

**In the name of our Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

<sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. **This is God's Word.**

**Dear Friends,**

How many of you like to run? It is a lot easier when you are younger and have energy to burn but it can be fun as you get older too. But if you are serious about it, you have to have the right equipment and you have to train – especially if you are running a longer race like a marathon.

That is the picture Paul wants us to think about in this portion of scripture – running the marathon of life. And of course the 1<sup>st</sup> question that comes to mind is, **“Are You Ready for the Race?”** Because this is no ordinary race – **“It's a Race for an Eternal Prize,”** and **“It's a Race which Requires Constant Effort.”**

**I.** The best part of winning a race is the prize. Sometimes it is a trophy or a medal you can hang around your neck. When Paul wrote this it wasn't so fancy. If you won the race you would get a laurel wreath to wear on your head. Everyone knew that this meant you were the winner but as you might imagine, this crown soon withered and the leaves fell off and it didn't last.

But the race through life that we are running has a more permanent crown as the prize. The prize we want is the **“crown of glory”** reserved for believers in heaven. John wrote, **“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”** (Revelation 2:10). But what does it mean to be faithful? And to what are we faithful in order to receive this crown?

Some people might think that they should be faithful to themselves. To be a good person and to do good things. We certainly want to be a good person and that sounds good – even logical but that puts a lot of pressure on us and if we are honest with ourselves – it is hard to be good and to do the right thing all the time. And if we listen to God he wants us to be perfect but we all fall short of that requirement. So being faithful to yourself – thinking you can do it all yourself is not the answer because how can we measure up to what God demands? Well, we can't but that doesn't mean we are without hope.

God is good and gracious and he has a plan for us. The Apostle Paul explained God's plan this way, **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:21). God made his Son, Jesus, who was perfect in every way, to be sin for us. That means Jesus took the punishment we deserve for our sins. That is what the cross of Christ is all about – Jesus suffering in our place on the cross so that he could give us his righteousness to bring us forgiveness for our sins. That righteousness comes to us through faith which God gives us as a free gift. So we want to be faithful to God. We want to be faithful to Jesus – God's Son – who stepped in and did what we can't for us.

So we want to be faithful to Jesus to receive the prize – the crown of eternal life and we do that by trusting he has done everything for our salvation and by listening to him as he guides us through life by speaking to us with his Word – the Bible – God's Word.

It is God's Word that encourages us and helps us as we run this marathon we call life. And Paul reminds us that, **"It is a race that requires constant effort and training."** So, what kind of effort and what kind of training?

**II.** Every runner needs a good pair of shoes. Shoes that are comfortable and that will protect the feet. Sometimes shoes have to be broken in – worn so that the soles of the shoes conform to the soles of your feet and when a person gets a good pair of shoes broken in they don't want to give them up. Some of the guys I was stationed with in the Marines would have a good pair of shoes that fit just right that had pieces of duct tape holding them together. That's how much they liked their shoes. Without a good pair of shoes it is impossible to finish a marathon – a long race like the race through life.

But as we think of Paul's words, shoes are symbolic of what we really need to run the marathon of life. What protects us and helps us go up the hills and through the valleys of life? It's God's Word – the Bible. God's Word helps us to recognize the dangerous influence of the world and Satan. God's Word helps protect us by giving us strength to run away from the temptations that come our way every day. God's Word keeps us on the road – the path to heaven.

And yet, there are times when we think we can take our shoes off – the grass looks green and smooth – it won't hurt, matter of fact it might feel pretty good. That is how sin and temptation sometimes lures us away from God. It does feel good until we step on something sharp or hot – and we feel the pain of our foolishness. That's why Paul tells us to, **"Run in such a way as to**

**get the prize.”** Keep those shoes on – in other words, keep your Bibles close and use them, just like you would use and love a good pair of running shoes.

I think one of the best inventions they have made is colored duct tape. I use my Bible often and eventually it started to fall apart and then I found burgundy colored duct tape to wrap around it. I have a new Bible to replace this one but like a good pair of shoes I am comfortable with this worn book. I use it a lot and I have notes written in it and post it notes and I know where to open the pages to find what I want and I have a number of bookmarks.

It might be a little ugly but it's what I need as I run through the marathon of life and I don't want to get rid of it. If you were to visit my study you would see that I have two more Bibles I use quite a bit too. They are easy to identify because they are the ones that are held together by a bunch of tape. And I would hope that you too might have a Bible that is just as worn and just as used, but if not get to work and start training and making the effort as you run your race through life.

As we consider that idea of running a race and getting a prize at the end keep in mind that we are not working our way to heaven – we need God's help to run this race through life but we are running it because Jesus has already won the prize for us. The goal/prize has already been achieved for us by Christ who has run the perfect race for us. We run not to work our way to the prize or goal, but to grasp it or lay hold of it by faith (to be in the winner's circle with the one who has already won the prize for us.) That's God's love for us and the best kind of race to be in – a race where you know that you can't lose because Christ has already won for you and he gives you the winners crown.

So be what God has made you – a child of God running the marathon of life. Strive to live and love unselfishly because that is what Christ has done for you. Listen to God and his Word and let him give you strength and encourage you as he leads you through life along the path to heaven – a path of faith in Jesus Christ.

That doesn't mean we won't have to struggle up some hills filled with challenges as we run through life but as we run along we can count on the love of our Savior to give us motivation and strength to deal with the challenges that try to block our path and to run through them. You are up to this race because God has promised an eternal prize to all who finish in faith. So make the effort and be serious as you run the marathon of life. Run it with Jesus at your side and in your heart. Amen.