

Run the Race Set Before You

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[0:00] It came back to mind as Jack went to the hospital on Monday, and then it was clear he was declining, and wasn't going to make it back home to Dubuque. And the story is about a gentleman by the name of R.C. Sproul. R.C. Sproul actually told the story.

Sproul was a preeminent theologian in the latter half of the 20th century into probably about 10 or 15 years ago. I can't remember when he died. But Sproul was a reformed guy. He was Presbyterian. He had very strong views on certain things, especially about the doctrine of election, or did God choose us in advance, and how that worked, and the security of our salvation. He believed very strongly on those things. And set the table for the story. He was asked a question about Billy Graham. Now, we all know who Billy Graham was. Now, what you may not know, because I didn't know this, is Billy Graham did not come from the Reformed theological tradition. He did believe we could lose our salvation.

And that's why he emphasized so strongly the lordship of Jesus and submitting yourself to the rule of Jesus in your life. And you need to respond and obey Jesus. That drove Billy Graham's message. So you've got these men, R.C. Sproul, highly regarded pastor and theologian, on one side of the theological spectrum.

And you've got Billy Graham on the other. Not long after Billy Graham died, Sproul was at an event that had a Q&A.; And Sproul was asked, Do you think you're going to see Billy Graham in heaven?

[1:37] What a dumb question. Sproul didn't say that, but you know. Really? So, Sproul was very serious. He said, No.

I don't. And he paused. He said, I believe Billy Graham is going to be so close to the throne of Jesus that I won't be able to get through the crowd to see him.

I think we could apply that to Pastor Jack. This is a man who has touched virtually every life in this room.

Mine included. Some of you have known him for decades. Some of you number more years of acquaintance with Jack than I have months of acquaintance with him.

Yet this was a man who loved God, who loved God's Word, who loved people, and was committed to find any way that he could to share the Jesus that he loved with the people that he loved.

[2:48] That's a legacy worth following. That is something that Jack would want for us. But as we're mourning, there's something I want us to remember. Remember that for a man like Jack, sorrow is not, it's not inappropriate unless it's your only response.

Because we're sad because he's gone. Our relationship has been broken. But we, brothers and sisters, we have got to rejoice. We have got to find comfort and peace and joy, true joy, in the fact that Jack is in the presence of Jesus now.

He probably doesn't have white hair. He probably doesn't have cirrhosis of the liver or diabetes or all the other things that he struggled with.

We don't have time to go through all of them. He has none of those. I believe Jack stands in the presence of God with great joy, having been welcomed into the presence of his God, his Father. Do you hear the words that he said over and over again that he wanted to hear? Well done, good and faithful servant. We need to find joy in that.

[4:15] Because not only is that Jack's experience, we know that from what the Bible teaches, that will be our experience as well. This isn't just reserved for the super saints.

This is reserved for all of us who trust and obey Jesus and follow him. And that's what we're going to talk about, believe it or not, briefly this morning. Now if there were betting people in this congregation, I bet you'd be betting against me keeping a sermon short.

But we're going to do our best. And I'll tell you, one way we're going to do it is I was very tempted to make a last minute change in what I was going to preach on. Guaranteed.

I'm going to tell you a little secret about me. If I go long, it's because I've modified the message that I pre-planned. The more prepared I am, the tighter my message is. So I'm not going to do that to you.

We're going to focus on a few things. So we're going to start, actually let's do this. I want you to turn to Colossians chapter 4. We're going to spend a little bit of time there. Very little.

[5:17] But once you're there, I want you to listen, and you'll see up on the screen, a text out of Hebrews chapter 11. Now if you don't know this, Hebrews chapter 11 is the Bible's hall of fame.

If you go to a sports hall of fame, they've got busts of all these great athletes and a list of their accomplishments and all the great things that they did. That is Hebrews 11. It's a list of those, and it's a short list.

It could be much longer. The author of Hebrews actually says that at the end of the chapter. But it's a spotlight on all these people who walked with God and trusted God in the hardest of times and overcame and triumphed and earned their reward.

So we're going to start there. Hebrews chapter 11 verses 13 through 16. This came to mind this week as I was thinking about Jack. All these died in faith without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

I think we could say that about Jack. He didn't receive all the promises. He has now. But some of those promises aren't fully realized until we're standing in the presence of God.

[6:37] Either because we have died and come into His presence or because He has returned and called us home. But like Jack, and like the people of Hebrews 11, we have not experienced all the promises yet.

We have not received them yet, but we can be sure that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. That's the path that we walk in confidence.

For those who say such things, make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

In Philippians 3, Paul wrote that our citizenship is now in heaven. Not here. You're a visitor here.

Your citizenship is in heaven because Jesus Christ has made you part of His family.

Pastor Jack is now fully realizing all the benefits that go with being a citizen of heaven. We get a taste of them now, but he's experiencing them all now that he's there.

[7:50] But what does the author of Hebrews say about these great believers? They made it clear that they were seeking a country of their own. We need to be a people who is seeking that country.

We live according to those rules. That reality, not the reality that is here. I'll give you a simple example that struck me right between the eyes when Kara and I were serving in the Dominican Republic.

So we're immersed in Dominican culture. We live there. But my job was hosting teams of missionaries coming down from the U.S. for short-term trips.

So we had people everywhere from as long as a year, but most of our volunteers were there for a week. And there was a real fundamental difference between our volunteers and the kids that worked at the orphanage and my friends that were adult Dominicans.

And I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what is the difference? Because there is a way that we as Americans talk, there is a behavior, there's an attitude that really feels like entitlement that we just take things for granted.

[8:58] Things like, if I work hard, my work is going to bear fruit. If I put in an eight-hour day's worth of work, I'm going to get paid an eight-hour wage. I can trust my employer.

I'm just pretty confident that I'm safe in my own home. I'm pretty sure that the government, we may disagree on the specifics, but generally, the government is doing its job.

And so they had this difference in action. Where is this rooted? And finally, it dawned on me that part of our heritage as Americans is hope. The theological definition of hope is a confident expectation of the righteous.

Because we have a relationship with God, we have a secure hope, a solid hope. We know what we've been promised is coming. And Americans, subconsciously, we really have that attitude about our country.

Because my friends who are Dominicans, you may work all day and have your boss say, thanks for the work, I'll pay you when I have the money, someday. They didn't have confidence that they could get access to the food to have a balanced diet.

[10:08] They didn't have the confidence that if I put in the work, I'll get the outcome. They just didn't have that. And so there was always this fear of the other shoe dropping, of what's going to happen next.

Now, I hope you see where I'm going with this. Our citizenship is not, this is not a patriotic message. This is a message, well, it is a patriotic message, but not about America. This is a patriotic message for those who are citizens of heaven.

Because there's a fundamental difference between the way we talk as believers in Jesus Christ and the way we carry ourselves. Why? Because we have a sure hope.

Our citizenship is in heaven. Just as stark a difference as I saw between Americans and Dominicans, I guess I was going to say Dominican Republicans, or just Dominicans. As stark as a difference as I saw between Americans and Dominicans, there's a far greater gap between those of us who are in Christ, who have our hope set on Him.

Because we are citizens of heaven, the difference between our conduct, our speech, and those who don't know Christ is vast. It's huge.

[11:31] That's the way Jack lived. That's the way we're called to live as followers of Jesus. For those who say such things to make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed, if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

So for example, Moses was one of those guys in the Hebrews 11. When the going got tough in the wilderness, he could have turned around, packed up, and taken the children of Israel back to Egypt. As a matter of fact, they were pushing pretty hard to do that.

And Moses said, no, I am pursuing the promises of God because I am not a citizen of Egypt. I'm a citizen in the promised land.

They didn't turn back. For us as believers, sometimes the going gets tough. And it's tempting to turn back to the way we were before Christ because it's comforting or it's familiar.

No, we don't turn back. We resolutely keep our eyes forward. Does that in Hebrews 12.1, which we'll get to in a minute.

[12:39] We run the race with endurance. How? With our eyes fixed on Jesus. We're continuing to pursue the fruit of being the citizen of the kingdom of God in heaven.

Amen. But as it is, they desire a better country. That is a heavenly one. Therefore, listen to this. Listen to this.

But as it is, they desire a better country. That is a heavenly one. You got to listen. Are you listening? I want you focused. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God.

Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God. Over and over again, we have turned to Colossians 3.12 that tells us or reminds us that we have been chosen.

We have been made holy and blameless. Past tense. Because we look to the cross. God and God is not ashamed to be called your God.

[14:01] We need to just soak in that for a minute. We're citizens of a far better country with far greater rewards, with a sure hope, God.

And the holy God is not ashamed to be called our God. Breathtaking. Absolutely breathtaking that that's true.

God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. The author of Hebrews is looking back to John chapter 14. Trust in God, trust also in me, Jesus said.

I am going to prepare a place for you. Jack was given that new address. He's moved in to that place that God prepared for him in heaven.

And I don't think God spares in the details. In our home, this is a contrast. We rented this home when Kayla came to live with us and we've discovered that pipes leak, we have a mold problem, the air conditioning was substandard, the doors are swollen, the windows are outdated, the yard's a mess, because the owner just collects whatever rent he collects and he just does the minimum to maintain it.

[15:41] That's not the house we're moving into in heaven. When Jesus said that I'm going to prepare a place for you, guaranteed, guaranteed, it's the top of the line across the board because

he's building it for his kids, for his children.

That's what Jack has moved into. That's what we're moving into, a place that God has prepared for us. And I'm going to speculate a little bit and step outside of what the Bible specifically says. I'll bet you it's custom. I'll bet you it's designed in such a way that those characteristics, those things that Jack takes particular delight in, that decor, that layout, it's there.

And I think for us, that mansion that's being prepared for us in heaven has custom touches that God, as he was making it, says, oh, he's going to love this.

She's going to love this. This is so cool. Well, how do we know? How can I say that? Because I look at the creation around us and I tell you, there are days I look around and I think, God made this day just for me.

[16:59] God knows that I love wildlife. And to go on a walk and have a deer come up and stand, I've had deer as close to this monitor.

That's just God saying, I love you, I know you like that. There was one day I was walking through the woods in San Antonio and I hear this clacking sound. What on earth is that?

I come around a bend and there's two big bucks just beating the tar out of each other. Because I'm not a particularly smart guy, I walked up and watched.

I was so close to these deer I could smell their sweat. I just thought, God, you're so cool. Because he knows that that's something that speaks to my heart.

I think that's the design of what we're headed toward in heaven. That's where we're going. That's our hope. And it's a sure hope. That's what we have to celebrate.

[17:58] We know Jack is there. We don't hope he's there as men hope. We don't wish it's true. We know it's true. How do we know it's true? Because somebody died and then came back and said, hey, proof, Jesus demonstrated clearly that the promises of God are yes and amen.

And because we can see it in Christ, we know that Jack is experiencing it and we can anticipate that we will one day. Sooner or later, we're going to be there as well. That's our hope.

That's what we have to look forward to. So what does that mean for us now? Let's go to the end of chapter 11 to chapter 12 because the author of Hebrews addresses the same question.

He's looked at chapter 11. So chapter 11, the first half, is about those who experienced triumph in Christ. So Abraham and Moses and Noah are featured there.

But then, the second half of Hebrews 11, there's a brief survey of what theologians call the but-others. And I can remember praying, God, I don't want to be a but-other.

[19:09] Because the but-others are those who are faithful to follow God and suffered nevertheless. Who died. Who suffered. One example is a man was sawn in half.

That was the prophet Isaiah. His reward for a life well spent serving God was, A, nobody's going to believe what you have to say. Very few people will listen to you. And B, you're going to die a martyr's death.

Thanks, says God. Those are the but-others. But they were faithful because they know the same thing we do. That our citizenship is in heaven and we're going to a better place.

that so belittles what it is. It's way better than just a better place. We're going to heaven to be in the presence of God. So the question is, what next?

In Hebrews chapter 12, he says, therefore, so looking back to chapter 11, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, so we can look around.

[20:14] We can look in the Bible and see these people and see how they lived and see the reward that they enjoyed. We can look at Jack's life. You know how he suffered. You know what he endured.

His health. And yet, he witnessed consistently, not just to people who needed to hear the gospel for the first time, being an evangelist, but to us as well.

God is good. God is faithful. He was a witness to us of what it means to follow Jesus. We are surrounded by a cloud of such witnesses.

Certainly in the biblical record, certainly in the record of church history, and certainly, if we're doing it right, to each other. We should be sharing the gospel with each other all the time.

Because the gospel is what tells us that there's hope. The gospel is the answer to every question. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. 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.

[21 : 25] So the imagery of that, you may have heard this before, the imagery is of the marathon and the Greek Olympic Games. Now one thing that they don't do anymore, but the runners used to run naked.

They literally set aside every possible encumbrance. encumbrance. Clothing that would tie up their legs. Shirts that would get in the way.

They were naked. Footloose and fancy free. And they ran. I'm not suggesting you follow Jesus naked, to be clear. But we want to run with endurance the race set before us.

We need to set aside every encumbrance, the things that get in the way. Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. We need to put away the sin that entangles us.

Say no to it and pursue God. Keep focused on Him. 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.

[22 : 33] The importance of the cloud of witnesses is that it reminds us that it's worth it. Because a lot of times those encumbrances are really attractive. They make us feel secure.

They make us feel safe. They maybe even make us feel important. But the cloud of witnesses says, no, no, no. You don't need those things. We can tell you from personal experience those things, the sin that's so attractive, the things that tie you up and tie you down, they don't hold a candle to what we have in Christ.

So we set them aside and we run with endurance that the race is set before us. You know, it's interesting, if you think back to the sermon we had a few months ago, we looked at Colossians 1.9. We talked about Paul's prayer that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of the will of God. And we explored the idea that that was trimming our sails to catch the power of the wind that would propel us in the life that God had called us to.

And there was a number of outcomes that when we're filled with the knowledge of God, there were outcomes that we could look forward to. Things like running the, we would live our lives in a way that was worthy of God.

[23 : 45] We would get to know God better. We would experience His pleasure. We would bear fruit. Well, another one of them is that we run with endurance. We gain endurance from having our eyes fixed on Jesus.

We gain endurance by being filled with the Spirit of God, being filled with the knowledge of the will of God, our sails trimmed to catch that wind and go where we need to go. Endurance is an outcome.

And then where does the author of Hebrews go on? Fixing our eyes on Jesus. I can't read the word of fixing without hearing Isaiah 26.3 quoted in the King James.

You will keep Him in perfect peace whose eyes are fixed on Thee.

Focused, determined, I'm not going to be distracted. We were watching the Belmont Stakes with the grandkids and one of the kids asked, why do the horses have those things on their eyes?

[24 : 52] So they can't get distracted. All they see is the track. They don't see the horses next to them. They don't see things that might spook them. They see the track. That's how we're supposed to run this race.

With our eyes fixed on Jesus. And He will keep us in perfect peace because we trust Him. Isaiah went on to say. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

In other words, He wrote it down. He planned it out. And He's the one at work in you. We may have talked a time or two about that. God is at work in your life.

God was at work in Jack's life to produce the fruit that He wanted to produce. Jesus said that in John 15. God is at work in our lives. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith.

And how did He do that? He said, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross. We tend to make the mistake of focusing on the endured the cross part.

[25 : 58] Which is not wrong. But what came first? For the joy fixed before Him with His eyes fixed ahead on the prize, that joy propelled Him through 33 and a half years of living as a human being.

the time in the Garden of Gethsemane, the fear, the terror, knowing He was going to be crucified, the joy set before Him.

That's our hope. That's what keeps us going. Just like Jesus, the joy set before us endured the cross, despising the shame.

This is nothing. I can handle this. That's what Jesus said. Okay. I can do, I can get through this. Because of the joy set before Him and has sat down at the right hand of God. You don't sit down until the work is done. I'm sure many of us had a dad that said, what are you doing sitting down? The work's not done. In our house, the rule was the job's not done until the tools were put away.

[27:08] So get off your backside, put the tools away. Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father because the work was done.

I suspect that when Jack stepped into heaven, the Lord said to him, have a seat, brother. The work is done. That's our hope. That's what we have to look forward to. That's the life that a Christian has.

We go through a hard, hard life. That's one of the realities of life is life is hard. We go through the challenges that come from following Jesus, the adventure of walking with God.

God, but we have a sure hope. And we live that way now, looking forward with anticipation to what comes ahead.

[28:14] We've got to make that our focus. So how do we do that? Very briefly. And if you haven't figured it out yet or you're thinking, he's not going to get done early, we're not going to Colossians. Except to allude to it.

Every one of Paul's epistles ends with a list of names. Every one of them. Paul was surrounded by friends. You read about Paul's journeys in the book of Acts.

He was surrounded by people. He never traveled alone. He had people that were with him. People he was teaching and training and developing and encouraging. I think Paul was surrounded by people as naturally as breathing.

And those friends sustained him. They were there to encourage him. They were there to supply his needs. His friends made sure he had what he needed during the imprisonment in Rome that allowed him the time to write the epistles of Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Paul was always surrounded by people. That's a model for us. We do life in community. We were made for relationship. I said last week that loneliness is a literal mental health crisis today.

[29:33] People are so desperately lonely. Surrounded by people on their stupid phones all the time. Thousands of friends on Facebook.

But they're lonely because there's no substitute for us being together. And that's what Paul models by sharing these greetings at the end of his letters is we do life in community.

Over the next days, weeks, months, we're going to be mourning together and sharing joy together. I just want to wrap up with a couple of ways that we can love each other well in the midst of mourning.

Pretty simple. First one is read the room. What do I mean by that? Be aware of the person you're talking to who's grieving. Be aware of what they might need.

Focus on what they need. You may have heard this before. Job's friends did their best work the first week that they were with him.

[30:43] Why? Because they were silent. Then those clowns opened their mouths. Don't be a clown.

I heard a story of a woman once who was in mourning. Actually, she was really worried. Her husband was in ICU. She was in the waiting room with a bunch of people and one of the church elders, bless his heart, he was trying to do the right thing, but he sat down with her and opened up the Bible and started sharing Scripture with her.

And she was gracious at the moment, but what she really deep down felt was, I do not need a Bible study right now. Read the room. Sometimes your presence is the best thing you can give.

It says in Job's or Proverbs, I can't remember which, don't pay attention to the words spoken in grief. That's the John Hopkins Standard Version.

Don't pay attention to words spoken in grief. Someone, when they're distraught and heartbroken, may say something that isn't theologically sound.

[31:53] That's not the moment to set them straight. Don't do that. Just don't. Let them say what they say. Let them feel what they feel. Just be there.

Be with them to listen and to talk. Pray for each other. We have got to be praying for each other. Certainly we need to pray for Peggy and Hannah and the rest of the Redmond family.

We need to pray for each other. I've already talked to many of you with tears in your eyes accepting the fact that Jack Redmond is no longer here.

We need to pray for each other, for comfort, for peace, to reinforce the truth that we looked at in Hebrews. Pray for each other. whether you're in the presence of your friend or when you're at home having your quiet time.

Pray for each other. Pray for peace. Pray for hope. Pray for comfort. We need to do those things. And the last thing I'm going to tell you that's going to sound a little bit contradictory to one of the first things I said is speak the gospel to each other.

[33:11] Paul said in Ephesians 4, which is the centerpiece of our church mission statement, that we are to speak the truth to one another in love. The super narrow interpretation of that verse is that speaking the truth to one another in love is to lovingly tell somebody when they do something stupid or wrong.

Okay. Yes, that's in there. That's way down on the list of what that means in that verse. Speaking the truth in love in this context is reminding each other and ourselves.

Yes, we're sad. And please don't forgive me for being sounding judgmental while he's in a better place. Well, that's true. But go beyond that.

Preach the gospel to each other. What is the gospel? The gospel is that Jack Redmond was a sinful man who met the Savior and decided to follow Jesus.

And because he decided to follow Jesus, many of you came to a personal relationship of your own with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. And now, now Jack is in heaven because Jesus died on the cross for his sins.

[34:39] Jesus made the exchange with Jack Redmond taking his sin and Jesus gave Jack his righteousness.

and now Jack's in heaven. That's the gospel, brothers and sisters. And it's not only true of Jack Redmond. It's true of John Hopkins. It's true of each one of you.

If you've put your trust in Christ, and sometimes we need to be reminded of that. And speaking the truth in love is simply reminding each other God is good. How's that saying go?

God is good all the time. All the time. Okay, we're getting warmed up. God is good all the time.

We just spoke the gospel to each other. We spoke truth to each other. That's what we need to do.

And that's how we comfort each other in times of grief.

[35:40] last thing. Paul said in Philippians, follow my example as I follow Christ. The idea of finding exemplary people and following their example is a biblical one.

It doesn't diminish Jesus to say that I want to be a man like Jack Redmond. Was he perfect? No. Doesn't matter. We can see the things in Jack that were a reflection of Jesus and we should follow his example.

Do that. Be faithful in season and out when it's convenient when it's not to share the gospel. Do that because Jack would.

Fill your pockets with candy and give them to people because that opens the door for sharing the gospel.

do that. Give it a try. Wouldn't it be cool as part of Jack's legacy because you're following his example if somebody comes to Christ?

[36:52] I wouldn't put it past God to do that. But that's where we want to end up. Our citizenship is not here. It's in heaven.

Live that way. consider the cloud of witnesses around us. Most prominent in our thinking right now is Jack Redmond. Set aside the things that get in your way and run with your endurance the cross run with endurance a race is set before you with your eyes fixed on the joy that you have at the end of the race because it's there.

It's certainly there. Let's pray together. God, thank you that we have a sure hope that we can set our mind on the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God that we can set our minds on you and not on the things of earth that we have hope that's secure.

Lord, help us to live that out, to be confident in it and to live accordingly. God, help us to find comfort in each other's presence, to find joy in each other's presence, and to love each other well.

God, I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So I just want to point out I did it. So if you bet against me, you lost. But more importantly, after Harold and Dory sing, use this time, let the Sunday school teachers finish their job, but this is our meet and greet time, is to be together as brothers and sisters

in the Lord, to celebrate Jack's life.

[38 : 39] There will be a celebration of life later. Details will be forthcoming when they're available. But in the meantime, let's celebrate our friend, our founding pastor, Jack Redmond.

All right. Thank you. Thank you.