

When the Race Has Been Run

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In Hebrews 12 we read: “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

As believers, the lives that we live can be compared to running a race. This race requires perseverance, and we have our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the life that He lived here on earth as our ultimate example of how this race should be run. And then one day, in God’s time and according to His will, plan and purpose, the race will come to an end for each of us. When that day comes for us, we will be with Him in Heaven, sharing in the glory in His Son Jesus Christ for eternity.

As we have seen from John 12:24-26, Jesus compared His life, and also the lives of all who would follow Him, to an individual grain of wheat, which must fall to the earth and “die” in order to bear fruit. The “death” of the grain of wheat, as

Jesus used the metaphor, means that we will be called upon to “die” to, or relinquish, our own will and what we would choose for ourselves in this life, and submit to God’s will and His plan for our lives. This “death” of the grain of wheat involves not only our turning away from sin, but it could also include our being called upon to give up many, or even all, of the things that we hoped to achieve or experience or have for ourselves in this life, if God should require it of us.

As we consider these things, we recall that in Luke 14:27 Jesus said: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” And again in Luke 14:33 He said: “none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions”. In place of all that we have or hope to have for ourselves in this life, we are called upon to accept the life and the place of service that our sovereign God has ordained for us, which will be revealed through the circumstances, conditions and limitations of our lives.

In John 12:24-26 Jesus revealed that all of us who serve Him must follow Him, experiencing a share in His sufferings as we also submit to our Father’s will and plan for our lives, just as He did. He also revealed that through this share in His sufferings, we will bear fruit, which will bring about for us a share in His eternal glory (Romans 8:17).

The sufferings that Jesus endured took many forms, as we can see from the Scriptures. He endured all of the sufferings mentioned in Isaiah 53. He was despised and rejected by men. He was a man of sorrows who was familiar with grief. He suffered unjustly at the hands of evil men. He endured false accusations, betrayal, and persecutions.

He suffered abandonment by those closest to Him (Matthew 26:56). He had no place to lay His head, no place on this earth to call home (Matthew 8:20). He bore the punishment due for the sins of others. He became poor for the sake of others so that they through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). And He endured the desolation of feeling that He had been abandoned by His Father God in the depths of His sufferings (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus also endured physical pain and suffering in His body. He suffered great pain as He was scourged and then crucified on Calvary’s cross. Peter wrote of this physical aspect of the sufferings of Christ in 1 Peter 4:1-2. In Isaiah 52:14, we also read that Jesus’ form and appearance was disfigured beyond that of any man, and many were appalled at Him.

Jesus' sufferings came about through no fault or wrongdoing of His own, and as believers, we share in His sufferings when we endure suffering that God allows to touch our lives apart from wrongdoing of our own. All of the undeserved sufferings that we experience, whatever form they may take, will bring grief and sorrow into our lives as all suffering does. And in this experience of grief and sorrow, we as believers share in the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3), in order that we may also share in His glory.

If however we should find ourselves suffering as a consequence of sin in our lives, then we can take comfort in knowing that God's discipline in our lives is itself a sign that we are indeed His. Those who are able to continue in their sin without God's discipline are illegitimate and not true believers (Hebrews 12:5-8).

If we are being disciplined by the Lord, then let us give thanks to God, knowing that we are among those who have received His mercy and forgiveness. Let us forsake our disobedience and leave it in our past, moving forward with the same mindset and attitude that the Apostle Paul had in his own life: "...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14).

The writer of Hebrews encouraged us again when he wrote: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:15-16). Our Lord and Savior, our faithful high priest Jesus Christ sympathizes with our weakness, and He has mercy and compassion for us.

With our God nothing shall be impossible (Luke 1:37), and He promises restoration for His people. In the book of Joel, after Israel had heeded God's call to forsake their sinful ways and return to Him, He promised to bless them, saying that He would repay them for the years of their lives that the devouring locusts had eaten (Joel 2:12-13, 18-27).

Now is Our Time of Grief...

In John 16:20-22, Jesus said that now is our time of grief. He said that during this present life we will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. But then

He encouraged us when He said that the day will come when we will see Him, and in that day no one will ever take away our joy again.

Though now is our time of grief as we share in the sufferings of Christ according to God's will for our lives, we are not left without help and comfort. Paul encouraged us when he wrote: "For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:5). Through Christ, the living Word of God, we have been given many promises of God's mercy, help, and provision for our lives as recorded in the Scriptures. And we have also been promised the grace and strength of Christ, which will be given to us in a measure sufficient to sustain us in our weakness and need (2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Philippians 4:13).

In Philippians 4:6-7 Paul encouraged us again when he assured us that God will give us His peace, which "surpasses all understanding", as we bring our requests to Him in prayer, with thanksgiving. God's peace transcends all human reasoning and understanding in that it is not a fragile peace that depends upon the continuance of favorable circumstances in our lives. Rather, it is a peace that will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus even through times of trouble and hardship.

If we should find ourselves in a hard place in life, or if we look back over the years lamenting of all the "good things" that we wanted for ourselves, but these things were withheld from us by our loving and sovereign God, then let us take comfort in knowing that we are among the few whom God has chosen and brought to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:13-14, 22:14, Luke 13:23-30). We are among the few who have been given an eternal inheritance "which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away" (1 Peter 1:4).

Let us also understand that for all of us who are called to faith in Christ, God has ordained that we must share in the sufferings of His Son, in order that we may also share in His eternal glory (John 12:24-26, Mark 10:35-40, Romans 8:17). When we consider the sufferings, losses and hardships of our lives, let us call to mind once again Paul's encouragement when he said: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18).

As believers we can be thankful in all of the circumstances of our lives, because God has ordained that all things will be made to work together for our eternal good, even the troubles and hardships which He allows to touch our lives.

We have been promised in God's word that all of our troubles will achieve for us an eternal weight of glory that far exceeds the weight and burden of the troubles themselves. And therefore Paul exhorted us to fix our eyes not upon the things of this world which are seen and are only temporal, but upon the things of God which are unseen and eternal (1 Thessalonians 5:18, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Our portion is not in this life; rather our citizenship and our reward are in Heaven. By God's grace we are no longer numbered with those of the world, upon whom Jesus pronounced woes. He characterized their lives in Luke 6:24-26 as those who have their comfort, consolation, and reward now, during this present life. By contrast, we are those who are blessed by God in that He has called us to faith in His Son. Jesus characterized our lives in Luke 6:20-23 as those who are poor, who hunger, and who weep now. We are excluded, insulted, and rejected because we belong to Christ, and the world hates us, just as Cain hated Abel (1 John 3:11-15).

In God's time, the day will come for every believer when our race has been run, and this present life will be over. At that time all of the days that God has ordained for our sorrows and our share in the sufferings of Christ will come to an end. As God's people, we can look forward to the day when "He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth...." (Isaiah 25:8).

One day according to God's plan, we will be citizens of the New Jerusalem, and as John prophesied in Revelation: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind." (Isaiah 65:17). The time will come for us when all of the "former things": the pain, the rejections, the betrayals, the afflictions, the hostility and harsh treatment, the losses of every kind, the struggles and threatening circumstances, the unfulfilled desires and longings, the suffering and sorrow of every kind, will come to an end and will come to mind no more.

... But Then We Shall See Him Face to Face

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12). In Paul’s day, mirrors were pieces of polished metal, which gave only a poor or dim reflection of one’s actual image. By way of comparison to this dim reflection, we cannot see or understand all that God is accomplishing through the sufferings and difficulties of our present life, because God requires of His people that we walk by faith and not by sight. It has been given to us to walk through this present life not by what we can see and understand, but by what God has said about Himself as revealed in His word (Isaiah 55:8-9, 2 Corinthians 5:7).

From reading the Book of Job, we find that it was not revealed to Job the reason that all of his sufferings and losses had come upon him. In the same way, many of us as God’s people will never fully understand in this life what God was accomplishing through our sufferings until we are finally together with Him in Heaven. At that time, as Paul encouraged us: “then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known”.

As God’s people we have been chosen from before the creation of the world to be brought to faith in His Son Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:4-5). We are those who have been appointed to eternal life (Acts 13:48), and it has been granted to us not only to believe in Christ, but also to share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death (Philippians 1:29, 3:10).

We share in the sufferings of Christ during our lives here on earth, and after this life is over we will receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls, and we will share in His glory in Heaven as the children of God. God began the work of salvation within us, and God Himself will carry this work through to completion (Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

In Revelation 7:9-17, John described the comfort and joy of the great multitude in white robes, the saints of God, who come from “every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues”. Within this passage, John wrote: “... they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to

springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”
(Revelation 7:15-17).

Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 2:9 that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has it ever entered into the mind of man the things God that has prepared for those who love Him. Since all that we as God’s people are able to see and understand of Him in this present life is but a dim reflection of what we will one day see and know, we will end this work with God’s words, and not man’s.

From the Apostle John, our “brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus” (Revelation 1:9), we have been given this vision of the risen Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. This is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom we shall one day see face to face. Having shared in His sufferings according to the will of God for our lives, we will also one day share in His glory. In Revelation 1:12-16, John wrote:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.