

Introduction

- Good morning. I can't believe none of you are out running Bloomsday? Or you already finished?
 - I know were not a very "Bloomsday" kind of church :o)
 - *Lifecenter Pastor --> You know your low on the teaching list when you're asked to teach on Bloomsday weekend.* Then without even realizing it the next week Donnie asked me to teach.
- Mara suggested that I teach on 1 Cor 9, seemed very appropriate.

1Cor 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. **25** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **27** But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

- Burrow into this conversation and the conversation between Paul and the Corinthians.
 - First look at the recipients of these words – the Corinthians.
 - Then investigate the author's heart in the matter.
- Then we'll look at the practical lessons that can be drawn from this analogy..
- Before that, let's ask for Jesus blessings over today, this lesson and that it may move us to serve Him better.

Prayer

- Recognize the race >> We are flawed >> We need our grace and guidance >> We need you Perfector

Audience

- Paul uses this analogy about running to give the Corinthians a description of spiritual discipline. And it landed on understanding ear.
- The Greek culture was very into sports. (this is true with our culture today as well)
 - It was very much part of their schooling. At age 7 (if the family could pay the fees) children would go to a schools and learn basics of reading, writing, counting, but also *being* a very artistic and philosophical culture they would study poetry, music, theater etc... as well as wrestling, boxing, running an throwing.
 - If a child was advanced enough and the family had the means they would then go to the gymnasium at the age of 17. There they would hone physical skills and listen to lectures by the Athenian greats - diving deeper into philosophy, politics and rhetoric.
- The best of the best would continue on to the annual games in a w/ somewhat friendly competition with the neighboring towns. [Map]
 - Athens being the Corinthians "rival"
 - The most famous sports event in history --> Olympics originates in Athens.
 - Whereas Corinth had the Isthmian games – well not quite as well known.

- Though Athens may have been known as the center of the empire of Greece due to its political, philosophical and athletic history. Corinth may have actually been a bigger and wealthier city.
 - Because of its location on the Isthmus almost all sea trade from the west and north came through Corinth. [Isthmus]
 - ❖ They even had a service where they would move small ships across the land to the other sea. Now there is a canal.
 - This vast trade means it had vast cultural and spiritual diversity.
 - 250,000 citizens 400,000 slaves. Archeologist have uncovered temples for at least 12 different gods.
- The historian Strabos (who died right around the birth of Christ) wrote of the great temple of Athena in Corinth. He said that something around 1000 temple prostitutes would come into the city in the evening to ... “collect” on temple “offerings”
 - A gem of a city. Beautiful – on the Mediterranean Sea: Filled with the most wonderful goods from around the world – great tourist shopping: Rich in culture and personality.
 - ❖ But ... so often with prosperity usually comes deep depravity.
 - Makes me think of San Francisco – or even other towns in our very own state.
- When Paul walked into this city he was heartbroken.

Author

- He had just come from Athens, where he gave a most brilliant spiritual and philosophical presentation ever recorded. Perhaps rivaled by only the Greek greats Socrates.Plato.Aristotal.
 - And received a very lack luster response.
 - All the locations he visits – regardless of the persecution – have famous churches he started.
 - There is no church of Athens ever mentioned.
- Paul spent the good part of the year prior in turmoil.
 - Acts 16-18: Paul’s Second missionary journey.
 - Philippi: Stripped, Beaten, Jailed.
 - Thessalonica: Ran out by a mob.
 - Berea: Chased down by the mob from Thess. Leaves friends behind (Silas and Timothy)
 - Then Athens: “His spirit was greatly upset because he saw the city full of idols.” [Acts 17:16](#)
- Enters Corinth alone, despondent and frustrated. Seems none of his previous (life endangering) endeavors were panning out so well. -->> You had a tough year.
- He enters Corinth into, what seems like, the devils den. Possibly quite depressed.
- Personally I would have a hatred for the city.

Las Vegas story – ate me alive

Went to Reno and ended up leaving with the same \$ in my pocket as when I arrived.

I got this – 100x worse. Temptation at every step - Porn on the streets. Dropped \$350 gambling the first night. After I was broke I went over and watched my cousin lose \$400 at one table in 15 minutes. This is a big money to teenagers back in the 80's.

- *To this day I hate that city. (city of sin built on sin for sin)*
 - ❖ *Ask Mara – 20 yrs later we opted out of a gymnastic meet in Vegas.*
 - ❖ *Haven't set foot in it since – and if up to me, never will.*
- I wasn't a righteous man, like Paul. I was a hedonist, still it discussed me.
 - Now, as a (*pious holier than thou*) Christian I can't even bear to look at the city.
- But here is Paul's heart.

1Cor 2:1-5 (ESV)

1 ...when I came to you, brothers [of Vegas], I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom [as he did in Athens]. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, **4** and my speech and my message were not in *plausible words of wisdom*, but in demonstration of the *Spirit and of power*, **5** that **your faith** might not rest in the *wisdom of men* but in the **power of God**.

- Paul enters the city lonely, defeated, weak and fearful. A failure.
 - And his focus soon turned back to the faith of the Corinthians – no matter how corrupt.
- These folks were a disaster. Sleeping with each other – family members.
 - In this letter he is correcting them for getting drunk off the communion wine but not willing to feed the poor that gathered out the door of the meeting halls.
 - Paul spent 1 ½ years there. Then travels back to Ephesus, across the Aegean Sea, where he writes a series of letters to the churches just planted encouraging and guiding them.
 - ❖ Which includes this letter we are looking at today (1 Corinthians)
- A year or so in Ephesus and he writes a second letter to the Corinthians, and tells them...
 - [I had] countless beatings, 5x the 39 lashes, 3x w/rods, pummeled with stones and drug out of the city left for dead, shipwrecked – drifted alone at sea ... I suffered through ...

2 Cor 11:27-28 ... toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. **28** And, apart from other things, there is the **daily pressure** on me of my **anxiety for all the churches**.

- He has an “anxiety for the church” -- such a deep love and concern. No matter how depraved.
 - I wonder how many of us can say they have an “anxiety for the church”
- Make sure we know the character of the author of this letter that we read here.
 - Of course the authorship ultimately is orated by the Spirit of Christ.
 - The human author is broken, **humble** and submissive to that Spirit.
 - This isn't a stuffed shirt of academia spouting his **opinion** on how they perceive reality.
- Ok, back to the scripture:

1Cor 9:19-27 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a **servant to all**, that I might win more of them.

20 To the Jews I became as a **Jew**, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.

21 To those **outside the law** I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.

22 To the **weak** I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become **all things to all people**, that by all means I might save some. **23** I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

25 *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things.* [30 days of intense discipline prior to the games] *They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.* **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.

27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

- Some may hear that scripture and see legalism.
 - Picture a monk whipping himself and think what foolishness.
 - It is not for the sake of kill-joy legalism. It is for a better life. With purpose meaning value.
 - As Christ said in His prayers for the disciples the eve before His arrest.

Jn 17:13 ... I am coming to you (Father), and these things I speak in the world, that they may have **my joy** fulfilled in themselves.
- Some may be so intimidated that it seems inaccessible.
 - Like a marathon or even a ultra-marathon (100 mi) – I can't even fathom 15 – 20 hours
 - Don't be intimidated, don't lose heart, remember we have a Great "Coach". (Great High Priest)
- There may even be someone who is thinking – what race? I am not in your silly Christian race.
 - Oh yes you are my friend.
 - ❖ Doors: Jim Morrison
 - Into this house we're born
Into this world we're thrown
We're riders on the storm
 - ❖ He got that from Martin Heidegger: - -
 - (*geworfen*) – being thrown || *Geworfenheit*: Thrown-ness; sense of
 - Yes my friend - all of us are in the race.
 - What roll will you play in the race?
 - ❖ The spectator watching it run by you?
 - ❖ The ignorant - fiercely and stubbornly trying to pretend that the race is not taking place.
 - ❖ The protestor complaining and offending
 - Swinging in the air like a boxer and no opponent?
 - ❖ The chattel (The masses) limping along untrained and in pain?
 - ❖ Or will you be the athlete, well trained, well prepared, effective, powerful, beautiful.

APPLICATION: GOSPEL

- Let's build out this Running analogy out even further.
 - One does need to be careful with analogies. There is a specific message being conveyed and taking an analogy beyond that point can yield inaccurate results.
 - ❖ ie: Words are weapons. Dangerous, so we better have license them and permit them.
 - ❖ Well that is a bit absurd. Because we left the point of the analogy. Words can hurt.
 - But Paul's analogy here can be taken remarkably deep.
- Normally I run Bloomsday, but this year I decided not to.
 - Nice not having the pressure of training.
 - But then I don't have the motivator to run and it affects me.
 - ❖ How I think, how I sleep, my mood. I am really missing it.
 - Am I required to train – No. But oh, when I hit that race – when I hit that hill – is it going to really hurt if I don't strengthen and discipline my body.
- Paul gives his disciple Timothy this advice

1Tim 4:7b -8 ... **train** yourself for godliness; **8** for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.
- Our spiritual walk is much the same as training for Bloomsday.
 - Out of shape, complacent, comfortable (and lazy)
 - ❖ When we hit that hill – oh it is going to hurt.
 - ❖ The better trained we are -- the easier the hill becomes.
 - ❖ It can even bring joy.
- Ten years ago or so I was in some of my best shape. I ran Bloomsday in just under 56min. That is a 7 min/mile.
 - I devoured hills. I met challenges with joy. I trained for it and succeeded. Oh it felt good.
 - It is a form worship – I run and I thank God. I marvel at His creativity in making the human body, praise Him for the glory of the world around me. The texture of the clouds the sun set on the river water ...

You have probably all heard this quote from Chariots of Fire: A true story about [Eric Liddell](#); the British athlete who won gold in the 400 Meter race in the Paris 1925 Olympics. *He said, "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure."*
- Join in Gods pleasure by using His gifts. By engaging in the race.
 - That's how Paul can endure beatings, shipwrecks; joy in the adventure of serving the creator of the universe. There is none better.

- Each of you are blessed with gifts, talents traits that ... skills for the adventure
- It is what we are made to do. But it will require some training.
 - ❖ Brilliant athletes, pianists, guitarist ... they all practice
 - ❖ Same with brilliant Servants of Christ.
- But think of all the effort we put into the physical race. Sports, hobbies, material, work, life...
 - It is all for a perishable reward.
 - We need to align our perspective with Paul. Train for the imperishable reward.
 - It isn't always easy. But the value is beyond measure.
- Eric Liddell when on to do missional work in China.
 - In 1943 Japan invaded the region he was serving in and he was put into an internment camp where he continued to server Christ and everyone around him until his death in 1945.
 - ❖ His final words were "*It is complete surrender.*"
 - He knew how to run the race. Worship Jesus on every hill and in every challenge.
- Church father Polycarp – Bishop of Smyrna 155AD (city just north of Ephesus)
 - While being tied to the stake to be burned said to his captors,
I bless Thee for deigning me worthy of this day and this hour that I may be among Thy martyrs and drink the cup of my Lord Jesus Christ. – Polycarp 155 – “To live is Christ to die is gain”
- Not many challenges greater than that. But Polycarp found it pure joy to engage that hill.
 - Emulating his trainer, “The Greater Coach”. Jesus on the cross.

Lk 23:34 And Jesus said, “**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**” And they cast lots gambling for his garments.
- **How** do we get there from here?
 - To be honest with you. The night I was writing this I was horribly insensitive to one of my children and got in an argument with them. After all the apologies were over I sat back down at my desk and reread that verse and my heart just breaks.
 - Why can't I be discipline and humble ... consistently
 - Sometimes I feel like I am Corinth. An undisciplined mob driven by emotion.
 - You know Paul wrote them two letters trying to correct them.
 - ❖ His heart broken over their worthless chasing after the wind.
 - ❖ Thirty years after Paul the 4th Bishop of Rome Clement. Wrote a very similar letter to Corinth.
 - ❖ It is like they just can't learn. – the temptations of the city just seem too great.
- **How** do we get there from here?

- Paul tells us there in that scripture – a man with great experience with the race and great advice.
 - Three (maybe 4) practical things to recognize.
1. Recognize the race. – Stop ignoring it or down playing it.

*Eric Liddell: You came to see a race today. To see someone win. It happened to be me. But I want you to do more than just watch a race. I want you to take part in it. I want to compare faith to running in a race. **It's hard**. It requires concentration of will, energy of soul. You experience elation when the winner breaks the tape - especially if you've got a bet on it. But how long does that last? You go home. Maybe your dinner's burnt. Maybe you haven't got a job. So who am I to say, "Believe, have faith," in the face of life's realities? I would like to give you something more permanent, but I can only point the way. I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way, or his own way. And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? ~~From within~~. Jesus said, "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. If with all your hearts, you truly seek me, you shall ever surely find me." If you commit yourself to the love of Christ, then that is how you run a straight race.*

- What a humble victory speech.
 - ❖ Don't run aimlessly after material goods.
 - ❖ Don't beat the air fighting an invisible opponent.
 - It is like fighting THE dragon with a whiffle ball bat.
 - What good is that? You'll just end up exhausted and wounded if not worse.
2. Recognize the goal – set the finish line in you sight. Always have the goal in your mind
 - ❖ There is an **eternal** reward. And as Liddell said, *I run for His pleasure*.
 - His pleasure is our victory.
 3. The main part of this scripture - Discipline ourselves. Have self-control.
 - ❖ But I can't, I am not smart enough, too sinful, temptation is too strong.
 - Then you are probably relying on yourself.
 - You need a trainer. A coach. "A greater Coach" A Hero. A king. A savior.

Heb 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest "a greater coach" who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in **every** respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then, with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find **grace to help in time of need**.

- ❖ You can't go it alone. – Jesus has experience your trials. His grace is available.
- ❖ That doesn't relieve you of responsibility. You are ultimately responsible for your actions.
 - So often we are in a tough run. A hill or a stretch of trails that seems endless and we are not prepared. We expect to shoot up that prayer. *Help me Lord! Deliver me from this suffering – Give me answers*. And He doesn't respond to your expectations.
 - His will is known through His word. His Spirit is found through consistent, honest, earnest prayer.

- He is there, His grace is always present. It is a matter of us accessing it. Of engaging in a relationship with Him.
- 4. There is no sport where the elite does not have a coach. (Maybe the forth thing to recognize)
 - ❖ You have the capability to be elite athletes in faith.
 - ❖ Focus on our “great trainer” – and discipline yourselfers to emulate Him to worship Him.

Heb 12:1-4 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith**, who for the **joy that was set before him endured the cross**, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. **4** In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

- Your perfection is Jesus perfection.

PRAY