

For the Corinthians it started almost 2,000 years ago, a prelude as to what we know today as the Olympics. But unlike today's games where there are dozens of events, the Isthmus games only consisted of a few events, and there was only one main event.

The Stadion Race. A foot race of sheer endurance. It's unclear today just how far this race was, but one thing is clear. This race had no third place, it didn't have a second place. Only the runner who came in first place, who won the race, received the prize.

Friends tonight we too are running a race, a spiritual race of endurance. Much like the Stadion Race; the length and duration of ours is likewise unknown.

### **SLIDE 1- LOOK AT JAMES SAYS ABOUT OUR LIVES. (James 4:14)**

Life is full of uncertainty, that is the goal of Satan to cause, chaos, confusion, doubt, and uncertainty in our lives.

There are only a few things however that we can count on.

1. You're here and its now.
2. Statistically proven 100% of us will at some point in our life die and that includes you.
3. Finally, tonight you can have 100% certainty where you will spend eternity.

### **SLIDE 2- TOMBSTONE**

On our tombstone there are two dates. The date which we were born marks the beginning of our race and the date when we die marks the end. But in between those two dates there is a once inch dash mark. That dash mark is the 'mist' that James talks about. That one inch dash mark is the summation of your life, the accumulation of every decision you have ever made.

Researchers claim that the average person makes over 20,000 decision per day. Now we know that many of those are small insignificant decisions, but some are big and may have the potential in alter the course of your life, such as will I look both ways before crossing the street...

There is only one decision though that you can make that will not only alter how you live your life, but determines where you will spend eternity. If you haven't, you will have that opportunity tonight.

The athletes of the Stadion Race. It was customary for these runners to dedicate their training, which consisted of a strict 12 months of denying themselves, laying aside indulgencies, and pursued rigorous workouts daily to prepare them for one main event, and to dedicate their that race to one person.

Jesus ran a race too, and He dedicated His training and His race to the will of the Father, so that you and I may have life and life abundantly.

I challenge you to think about this:

**SLIDE 3-** Who am I running my race for?

\*Anyone or anything, yourself included, that you put more time, more effort, more energy, more devotion in, other than God is who you are running your race for.

**SLIDE 4** Galatians 1:10 says: <sup>10</sup> 'Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant.' NLT

Remember Satan's goal? To cause chaos, confusion, doubt, and uncertainty. Not serving or running for Jesus Christ opens the door all the more wider for Satan.

**SLIDE 5 Run FOR Jesus. He will give your life direction.**

- a. Proverbs 3:6 says, <sup>6</sup> in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

The athletes, the participants of the Stadion Race, competed completely nude. They hid nothing and they had nothing to hide because they had nothing to be ashamed of. You see, competing in the nude some 2,000 years ago was a method of accountability that they should not be found a cheater or accused of cheating in any way.

Turn with me to:

**Hebrews 4:13-** ' Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.'

God see's everything that we do, He knows our thoughts, **He knows our motives.** We can hide nothing from the eyes of God. One day, at the end of our race, at the end of my life, at the end of your life you will stand before the throne of God and give an account for what you did with Jesus Christ.

**SLIDE 6**

Did you accept Him or did your reject Him?

So then, how do we run our race, how do we live our life in way, well as Paul says, in a way that we will not be disqualified for the prize?

**Hebrews 12:1-2** says, 'Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us throw off **everything that hinders** and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (2) **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith...'

It starts with **fixing** your eyes on Jesus Christ and **recognizing** that I am a sinner, that you are a sinner and that our sin separates us from a Holy God and then letting Him refresh us.

You see we all mess up, I mess up everyday. **(Cell Phone Story)** So we repent, ask for forgiveness and move on. But you see, we will never be able to fully run the race and receive all the blessings that Christ has planned for you and for me with **consistent habitual sin** in our life. Maybe there is a sin that you are struggling with tonight. A sin that you know is wrong, but yet you continue to do it. I have been there too. Maybe its drugs, drunkenness, may be its pornography, lust, lying...selfishness anyone? How about disrespect? Whatever your habitual sin is,, tonight is the night to give it up to the Lord. You will never be able to completely break it on your own. You NEED Jesus in your life to break that habit.

**2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth, and the life. And the truth will set you free!"

ONLY Jesus can set you free! He who the Son sets free is free indeed!!

Verse 24- "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."

Paul knew that eternity was real. He was stoned and left for dead, its unclear if he was actually dead of if in the spirit but Paul does make one thing clear and that is what I have seen I can not put words too. Eternity...eternity is for real.

Paul believed eternity was real, Paul...he knew that eternity was real and when we came back he...from that time on ran for one thing...the prize! He had a sneak peek if you would of coming attractions. Paul ran for the prize because eternity is real.

Do you believe that Heaven and Hell are real? Do you believe that eternity is for real?

"Don't you know that in a race all the runners run, but only one received the prize?"

Understand this tonight: You are not competing against anyone, turn to your neighbor and say to them; *"I am not competing against you."*

You are competing against yourself. The gifts that God has given you. The talents and abilities that He has created in you. Jesus teaching on the talents makes that very clear. You are not competing against someone else, but what the Lord has entrusted to you. Are your gifts being developed for His glory? Are you bringing other people into the Kingdom?

**POINT 2- RUN IN A WAY THAT YOUR GOD GIVEN GIFTS EXPAND THE KINGDOM.**

That is the competition- Yourself.

VERSE 25- "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training." In order to qualify to compete in the games the athletes had to commit had to dedicate themselves into 1 year of strict training. They trained continually for one year so that they might be in the best possible condition to compete. They denied sexual indulgencies, gluttony, any possible enticement that would distract them or in any way compromise their goal; to win the prize. The prize was all that was on their hearts and minds.

As Christ Followers our training is also daily, our lives are to be committed to training in the Word of God.

**a. SLIDE 7- 2 Corinthians 13:5- Message Translation**

SLIDE 8- Colossians 3:1-3

SLIDE 9- 2 Timothy 3:16

**POINT 3- TRAIN IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOUR HEART AND MIND ARE SET ON JESUS.**

**Stay focuses on the finish line.**

**Benchwarmers**

Continuing in VERSE 25- "They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."

**SLIDE 10** Remember in the Stadion Race there was only one winner. Only first place. The winner of the race would step in the an area marked with smooth quartz stones, an area called the winners circle, and there they would be honored for their, dedication, their commitment, and their victory. That honor was a crown. A simple laurel wreath crown. Paul says that this crown will not last, but we (Christian) do it (run) to get a crown that will last forever.'

Maybe crowns aren't your thing, maybe that doesn't excite you. Too bad. You see the Bible specifically mentions five crowns.

I believe that the crown that Paul talks about here is linked to Proverbs 11- "He who wins souls is wise." Daniel 12 says, "The wise shall shine like the stars forever."

Timothy talks about a crown given to the righteous, who lead people to Jesus.

Understand this tonight, a crown will personally be given to you if you make your concern for the lost a priority in your life. If you lead people to Christ.

What Daniel wrote us in Ch12 gives us insight into what Paul later wrote us in 1 Cor. 15. Tonight when you leave here look up at the night sky, notice the stars. Some will shine brightly, others will be noticed, and yet some, even with a strained eye will be hardly visible.

1 Corinthians 15 says that is the way that it will be in Heaven. In Heaven there are different intensities, different vibrancies in heaven. Some of us will shine brightly, others a twinkle, and yet others as if just by escaping the flames. But in Heaven everyone is, and will be completely happy, completely satisfied, filled with joy. But our roles in heaven, what we are going to be personally responsible for will differ.

Our role in Heaven is directly linked to our developing the gifts that God has given us to lead people to righteousness. To lead people to Jesus.

I remember in elementary school made door holder for a week or so in my third grade class. I was so excited to have that position! I got to hold the door open for everybody, oh yay! Looking back at it now it just doesn't have the same impact on me as it did then, to tell you the truth it really doesn't excite me. My understanding has changed as I have matured...somewhat...but here is the key;

Jesus said in the parable of the talents, that some will rule over 10 cities, others 5, others 1. You know some of us might be door holders too. I don't know how it all works out, but I do know that we will all be completely happy.

Motive check! **Hebrews 4:13**- ' Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.'

God see's everything that we do, He knows our thoughts, **He knows our motives.**

**SLIDE 11- Colossians 3:23-24** <sup>23</sup>Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, <sup>24</sup>since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

**SLIDE 12- 1 Corinthians 9:23**

**SLIDE 13**

**POINT 4- THE CROWNS WE WIN ON EARTH DETERMINE OUR ETERNAL RESPONSIBILITY.**

Paul knew all this to be true, Paul believed it. What if you really truly believed it? What would you do differently? Wouldn't you want to be a stepping stone that led others to Christ?

I encourage you tonight to not waste your time, don't waste your gifts and abilities, I encourage you to wherever you are run in a way that expands the kingdom of God.

VERSE 26- "Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. (27) 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."

Paul ran his race with direction and with purpose. In short Paul dedicated his race to Jesus Christ.

Remember our first point tonight? **RUN FOR JESUS AND HE WILL GIVE YOUR LIFE DIRECTION.**

Again I ask you, who are you running your race for?

**SLIDE 14**

Proverbs 16:9, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."

Proverbs 3:6, "In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."

Psalms 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and light for my path."

VERSE 27- Paul says that he beats his body and makes it his slave. What implication does that have for you and for tonight? Simple. Take control of your body. Be in check, your spirit should bear witness with His spirit.

Christ has set us free, we are have freedom in Jesus! Be careful. You say oh, I can drink that, I can go there, I can check out that new bar, rent that video, go to the website..."all things are lawful unto me, I am free." Careful. If you are careless with your freedom and it causes someone else to sin, if you cause someone else to stumble in coming to know the Lord...well Paul says to make your body your slave lest you be disqualified for the crown.

Before you were saved, your body was in control. There was this hierarchy order that goes like this: Body, Soul, and Spirit. Your body or your fleshly desires were on top, your Soul is your mind, your thoughts, and emotions- they were controlled by your body. Finally your Spirit, the part of you that goes on living forever was on the bottom, being neglected. This is called being carnally minded. Romans says to be carnally minded is death.

Then BOOM you get saved, Christ comes to live in you. Now everything is different. Your spirit is on top now. What you think about in your soul is now a reflection of you being spirit led. What you use your body for now begins to have eternal value. There is nothing that you are struggling with tonight that Jesus Christ cannot change. You have to be willing.

One day we will all be part of that statistic. 100% of us in this room will eventually die. Our race is but a mist, we can only run for so long.

Today is the day of salvation. The Bible says, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." It really is that simple.

Run for Jesus, use your God given gifts for His glory, train daily to set your heart on the Lord, and win crowns for Christ.

Today is the day of salvation. And when you get to heaven and enter into the winner's circle and hear the voice of the Lord proclaim well done my good and faithful servant you will receive your crown and the bible says we will cast it back unto to the Lord, and some of us will rule over cities...then you will be so glad that you chose this night to run for Jesus Christ.

At the end of Paul's like he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will award to me on that day and not only to me but to all who have longed for His appearing."

Finish the race!