

Finishing The Race Strong

by Sanjay Poonen

This sermon encourages young people to finish strong in their faith, emphasizing the importance of gratitude to Jesus and the need to be faithful in all circumstances. The speaker reflects on the brevity of life and the certainty of meeting the Lord, urging listeners to lay aside burdens, run with endurance, and fix their eyes on Jesus. The message highlights the power of the Holy Spirit to help believers persevere and remain faithful, regardless of past setbacks or challenges.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1, Matthew 25:21, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Psalm 90:12, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:24, 2 Timothy 4:7, Galatians 6:9, Revelation 2:10, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Perseverance in Faith", "Gratitude to Jesus"

Description

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Transcript

I wanted to just share a brief word of encouragement to especially the young people. As you know, that's been my burden every time God has given me the privilege to be back here at CFC. The next generation, we are very privileged to have brothers in their 70s, 60s, but all of us are getting older.

And my passion is not just for my children, who are 7 and 11, but for every one of you who some of whom I saw as young children now, the next few decades pass and they're now 25, 28, 30. Some of you have your own children. And my prayer is that the words that I heard that have inspired me, when I first saw CFC start when I was 5 or 6 years old and I'm now 48.

So for the better part of 40 years, God has really given me so much that I am grateful for. I want to share a brief word with all of you young people especially, titled Finishing Strong in 20XX. XX stands for whatever year, one of the two things will happen sooner, either we will die or we will meet the Lord.

Guaranteed one of these two things is going to happen. There's no third choice. We will either meet the Lord or we will die.

So whatever that year might be, 20XX, we're very, very privileged that the Lord has allowed us to end 2017. There's no guarantee that we will see the end of 2018. We've known brothers and sisters who passed away in 2017.

People think, oh, you know, here comes, people predicted that Jesus was going to come 40 years after 1948 because that was when Israel was formed. Then 40 years after 1967, which was when Jerusalem was freed. This year is 50 years since Jerusalem was freed and we don't know the timing, but we see the signs of the times, all of this war and activity in the Middle East so that we believe we are in the end times for sure.

I don't know that I will see another generation when my children will live to be my age, but all of us can finish strong, whatever that, and I was thinking to myself when I think about the heroes who I admire in my life, how long did they live? This year we came back to celebrate my mom's 75th birthday. My dad turned 78 this year, brother Ian turned 77. Jesus lived to 33 and a half.

Many of his disciples died, martyred often, James, the son of Zebedee, late 30s, early 40s. Peter and Paul lived to their 60s. Maybe John lived to the 90s.

Some of the saints I admire now in the last 30, 50 years, David Wilkerson died in a car accident when he was 79, so we don't know. Another person I admire, Eric Little, as you know, the person who stood for God and didn't run on a Sunday, died when he was 42 of brain cancer. This word that my dad has at the entrance of our door has stayed with me, there's only one life will soon be passed, only what Christ does through you will last.

And I think there's two things I would encourage us to reflect on, it's almost two sides of the same coin. One is tremendous gratitude, giving thanks, we sang much of that today, give thanks. And the gratitude we need to have to Jesus who died for our sins, who gave his life to us for examples, godly examples we have.

We have a heavenly father and many of us have spiritual fathers also who have given so much to us that our obligation of the other side of that same coin is to be faithful. And to me the tremendous, we've heard this message here and it really, I heard the parable so many times in Matthew 25, if you go to Matthew 25, you read the parable of this man who had different bags of talent, in one translation it says bags of gold, and the man went on his journey it says, in verse 14, and he called his servants and trusted well to them and he gave five bags of gold to one, two to another, and one to a third, we know the rest of the story. But to me the amazing part of the story is two things, one is there were only two end outcomes for these servants, you were either faithful or you were doomed.

There are other parables where it talks about different degrees of reward, but when you look at the master's response towards the end of this parable, he says repeatedly to the one with five and with two that had been faithful with what god had given them, he says repeatedly these three things, well done, good, and faithful servant. The entire modus operandi or the entire purpose of the world is to be successful, successful in your college, education, money, it doesn't say well done, even maybe in churches or in Christian work it might be being successful in God's work, here it says well done, good, and faithful servant, and I will put you in charge of many things. So to me, my obligation because of this gratitude that I have to my heavenly father and to the spiritual parents is the other side, to be faithful, that's all it is, it's not about how successful, that's irrelevant, it's to be faithful, and faithful everybody is equal here, whether you are someone who is speaking at this pulpit, a brother or sister who is playing an

instrument, a sister who is helping with the slides, another brother or sister who is helping hidden, maybe a mother who is at home, every one of us can be faithful, that requires the power of the Holy Spirit that transforms us.

And then the other state you see later on is a sad state where the one person who was not faithful, you see at the end in verse 30 it says, throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and I see a very clear binary choice almost, I can be faithful or I can be doomed. So what is my obligation, I say Lord, can I do this on my own strength, I can't, but I don't want to be living in fear, but I want to be faithful, and how can I be faithful? Many many features in the Bible of running a race, and the beauty of this race is it's not a sprint, 100 meters is a sprint, you're over and it's maybe over if you're an Olympic athlete it's 10 seconds, you know, for us who are not as talented maybe it's 20-25 seconds, this is a marathon, it's as long as you last, so there may be some bumps, and many of you may remember in the Olympics, I still remember this, there was a, I think it was a Somalian athlete who was running 10,000 meters in the 2016 Olympics, he's now a UK citizen, and he fell down, about halfway through the race, and if you fall down in an Olympic race, pretty much you can kiss your dreams of having a gold medal goodbye, it's not going to happen because you've lost many seconds, and every second is very precious, and this Somalian athlete he got back up, he got back up and fortunately there were 16 laps left, he came back and he won the race, and he talked afterwards in an interview about how that moment when he fell down he thought his dreams were shattered, and he mustered enough courage, and you know what it says, as we know, this says running the race is like running, 1st Corinthians 9, 24, 27 it says, do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize, run in a way that you may win, everyone competes, exercises self-control, they do it, they're talking about athletes like this Somalian athlete for a perishable crowd, but we do it for an imperishable crowd, and how can we run every day brothers and sisters, because many of you in your teenage years, in your 20 years, you might feel like that Somalian athlete who fell down sometime in 2017, or maybe even just today, something happened, the key with faithfulness is it's not over, God's given us another day, thank God that he's given us December 31st, God willing he'll give us January 1st 2018, but the trend needs to be up, up and to the right, as opposed to up and down and up and down and headed down, that is tremendous hope, so if you're in your 20s, and you feel like maybe your 28 in the last year was not the best year, but persevere, you can get back up and be faithful, and here's how you can be faithful, we know this verse so well, these are all verses I heard and heard over and over again, but here you can hear it today and hopefully it has an impact on you, Hebrews 12 verse 1 and 2, we have a great cloud of witnesses, and I think not just of the apostles of Jesus, I think of the many cloud of witnesses we have here in CFC, think about this, in the country of 1.2 billion people, they estimate maybe 2% are Christian, 20 million maybe, out of that 20 million Christians in India, a few hundred God has granted this tremendous privilege to hear these truths that we heard, maybe collectively now with all of the connected CFC churches a few thousand, we're not saying these are the only ones who are saved, but the heritage, the inheritance that we receive is so precious, it's like the master came and gave us the five bags of gold, so we have that great cloud of witnesses, what's our obligation, three things, very simple, this is the way in which we can run, so that we can finish strong, whatever year the Lord calls us, 20XX, number one, lay aside every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles you, so young brother, young sister, there is some encumbrance that's probably holding you back, and to me that picture is a pilgrim's progress, maybe a burden on your back, something that's entangled, maybe it's a friendship, maybe it's something that you don't want to give up, maybe it's some sin that's addicting to you, lay it aside, because it's entangling you, it's causing you to stumble, see this Somalian athlete who fell down, he tripped over his colleague's foot, this is not saying you tripped over somebody's foot, there's something in your own life that's causing you to stumble, he

says number one, lay it aside, through the power of the Holy Spirit, I pray that God can make that happen, every one of our lives, whatever it is, number two, run with endurance, I say praise God, Lord, if there was bumps in my 20s, maybe bumps again in my teenage years, wherever you are, young brother or sister, that's okay, run with endurance, it's not over in 10 seconds or 25 seconds, God's given you another year, run with endurance, it's a marathon, until you die or until Jesus comes, it's an endurance race, it's not a sprint, the race that is set before us, and as I read earlier, run to win the race, winning the race is the imperishable crown, and number three, and this is the best part, fix your eyes on Jesus, and this is the part that to me, that's so precious about the ministry of Jesus in our lives, first he authored it, in other words, he put in us, we didn't earn this ourselves, what did we choose to be among these few hundred people, among the 20 million Christians in India, among the 1.2 billion people in India to hear this, nothing, we didn't deserve that, but God, Jesus authored that, and then here is the all, the finishing part of it that encourages me, he will perfect it, so when we have this verse here that says, let's press on to perfection, I say, Lord, I cannot do it on my own, but I want to be perfect, more and more perfect every year, and you can do it, because you are the author and the perfecter of my faith, and you set an example, how did you set an example, you went through the cross, and you consider that cross everyday joy, despise the shame, sat down on the right hand of God, so this to me is so easy for all of us to say, Lord, I want that power that you had in 2018, or if you give, if you tarry, or you let me live another year, 2019, I tell my children every time we leave seeing our grandparents, you know, grandpa and grandma in their 70s, not a guarantee you'll see them again, a lot of people die in their 70s, so make this time really special, the last time you see them, goodbye, you may not see them again, same thing could be said, now longevity of life, you know, statistically, those of you in your 20s, 30s, and 40s will probably live, but it's not guaranteed, I had friends of mine who died of perfect health, died of a heart attack in their 40s, and I say, Lord, if today is the last day that you've given me on this earth, how am I going to live my life for you, doesn't matter what's happened in the past, what happens is now running with endurance, setting aside the encumbrance that's holding us back, fixing our eyes on Jesus, for me there's tremendous hope, so brother and sister, I pray that you will not be discouraged by this, you will be encouraged by this, and if you have a friend, maybe it's a family member who also needs to hear this for their own life, don't stop praying that God will pick them back up on their feet, as long as they've decided they still want to run in the race, as opposed to get out of the race, there's hope, as long as you leave the race, then you're disqualified, okay, you fell down, get back up, run with endurance, Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith, I believe great things are in store for us, whatever time the Lord has left for us, whether it's 2018 when he comes, if he gives us another year to live, whatever it is, I pray that every brother and sister here and the next generation and if God wills a generation after that, will be faithful, wherever it is, and the beauty now of the amazing aspect of technology, all the messages that you hear here, I think of the number of people who've been blessed through the ministry, you don't realize that this message is blessing people all over the world, will get messages into CFC India's email account from Mongolia, from Africa, think about that, that didn't exist when I was here in 1980s, so the remaining years the Lord has given us, I pray that everyone here will be faithful, the point is not to be successful, the main point is to be faithful and all of us can be faithful wherever you are and God give you grace, amen.

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