

# Waters, Rivers and Fires

by Carter Conlon

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a deep root in God to withstand the trials and difficulties of life and to receive the promise of God.*

**Duration:** 43:44

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:1-9, Matthew 13:18-23, Hebrews 10:35-39, Hebrews 11:36 - 12:2

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor uses the analogy of a long distance runner to illustrate the importance of staying committed to the Christian journey. He emphasizes the need for spiritual nourishment through the word of God, comparing it to the proper diet and vitamins needed for a marathon. The pastor also highlights the challenging times that believers will face before Christ's return, urging them to persevere and not give in to despair. He encourages every believer, regardless of their starting point or abilities, to finish the race by the grace of God and not be swayed by the voices that say they are inconsequential.

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## Transcript

I want to speak to you today from Matthew chapter 13. If you have your Bibles there with you, please, Matthew chapter 13. A message called Waters, Rivers, and Fire.

Waters, Rivers, and Fire. So Father, I thank you, God, with all of my heart for your presence in this house today. I thank you, Lord, for how you have led us as a people these 31 years, Lord.

You've led us as a church. You've spoken to our hearts. You've prepared us.

Lord, you have brought us to this place, this shore, this day. I pray, God, that you would give us the strength to finish the journey, every one of us, that there'd be none left behind that are here this morning unless they choose to be left behind. I pray, God, for strength for every mother, every father, every young person, Lord, every older person.

God, give us strength. Give me strength this morning, Lord, and I thank you for your willingness to pour through this frail vessel one more time for the sake of your people. God, one more time, feed your people.

Feed the sheep, Lord, that you've gathered here this morning. Feed the lambs, Lord. Feed those that are hungry, God Almighty.

Lord, feed those that have to be force-fed this morning. God, I pray, Lord Jesus Christ, that you would feed everyone in your house today, Lord. Father, thank you, God, for all that you're going to do.

We esteem you, Lord. We welcome you. You are welcome in this house, Holy Spirit.

You are welcome here, Lord Jesus Christ. You are welcome to walk the aisles of this church and to examine this testimony any way you choose. We thank you, Lord, that you've given us hearts that can be corrected and moved in the direction of life.

Oh, God Almighty, God Almighty, quicken your word. If you don't quicken your word, we can't hear it. We see it with our eyes, but we can't comprehend it.

It doesn't take a lodging in our hearts, Lord, if you don't quicken it. So help us, even give us the hunger, Lord, for your word today. And Father, we thank you for it all in Jesus' name, amen.

Matthew chapter 13, beginning at verse 20, waters, rivers, and fire. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while.

For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. The original King James says he is offended. And the root meaning of the word means he falls into a trap, literally a trap of his own making.

He falls into spiritual ruin. Now, it speaks of a person. I'm gonna say the word he and him throughout this message, but it's inclusive, okay? Just so that I don't have to repeat his and her and he and her and him all the way through the message.

It says, but he who received the seed on stony places, he hears the word and receives it with joy. It's somebody that hears that Jesus Christ died on a cross and paid the price for their sin and offers them eternal life in heaven. Says that I'll come and make my abode with you and I'll give you of my Holy Spirit and you'll become someone greater than you're able to be in your own strength, not just eternally, but you'll have an abundant life here on this side of eternity.

And it's the kind of a person who hears that and say, well, wow, only a fool would reject that. I mean, that's too good to be true. So he or she opens their heart and says, Lord, come into my life and be my Lord and my Savior.

But the scripture says that particular person has no root in himself. In other words, he chooses to live his life only on the surface of what his life in Christ is called to be. Never goes deep, just satisfied with maybe a little bit of Bible reading, a little bit, if any prayer, a little bit of church attendance, and it all is coupled together with a little bit of change and makes excuse in a sense for a shallow relationship with God.

And as long as the sun is out and the wind is blowing softly, he endures and his shallow roots are able to hold him up. A lot of people are not very deep in God in this generation, and I'm honestly afraid for them. I really am because we are going into a storm, folks.

This whole world is going into a storm. America is now in a storm. We're on the edges of a cultural hurricane.

Do you understand? We're going into a storm, and you know that from the workplace. You know that from what you're facing out on the street. Everyone here knows that, and we're entering into a season where the sun is going to be out, but the wind is not gonna be blowing softly.

He endures, but his shallow roots are able to hold him up during this nice season of Christianity, and we have in America preached a very, and when I say we, I'm talking about the church at large has preached not everywhere and not everyone, but in great measure, it's been a very light and a very shallow gospel, and the roots of the people are not very deep. They're not prepared for what could come their way. This man that Jesus refers to in the scripture fails to see that his lack of depth will cause him to fall when that which he didn't prepare for comes his way, and trust me, Jesus said in this world, you shall have tribulation.

In this world, anybody that preaches to you that to become a Christian, you're gonna be light and happy and skippy and flowers and sun all the way is a liar. There's no other way to say it. No, no, no.

Sickness comes to every house eventually. Death comes to every door. Despair comes to most every mind from time to time.

Tribulation and trouble come when you least expect it. Every day, you're going through your day happy, and suddenly your boss comes in and says, I'm sorry, but your job is terminated, and suddenly you're just, you're thrown out into the midst of a storm where all these voices from every side are coming at you, and I'm telling you, in Christ, your roots have to go deeper than just on the surface because if they don't, this adversity will literally blow you over. You won't be able to stand.

Now, the Bible, for example, tells us that in the season just before Christ's return, here's what it's going to look like in this world. Now, if you believe that Jesus is coming soon, as I do, I don't know how many days soon is, but it's soon. We're in the season of his coming.

Here's what the Bible describes this world as looking like. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3.1, these are gonna be perilous times. Slander is going to be everywhere.

Does it sound familiar? It sounds like listening to the news today. Despisers of those that are good are going to come to the surface. In other words, society is going to start hating those that are good.

Of course, good is defined by God and the word of God, and society is going to start hating those, it says despising, those that are good, those who believe in the biblical concepts of morality, for example, or family, or just boundaries on behavior will be despised in the last days. Matthew 24, verse nine, Jesus said, and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. There will be a lawlessness in the last days that's going to stagger people.

It's beginning even now as I speak. Matthew 25, Jesus said, many will be unprepared. They thought they had a relationship with God.

They thought they were belonging to the bridal party as it is, that they were waiting for the bridegroom, only to find out when the days got dark, they had nothing in them that enabled them to see, or stand, or direct anybody to the bridegroom. Matthew 20, verse 12, Jesus said, the love of many in the last days will grow cold. In other words, the love of life, the love of even being here, the love of people, maybe even the love of the word of God, I don't know, but just the love, that family love, that sense of belonging is gonna grow cold.

In 2 Thessalonians, chapter two, verse one, the apostle Paul speaks of a great falling away before the ultimate lawlessness or the man of sin is revealed, and this final worldwide rebellion against Christ reaches a crescendo. There'll be a great falling away. In other words, the difficulty of the time.

Now, I don't know what they're falling away from. I don't know how close they have been to the throne of God, but I suspect that it's along the lines of what Jesus says in these verses of Scripture. It's not like they didn't identify as Christian.

It's not like they didn't go to the house of God and be involved in some form of worship, but they had no depth, and when the darkness came, when the winds came, when the storm came, as the Scripture says, immediately their house fell. They couldn't stand. They're offended.

They fell into a trap. It's the trap of thinking that I can make it through without going very deep in my commitment to God. That's a trap.

If you're there right now, that's a trap for you. I'm warning you right now. I'm warning you as your pastor.

You're gonna fall into a trap. If you think you don't have to go very deep, if you think you're strong enough to stand without God, if you don't see the necessity of getting into the Word of God, of becoming a person of prayer, at least to some degree, if you don't see the necessity of calling out to the Holy Spirit and saying, God, change my life, change my heart, change my ways, change my speech, change my behavior. If you don't, and in order for those changes to happen, your roots have to go down deep because the supply has to come from something that only God can give.

And if your roots don't go down, the adversity of this world will ultimately cause you to be offended. You'll fall into a trap. Your roots won't hold.

This falling away is like a long distance runner who opts out before the race is finished because he didn't train seriously enough or didn't take it seriously enough to train for it. It's like the Christian person who, I'm telling you today, this journey is gonna be tough for many. If this was a course on long distance running today and say, okay, I thank God you're all here today.

There's a marathon coming up in New York City. It's 26 miles. We're gonna prepare.

Now, first of all, we gotta talk about diet. There's certain things you have to eat and certain things you have to stop eating. If you're eating only cheeseburgers, you're not gonna make it the full 26 miles.

You have to have certain vitamins. Now, how about as your pastor, if I tell you today to make it the full journey, you have to get in the Word of God. You have to know the Word of God.

You have to digest the Word of God. The Word of God has to become part of your character. You have to long.

You see, you have to long to win and you have to long to win enough that you want the proper diet. Then you have to get out and begin to exercise. You can't just go after church and sit at McDonald's.

Now, I'm not downplaying McDonald's, so please don't. But you can't just go sit there and gorge on fries and cheeseburgers and then suddenly go out and run a race. You have to get up every day.

You gotta discipline yourself. You gotta start exercising. You gotta become a proper weight.

You have to have the right nutrition. You have to get out and run. You start with two miles, then three miles, then four, then five, then 10, then 15, then 20.

And you have to actually do some practice runs all the way to the end because your body is going to tell you you can't make it. You have to train your body to believe. You have to train your body to run through the exhaustion.

You have to train your body to run through the pain. You have to train your body not to quit when every joint in your body is crying out, stop, stop, stop. We don't need this.

It's only a ribbon anyway. Who cares? And the Bible tells us in Hebrews chapter 12 that we have a great cloud of witnesses. We have people that have run the race before.

And it's really good to examine their lives. It's really good to study their lives and to take the example of how they ran it. It says, therefore, in chapter 12, verse one of Hebrews, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

We have to lay aside excess weight if we're gonna run this race, folks. Excess baggage, stuff that clings to us, that weighs us down and makes us heavy, it doesn't belong there. If you're gonna run this kind of a race, you've gotta be spiritually trimmed down a little bit.

There's things that don't belong in your body and they don't belong on your body. May I put it that way? And the sin which so easily ensnares us, things that we know according to the word of God are not right and we know brings weakness into our lives. If we're gonna finish the race, we've gotta lay it down.

There's no more discussion about this. I'm coaching you now to run a 26-mile marathon and I'm telling you, if you don't stop drinking, you're not gonna make it, do you understand me? Yeah, I hear that one clap, thank you. I'm talking about alcohol, I'm not talking about water and juice and stuff like that.

There's certain things you have to lay down that cling to you, certain practices, certain behaviors that the Bible makes really clear are either right and gonna give you strength or they're wrong and they're gonna take away your strength. Now looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, who for the joy of crossing that finish line, who for the joy of winning that victory, for you and I endured the cross, despising the shame and I sat down at the right hand of God. For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Consider him, he won the victory, he had to run through. I think the deepest hostility this world can express towards God and his people and yet he won the victory for us. And now he resides inside of these earthen vessels and he is able to carry us through.

He is able to give us strength. He is able to be our victory and our covering. Consider him who had to endure this hostility lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. Now who are these witnesses? Who's this great cloud of witnesses? I love the fact that right before chapter 12 begins, there are a certain group of people that are listed. Now these are not the lion killers necessarily or the people that fought giants in pits and all that kind of stuff.

But listen, verse 36 says it this way of chapter 11. Still others had trials of mockings and scourgings, yes of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sun and two.

They were tempted, they were slain with the sword. In other words, they were tempted to quit just like anybody else is. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins being destitute, afflicted and tormented of whom the world was not worthy.

They wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth. And all these having obtained a good testimony through faith did not receive the promise. God having provided something better for us that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Therefore we also, you see verse chapter 12 is something that the translators put in. It's not in the original letter, it just carries on. Therefore we also since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

These witnesses who were able to endure the storm of opposition that this world threw against them. Oh, thank God, that means it's possible. You look at the latter half of chapter 11, can it get any worse? You look at what happened to these people.

They were mocked, they were beaten, they were put in prison, they were stoned. Some were sawn in two, they were tempted, slain with the sword, wandering about. They didn't have the finest clothes this world's got to offer, that's for sure.

The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts, that means dry places and mountains, they had to hide, dens and caves of the earth. And all these having obtained a good testimony through faith did not receive the promise.

You see, they embraced the promise of God. Hebrews 13 five, the Lord Jesus himself is recorded as saying, I will never leave you nor forsake you. They saw a city whose builder and maker is God.

They had transferred their affection and their citizenship. It doesn't mean they don't vote on this side of eternity. It doesn't mean they don't contribute to society, but they had transferred their citizenship and affection to an eternal kingdom.

And they saw the promise. In my father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also.

Jesus Christ promises that you and I will rule and reign with him forever. He promises he's going to take us to a kingdom of eternal life, a kingdom of never ending revelation of the greatness and magnitude of God and of the understanding of our redemption. Something that is beyond our understanding.

I think our heads would explode if God tried to put it all inside of us. The eye has not seen, the ear has not heard the things that God has prepared for those who love him. They saw the promise and because of the promise, they moved forward and God enabled them to walk through the trials and difficulties that they had to face on this earth.

I want you to just listen as I read to you the promise that God once made to his people Israel in Isaiah chapter 43. But now thus saith the Lord who created you, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel, fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned nor shall the flame scorch you.

For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Saba in your place. Since you were precious in my sight, you have been honored and I have loved you.

Therefore, I will give men for you and people for your life. Fear not for I am with you. I will bring your descendants from the East and gather you from the West.

And I will say to the North, give them up and to the South, do not keep them back. Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth. Everyone who's called by my name whom I've created for my glory.

Don't be afraid, your faith is not in vain. I know where your sons are. I know where your daughters are.

I know where your families are. Hold to the promise. Keep moving forward.

Run the race that is set before you. Go down deep in God. Don't be afraid of depth in Christ.

And don't turn back when adversity comes your way and when you have to face those things that everyone in this world eventually has to face. I want you to think for a moment of the Apostle John, a fine young man. He really loves Jesus with all his heart and he knows that Jesus loves him.

He describes himself in the Gospel of John as the disciple whom Jesus loved. He's at the Last Supper, he's leaning on his chest. He's just, you can't get any closer to God than John is at this point.

And yet at the end of his life, he's hearing the voice of God, of course. So close, but at the end of his life, he's in prison, exiled to an island called Patmos for the testimony of Christ. It's cold, he's 80 years old roughly at this time.

And he's cold. That, you see, I wear a sweater even when it's warm in here. Now I'm starting to understand this a little more.

You know, there's a scripture that says, David got no heat. I get that now, I get what he got. He got no heat.

And you find yourself, I know, I used to make fun of people who moved to Florida when they got old until lately. I'm not so sure anymore. But John is in Patmos, he's on an island.

It's cold, it's miserable, it's damp, it's barren. And if you go and just research this island, this prison, it's a terrible prison. The worst of the worst are in this place.

And he's there for the testimony of God. The storms would be raging. It's an island, you can't get off.

The storms would be raging all around him at this time of year. And yet in Revelation 110, he talks about, I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, he said. That voice that rises above the storm, that voice that he once heard as they were trying to row to the other side, and they woke him up and said, Master, do you not care that we perish? That voice that stood in the midst of the storm and said in a voice louder than the storm, peace, be still.

And the wind stopped and the waves immediately stopped so much so that the disciples said, what kind of a man is this that even the wind and the waves obey him? And I'm telling you, the waves didn't just suddenly go down, they stopped. And they're suddenly on a clear sea. And yet in the midst of John's storm, that scripture that says, I will not leave you nor forsake you.

He heard a loud voice, louder than the wind, louder than the despair, louder than all that was coming against this man to destroy him and take away his confidence in God. And that could only happen to John because his roots were deep in his savior. He had listened, he had heard, he had walked with, he had followed, he was willing to even lose his freedom for the sake of Christ.

John the Baptist, Jesus described him as there's not been a woman, a person born of women up to that point that was greater than John the Baptist. But John had a certain perception maybe in his heart of what this walk with the Messiah was gonna look like only to end up in prison at a certain point in his life. And he sent messengers to the son of God.

And he said, are you, now remember, this is the same John that said, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. I'm not, he's the bridegroom, he's the bridegroom, I'm the friend of the bridegroom. I'm not worthy to tie his shoes.

You remember that. Now he's in jail many, many years later. And he sends messengers and he says, are you, are you the one, you know, sometimes confusion can get into your mind when trouble comes.

I thought, because you thought something that wasn't exactly correct. You thought your life was gonna go a certain way. You thought that walking with God was going to mean a certain thing.

And it didn't turn out that way. And so he sends messengers and he says, are you the one or do we look for another? Now Christ could have been easily offended by that, but he wasn't. He understands our struggles and our trials.

And he said, go tell John, go tell him. The deaf are hearing, the blind are seeing, lepers are cleansed, the dead are being raised and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Then he says, and blessed is he who's not offended in me.

Blessed is he who is not blown over by the winds of adversity. And the word blessed in the Greek means indwelt by God and fully satisfied. Blessed is he who trusts me when he can't fully understand why he's in such a storm, but knows in his heart that God will still be faithful to me.

Then he turns to his disciples and the people around him. He says, what did you go out in the wilderness to see when you went to listen to John? Did you go out to see a reed shaken by the wind? Do you think John, in other words, he's saying, do you think John was a plant with shallow roots? No, that man has deep roots in God. And though the storms are raging against his mind, though the storms are raging against his life, though he's going through the valley of the shadow of death, he's basically saying that man will not be blown over by this.

He will not fall into the trap of such despair that he'll begin to doubt the reality of God in his life. Oh, I thank God. And then he makes an incredible statement.

He says, but everybody in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist. You see, because we have a source of strength that John didn't have. We have the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit.

Every one of us, we have the word of God. We have the strength of God. We have the promises of God.

John didn't have everything that we have. He had measures of it, of course, but he didn't have everything that you and I have. And so we have a greater access to strength and stability and depth in God that will preserve us to the end.

Because for some, today it's going to be hard. It's gonna be harder than it already is. But there is a promise of God that goes on in verse 23 of where we started.

Remember, he says, he who receives seed in stony places is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, but he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. And when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. But verse 23 says, but he who receives seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces, some a hundredfold, some 60, and some 30.

The promise of God to you today is that no matter what happens, you will bear fruit. If your roots are down, you will bear fruit. There's a season coming when people are going to be running to you and saying, give me a reason for the hope that is in you.

Tell me why you still smile. Tell me why you still have a song. Tell me where you're going because I'd like to take that journey with you.

And those whose roots are down deep in the coming storms that we're all going to have to face, and some are facing today, the promise is that you will bear fruit by the grace of almighty God, just by standing. Just by standing. You don't know all the Hebrew.

You don't know all the Greek. You're not a great preacher. You'll never stand before crowds, but just by standing, you will bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

That is the promise of God. That is the promise of God. So my challenge to you today, start running this race.

Start training for this race. Start saying, God, put my roots down deep in you. Help me not to live on the surface of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Give me grace, oh God, to believe your word. Give me grace to read your word. Give me grace to spend some time in prayer.

Give me grace to start standing now for what I believe in. Start speaking now about what I believe. Give me grace not to be a coward.

Bring me, don't let me be a closet Christian, my God. Give me the grace to stand in the open field. You promised that I'm gonna bear fruit, so I'm gonna hold you to that promise.

Even though John was in jail, the apostle John, he was given the book of the revelation of Jesus Christ. How many people has that? How much fruit has been born for the kingdom of God through a man in prison? The apostle Paul was in prison. All he had was a parchment and a quill, and he decided to write some letters under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to some of the friends he'd left behind.

How much fruit did that leave for the kingdom of God? That's the promise of God. Because their roots were down deep, they bore fruit for God's kingdom. John the Baptist inspires me today and should inspire you, that God's not offended with our struggles or our trials or our difficulties or even our questions, because we look at him today as a man who walked it to the end, a man who was a man of courage and inspires us to follow the journey he took.

Praise be to God, praise be to God. The writer of Hebrews tells us in chapter 10, verses 35 to 39, I'm gonna close with this. Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward, for you have need of endurance, so that after you've done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

For yet just a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith, but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

In other words, we are not of those who draw back to their old way of living, their old way of thinking, the old value system, we are not of those who draw back into the world for our protection, but we believe God to the saving of our soul, right to the end. I'm only speaking to you this way because I care. I care about you, I care about your life, I care about you making it all the way through, and I'm cautioning you now as your pastor, start to prepare, get your roots down deep, you're going to need it, I'm going to need it.

We're entering into a season, perhaps like none in the history of this world. We may get a reprieve, we may have a few years of grace, I don't know, I hope so, but I know that on the other side, there's a very, very difficult time coming because the Bible says it's going to happen and what God says is what is. Right now, pray for confidence in your storm.

Whatever storm you're in now, say Lord, now teach me now and get my roots down deep now, whatever your storm is, and we all have them, in some measure at least, and if you don't, wait a week, yours is coming. But pray, God, teach me, help me to learn through this, help me not to live on the surface, help me, God, to put my roots down deep in you, in confidence in you, in trust in you, so that when the deeper storms come, and they do, I'll not be blown over by it. I'll find myself standing and will be a vessel through whom your name can be honored and great fruit can be brought into your kingdom.

And so that's my altar call this morning. Both here in the main sanctuary in the annex and in our overflow churches as well. God, give me confidence, deepen me, prepare me, guide me.

And it starts, remember, by putting aside the weight and the things that so easily beset us and preparing to run the race before us. And there's gonna be a lot to stop you and I, but by God's grace, there's no greater feeling than when you cross that line and raise your hands. I ran, the longest marathon I've ever run is seven miles.

That's not much to boast about, but it was physically speaking. I'm not a good runner. I don't have a good runner's gait.

My feet go up and down really good, but they don't go forward very well. So I got passed by an electric wheelchair one time when I was running just, and the fellow in it was cheering me on. He waited for me down at the end of the, so I'll just give you an idea.

So my friend Vince and I, my friend Vince and I decided to run this seven mile. It was listed as a community run. And we were both in, I was in community relations at the time in the police department

and Vince was a friend.

And Vince never exercised in his whole life. So I said, well, let's go and join the community run. And so we did.

And the first sign that something was wrong when we got to the starting line was numbers. Why do you give out numbers on a community run? And why is everybody from Kenya and about 14 feet tall? And when the gun sounded, it was like, I don't know if anybody's ever seen the cartoon, the coyote and the road runner. It was like that.

It was just, they were gone. This was a run. This was not like a jog.

This was, they actually ran this race. And Vince and I were so far behind that we, like, we noticed that when you came to the tables, you know, where you can get a drink, that they were gone, the people were gone, everything's gone. And when we got to the end, there's nobody there.

When we got over, I can't understand why. It only took us two hours to run the seven miles. And when we got to the end, there's nobody there.

And they'd even cleaned up all the ribbons and even the sweepers are gone. But I'll tell you, when we crossed the finish line, hallelujah, the point is, we had, anybody ever seen the movie Rocky here? Okay, when we had a Rocky moment, when we, and there was steps and everything too. When we crossed, our hands were raised.

There's nobody there, there's nobody to greet us. But the point is, the race is not to the swift, it's to those who keep on running, hallelujah. When it looks like you're all alone, when it looks like you're gonna lose, when it looks like it's a waste of time, when your body is aching because you've not really fully understood what the demand is for a race like this, but you keep on running, you keep on going, you keep on believing, you keep on trusting the great prize that's ahead of all of us.

Keep on running, my brother, keep on running, my sister. Don't give in, don't give in to the fatigue, don't give in to the threats, don't give in to the despair that would want to swallow you. Don't give in to the critics that criticize your run.

Don't give in to any of it, don't give in to any voice, but give in to the voice of God. Come unto me, he says, come unto me, come unto me, come unto me, keep on running, keep on running. Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, glory, glory.

There's a whole crowd of witnesses even today leaning over the balcony of heaven, looking down at us and say, you can do it, keep running. By the strength of God, keep running. Don't give up, don't despair, don't draw back.

Go down deep, go down deep, God is with you. Hallelujah, don't buy the lie that you are an inconsequential runner in this race. Don't listen to those voices, you matter to God, you matter to the kingdom of God.

Even if you're just starting out, it doesn't matter. Even if you're not the fastest runner in the kingdom of God, it doesn't matter. Finish the race, finish the race, finish the race by the grace of almighty God.

You see, I didn't get a prize that day, I didn't get a ribbon, I didn't get anything, but I got something greater. There's somebody at home somewhere in Kenya with a medal that's gathering dust on a desk somewhere, but I get to tell you the story that I didn't quit. Vince didn't quit, we made it, and that's a greater prize than what anybody else got that day.

Thank God, thank God, thank God, thank God. So don't quit, don't quit. You're in the midst of a storm, don't quit.

The waves are crashing in your boat, don't quit. Despair is eating at your mind, don't quit. You're afraid of the future, don't quit.

There's a great reward ahead of you. There's a great future and it's eternal with God and it's forever. Thank God, thank God.

Father, thank you, Lord, for the presence of your Holy Spirit here today. Thank you for the encouragement, oh God, that comes from your word. Thank you, Lord, that you are calling us to something that we can't do in ourselves, but by your Holy Spirit, we will.

We will, Lord, finish the race by the promises you've given to us and by the declaration that you declare over us. You say that we are your people, that you will push others, you will push everything aside that we may finish the race. And so God, thank you.

Give us the grace to go down deep, my God. Give us the grace to trust you. No matter how dark our days might be, give us the grace to trust you, oh God, and to finish our race.

If that's the cry of your heart, we're gonna stand in just a moment. And for those who can say, I need the strength of God, I need, maybe you're not in a trial, but you're afraid of the future and what it might bring you, just say, God, please help me. Please help me, God, please help me just to go down.

And there's no shame in that. Don't make promises to God, you can't keep them. Just come and ask him, say, God, please help me.

Please help me to run this race. Please take me down deeper in my walk with you. Let your character be formed in me and give me the grace to put away the sin, to put away the weight, all these things that I don't need.

Give me the grace. Praise God. We get to gather at an altar to pray to a God who hears us, to pray to a God who answers prayer.

And Lord, we just come to you, needing you. Lord, you know the days ahead. You know the times of tribulations, persecutions, and everything, oh God, that a darkened world descending into gross darkness can bring.

But Lord, you are the light of the world and you are our savior. And Lord, though the spirit of this age and everything is too great for the spirit of man, it is not too great for the spirit of God who lives in us. Thank you for loving us so much.

Thank you for loving us and understanding us. Thank you, oh God, that if we have to come to you 10,000 times a day to say, Lord Jesus, help me, you hear us and you answer us with your supernatural help. Lord, help us, oh God, to shame the devil and to condemn the dimmer, condemner.

Help us, oh God, when he tells us we're going down. We tell him I belong to Jesus who loves me and gave himself for me. Thank you, Lord, that when, oh God, we feel so weak and helpless, Lord, it's not true because you are for us and you are with us.

Help us, Lord, at our weakest times to open our mouth to help someone else, to open our mouth and bless you, to open our mouth and speak the greater truth that you will never leave us, you will never forsake us, that you are for us. So God, I thank you, Lord, that no matter, oh God, what the day will bring, you go with us. I thank you, oh God, because, Lord, you are with us.

We will not fear. I thank you that you will take us on a journey that will break up the depths of fear, that you'll take us on a journey where we remain hopeless. You will take us on a journey of hope, Lord, and of strength.

So I thank you, oh God, you are with us today. I pray, oh God, that we would remember, oh God, that there are so many that don't have you, so many that don't have this hope, so many that don't know, oh God. And I thank you, Lord, we will grow from strength to strength, Lord, as we remember and see those around us.

And Lord, as we call on your name, you will help us, oh God. So we thank you. The devil is defeated, this world is defeated, but you are not, hallelujah.

You have overcome this world, and greater is he that is in us, greater is he, greater is he, greater is he that is in us than he who's in the world. Lord, receive praise today because we go with you. Thank you for the victory.

Thank you, your finisher. We will finish this race by the grace of God and the love of God. In Jesus' name, amen, amen.

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