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THE GREAT RACE

Hebrews 12:1-2

Intro: Chariots of Fire

I. Fans Cheering for You: “A Great Cloud of Witnesses” (v.1a)

- A. Physical runners run best with a crowd
 - o “surrounded by” reflects coliseum imagery from Greco-Roman athletic competitions
 - o Cheering crowds motivate, inspire, encourage you as a runner
- B. Spiritual runners also have a crowd
 - o “great cloud of witnesses” refers back to all the saints in chapter 11
 - Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Samson, David are all cheering you on!
 - It can also refer to any saints around you today: parents, friends, siblings
 - o Why do we need this crowd? How do they help us?
 - Unlike normal athletic competitions, these fans are not there so much to see the runner, but so the runner sees them!
 - They remind you the race is not impossible; it can be finished; you are not alone
- C. Key Point: Don’t run alone! You were meant to run with God’s people

II. Freedom from Entanglements: “Lay aside every weight” (v.1b)

- A. Physical runners need to avoid hindrances
 - o In the Greco-Roman world, the common dress was a robe which one had to “lay aside” before they ran
 - o Runners would strip down to the bare essentials in order to run faster
- B. Spiritual runners need to avoid hindrances
 - o Lay aside “sin which clings closely”
 - Disobedience to God will ruin your running—you will trip, stumble, fall



- Persistent disobedience may even keep a person from finishing (apostasy)
 - NIV: "the sin that so easily entangles"
 - The point: you don't have to put sin on—it's already there. You have to take it off so you can run!
 - o Lay aside "every weight" (even if it's not sin!)
 - It doesn't have to be sinful to slow you down
 - Don't ask only whether something is wrong, ask whether it helps you run!
 - What are some things that can slow us down even if they are not sinful?
- ** Key Point: You are running for your life! So be ruthless with what you lay aside

III. Finish Line: "Looking to Jesus" (v.2-3)

- A. Physical runners need a finish line to look at
 - o Without a finish line, a runner can lose focus, get distracted, give up
 - o A sure way not to finish a race is to not have a finish line!
- B. Spiritual runners also need a finish line
 - o We have the greatest finish line imaginable: Jesus waits for us there!
 - Jesus is not just a spectator like the other saints, he's the finish line
 - Jesus is not just one who has faith, but is the "founder and perfecter of our faith"
 - Don't look around you while you run, look to Jesus! "so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted" (v.3)
 - o What can we learn from the way Christ ran the race?
 - #1: He ran with great endurance: "endured the cross"
 - o "endured from sinners such hostility" (v.3)
 - o Cross was not just about physical pain, but about shame
 - #2: He ran with a goal: "the joy set before him"
 - o Joy helps you run better than duty
 - o Eric Liddle: "God made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure"
 - #3: He received the reward: "seated at the right hand of the throne of God"

**Key point: Jesus is the goal and motivation for the Christian life. Don't take your eyes off him!



Discussion Groups

1. How's the Christian race going for you today? Are you tired or weary? Share honestly with the group.

2. What are some things that hinder your running today that you need to put aside, even if they are not sinful?

3. How are you encouraged today by Jesus' running? How does his example help you run the race better?

