgot was, "Remember when you get into ministry one day, it's very easy relatively to begin something but it's challenging to keep it up." That's true. If I were to announce in my church I'm starting a Thursday evening class on some interesting subject next week, I'm sure we'd have 300 people come out or thereabouts, but two years later, how many people would there be? I'd be happy with 150. You see, it's a miracle to be born again, that's wonderful and it makes a wonderful story of how God drew you, but the daily life of being a Christian, the daily life of persevering is also a miracle.

In a few weeks we'll be commemorating Pentecost again. Well, you know the big Pentecost text is Acts 2:4, the Holy Spirit filled them and they spoke with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. That's the text, but most people don't realize that just as big a text, in many ways, is Acts 2:42, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine

and breaking of bread in fellowship and prayers." Persevering. When your hands hang down, when disappointment promotes discouragement and discouragement drives us to our knees and we feel weak and tired emotionally and spiritually and are tempted to give up, when the days of, may I say it this way, spiritual COVID don't seem to end, and we say, "What's the use?" We say with Asaph, "Verily, I've cleansed my heart in vain." What's the use of persevering and enduring when everything seems hopeless? So how do you persevere? Well, the answer is Solus Christus. You persevere, you endure as Christ endured when he was tempted to surrender in the battle of spiritual warfare. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will but thine be done." We walk as he walked, by his grace and by his strength.

So I want to look at this theme with you of running the best race by looking to Jesus from Hebrews 12:1-2 this morning, and we're going to look at three simple thoughts. Its mission, that is, the mission of running this best race. Second, its manner, how do you run it? And third, its motives, what motivates you to keep running the Christian race and not to give up? So mission, manner, and motives.

Now the author of the book of Hebrews wrote to Jewish Christians who were being persecuted, who were discouraged, who were being marginalized from society, and these discouraged Jewish converts, he tells them, were paying too much attention to Christ-rejecting Jews and these Christians were living too much by the fear of man and too little by the fear of God. God was small and people were big and they were getting their priorities mixed up. They felt beaten down, beaten back, ostracized by the society around them and certainly we live in such a society today. I mean, when most of us who are a bit older grew up, we couldn't imagine the rejection of the Christian views that we espouse as happening in America today. I think of my own father who died on the pulpit and went straight to glory, he had a massive heart attack and fell over and went straight from the pulpit to be with the Lord 27 years ago now, 28. Twenty-eight years ago. It seems like yesterday, but if he were to come back to us today and see what's being said about Christians, how discouraging. What discouragement we face as Christians. Really the Hebrew experience isn't much different than what we're experiencing today. There are pastors being thrust into prison just for having their churches open in Canada and it's coming, no doubt, here as well.

So the entire book of Hebrews is written for one purpose, to encourage the discouraged Christian. I once had to do a conference address on just the whole book of Hebrews. That's quite a task and I read it through 2-3 times and suddenly I realized as I never had before, that endurance, endurance is the theme of this book and I counted 96 verses in 13 chapters, 96 verses on the theme of endurance, keep on keeping on, hold fast your profession, run the race, 96 verses of encouragement not to give up, to keep on keeping on, as Winston Churchill put it in his famous address to a number of graduates. Well, that's actually the main theme of these climax verses as well in Hebrews 12:1, 2 and 3. Run with patience. The original Greek word there in verse 1 is run with endurance, and then verse 2, Jesus endured the cross, and verse 3, considering him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself. So what I'm saying to you is this: this is the

mission of every Christian, to endure. It's not over when you first get converted, rather you've got to live the life of conversion.

So we had a pastor in our circles who used to say it this way. By nature we're walking with our back to God, and as we walk along, God stops us and he says, "Halt," and then he says, "About face," and that's the moment of regeneration, you see, you're turned around. But the word "converted" also means to be turned around so that's when you get converted, converted initially. But then he says, "Forward march," and for the rest of your life, you want to be walking in the face, the lovely face, the favor of Jesus Christ, you want to be going forward in the Christian life, you want to be running the best race ever and that's the continued life of conversion and that's what we're dealing with here. That's our mission. That's our mission, we must run and keep on running.

Now what the author does here is rather intriguing because whether it's Paul who wrote this or someone else, he's painting for us one of the great Greek coliseums and much like we know the French bikathon today, it just goes on and on and on for, what is it, a week or two weeks? They just keep riding their bikes miles and miles and miles. So in New Testament times, they did with running. They would hand the baton on to someone else after a long while, then they'd keep on running and fans would fill the stands and keep shouting to the runners to keep on running, keep on running. Now the goal in the long Greek marathons was that the runners would not sprint, they'd be tired in no time, but they had to set a good pace. They had to run at a good pace and not let their hands hang down and their feet, knees grow feeble and not to be injured and be sidelined, but they had to run steadily. Steadily, that's the picture he's painting for us here and not to be shaken up with every little persecution, disappointment, trial in life, but to keep running, to keep running, keep running, always, always, always Solus Christus, looking to Jesus.

So the goal of the Christian life is to make a steady use of the means of grace, reading and searching the scriptures, daily engaging in personal intercessory prayer, reading sound literature, fellowshiping among the saints, keeping the sabbath every Lord's Day, drinking in the sermons, living out the sermons. Keep running using the means of God's provision, looking to Jesus in all the means. That's our mission. Simple, yes. Can we be easily distracted? Yes, because of our natural tendency to live by things we see rather than by faith in an unseen Jesus.

So the call of the book of Hebrews is you keep running, you press on, you keep looking Solus Christus. You keep saying with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." But that raises the question now: what is the manner of running? How do we run? It's wonderful to say, well, we've got the means of grace and you run steadily, but how do we do it? And our text gives us two ways. I might call one way negative, and the other way positive.

So look at verse 1 with me. First of all, we run it by laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us, running with endurance the race that is set before us. Now laying aside every weight. That's so picturesque because when the Greek runners, much like runners today, when they get out in the racetrack, they'd have all this paraphernalia

with them in their hands and they'd have clothing on and they'd give all the paraphernalia to their coach, they'd take off all their clothing except the bare minimum they need, and they didn't want, you see, anything to encumber them, nothing to trip them up, and the author to the Hebrews uses that as an example of the encumbrances that sin brings into our lives. He says just as the runners lay aside every weight when they go out to run in the Greek coliseum, so you, Christian, you must lay aside every sin, the sin which so easily besets us.

Now there are three, actually, three interpretations that scholars have given to exactly what the word "the sin" means here. Interpretation number 1: "the sin" means that everyone has their own darling, bosom, besetting sin, as the old divines used to call it, a bosom sin, a darling sin, a besetting sin, something that trips you up in running the Christian race or easily can if you're not very careful, and hopefully every one of you right now can think, if you're a Christian, about what that sin might be. Something tempts you more than other things. When I was your age, teenagers, it was basketball. I lived basketball. I was going to be, yeah, I was going to be a star basketball player in college, and I had to give it up because it interfered with my Christian life, consumed too much of my time. I don't say you have to give up basketball but, you see, it's something that can be legitimate even in the eyes of other Christians but maybe it's consuming an inordinate amount of time. Maybe you're a shopaholic, internetaholic, but something that consumes you, that draws you away from running the race. Or it can be, of course, an outright sin, something that by its very nature is generically sinful, which is terrible. But that's one interpretation, you see, a sin that can hinder you in running the race. It can be fear. It can be love of things, cares of this life, certain relationships, professional duties, recreational pursuits. If these things take up an undue proportion of our time and heart, they can hinder us in running the Christian race.

The second interpretation is that the sin that hinders us, "the sin," is simply unbelief, the mother sin of all sins. That makes a lot of sense in this context because all of Hebrews 11 is saying, "Your problem, Hebrew Christians, is that you're not living by faith like the Old Testament saints, by faith Abraham, by faith Noah, by faith Joseph, by faith Rahab, etc. Now you're not living by faith and that's why you're being discouraged, therefore set aside the sin of unbelief." And certainly that's a sin we've got to put a sword through by the grace of God, because unbelief will trip us up at every step of the way in running the Christian race. Very legitimate interpretation given the context in particular.

The third view is that sin is just sin and what he means to say here is you've got to put a sword through all sin. All sin is bad. All sin is spiritual insanity. Any sin can trip us up in running the Christian race. And that makes sense too, doesn't it? Actually all three interpretations are legitimate and maybe they all have truth in them. Sin is dreadful. All sin is dreadful. There's no such thing as small sin in the sight of God. Sin interrupts our relationship with God. Sin is anti-God. Sin wants to dethrone God, especially proud sin, selfish sin, worldly sin. Sin is spiritual insanity.

So it's not easy, is it, to put off sin, to take off the baggage, the encumbrances of sin and run the race just looking solely to Jesus but that's what we're called to do in running this

race. Actually, as Christians we have no business sinning. I had an elder in my church when I first came 34 years ago who died shortly thereafter but his dad was also an elder way before my time, and he used to tell me, he'd say, my dad said to us when we were boys, "Son, if you're a Christian, you ain't got no business sinning." Doesn't make much sense grammatically but it was powerful in his life. "You ain't got no business sinning." And really that's scriptural, isn't it? Romans 6:11, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "Romans 6:11 is more of a help to me than any other text in the entire Bible in living and running the Christian life. "Reckon yourself dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord," because you're a Christian. You see, we should give ourselves no open window space for sin. If you're serious about running the Christian life and you want to live to Jesus, you want to live Solus Christus and you know that Jesus hates sin, that Jesus suffered and died and bled to pay for your sin, once you understand that every sin is like a fresh slap in the face of Jesus, the Jesus whom you love, we ought to shut the window, don't you think, on every known sin and pray against unknown sins.

I was once visiting with a woman when I was in Wales and she was an 85 year old feisty Christian. Oh, was she feisty but godly. And she was telling me that one day three thieves broke into her home and they bound her up, blindfolded her, sat her in a chair, and they began taking things and she could hear when they got to her grandmother's heirloom china. She could hear them banging it together and they were stealing that as well. She got very upset with them so she said to them, "You thieves, you don't belong here and God will one day bring you into judgment for what you're doing." And one thief sat down beside her and began to commiserate about his deprived childhood, and the other two thieves began to mock with the third thief, and then they got in an argument together and they ended up leaving, forgetting the china. So that story ended all well, but I thought later, you know, what that woman said was very interesting because she said, "Thieves, you've got no business being in this home," and as John Bunyan said in his classic, "The Holy War," that most sin enters through two gates into man's soul, either the ear gate or the eye gate. So, you see, those doors that enter into our soul, we should carefully guard them, protect them, and say to the Lord, "Give me grace not to let any sin come in ear gate or eye gate. Help me to lay aside every sin, to put the sword through sin, and just run the race and look to Jesus because I'm a Christian. I've got no business sinning."

So when the temptation to sin comes, here's what we should do. We should say, "What? Me, sin against a God who has done everything for me? Sin against Solus Christus? Of course not. O my soul, reckon yourself dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Repudiate sin. "Thief, be gone! You're trying to steal my relationship with Jesus. You're trying to interrupt me. You're trying to get me to backslide. Be gone, you've got no business being here!" Go to Jesus. He's my head. "You have to conquer me, you have to conquer him and you can't do it. I've got the victory through Jesus." We're more than conquerors through Jesus. Solus Christus.

That's how Martin Luther used to deal with the tempting devil. You know, Luther said the devil was very very real to him. He said when God becomes real to a Christian, the devil becomes real too because the devil wants to destroy you. And the devil would tempt him. Sometimes Luther would talk out loud to the devil even and he'd say things like this,

"Devil, you're at the wrong address. If you want me, my head is in heaven. He's the one who rules me. He's the one who governs me. To get at me, you have to get him and he's beyond your reach, Satan, so just be gone, Satan. You have nothing to do with me because I'm in Christ. I reckon myself dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

So that's one way to run the Christian race, negatively, that is, anti-sin which is anti-God. Now the second way to run the Christian race, the second manner, is, of course, positively. You can never run the Christian race effectively if you're only doing the "thou shalt nots." The negative aspect of the Christian race will never capture your whole heart, only Jesus can do that. You need the positive. You need to be looking to Jesus to run the Christian race.

When I was in high school, I ran track and there was a guy who was our coach who always counseled us, "When you run the race, don't ever look back. Don't look over your shoulder, especially not around the last bend," he said, "but keep your eye on me. I'll be at the end of the race. Keep your eye on me. If you turn around and you look where the other guys are coming around behind you as you're running, you'll lose about a quarter of a step and that might be the difference in the race. So you keep looking to me." And you see, that, that is something of what the apostle who wrote this is trying to press upon us. Jesus Christ is our exemplar. He's run the race before us. He's our model runner. He's also our coach and we are to look to him by confessing him, by appropriating forgiveness, by learning to live out of him and by him and through him and unto him, to live by faith as a forgiven sinner as we run the Christian race looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

So just as the Old Testament saints lived by faith in the promises of God, so we surrounded by them as a crowd of witnesses, must focus on Jesus alone in whom all those promises are yea and amen. So enduring is a matter of faith and this faith depends on looking to Jesus Christ. So Jesus is the answer. Solus Christus. Jesus is our uniquely qualified supplier and sustainer of faith. He evokes and stimulates our faith. He's the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He will not allow a single one of his children to fall to the side of the road or the racetrack because he's the finisher of the faith of his runners. He takes us from origin to completion, from beginning to end. He's the Alpha and he's the Omega. He's a supreme exponent of faith.

My mother died maybe 8-9 years ago now. She was 92 at the time. She was an only child. She had 92 great grandchildren when she died and 35 grandchildren, one great great grandchild. She was just a model mother, God-fearing mother, prayer warrior, but the last 18 months she got dementia. It was tough. She didn't know who I was. She couldn't remember my dad. Couldn't remember him. Married to him for 52 years. All she could remember were the psalters she learned when she was a child. She could sing the whole psalter 140. She could sing all four verses, every word. And once in a great while she'd have a little flash of insight like people with dementia often have, but about six weeks before she died, I was trying to get her to focus on heaven and I said, "Mother, do you long to be there?" And she said, "Honey," she called everybody honey, "I'm too tired

to think about it." So I thought, I'll read Revelation 21 anyway. So I read Revelation 21 to her about heaven, I got to the verse, "I'm Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," the first letter of the Greek alphabet and the last letter of the Greek alphabet, and I said, "Mother, do you know what that means?" And as soon as I said that, I thought, "Ah, that was a foolish question. Of course she doesn't. You're just going to make her feel like a fool." But all of a sudden she had a flash of insight and she said, "Doesn't that mean that Jesus is the beginning of our salvation and he's the end of our salvation?" Then she added to the text, in seminary we called that eisegesis instead of exegesis, she said, "And he's everything in between." I go, "Wow, that's a better answer than I would have given you. It's fantastic." That's Jesus, you see. We run the Christian race looking to him. He's the beginner, he's the concluder, he's Alpha and Omega and he's everything in between. He is, indeed, as your pastor just prayed, the everything of our salvation.

So the way we run the Christian race is we negatively cast aside sin and we positively look to Jesus and we keep our eye on Jesus through the Bible, through the means of grace, and whatever honors him we want to do, whatever dishonors him we don't want to do. That's how you run it. That's how you endure. But that leaves us with something else that's important, that's my third thought, how do you get motivated to do this? So many distractions in life. How do you stay motivated on the racetrack? Well, that's an important question in any sport or even in your daily exercise. It's one thing to say, "You know, I really need to exercise. I need to keep fit." It's another thing to go out and do it and probably every one of us has struggled with getting motivated to do in many areas of our lives what we know we need to do and that's really true spiritually because so much of what we need to do spiritually are not things tangible, they are things spiritual.

How do you stay motivated? Well, there's two major motivations in this text. One is Jesus himself and that motivation actually is broken into four parts in verse 2. Let's look at them all very briefly and quickly. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith," it doesn't stop there but then it gives us four-fold motivation, "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." So Jesus is not only our Savior, he's not only our exemplar, he's not only our Alpha and Omega, he's not only our coach, he's also our motivation.

Way number 1 he motivates us: by what he endured. See what the text says, "who for the joy that was set before him endured," what? "The cross." The cross. He endured the cross of Calvary. He died for you. Ought that not to motivate you to live for him and to take your little crosses and put them up in the same light of his big cross and say if he carried that big cross for you, can you not carry a little cross for him? That's the way to live. Remember what he did, remember what he endured, remember that he hung in the naked flame of his Father's wrath for six long hours on the cross. No eye of mercy being cast toward him saying, "Lord Jesus, we understand what you're going through." Remember what he endured when the cry of dereliction escaped his lips, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In order to pay for your sin remember that every thorn in his crown is your sin, my sin. Every spear thrust in his side is your sin, my sin. Every nail in his hands and feet is your sin, my sin. Every agony in his soul he underwent for your sin and my sin. The agony of the cross is unbelievable. Jesus endured the cross even when he

felt abandoned by God. He kept on going even when no grace was extended to him, no favor shown, no comforted minister, no part of the cup of his Father's wrath removed. That ought to motivate you to run for him all the way, all the way to the end.

Secondly, we're motivated by Jesus by what he rejoiced in. You notice what the text says, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,." That's amazing, even on the cross he knew the joy that was before him, in fact, he had a moment of joy on the cross when he said to the thief, when he said it, I think the nails of both him and the thief were forgotten at that moment, "Verily, verily I say unto you, today thou shalt be with me in paradise." He rejoiced, you see, in saving that thief. He rejoiced unto the cross knowing he would be the victor in the battle with the powers of evil, knowing he would soon be resurrected by his Father, knowing he would soon be taken home to glory to receive his promised reward. The joy that was set before him was the joy of his own homecoming, the joy of reunion with his Father, the joy of being crowned with honor and glory and having all things put under his feet, the joy of bringing many sons to glory, the joy of saying one day, "Here am I, Father, and all those whom thou hast given to me," and hopefully you and I will be included in the "all those."

What a joy for Jesus to present to his Father his entire elect church on the great day to come. There will be no empty chairs in heaven. There's a place for everyone and you and I ought to be motivated by that, you see, the joy of many sons being brought to glory. You know, one of my greatest joys in life is thinking about meeting people in glory that God may have used me for, for their conversion here in this life. I feel like Samuel Rutherford when he said, "To meet a soul from my church, to meet that soul in heaven will make heaven a double heaven for me." Oh, the joy that is set before a preacher knowing that he will meet people in heaven that he never knew in this world, that he was used for their eternal conversion. It's just overwhelming. But that can be for you as a Christian too when you lead others to Christ.

But think also of the joy, just yourself, of coming into sin-free Immanuel's land. Doesn't that encourage you at times to press on knowing that all shall be well in the end, all the riddles and vexations of life will be unriddled, will be straightened out in the end and you'll enter into heavenly glory, into heaven a world of perfect love. There is a utopian marriage coming, it's the utopian marriage with Jesus Christ. The joy that is set before you is so great that Paul says all the afflictions he went through in this life are but small compared to that. Let that motivate you, that the best is yet to be.

Then, third, we're motivated by what Jesus despised. He despised the shame, verse 2 says. He despised the shame. That's interesting, isn't it? To die naked on the cross on the main thoroughfare going out of Jerusalem as a spectacle and to have mothers walk by with their kids and point to the three figures there and say, "Don't you ever be like them," is a very shameful way to die. Shameful way to die. But Jesus despised the shame because he knew he was on that cross in your place, dear believer, and he had to fulfill his Father's will. You see, people weren't big and God small, for him God was big and people were small and his meat and drink was to do his Father's business, and the essential aspect of that business was to die for sinners like you and me, and that ought to

motivate us, ought to motivate us to live by the fear of God and not by the fear of man. It ought to motivate us not to think so much about what a few people think about us, but what does God think about you. That ought to motivate you to run the race set before you.

Then, fourth, we ought to be motivated by the last part of verse 2, he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. I love those words. I think the intercession of Christ is the most underestimated doctrine, even by Reformed preachers, in the Bible. Now why do I say that? Because the Bible tells us he's sitting at the right hand of the Father ever living to make intercession for us. Do you know what that means? That means every single second of your life, if you're a believer, Jesus is interceding for you. You see, we only have the capacity to intercede for one person at a time. Our mind is finite. His mind is infinite. He can intercede for his entire church all at one moment, and he can intercede for every individual believer of that church, millions of them at the same moment. You can't comprehend it and neither can I, but you can't comprehend how he can be God and man in one divine person either, can you? He's infinite. He's far above us. Every tick of the clock, tick, tick, tick, tick, he's remembering you, remembering you, remembering you, remembering you, remembering you, remembering you. Wow. "Who will condemn us," says Paul in Romans 8:34, "Jesus Christ is risen and is interceding for you at the right hand of God. You've got a guaranteed victory. We are more than conquerors through Solus Christus. Don't despair. Be motivated by him who sits at the right hand of the throne of God. He will take care of you. He will govern you. By his Spirit, he will lead you all the way to glory. He will be your breaker to go before you all the way to the celestial city."

So be motivated, be motivated to run the Christian race by Jesus, by what he endured, by what he despised, by what he rejoiced in, and by what he's doing now at the right hand of God and then one more thing. So we have this four-fold motivation directly from Jesus but we also get motivated by the witness of the saints. Go back to verse 1, the first part, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." Wherefore let us... The idea is let these saints motivate you, Hebrew Christians, let the Old Testament saints motivate you.

I remember when I was 17 years old, I read Genesis 5:24 as if I never read it before, "Enoch walked with God," and I remember just falling on my knees with tears and saying, "That's what I want, Lord. I want to walk with thee." What does that mean, "he walked with God"? Enoch motivated me. Hasn't David ever motivated you in the Psalms? I think so. Hasn't Paul ever motivated you in the epistles? We don't only have the Old Testament saints in our stands like the Hebrew Christians, we've got all the New Testament saints in our stands, and what about all the figures in church history? We've got 2,000 years worth in our stands. Samuel Rutherford is my stand and John Calvin and Whitefield and Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones. Martin Luther said, "Most of my best friends are dead. They're sitting on my shelves. I feel like I know them by reading their literature. They're in my stand." That's why good books that really bring out the word of God are so precious, you see. You feel bonded to J. C. Ryle or John Bunyan or Thomas Goodman or Wilhelmus a Brakel, or female writers like Mary Winslow and Ruth Bryan, so rich, so

full of Christ. They're in your stands. They motivate you. They say to you, "Keep on running."

Then what about loved ones who have passed away? You've heard me already talk about my mom and my dad. They're in my stands. One of the last things my dad said to me when he went through an aneurysm surgery, thought he was going to die, got us around him, spoke some words of farewell and came to me, here's what he said, "Son, keep on preaching Christ. You can never preach him enough." Solus Christus. I still hear those words sometimes even while I'm preaching, "Keep on preaching Christ."

Now what about people that are alive? God's people, it's kind of interesting, I'm getting a little imaginative here but in one way they're running the race themselves, in another way they're in our stands as well, cheering us on, aren't they? Isn't that what church is all about, the communion of saints as you feed into each other's lives and encourage each other? You're in each other's stands. My wife is in my stands, big time. Four or five times a year, it seems, I get this overwhelming feeling, I just can't preach, and I'm driving to church on a Sunday morning and just can't do it. To be the mouthpiece of God and feel like you don't have much to say? It's overwhelming and I get quiet at those times and she looks at me and she says, "You've got it again, don't you?" I say, "Yup." And she leans over and she puts her hand on my wrist and she says, "Honey, he'll help you one more time." Oh, one more time. One more time. She's in my stands.

You know, I preached about this in my own church one time, and I had a young man who gave me more trouble in Catechism class than anyone I've ever experienced in 40 some years. He just wanted to ask me trick questions. He didn't want to be there. He was a thorn in the flesh. I prayed for him but you know how it is, sometimes you pray for something you don't believe the Lord will even answer, it just seems so hopeless. But after I preached this sermon, I thought maybe the Lord was working in him or dealing with him for some things I noticed but I wasn't sure yet, but he came to me on a Monday morning in my study, he burst into my study room at the seminary and he was weeping and he said, "Pastor, I just want to thank you for being in my stands." Oh, I said, "Has the Lord been working in you, brother?" "Yeah," he said, "yeah." He couldn't talk. He was so overwhelmed. "Just thank you for being in my stands." Who's in your stands and for whom are you in their stands? Are you motivating each other to look to Jesus to run the Christian race to the end? That's the way to live. That's the way to die. Solus Christus, running the race, laying aside sin, looking to Jesus.

Well, I want to close this sermon with two illustrations again. The first is this. My wife and I are from Grand Rapids, Michigan. There's not a lot of touristy things to do in Grand Rapids. Probably one of the most touristy things to do is to go see the Gerald Ford Museum. Grand Rapids is kind of proud that Gerald Ford grew up in Grand Rapids and when he died he wanted to be buried in Grand Rapids. My wife and I, along with hundreds and thousands of other people, were lined up on the highway, on both sides of the highway where the hearse would go through and from the airport to the Ford Museum where he would be buried. There was a little boy on the other side of the highway who had a sign above his head that was bigger than he was and he was kind of joyfully

moving that sign around and the sign said, "Welcome home, President Ford." I thought, "Isn't that amazing? There's a boy that's so happy to welcome home a dead body to Grand Rapids." But you see, when you run the race, the day is coming when the angels, the seraphim, the cherubim, the redeemed made perfect will line the highway, as it were, to the entrance of the celestial city and when you come down that highway, not dead but alive with a resurrected body and a living soul and hear the redeemed and the angels join in a kind of choir crying out to you, "Welcome home, sinner saved by grace," you will enter forever into the joy of your Lord. Keep on. Keep on keeping on. The best is yet to be.

But if you're not a believer, then I want to leave you with this illustration. There was once a Northern Scotland shepherd boy who bedded down his sheep one night and there was a ferocious storm, there was a viaduct, a train track going over the valley where he was, and in the middle of that night that track broke, the viaduct broke, and in the morning the track was laying in the valley and the boy ran up the embankment, he got up in time to wave down the train that was coming to tell the conductor to stop but the conductor just waved him away. So the boy threw himself across the track and the conductor stopped, slammed on his brakes, ran over the boy, stopped the train just in time before it went down into the abyss. Everybody got out of the train, they ran to the valley, they looked, they saw the mangled track, then they saw the mangled remains of the shepherd boy and no one said a word. No one said a word until finally an old man, an old man said, "That boy there, that boy there, he saved my life!" And if Jesus Christ is not your Solus Christus, if he's not your everything, your total salvation, your number one, your life, your love, your treasure, your Savior, your Lord, I say to you, "Stop the train of your life now before you go down into the abyss." And don't rest until you can say, looking at the cross of Calvary, "That God-man there, that God-man there who throws himself across the track of my life in every sermon and offers me himself every Lord's Day and every time I open the Bible, that God-man there, he saved my life!" Amen.

Let's pray.

Great God of heaven, please bless, bless this word that we might run the race set before us, looking to Jesus, laying aside sin, being motivated by him and the saints around us to persevere to the end. O Lord God, help us, we pray, to run the race Solus Christus. In Jesus' name. Amen.