

THE HEAVENLY RACE

NO. 198

A SERMON
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 ON THE GRAND STAND, EPSOM RACE-COURSE

“So run, that ye may obtain.”
1 Corinthians 9:24

WE are continually insisting upon it from day to day that salvation is not of works, but of grace. We lay this down as one of the very first doctrines of the Gospel. “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” “By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God.” But we find that it is equally necessary to preach the absolute necessity of a religious life for the attainment of heaven at last.

Although we are sure that men are not saved for the sake of their works, yet are we equally sure that no man will be saved without them. And he that leads an unholy life, who neglects the great salvation—can never inherit that crown of life which fades not away. In one sense, true religion is wholly the work of God. Yet there are high and important senses in which we must ourselves “strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

We must run a race. We must wrestle even to agony. We must fight a battle before we can inherit the crown of life. We have in our text the course of religion set down as a race. And inasmuch as there are many who enter upon a profession of religion, with very false motives, the apostle warns us that although all run in a race, yet all do not obtain the prize. They all run, but only one is rewarded.

And he gives us, therefore, the practical exhortation to run, that we may obtain, for unless we are the winners, we had better not have been runners at all. He who is not a winner is a loser. He who makes a profession of religion and does not at last obtain the crown of life, is a loser by his profession, for his profession was hypocrisy or else a formality, and he had better not have made a profession than fall therein.

And now, in entering upon the text, I shall have to notice *what it is we are to run for*. “So run, that ye may obtain.” Secondly, the *mode of running* to which we must attend—“So run, that ye may obtain.” And then I shall give a few *practical exhortations* to stir those onward in the heavenly race who are flagging and negligent, in order that they may at last “obtain.”

I. In the first place, then, WHAT IS IT THAT WE OUGHT TO SEEK TO OBTAIN?

Some people think they must be religious in *order to be respectable*. There are a vast number of people in the world who go to church and to chapel, because everybody else does so. It is disreputable to waste your Sundays, not to be found going up to the house of God—therefore they take a pew and attend the services, and they think they have done their duty. They have obtained all that they sought for, when they can hear their neighbors saying, “Such and such is a very respectable person. He is always very regular at his church. He is a very reputable person and exceedingly praiseworthy.”

Verily, if this is what you seek after in your religion, you shall get it—for the Pharisees who sought the praise of men “had their reward.” But when you have gotten it, what a poor reward it is! Is it worth the drudgery? I do not believe that the drudgery to which people submit in order to be called respectable is at all compensated by what they gain.

I am sure, for my own part, I would not care a solitary rap what I was called or what I was thought. Nor would I perform anything that was irksome to myself for the sake of pleasing any man that ever walked beneath the stars, however great or mighty he may be. It is the sign of a fawning, cringing spirit, when people are always seeking to do that which renders them respectable. The esteem of men is not

worth the looking after, and sad it is that this should be the only prize which some men put before them in the poor religion which they undertake.

There are other people who go a little farther. They are not content with being considered respectable, but they want something more. They *desire to be considered pre-eminently saints*. These persons come to our places of worship, and after a little time they venture to come forward and ask whether they may unite with our churches.

We examine them and so hidden is their hypocrisy that we cannot discover its rottenness. We receive them into our churches. They sit at the Lord's Supper. They come to our church meetings—mayhap they are even voted into the deacon's office. Sometimes they attain to the pulpit, though God has never called them, and they preach what they have never felt in their hearts.

Men may do all this merely to enjoy the praise of men. And they will even undergo some persecution for the sake of it—because to be thought a saint, to be reckoned by religious people to be everything that is right and proper—to have a name among the living in Zion, is to some persons a thing exceedingly coveted.

They would not like to be set down among the “chief of sinners,” but if they may have their names written among the chief of saints they will consider themselves exceedingly exalted. I am afraid we have a considerable admixture of persons of this sort in our churches, who only come for the mere sake of keeping up their religious pretensions and obtaining a religious status in the midst of the church of God.

“Verily, I say unto you *they have their reward*,” and they shall never have any but what they obtain here. They get their reward for a little time—for a short time they are looked up to. But perhaps even in this life they make a trip, and down they go. The church discovers them and they are sent out like the ass stripped of the lion's skin to browse once more among their native nettles, no longer to be glorious in the midst of the church of the living God.

Or mayhap they may wear the cloak until the last day of their lives, and then death comes and strips them of all their tinsel and gewgaw. And they who acted upon the stage of religion as kings and princes are sent behind the stage to be unrobed, and to find themselves beggars to their shame, and naked to their eternal disgrace. It is not this which you and I would seek after in religion. Dearly beloved, if we do run the race, we would run for a higher and more glorious prize than any of these things.

Another set of people take up with religious life *for what they can get by it*. I have known tradespeople attend church for the mere sake of getting custom of those who went there. I have heard of such things as people knowing which side their bread was buttered, and going to that particular denomination, where they thought they could get the most by it.

Loaves and fishes drew some of Christ's followers, and they are very attracting baits, even to this day. Men find there is something to be gotten by religion. Among the poor it is, perhaps, some little charity to be obtained, and among those who are in business, it is the custom which they think to get. “Verily I say unto you, they have their reward,” for the church is always foolish and unsuspecting.

We do not like to suspect our fellow creatures of following us from sordid motives. The church does not like to think that a man would be base enough to pretend to religion for the mere sake of what he can get. and therefore, we let these people easily slip through and they have their reward.

But ah! at what a price they buy it! They have deceived the Lord's servants for gold and they have entered into His church as base hypocrites for the sake of a piece of bread. And they shall be thrust out at last with the anger of God behind them, like Adam driven out of Eden, with the flaming Cherubim with a sword turning every way to keep the tree of life. And they shall forever look back upon this as the most fearful crime they have committed—that they pretended to be God's people when they were not, and entered into the midst of the fold when they were but wolves in sheep's clothing.

There is yet another class, and when I have referred to them I will mention no more. These are the people who take up with religion for the sake of *quieting their conscience* and it is astonishing how little of religion will sometimes do that. Some people tell us that if in the time of storm men would pour bottles of oil upon the waves, there would be a great calm at once.

I have never tried it, and it is most probable I never shall, for my organ of credulity is not large enough to accept so extensive a statement. But there are some people who think that they can calm the storm of a troubled conscience by pouring a little of the oil of a profession about religion upon it—and it is amazing how wonderful an effect this really has.

I have known a man who was drunk many times in a week and who got his money dishonestly—and yet he always had an easy conscience by going to his church or chapel regularly on Sunday. We have heard of a man who could “devour widows’ houses”—a lawyer who could swallow up everything that came in his way and yet he would never go to bed without saying his prayers, and that stilled his conscience.

We have heard of other persons, especially among the Romanists, who would not object to thieving, but who would regard eating anything but fish on a Friday as a most fearful sin, supposing that by making a fast on Friday, all the iniquities of all the other days in the week would be put away. They want the outward forms of religion to keep the conscience quiet.

For Conscience is one of the worst lodgers to have in your house when he gets quarrelsome—there is no abiding with him. He is an ill bed-fellow—ill at lying down and equally troublesome at rising up. A guilty conscience is one of the curses of the world—it puts out the sun and takes away the brightness from the moonbeam. A guilty conscience casts a noxious exhalation through the air, removes the beauty from the landscape, the glory from the flowing river, the majesty from the rolling floods.

There is nothing beautiful to the man who has a guilty conscience. He needs no accusing—everything accuses him. Hence people take up with religion just to quiet them. They take the sacrament sometimes. They go to a place of worship. They sing a hymn now and then. They give a guinea to a charity. They intend to leave a portion in their will to build almshouses.

And in this way Conscience is lulled asleep, and they rock him to and fro with religious observances, till there he sleeps while they sing over him the lullaby of hypocrisy, and he wakes not until he shall wake with that rich man who was here clothed in purple, but in the next world did lift up his eyes in hell, being in torments, without a drop of water to cool his burning tongue.

What, then, is it for which we ought to run in this race? Why heaven, eternal life, justification by faith, the pardon of sin, acceptance in the Beloved, and glory everlasting. If you run for anything else than salvation, should you win, what you have won is not worth the running for. Oh! I beseech every one of you, make sure work for eternity—never be contented with anything less than a living faith in a living Savior. Rest not until you are certain that the Holy Spirit is at work in your souls.

Do not think that the outside of religion can be of use to you. It is the inward part of religion that God loves. Seek to have a repentance that needs not to be repented of—a faith which looks alone to Christ and which will stand by you when you come into the swellings of Jordan. Seek to have a love which is not like a transient flame, burning for a moment and then extinguished—but a flame which shall increase and increase, and still increase—till your heart shall be swallowed up therein and Jesus Christ’s one name shall be the sole object of your affection.

We must, in running the heavenly race, set nothing less before us than that which Christ set before Him. He set the joy of salvation before Himself, and then He did run, despising the cross and enduring the shame. So let us do the same, and may God give us good success, that by His good Spirit we may attain unto eternal life, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord!

II. Thus have I noticed what it is we are to run for. And now the apostle says, “So run, that ye may obtain.” I shall notice some people who will never obtain and tell you the reason why, and in so doing, I shall be illustrating THE RULES OF THE RACE

There are some people who certainly never will obtain the prize, because they have not even *entered*. Their names are not down for the race, and therefore it is quite clear that they will not run, or if they do run, they will run without having any warrant whatever for expecting to receive the prize.

There are some such here this afternoon—who will tell you themselves, “We make no profession, sir—none whatever.” It is quite as well, perhaps, that you do not—because if you did, you would be

hypocrites and it is better to make no profession at all than to be hypocrites. Still, recollect, your names are not down for the race and therefore you cannot win.

If a man tells you in business that he makes no profession of being honest, you know that he is a confirmed rogue. If a man makes no profession of being religious, you know what he is—he is irreligious—he has no fear of God before his eyes, he has no love to Christ, he has no hope of heaven. He confesses it himself.

Strange that men should be so ready to confess this. You don't find persons in the street willing to acknowledge that they are confirmed drunkards. Generally a man will repudiate it with scorn. You never find a man saying to you, "I don't profess to be a chaste living man." You don't hear another say, "I don't profess to be anything but a covetous wretch."

No—people are not so fast about telling their faults—and yet you hear people confess the greatest fault to which man can be addicted. They say, "I make no profession"—which means just this—that they do not give God His due. God has made them and yet they won't serve Him. Christ has come into the world to save sinners and yet they will not regard Him. The Gospel is preached and yet they will not hear it. They have the Bible in their houses and yet they will not attend to its admonitions—they make no profession of doing so.

It will be short work with them at the last great day. There will be no need for the books to be opened, no need for a long deliberation in the verdict. They do not profess to be pardoned. Their guilt is written upon their own foreheads—their brazen shamelessness shall be seen by the whole world as a sentence of destruction written upon their very brows.

You cannot expect to win heaven unless your names are entered for the race. If there be no attempts whatever made, even at so much as a profession of religion, then, of course, you may just sit down and say, "Heaven is not for me. I have no part nor lot in the inheritance of Israel. I cannot say that my Redeemer lives. And I may rest quite assured that Tophet is prepared of old *for me*. I must feel its pains and know its miseries, for there are but two places to dwell in the hereafter, and if I am not found on the right hand of the Judge, there is but one alternative—namely, to be cast away forever into the blackness of darkness."

Then there is another class whose names are down, but they *never started right*. A bad start is a sad thing. If in the ancient races of Greece or Rome, a man who was about to run for the race had loitered, or if he had started before the time, it would not matter how fast he ran if he did not start in order. The flag must drop before the horse starts, otherwise even if it reaches the winning post first, it shall have no reward.

There is something to be noted, then, in the starting of the race. I have known men run the race of religion with all their might and yet they have lost it because they did not start right. You say, "Well, how is that?" Why, there are some people who on a sudden leap into religion. They get it quickly and they keep it for a time, and at last they lose it because they did not get their religion the right way.

They have heard that before a man can be saved it is necessary that, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, he should feel the weight of sin, that he should make a confession of it, that he should renounce all hope in his own works, and should look to Jesus Christ alone. They look upon all these things as unpleasant preliminaries, and therefore, before they have attended to repentance, before the Holy Spirit has wrought a good work in them, before they have been brought to give up everything and trust to Christ—they make a profession of religion.

This is just setting up in business without a stock in trade and there must be a failure. If a man has no capital to begin with, he may make a fine show for a little time, but it shall be as the crackling of thorns under a pot—a great deal of noise and much light for a little time—but it shall die out in darkness. How many there are who never think it necessary that there should be heart work within! Let us remember, however, that there never was a true new birth without much spiritual suffering—that there never was a man who had a changed heart without his first having a miserable heart.

We must pass through that black tunnel of conviction before we can come out upon the high embankment of holy joy. We must first go through the Slough of Despond before we can run along the walls of Salvation. There must be ploughing before there is sowing. There must be many a frost and many a sharp shower before there is any reaping.

But we often act like little children who pluck flowers from the shrubs and plant them in their gardens without roots—then they say how fair and how pretty their little garden is—but wait a little while and all their flowers are withered because they have no roots. This is all the effect of not having a right start, not having the “root of the matter.”

What is the good of outward religion, the flower and the leaf of it, unless we have the “root of the matter” in us—unless we have been dug into by that sharp iron spade of conviction and have been ploughed with the plough of the Spirit, and then have been sown with the sacred seed of the Gospel, in the hope of bringing forth an abundant harvest? There must be a good start—look well to that, for there is no hope of running unless the start be right.

Again, there are some runners in the heavenly race who cannot win because they *carry too much weight*. A light weight, of course, has the advantage. There are some people who have an immensely heavy weight to carry. “How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven!” What is the reason? Because he carries so much weight—he has so much of the cares and pleasures of this world. He has such a burden that he is not likely to win, unless God should please to give him a mighty mass of strength to enable him to bear it.

We find many men willing to be saved, as they say. They receive the Word with great joy, but by and by thorns spring up and choke the Word. They have so much business to do. They say they must live. They forget they must die. They have such a deal to attend to, they cannot think of living near to Christ.

They find they have little time for devotions. Morning prayer must be cut short, because their business begins early. They can have no prayer at night because business keeps them so late. How can they be expected to think of the things of God? They have so much to do to answer this question—“What shall I eat? what shall I drink? and wherewithal shall I be clothed?”

It is true they read in the Bible that their Father who is in heaven will take care of them in these things if they will trust Him. But they say, “Not so.” Those are enthusiasts according to their notions who rely upon providence. They say the best providence in all the world is hard work. And they say rightly, but they forget that into the bargain of their hard work, “It is in vain to rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness; for except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain who build it.”

You see two men running a race. One of them, as he starts, lays aside every weight. He takes off his garments and away he runs. There goes the other poor fellow—he has a whole load of gold and silver upon his back. Then around his loins he has many distrustful doubts about what shall become of him in the future, what will be his prospects when he grows old, and a hundred other things. He does not know how to roll his burden upon the Lord.

See how he flags, poor fellow, and how the other distances him, leaves him far behind, has gained the corner, and is coming to the winning post. It is well for us if we can cast everything away except that one thing needful and say, “This is my business, to serve God on earth, knowing that I shall enjoy Him in heaven.” For when we leave our business to God, we leave it in better hands than if we took care of it ourselves.

They who carve for themselves generally cut their fingers. But they who leave God to carve for them, shall never have an empty plate. He who will walk after the cloud shall go aright, but he who will run before it shall soon find that he has gone a fool’s errand. “Blessed is the man who trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.” “The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that wait upon the LORD shall not want any good thing.”

Our Savior said, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” “Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are you not much better than they?”

“Trust in the Lord and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed.” “His place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.” “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Carry the weight of this world’s cares about you, and it will be as much as you can do to carry them and to stand upright under them—but as to running a race with such burdens, it is just impossible.

There is also another thing that will prevent man’s running the race. We have known people who stopped on their way to *kick their fellows*. Such things sometimes occur in a race. The horse, instead of speeding onwards to the mark, is of an angry disposition and sets about kicking those that are running beside him—there is not much probability of his coming in first.

“Now they who run in a race all run, but one receiveth the prize.” There is one, however, who never gets it, and that is the man who always attends to his fellow creatures instead of himself. It is a mysterious thing that I never yet saw a man with a hoe on his shoulder, going to hoe his neighbor’s garden. It is a rarity to see a farmer sending his team of horses to plough his neighbor’s land.

But it is a most singular thing that every day in the week I meet with persons who are attending to other people’s character. If they go to the house of God and hear a trite thing said, they say at once, “How suitable that was for Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown.” The thought never enters their head how suitable it was to themselves. They lend their ears to everybody else, but they do not hear for themselves.

When they get out of chapel, perhaps as they walk home, their first thought is, “Well, how can I find fault with my neighbors?” They think that putting other people down is going up themselves (there never was a greater mistake), that by picking holes in their neighbor’s coat they mend their own. They have so few virtues of their own that they do not like anybody else to have any—therefore they do the best they can to despoil everything good in their neighbor.

And if there be a little fault, they will look at it through a magnifying glass—but they will turn the glass the other way when they look at their own sins. Their own faults become exceedingly small while those of others become magnificently great.

Now this is a fault not only among professing religious men, but among those who are not religious. We are all so prone to find fault with other people instead of attending to our own affairs. We attend to the vineyards of others, but our own vineyard we have not kept. Ask a worldly man why he is not religious and he tells you, “Because So and so makes a profession of religion and is not consistent.” Is that any business of yours? To your own Master you must stand or fall, and so must he. God is their judge—not you.

Suppose there are a great many inconsistent Christians—and we are compelled to acknowledge that there are—so much the more reason why you should be a good one. Suppose there are a great many who deceive others—so much the more reason you should set the world an example of what a genuine Christian is.

“Ah! but” you say, “I am afraid there are very few.” Then why don’t you make one? But after all, is that your business? Must not every man bear his own burden? You will not be judged for other men’s sins—you will not be saved by their faith—you will not be condemned for their unbelief. Every man must stand in his own proper flesh and blood at the bar of God, to account for the works done in his own body, whether they have been good or whether they have been evil.

It will be of little avail for you to say at the day of judgment, “O Lord, I was looking at my neighbors. O Lord, I was finding fault with the people in the village. I was correcting their follies.” But thus says the Lord—“Did I ever commission you to be a judge or a divider over them? Why, if you had so much time to spare, and so much critical judgment, did you not exercise it upon yourself? Why did

you not examine yourself, so that you might have been found ready and acceptable in the day of God?" These persons are not very likely to win the race, because they turn to kicking others.

Again, there is another class of persons who will not win the race—namely, those who, although they seem to start very fair, very soon *loiter*. They dart ahead at the first starting and distance all the others. There they fly away as if they had wings on their heels. But a little further on in the race, it is with difficulty that with whip and spur they are to be kept going at all and they almost come to a standstill.

Alas! this race of persons are to be discovered in all our churches. We get young people who come forward and make a profession of religion, and we talk with them, and we think it is all well with them, and for a little while they do run well. There is nothing wanting in them. We could hold them up as patterns for the imitation of others.

Wait a couple of years. They drop off just by little and little. First, perhaps, there is the attendance on a week-day service neglected—then it is altogether discontinued. Then only one service on the Sabbath. Then perhaps family prayer, then private prayer—one thing after another is given up—until at last the whole edifice which stood upright and looked so fair, having been built upon the sand, gives way before the shock of time, and down it falls, and great is the ruin thereof.

Recollect, it is not starting that wins the race—it is running all the way. He who would be saved must hold on to the end—"He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." Stop and loiter in the race before you have come to the end thereof, and you have made one of the greatest mistakes that could possibly occur.

On, on, on! while you live—still onward, onward, onward! for until you come to the grave, you have not come to your resting place. Until you arrive at the tomb, you have not come to the spot where you may cry, "Halt!" Ever onward if you would win. If you are content to lose, if you would lose your own soul, you may say, "Stop," if you please. But if you would be saved evermore, be on, on, till you have gained the prize.

But there is another class of persons who are worse than these. They start well too, and they run very fast at first, but at last they leap over the posts and rails. They *go quite out of the course* altogether and you do not know where they are gone. Every now and then, we get such people as this. They go out from us, because they are not of us, for had they been of us, doubtless they would have continued with us.

I might point out in my congregation on the Sabbath day, a man whom I saw start myself. I saw him running so well I almost envied him the joy he seemed always able to preserve, the faith which ever seemed to be so buoyant and full of jubilee. Alas! just when we thought he was speeding onwards to the prize, some temptation crossed his path and he turned aside.

Away he is scrambling far over the heath, out of the path of right, and men say, "Aha! aha! so would we have it. So would we have it." And they laugh and make merriment over him, because having once named the name of Jesus Christ, he has afterwards gone back again, and his last end is worse than the first.

Those whom God starts never do this, for they are preserved in Christ Jesus. Those who have been "entered" in the great roll of the covenant before all eternity shall persevere, by the aid of the good Spirit. He that began the good work in them, shall carry it on even unto the end.

But alas! there are many who run on their own account and in their own strength. And they are like the snail, which as it creeps, leaves its life as a trail upon its own path. They melt away. Their nature decays. They perish and where are they? Not in the church, but lost to all hope. They are like the dog that returned to his vomit and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. "The last end of that man shall be worse than the first."

I do not think I shall now mention any other class of persons. I have brought before you the rules of the race, if you would win. If you would "so run, that ye may obtain," you must first of all take care to start well. You must keep to the course. You must keep straight on. You must not stop on the road, or

turn aside from it, but urged on by divine grace, you must always fly onwards, “like an arrow from the bow, shot by an archer strong.” And never rest until the march is ended and you are made pillars in the house of your God, to go out no more forever.

III. But now I am about to give you some few reasons to URGE YOU ONWARD IN THE HEAVENLY RACE—those of you who are already running.

One of my reasons shall be this—“*We are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses.*” When zealous racers on yonder heath are flying across the plain, seeking to obtain the reward, the whole heath is covered with multitudes of persons, who are eagerly gazing upon them, and no doubt the noise of those who cheer them onward, and the thousand eyes of those who look upon them have a tendency to make them stretch every nerve and press on with vigor.

It was so in the games to which the apostle alludes. There the people sat on raised platforms, while the racers ran before them, and they cried to them, and the friends of the racers urged them forward, and the kindly voices would always be heard bidding them go on. Now, Christian brethren, how many witnesses are looking down upon you? Down! do I say? It is even so.

From the battlements of heaven the angels look down upon you and they seem to cry today to you with sweet, silvery voice, “Ye shall reap if ye faint not. You shall be rewarded if you continue steadfast in the work and faith of Christ.” And the saints look down upon you—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Martyrs and confessors, and your own pious relatives who have ascended to heaven look down upon you.

And if I might so speak, methinks sometimes you might hear the clapping of their hands when you have resisted temptation and overcome the enemy. And you might see their suspense when you are lagging in the course, and you might hear their friendly word of caution as they bid you gird up the loins of your mind, and lay aside every weight, and still speed forward.

Never resting to take your breath, never staying for a moment’s ease till you have attained the flowery beds of heaven, where you may rest forever. And recollect, these are not the only eyes that are looking upon you. The whole world looks upon a Christian—he is the observed of all observers—in a Christian every fault is seen.

A worldly man may commit a thousand faults and nobody notices him. But let a Christian do so and he will very soon have his faults published to the wide world. Everywhere men are looking at Christians and it is quite right that they should do so. I remember a young man, a member of a Christian church, who went to a public-house ball of the lowest character.

And he was no sooner mounting up the stairs than one of them said, “Ah! here comes the Methodist. We will give it to him.” As soon as they had him in the room, they first of all lead him up and down to let everybody see the Methodist who had come among them, and then they kicked him down stairs. I sent them my respectful compliments for doing so, for it served him right. And I took care that he was kicked down stairs in another sense afterwards and kicked out of the church.

The world would not have him and the church would not have him. The world, then, looks upon you. It never misses an opportunity of throwing your religion in your teeth. If you don’t give sixteen ounces to the pound of morality—if you don’t come up to the mark in everything—you will hear of it again. Don’t think the world is ever asleep.

We say, “As sound asleep as a church,” and that is a very good proverb. But we cannot say, “As sound asleep as the world,” for it never sleeps. It always has its eyes open. It is always watching us in all we do. The eyes of the world are upon you. “We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses.” “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”

And there are darker and yet more malignant eyes that scowl upon us. There are spirits that people this air, who are under the prince of the power of the air, who watch every day for our halting.

*“Millions of spiritual creatures walk this earth,
Both when we wake and when we sleep.”*

And alas, those spiritual creatures are not all good. There are those who are not yet chained and reserved in darkness, but who are permitted by God to wander through this world like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour, ever ready to tempt us. And there is one at the head of them called Satan, *the enemy*, and you know his employment.

He has access to the throne of God and he makes most horrid use of it, for he accuses us day and night before the throne. The accuser of the brethren is not yet cast down—that is to be in the great day of the triumph of the Son of Man—but as Jesus stands as our Advocate before the throne, so does old Satan first watch us and tempt us, and then stands as our accuser before the bar of God.

O my dear brothers and sisters, if you have entered into this race and have commenced it, let these many eyes urge you forward.

***“A cloud of witnesses around
Hold thee in full survey;
Forget the steps already trod,
And onward urge thy way.”***

And now a more urgent consideration still. Recollect, your race is win or lose—death or life, hell or heaven, eternal misery or everlasting joy. What a stake that is for which you run! If I may so put it, you are running for your life. And if that does not make a man run, nothing will.

Put a man there on yonder hill and put another after him with a drawn sword seeking his life—if there is any *run* in him, you will soon see him run. There will be no need for us to shout out to him, “Run, man, run!” for he is quite certain that his life is at hazard and he speeds with all his might—speeds till the veins stand like whipcords on his brow and a hot sweat runs from every pore of his body—and still flees onward.

Now, he looks behind and sees the avenger of blood speeding after him. He does not stop. He spurns the ground and on he flees till he reaches the city of refuge where he is safe. Ah! if we had eyes to see, and if we knew who it is that is pursuing us every day of our lives, how we should run! for lo! O man, hell is behind you, sin pursues you, evil seeks to overtake you.

The city of refuge has its gates wide open. I beseech you, rest not till you can say with confidence, “I have entered into this rest and now I am secure. I know that my Redeemer lives.” And rest not even then, for this is not the place for rest. Rest not until your six days’ work is done—and your heavenly Sabbath is begun.

Let this life be your six days of ever-toiling faith. Obey your Master’s commandment. “Labour, therefore, to enter into this rest,” seeing that there are many who shall not enter in, because through their want of faith they shall not be able. If that does not urge a man to speed forward, what can?

But let me picture yet one more thing. And may that help you onward! Christian, run onward, for remember *who it is that stands at the winning post*. You are to run onward, always looking unto Jesus—then Jesus must be at the end. We are always to be looking forward and never backward. Therefore Jesus must be there.

Are you loitering? See Him with His open wounds. Are you about to leave the course? See Him with His bleeding hands. Will not that constrain you to devote yourself to Him? Will not that impel you to speed your course and never loiter until you have obtained the crown? Your dying Master cries to you today and He says. “By My agony and bloody sweat, by My cross and passion—onward! By My life, which I gave for you, by the death which I endured for your sake—onward!”

And see! He holds out His hand, laden with a crown sparkling with many a star, and He says, “By this crown—onward!” I beseech you, onward, my beloved. Press forward, for “I know that there is laid up for me a crown of life which fadeth not away, and not for me only, but for all them that love his appearing.”

I have thus addressed myself to all sorts of characters. Will you this afternoon take that home to yourself which is the most applicable to your case? Those of you who make no profession of religion, are living without God and without Christ, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel—let me affectionately remind you that the day is coming when you will want religion.

It is very well now to be sailing over the smooth waters of life, but the rough billows of Jordan will make you want a Savior. It is hard work to die without a hope—to take that last leap in the dark is a frightful thing indeed. I have seen the old man die when he has declared he would not die. He has stood upon the brink of death and he has said, “All dark, dark, dark! O God, I cannot die.”

And his agony has been fearful when the strong hand of the destroyer has seemed to push him over the precipice. He lingered shivering on the brink and feared to launch away. And frightful was the moment when the foot slipped and the solid earth was left, and the soul was sinking into the depths of eternal wrath.

You will want a Savior, then, when your pulse is faint and few. You will need an angel then to stand at your bedside—and when the spirit is departing, you will need a sacred convoy to pilot you through the dark clouds of death and guide you through the iron gate, and lead you to the blessed mansion in the land of the hereafter.

Oh, “seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him; And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

O Lord, turn us and we shall be turned. Draw us and we will run after You. And Yours shall be the glory. For the crown of our race shall be cast at Your feet and You shall have the glory forever and ever.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.