

WCCC July 30, 2010

The Right Course to Finish: Finishing the Race (3)

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I would like to continue to fellowship with brothers and sisters the matter of finishing the course. In the past two evenings we had already shared that Paul has told us that in order to finish the entrustment of God, to build a good testimony for Jesus Christ, we must run in the path that God has set for us. We mentioned that we need to run in the right way of God because only this right way can lead us to the goal that God wants us to get to. Not only do we need to run in this right way, but we also need to run it well. Our condition before God has to be right as well. To go one step further, the Apostle Paul tells us that we need to finish the course. Finishing the course is one of the keys to whether or not we receive the crown from the Lord. Paul tells us that he already *fought the good fight, finished the course, kept the faith and there is a crown of righteousness* reserved for him. Not only on earth do we need to be a good testimony for our Lord, but we also should have a longing to receive this crown. In order to receive the crown, we have to finish the course. In the past when I read 2 Timothy 4, I always felt that that course was only set for Paul and that I would not be able to finish the course. We see how Paul loved the Lord, had such great gifts, received such great revelations, had great zeal beyond everyone else, so every time I thought about him, I thought only he could finish the course. I felt there was no hope for me. Every time I read this passage, I feel there was a great weakness within me. We know that when Paul said this, he intended to encourage Timothy and all brothers and sisters. Gradually when I came to know God's Words a bit more, I realized that each person's path in the way of our Lord Jesus is different. The Lord did not call me to run Paul's course. If I run Paul's course, I'd never be able to finish it. Thank the Lord, He has given each one of us our own course to finish. The highway of our Lord is only one, but the personal paths are many. We can see from Paul's life that he did finish his course. It is a great example which brings us encouragement, but we do not have to run in his condition. We can see some very important principles based upon the course that he ran. We do not have to imitate his example, but we need to keep the principles. Tonight we hope that through the lives of past saints we can see some important principles. We hope the Lord will encourage us so that we can also finish the course the Lord has measured to us on earth.

2 Timothy 4:6-8

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Acts 13:24-25

*... after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'*

Acts 20:24

*But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.*

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*

Philippians 3:13-14

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Hebrews 12:1-2

*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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Psalms 103:7

*He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.*

Jeremiah 31:21

*Set up for yourself roadmarks, place for yourself guideposts; direct your mind to the highway, the way by which you went. Return, O virgin of Israel, return to these your cities.*

### ***The Testimony of Jesus is First in Our Lives***

We would like to see some principles from people in the Bible who have finished the course in their lives. The first thing they paid attention to was that they highly valued the entrustment of God, that is to say they placed the testimony of Jesus in the first place of their lives. When Paul had that discourse at Pisidian Antioch, he mentioned John the Baptist. He said that John the Baptist *was completing his course*, one who had run the course of God and was about to finish his course. The testimony of John was a great influence to Paul. He saw John's service and how he ran that course faithfully, so he mentions John the Baptist's testimony. How did John finish the course? John said, *"I am not..."* We can see he placed Jesus at the very important place in his life. By denying himself, he was allowing Jesus Christ to be manifested. If we do not know how to deny ourselves or a person who cannot deny himself is easily hurt. If we continue in that hurt, it is very difficult for us to finish the course. The Lord Jesus previously said to His disciples that to follow the Lord, they must daily deny themselves. John the Baptist was one who learned to deny himself. He had a very humble attitude before the Lord, he said that he was even unworthy to untie the sandals of the Lord. Untying sandals was a task for a servant, and yet he said that he

was not even worthy of doing that. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus, a man of power and influence. Many Jews came to the Jordan to be baptized by him, yet in that condition, John the Baptist revealed his humility. It was because he realized that in his ministry, he himself was not important. The most important was to manifest Christ to others. Brothers and sisters, a person who truly places the Lord Jesus Christ in the most important place in his life is a person who does not pay any attention to himself and a humble person.

### ***Run in Denial of Self***

In John 3, there is a recording of the story of John the Baptist. John was the one originally baptizing people. At that time, Jesus and his disciples were also baptizing people. All of a sudden, the large crowd went to Jesus. The disciples of John came to him and said how everyone was going to Jesus now. In John 4 it says that actually it was not Jesus who was baptizing, but His disciples. If it were us, and we are baptizing people and people are running to another place, the other place being the Lord Himself baptizing, it would be acceptable. But it was His disciples who were baptizing, so John's disciples felt like this was unfair. We truly see how John the Baptist denied himself. He said, "*A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' ...but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him rejoices greatly...*" And he said these words which are very famous in the Bible: "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" Brothers and sisters, this is a person who was running the heavenly way. Only in this condition can a person finish the course. Eventually he was martyred for the Lord and bore a wonderful testimony for the Lord Jesus. A lot of us may use this saying, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*", but sadly we see many brothers and sisters who serve in the Church who had nothing when they first came out to serve. It seemed that they had a reverent heart for the Lord, but gradually they become famous and well-known. Then what happens? That person continues to increase and the Lord Jesus continues to decrease. Brothers and sisters, this is a very abnormal condition. This reminds us that John the Baptist is a good example. Through his life we see some important principles and we thank the Lord, his testimony influenced the Apostle Paul. So in Paul's discourse he mentions John the Baptist. Of course John the Baptist was a good example and Paul's testimony was very strong too.

### ***Run with Determination***

Paul was also a person who finished his course. When we turn to Acts 20, we see that in Paul's early service he already had this determination. He wanted to complete the entrustment and course that the Lord had given to him, he had to finish the course. He laid his own life aside, not considering it precious. Brothers and sisters, we know in this world there are many successful people who also lay aside their lives for their career. We can see that people are striving in this world for a crown that will perish, and striving so much for it without caring for their own lives. They pay the entire price to receive that, so when I see this I have a deep sigh from within. Towards our Lord and His entrustment to us, how many brothers and sisters have such an attitude? A lot of times we have such a passive attitude and look lightly upon the things of the Lord and if we do not consider His entrustment as something important, how can we finish this course? Brothers and sisters, we truly need the mercy of the Lord, so that we can see how God has placed such a glorious entrustment upon us. I have a music teacher and he knows that I like to sing. One day he told me, "You must consider singing more important than your life! Then you will sing well." I replied, "I'm sorry, I've already consecrated my life to the Lord." Brothers

and sisters, do you see that in the matters of this world, that if you do not pay a price and put in effort, you cannot be successful. Yet in this world what you will gain is just vainglory. Often we have so much reservation for our Lord. If we cannot consider the things of the Lord more important than our life, it will be very hard for us to finish this course. Paul in Philippians 3 also says that he counts all things as *rubbish so that I may gain Christ*. If you only have this determination, then there is a possibility that you may finish the course. Paul finished his course in this way.

### ***Run with a Clear Goal***

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul uses an athlete competing in the field to illustrate how to complete the course. Those who know the background tell us that every two years in Corinth there are athletic competitions. These games are called the Isthmian Games. These games were held the year before and after the Olympic Games. Paul used these games to encourage the brothers and sisters in Corinth. Actually when he wrote this passage, he was actually talking about how he ran this course. He said, *I run in such a way, as not without aim*. When he ran, he had a set direction. He had a very clear goal and a determination to win the prize. Just like an athlete on a field, you cannot run randomly; if you run randomly, you cannot win the prize. Every athlete knows the direction and press on in that direction. The Apostle James also tells us that you cannot be double-minded. If you are double-minded, you cannot have a set direction to run in. Athletes in competition forget everything and their eyes focus on the goal and place their entire effort into it. Paul tells us that as he was running the course, he had a set direction for his goal. Our difficulty today is that we run in one direction, then we see that another direction is good so we run in that direction for awhile, running around and waste a lot of time. We like to switch lanes, so it is very hard for us to finish the course. May the Lord quickly give us a very clear direction, so that we can use the rest of our lives to focus on the right direction and strive in this direction. Paul encouraged the Philippians using his own testimony saying, *...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal...* Only in this condition can you finish the course. If you always look back, thinking about the past, then you will lose heart and your steps become slow. No matter whether your past was good or bad, you need to forget it. Rise up and run today.

### ***Run with Discipline and Self-control***

Thank the Lord, Paul placed his own personal testimony before the children of God. When he mentions the race, there is a great encouragement from his words. Not only do you need a set direction, but another important lesson for the athlete is to discipline your body. What does it mean to discipline our bodies? It means to make our bodies manageable. Every successful athlete is a person who knows how to control his body. When an athlete runs, every muscle needs to cooperate, so the person must go through much training. Every part needs to be trained so that everything is controlled by the person. Brothers and sisters, for us to finish the course, we need to discipline our bodies. After man fell, most people are slaves to their bodies. Honestly, we labor hard to serve our bodies: what to eat, what to drink, how to entertain ourselves. Our bodies are our masters controlling us. Nowadays as we are running the heavenly way, we need to control our bodies. Many brothers and sisters love this saying, these words that the Lord spoke to His disciples: *"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."* Every time we read that verse, we say, "Amen." This is actually the cause of our failure. How can we discipline our bodies? Paul

tells us, we need to have *self-control in all things*. This tells us that we need to have the strength for self-control within us. We'd like to mention a few points for your reference.

### ***Self-control in Time***

Concerning self-control, the first point is regarding time. We know that eventually we will enter eternity, but while on earth, time is very important to us. The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians that we need to *redeem the time* [Darby Translation]. This is the matter of time and those who understand the original Greek say that to *redeem the time* means to lay hold of opportunities. We know that our God loves us so much and loves to give opportunities to us. In our lifetime, God has given us countless opportunities. If we can lay hold of these opportunities, then we lay hold of time. This means to redeem the time. It's not that you make a schedule and try hard to follow it, you cannot do that. You need to lay hold of the opportunity the Lord gives us, and then you will redeem the time. History is written in time and many people's history were recorded in the Old Testament. That history is not complete and why is that? Only when they lay ahold of the opportunities God gave them, God recorded it, but all the opportunities not gained were not recorded. The only things which counted were the things done for Christ. Anything not done for Christ did not count. That was how history was written. To waste our time is to waste our life. We need to learn self-control concerning our time.

### ***Self-control in Energy***

Secondly, regarding our energy. We are very limited in our bodies. We need to make important choices, so we need to prioritize. We need to know which matters need more attention, and those which don't need much attention. Many years ago I was encouraged by an elderly brother. He told me, "Brother, as you serve the Lord, do not do scattered work." Meaning, do not do piece-meal work, a little here, a little there. That is to not do casual work, but work with purpose. It means that I need to put all my time and energy into things that God wants me to do. This is something we need to learn before the Lord. If we do not know how to control our energy, then you will be too tired before you're even half-way through.

### ***Self-control in Speech***

Thirdly, we need to have self-control in our speech. Of course the Bible tells us that we are to speak words which will edify others. We need to speak words which will supply life. Younger brothers and sisters, you also need to learn to speak words which you will not regret. If today you say something that you know you'll regret for the rest of your life, do not say it. We need to have self-control with our words.

### ***Self-control in All Things***

So Paul says here that we need self-control in all things. Of course this is not religious asceticism. The Lord knows us and not all of us have strong wills. Most of us have weak wills. Thank the Lord, He helps us. God has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. In Galatians 5:23 we see among the fruit of the Spirit, one is self-control. We need to learn self-control through the Holy Spirit. This is a great grace of God. He is such a great God and His Spirit lives inside of us. He cares about all the details of our lives. Sometimes He teaches you to not speak, or disciplines you to not go there and reminds you to lay hold of that opportunity. Brothers and sisters, as long as you are someone saved by grace, you will experience this in your life. We need to learn to follow the Holy Spirit. We should forsake religious asceticism. Paul says in Colossians 2 that

*self-abasement and severe treatment of the body ... are of no value.* Yet we see today that among God's children there are those who are still doing this. We do not have to as the Spirit of God is inside of us. John tells us that we are to abide in the anointing which teaches us. As long as you following the teaching of the holy anointing from the Lord, this self-control will becoming your experience. Many of us may set resolutions, and we know that the result of resolutions is just as what Paul says, *for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.* We may have set hundreds of resolutions, but can never carry it out. Now we know that we do not need to set resolutions, but instead to follow the Holy Spirit. Then naturally you will learn the lesson of self-control in all things.

### ***Run with Freedom***

In Paul's epistles, he mentions another thing which I feel is very important concerning running the course. This is knowing how to use the freedom that we have in Christ. Yes, the Lord has saved us and we are a free man, yet we need to know how to exercise this freedom. In 1 Corinthians, Paul used a large passage to write about this freedom. There's a good phrase here in 1 Corinthians 6:12, it says, *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.* Paul is teaching us how to exercise this freedom. People who understand the Biblical background tell us that this phrase *all things are lawful for me*, was a phrase actually used by Greek philosophers at that time. They said that we are born free so we can do whatever we want. This thought greatly influences America and the entire world today. We are free and not controlled by anything. However, Paul adds another sentence, *yes, all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but I will not be mastered by anything.* This is a very important matter. Let me give you an example. I know a brother who does not want to attend any summer conference or special meetings. Why does he not want to attend? It is because he says that the meals are not good. He is an epicurean and only likes good food. One time he really did come to a conference. When we sat down to eat, he pulled food out from his own pocket. Brothers and sisters, in this type of condition, he would not be able to run well in the course. Paul was very humorous in 1 Corinthians 8:8, he tells us that *food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.* Sometimes if the Lord gives us good food, we thank Him. If we do not have, that's alright too as we are not mastered by it. We see that many details in our lives are mastering us. If we are bound by this, how can we run the course? We thank the Lord, Paul was one who finished the course. He fellowshipped his own personal experiences with brothers and sisters. These principles are very helpful to us.

### ***Run as a Sojourner & Stranger in This World***

Beside Paul, the author of Hebrews also encourages us to run in this way. In Hebrews 12:1-2, it says that *we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us.* These witnesses refer to the witnesses of faith in chapter 11. These are the witnesses from the Old Testament and among them, the majority had finished their course. How did they finish their own course? Certainly it was different for each individual, but there are still some important points we'd like to mention. One thing they recognized was that they are but sojourners and strangers in this world. That is to say, they did not put their hope in this world. They left their homes and while they had opportunities to return, they decided not to because they desired after the heavenly country. That is the City of Jerusalem, the greatest type and illustration of the testimony of Jesus. It is a city with foundation, built by God. Their eyes were opened and they saw that glory, therefore they

had no more admiration for the things of this earth. They did not want to build any career for themselves, but only lived in the promise of God. Brothers and sisters, if we cannot recognize that we are sojourners and strangers, still holding to the hope of the earth, trying to build something in this world, then we cannot finish the course.

### ***Run by Laying Aside Encumbrances & Sin***

The author of Hebrews used their condition to encourage us: *run with endurance the race that is set before us, lay aside every encumbrance*. What is encumbrance? Anything in our lives that causes a hindrance for our running is an encumbrance. We need to learn in our service and life to give everything up to our Lord. There is a small book written by Brother Fénelon called Let Go. This is a very good book and good reminder that in our lives on earth we learn to let go, to lift up everything to the Lord. No matter whether it is good or bad, we lift it up to the Lord. We do not need to carry such weight; if we are carrying such a heavy burden, how can we run the course? *Lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us*. Some explain the sin here as unbelief. Indeed, we if do not have faith and belief towards God, this can easily entangle us into the sin and cares of the world. We need to be very careful to not allow this sin to creep up upon us. It is different for each person. Some things may not influence you, but the same matter may have a great influence on someone else. We need to be very careful about the sin which so easily entangles us and need to be set free, lay it aside. How can we do it? *Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith*. We know that to *fix*, in the original language explains it as “looking off unto Jesus.” Our problem is that we do not know how to look off, and as we encounter things we are blinded by it. In our daily lives we need to often focus our attention on the Lord Himself. If we can look off unto Him, then these burdens and sin cannot entangle us and it will be easier to run the course.

### ***Run Based Upon Principle***

In the Old Testament, Moses was also someone who finished the course. Through his life we can also see some principles. In Psalm 103, it says that *He made known His ways to Moses*, while the sons of Israel only knew *His acts*. The reason why Moses could finish the course God gave him was because he ran based upon principle, not based upon circumstances. For God’s children today, it is hard for us to distinguish the difference. As we run the course, we need to run according to God’s principle. Everything is according to spiritual principle, not based upon the circumstances or outward works. Outward appearances is based upon works, so if you follow appearances you may easily misunderstand and go astray. One can only walk in the right way by following principles. In Christianity today there are many different works. Some works have attracted thousands upon thousands of God’s children because they can see some fruits of the work and see some outward appearance of their work. There are miracles and signs that have attracted many of God’s children. Especially in today’s age, it is an unprecedentedly dangerous time. We can only follow the Lord according to principle, so that we can be set free from many mistakes, otherwise our course will be very difficult. Our Lord can never accept anything that deviates from His way. He has already given us His Words, and it is *the* principle. We need the Holy Spirit to open up His Word so that we can see His clear principle and clearly understand the testimony of Jesus and God’s will. If we are following the Lord in this condition, then it will be hard to go astray. For forty years, while God’s children were led in the wilderness, there were so many acts of God which caused excitement, but those acts could not be the guidelines for their walk. Moses did not follow these acts. This is another very important principle that we need to

follow, and thank the Lord, there are so many witnesses in the Bible. In their lives, they finished their courses. Through their testimonies we see many important principles. May the Lord give us some light so that in this light we finish the course that the Lord has measured for us.

### ***Run the Race, Fight the Battle***

We know that as we run in this course, it is not a safe path. This path is full of battles. The *fight* mentioned in 2 Timothy 4, and the *race* mentioned in Hebrews 12:1 is the same in the original Greek. Brother Dana had already mentioned to us that this word in the original Greek is *agoni*. So the author of Hebrews tells us that while we are running the race, we are fighting the battle. Of course this is my brother's responsibility, so I cannot talk too much about it. Our brother will continue to fellowship with us in this regard. Today as we are on this path, we see there is much deception from the enemy, much temptations, attacks and oppositions, as well as killings. In Romans 3:12 it says that the works of the enemy is to make all *turn aside, together they have become useless*. This is terrifying. Anytime you turn aside from the right way, you become useless. From the Bible, whether it's your personal or church life, we see that the enemy attacks very severely. When we read Acts, the Apostles Paul and Peter encountered much risk as they were running the race. Without the intervention of the hand of God, they would have failed miserably. In Galatians 2, Peter almost failed. Fortunately, Paul rose up and dealt with it in strength. He said, *For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor*. When you read this, you have the feeling that Paul was a young man again. We thank the Lord that Peter received these words. However, we do know that when Paul returned the last time to Jerusalem, he was greatly oppressed by Judaism and took the suggestion of James. He was one step away from failing. If he had failed at that time, the words in Galatians would have been his own curse, but we thank the Lord for His hand intervened. As we run in this course, we need to pay much attention to the work of the enemy. This is true for the Church. The church in Galatia has been running well, as we read Paul saying, *You were running well; who hindered you...?* We know that when the teaching of Judaism came into the church at Galatia, it caused a church which had been running well to deviate. Just like the church in Jerusalem, they had such a bright beginning, but the influence of Judaism continued to increase to a point where the Holy Spirit could not continue to work there and He had to turn His attention to Antioch. Brothers and sisters, the enemy is using all that he has to attack God's Church. It was the same for the church in Corinth. We see man's wisdom, natural affections, mixtures in the flesh, and so many problems which became great interference to the testimony of Jesus among the Corinthians, to the point that the testimony of Jesus could not be manifested there. We can see the work of the enemy everywhere. Even in the early churches, everywhere we see problems. Only those churches which had many witnesses had a strong testimony, and because of their faithfulness the testimony was still held. This is a great warning to us. How much we need the mercy of the Lord as we are running in the course. Not only do we have our personal difficulties, but there is much difficulty in the environment, in addition to the work of the enemy. In order to finish the course, we need to pay a price. In order to win the prize, we need to pay the cost. Thank the Lord, generation by generation we see such great chaos on the earth, but God always has grace to lead His people forward.

### ***Run According to the Roadmarks and Guideposts***

Lastly, I'd like to use a passage from Jeremiah to be an encouragement. We know that in early captivity, Israel was in great chaos. The circumstances were very chaotic and people did not see

the way of the Lord and did not know how to move forward. We thank God because God used the prophet Jeremiah, and Jeremiah used God's Word to encourage His people. Jeremiah 31 was a passage of great reminder for God's people at that time. *Set up for yourself roadmarks, place for yourself guideposts; direct your mind to the highway, the way by which you went...* Here the prophet Jeremiah was reminding the people of Israel that during this confusing condition, they needed to set up roadmarks and guideposts. We know that as we are running a course in the world, roadmarks and guideposts are very important things. Roadmarks will tell us where we are and how much further to the goal. Guideposts tell us which direction we are headed towards. Brothers and sisters, these verses are very applicable to our condition today. We see the Church condition today is so confusing, more confusing than the roads in Los Angeles. Though you do not need to be afraid in Los Angeles, because there are roadmarks and guideposts. We would be lost if we do not have these things. Brothers and sisters, what are our roadmarks and guideposts? My understanding is that roadmarks refer to the cross. We have to realize that only the experiences from the cross are reliable. Only when we carry the cross can our self be put to death, so it can help us walk the way of the Lord. It is also true in regards to outward circumstances. Where ever there is an experience of the cross, that is reliable. I'll give an example. We have read many biographies of the saints in the past, and only those who carry the cross, those who bear the mark of Christ Jesus, their writings bring us great help and direct us to walk in the right way. This is a reminder. Younger brothers and sisters, know what books you should read. Find out whether or not there are true roadmarks within it. This is also true for the Church. Those who truly live in the meaning of the cross will allow the Church condition to be within the will of God. What are guideposts? To me, the guideposts refer to the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament when Israel was in the wilderness, they did not have any maps or directions. They were led by the pillar of cloud and fire. Nowadays the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and within us, so we need to pay much attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We need to use the leading of the Holy Spirit as the guidelines for our walk. Today if we can set up roadmarks and guideposts, then we can turn back to the way of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, on one hand, the age we live in is very difficult, but we have no need to fear because we have the grace of God. We also have the clear Word of God in our hand and God uses these principles to guide us in this way. May the Lord have mercy on us, so that we can see that God has set a path for each one of us. Whether we are running in the right way or running it well, it has a close relationship to the testimony of Jesus. If we can finish this course, then we will be just like Paul, gaining the crown of God. Paul said to Timothy that this crown of righteousness is not only given *to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing*. We all long for our Lord's return, but before He returns, we are running in this course. May the grace of God be upon us so that each one of us can finish the course the Lord has measured out for us. May the Lord encourage us these days, so we can give the rest of our time into His hands and be a person running in this course, to give the glory back to Him. May His heart be satisfied and we win the prize that is from above.

*Lord, we want to thank You with all our hearts. Not only have You redeemed us, but You have placed us on this course. We pray that You will give us strength from within so that we will have great longing to run in this course, to finish the entrustment, so that Your testimony will become brighter and brighter among us. We want to be like the people who have loved You and have run the course throughout the generations. In their lifetimes, they were running toward the goal. Lord, these people are like a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, please encourage the saints in these end times, for we know that You will return very soon. Thank You for giving us*

*opportunities. May You encourage us with Your words, enlighten us, supply us so that we can give You the glory that You are worthy of. Thank You for listening to our prayer. In Jesus' most precious name, amen.*