

LOVE WINS

Well Done!

The Death of Jesus

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19 v 28-30)

The Race:

Defeat! He lay there silently, a tear dropped from his eye.

"There's no sense running anymore – three strikes,
I'm out – why try?"

The will to rise had disappeared, all hope had fled away,
So far behind, so error prone, closer all the way.

"I've lost, so what's the use," he thought,
"I'll live with my disgrace."

But then he thought about his dad who
Soon he'd have to face.

"Get up," the echo sounded low,
"Get up and take your place.

You were not meant for failure here,
So get up and win the race."

With borrowed will, "Get up," it said
"you haven't lost at all,

For winning is not more than this –
To rise each time you fall."

So up he rose to win once more, and with a new commit,
He resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.

So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been,
Still he gave it all he had and ran as though to win.

Three times he's fallen stumbling,
Three times he rose again.

Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end.

They cheered the winning runner as he crossed,
First place,
Head high and proud and happy, no falling, no disgrace.
But when the fallen youngster crossed the line, last place,
The crowd gave him the greater cheer for
Finishing the race.
And even though he came in last,
With head bowed low, un-proud;
You would have thought he won the race,
To listen to the crowd.
And to his dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well."
"To me, you won," his father said.
"You rose each time you fell."

And now when things seem dark and hard
And difficult to face,
The memory of that little boy helps me in my race.
For all of life is like that race,
With ups and downs and all,
And all you have to do to win – is rise each time you fall.
"Quit! Give up, you're beaten," they still shout in my face.
But another voice within me says,
"Get up and win that race."¹

In life it's easy to give up – lots of people do. People give up on relationships, jobs, projects, diets, exercise regimes, dreams and sometimes even on themselves. Maybe, right now, you are on the verge of giving up. Maybe, in one area of your life, at the moment, you are feeling like you can go on no longer.

It would have been easy for Jesus to give up. Jesus was born to an unwed mother in a time when, if the law was applied to the letter, his mother could have been stoned to death. Jesus lived with that shame. Jesus experienced the terror of becoming a refugee when his family fled the persecution of king Herod. Jesus lived in a region in the time of an oppressive occupying power.

¹ Quoted in Farrah, Steve: *"Finishing Strong,"* The Doubleday Religious Publishing Group 2000, page 23-24
(Author Unknown)

Jesus was tempted by Satan for forty days. We tend to think there were just three temptations – because those are the ones we read about. But, Luke tells us that Jesus was tempted for forty days. It seems that Satan tried and tried and tried to tempt Jesus to take a short cut – not just three times, but many. And there is no reason to believe that at the end of those forty days, temptation stopped, never to return.

You might say, as we saw last week, that in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was tempted to find another way rather than go to the cross. Surely it would have been easier for Jesus to give up.

Those in his home town didn't believe he was who he said he was, the people who'd seen him grow up had their doubts. Jesus chose twelve men to be with him, but what frustration he must have felt as time and time again they failed to grasp the truth of who he was. How he must have despaired as Judas traded him for thirty pieces of silver.

How he was criticised and mocked as he befriended prostitutes, ate with corrupt businessmen, cared for the leper, the outcast, the widow, the poor, did good on the Sabbath and ministered to non-Jews. How hard it must have been for Jesus to experience the hatred of the religious leaders – those who should have known better. How it must have disappointed him when he saw the fickle nature of the crowds – one day cheering for him, the next buying for blood.

Jesus experienced the loneliness of being abandoned by his followers in his hour of need. The heartbreak he must have felt as Peter denies he even knows him. Jesus suffered the injustice of an illegal trial, lies were told about him in front of Herod. The crowd was manipulated by those who called themselves religious leaders. He was then exposed to a physical beating that often resulted in a person's death. Some people spat on him, and he had to endure the shame of the punishment reserved for criminals and the lowest members of society. His enemies gloated, onlookers insulted him and God, it seemed, abandoned him.

It would have been easy to give up at any stage before it got to that point. We would understand, wouldn't we, if he had? But, he didn't give up – he chose to finish, and finish well.

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²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19 v 28-30)

"It is finished," could be a cry of utter relief: "thank goodness that's over". "It is finished," could be a cry of joy: "I just made a way for all those my Father loves to come to him!" Jesus cried, 'It is finished!' He finished and finished well! And yet, it would have been easy to give up.

It was the eighth Olympiad of modern times. It began on July 5th 1924 in the city of Paris, over 45 countries were represented and a crowd of 60,000 packed the stadium. In the Great Britain team was a Scot named Eric Liddell. Liddell was fast, but he arrived surrounded by controversy. Liddell refused to compete on a Sunday as an expression of his Christian faith. A few months before the games began he had informed the Great Britain Olympic committee he would not be able to run in the preliminary heat for the 100m.

As the games drew closer he was severely criticised and accused of being a fanatic. Liddell refused to change his mind: he would not compete on a Sunday. Harold Abraham ran, and won the heat on that Sunday and he would go on to win gold in a record time that stood for fifty-six years. While Abrahams ran in, and won that heat, Liddell preached to a congregation in the Scots Kirk in another part of Paris.

On the following Tuesday, Abraham and Liddell qualified for a place in the 200m final. Liddell would go on to win a bronze medal in the event – the first Scot to win a medal in the event and the highest placed Great British competitor in that race too. Liddell also competed in the 400m race – not really his distance. Before the final, Liddell, as he always did, went down the line to shake the hands of his competition. Remarkably and to everyone's surprise, Liddell crossed the line 5 metres ahead of the rest, to win gold!

The crowd exploded into rapturous applause and then fell silent while waiting for the time to be announced. Liddell won the race and set a new world record of 47.6 seconds and the crowd erupted into cheers and applause once more. For Liddell there was something more than the winning of the medal that

sustained him and enabled him not to give up. That something more took him to China as a missionary where he literally gave his life for his faith.

12 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, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12 v 1-3)

Jesus ran his race and finished well for the joy set before him. His cry on the cross as his earthly life came to an end is a cry of deep joy. It is the joy of knowing that he had done the will of his father. Jesus' greatest desire was to do his father's will. What kept him going through the pain and agony of his forty days of temptation by Satan in the desert, was knowing that he did not want to short cut his father's will.

What kept him going through the anguish of knowing he could quit at any time was committing to do his father's will, because doing his father's will was a source of great joy, deep, lasting joy. To cry; "It is finished!" was to know the joy of doing his father's will.

To cry, "It is finished!" was a cry of joy because Jesus had reached the highest personal achievement. Jesus, on the cross, knowing he had done this will of his father, had done the very best he could and reached his full redemptive potential. Jesus, on the cross, was, and is, the very best thing any human being has done or will ever do. It brought him joy to know he had done his very best.

"It is finished!" is a cry of deep and profound joy at knowing that his death on the cross opened the way for people, like you and me, to know God and his magnificent love. It brought Jesus deep and profound joy to know his journey to the cross made it possible for everyone to come to his father – the one who loves because he loves because he loves...

We are encouraged to fix our eyes upon Jesus. We are encouraged to look to him as an example of how we can live. We are encouraged to have a heart like his; to make our desire the will of our father in heaven, to do the very best we can and to tell others of the magnificent love of God. We are encouraged to fix our eyes on Jesus so that we won't get discouraged and give up.

Maybe, we are, right now, in truth, tempted to give up the Christian race. After all, it can be hard and it can be tough. We've been through some tough times in the last couple of years. Many, many of us have experienced our own deep personal pain, and to live as a follower of Christ seems to be being challenged more and more in our society.

We need to fix our eyes on Jesus. We need vision.

It was the first time away for Walt, and it was the first time away for Ray too. They were in the army now, and their bunks, it turned out, were just a few feet away from each other. They both had it even then, but neither knew the other one did. It turned out they both had vision. Walt was always drawing in his spare time and it didn't take long for him to make his mark, and he soon had enough Vision to turn drawings into Mickey Mouse, to turn Mickey Mouse into a studio and to turn a studio into Disneyland. Walt, to be sure, had vision.

So did Ray, but it took Ray longer to get there. Ray, it turned out, was great at selling and great at business. He was the top salesman in his company. One day Ray pulled into a hamburger stand in San Bernardino that was owned by the McDonald brothers. Ray sold multimixer milk shake machines all over the US. Most restaurants had one, some as many as five. The McDonald brothers had eight working all day, and they could serve their hamburgers cheap and fast.

Ray could see what the McDonald brothers couldn't see. Ray was 52 and was suffering from diabetes and arthritis, but Ray had vision. Ray drove out of San Bernardino with a contract to do what he could see, and the McDonald brothers couldn't. And the rest, as they say, is history.

It takes vision to finish strong. We are encouraged to fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before him, finished strong. Jesus is the only human being to have experienced heaven before living on earth. Jesus knew what awaited him once he had endured the cross.

The great American preacher DL Moody once said: "Someday you will read in the papers that DL Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this clay tenement into a house that is immortal – a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body."

That's our vision, brothers and sisters.

One bright hour he will come for me,
One bright hour he'll set this captive free
One bright hour he will wipe the tears away
From eyes that now can see
One bright hour
And I will sing Hallelujah
(adapted from Bebo Norman)

One bright hour I will be more fully alive than I've ever been
One bright hour I will know fully, for the first time, how deeply loved I really am.
One bright hour I will know and be fully known
One bright hour I will fully see God
One bright hour I will be healed forever
One bright hour I will enjoy God in ways I now cannot begin to imagine
One bright hour I will hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant – enter the joy of the Lord."

Friends, hold that before you, always, as you fix your eyes on Jesus and run your race.

Amen.

Preached and Live Streamed from Crawley Baptist Church, on Sunday 28th November 2021, by Rev. Ian Phillips...