

Christians Are Like Athletes

Text : Hebrews 12: 1-15

INTRODUCTION :

A. This is “Super Sunday” and most people’s minds are on the big game.

1. It’s one of the most significant events in the year. (Even non-fans get into the game.)
2. More people watch the Super Bowl than any other sporting event.
 - a. More than the Olympics
 - b. More than the World Series
 - c. More than the NBA championship (**more than any other TV program**)
3. Some congressmen tried to get it declared a national holiday.

B. It’s interesting to observe the struggles teams go through to get to the championship.

1. There’s an enormous amount of discipline and sacrifice required to just make a team.
 - a. Years of work and of sacrifice
 - b. Playing through pain
2. Teams must be totally committed to make it to the playoffs.
 - a. Endless hours of practice
 - b. Takes president over every aspect of life (family, hobby, personal ambition)
3. In the playoffs they face their toughest competition when they are :
 - a. Tired from the season
 - b. Fighting injuries
 - c. Competing against an emotionally charged opposition

C. The scriptures make numerous references to sports.

1. Sports were one of the most popular forms of recreation in N.T. times.
 - a. Rome built enormous sports coliseums to accommodate public demand.
 - b. Slaves could win their freedom in games.
2. Paul must’ve been a big sports fan.
 - a. He and other writers often used sports metaphors.
 - 1) Boxing ... **I Cor. 9: 26**
 - 2) Racing ... **Heb. 12: 2**
 - 3) Games ... **I Tim. 2: 5**
 - b. Thus, sports are a valid way to illustrate the Christian’s struggle.

*** The Hebrew writer challenged Christians to put their whole heart into running the Christian race so let's observe a few of the parallels between our race and sports.**

I. THE HEBREW WRITER CHALLENGES US TO RUN WITH ENDURANCE.

A. The Christian race is a marathon, not a sprint.

1. There's a very big difference between a sprint and a marathon.
 - a. Most champion sprinters don't do well at long distances.
 - b. They pour all they have into a few seconds of speed, but soon burn out.
2. The long distance runner must develop his entire body to peak condition.
 - a. His muscles must be developed to be able to endure long periods of stress.
 - b. His heart must be strong enough to pump sufficient blood to maintain strength.
 - c. His lungs must have sufficient capacity to keep the blood oxygenated.
3. The Christian must develop his faith in the same way. (**train faith for life's marathon**)

B. Jesus taught the necessity of endurance in :

1. The parable of the sower.
 - a. **Luke 8: 13** ... Seed on rocky soil ... (fast start, quick failure)
 - b. **Luke 8: 14** ... Fell among the thorns and was choked by the competition
2. The builder / King
 - a. **Luke 14: 27- 30** ... Tower ... Make sure you can finish before you start.
 - b. **Luke 14: 31- 33** ... Army .. don't engage a battle which you're not prepared to win.

C. Athletes practice long and hard to be able to win. (**Come early & Stay after practice)**

1. People don't succeed at anything doing only the minimums.
2. This is true in all realms.
 - a. Athletics
 - b. Scholarship (Don't just do assignments.)
 - c. Professional life ... **Spiritual life**
3. The opposing teams are also practicing, preparing for the competition. (**Satan**)

D. "No pain, no gain" (**Champions press their limits to develop)**

1. Faith is strengthened as a byproduct of one's walk with God.
 - a. Knowledge is essential, but faith is made strong by use. (**by exercise**)
 - b. **ILL.** – Dockworkers develop strong arms as byproduct of use. (**Doers of the word**)

2. Brother James taught us that we should rejoice at our struggles because each victory strengthens our faith. (**Strong faith is the byproduct of the pain.**)
 - a. Just as physical victories give us confidence, so spiritual victories give us confidence.
 - b. Each victory broadens our foundation of trust.
 - 1) Faith in ourselves and in our ability to stand
 - 2) Faith in God ... **II Tim. 1: 12** ... I know whom I have believed
- * **Experienced teams tend to win because they know how to win.**

II. WINNERS ARE TEAM PLAYERS.

- A. No team gets to the playoffs because they have one or two great players.
 1. “**Showboaters**” seek to lift themselves up above their teammates.
 2. Each player must see himself as part of a unit, not as an individual.
 - a. Basketball teams keep track of assists. (**Why ? Being a team player is valued.**)
 - b. No quarterback succeeds if his line doesn’t block for him.
 3. A superstar who’s not a team player will be traded.
- B. Christians are judged individually, but also upon the basis of their performance as a member of God’s team. (**Love lifts up it’s object.**)
 1. Jesus taught us that the very most important thing is love.
 - a. **Matt. 22: 34-40** ... Love is seeking the welfare of another. (**lifting up teammates**)
 - b. The very essence of God is love. ... **I John 4: 8, 16** ... **God is love.** (**godliness is**)
 2. The Apostle Paul taught us that NOTHING is more important than love.
 - a. **I Cor. 13**
 - b. No act is of value if not motivated by love. (**even martyrdom**)
 3. Jesus demonstrated the love that He wants us to have, that He wants to be our essence.
 - a. **Rom. 5: 6-8**
 - b. **Phil. 2: 3-8**
- C. Just like being members of a championship team, every member of God’s church is required to contribute all of his strength to the whole. (**not just the congregation**)
 1. The whole is only strong when each and every part contributes strength.
 - a. **Eph. 4: 11-16**
 - b. **Rom. 12: 3-16 ; Col. 2: 19**

2. Every member of God's team must support every other member.
 - a. **Heb. 3: 13 ; 10: 24-25** ... Motivate them to perform better.
 - b. **Gal. 6: 1-2** ... Pick them up when they fall.
 - c. **I John 5: 16 ; James 5: 16** ... Pray for each other.

III. ONE MUST KNOW WHEN NOT TO GO FOR IT. (Strategy)

A. In football one must know when to punt.

1. A team only has four tries to advance the ball ten yards, then the other team get the ball.
2. If a team has tried three times and still has five yards to go, they are wise to punt.

B. In basketball the last minute of the game takes the longest to play.

1. There are many timeouts.
2. Each shots is carefully planned and set up.
3. The best players are put on the floor and poor shooters are told to pass quickly.

C. Likewise, Christians are told not to make unwise challenges.

1. There are times when we are supposed to flee. (**a spiritual punt**)
 - a. Flee youthful lusts. ... **II Tim. 2: 22**
 - b. Flee covetousness and controversy. ... **I Tim. 6: 11**
 - c. Avoid wicked men. ... **II Tim. 3: 1-5**
2. No team wins the championship without pressing the attack. (**best defense is offense**)
 - a. Jesus established His church as an offensive force.
 - 1) **Matt. 5: 14** – “**You are the light of the world.**”
 - 2) **Matt. 16: 18** – “**The gates of hell will not prevail against it.**” (**resist its attack**)
 - 3) **Matt. 28: 19-20 ; Mark 16: 16** ... Spread the kingdom to include every person.
 - b. Be vigilant, but oppose the works of Satan. (**Keep Satan on defense.**)
 - 1) **I Pet. 5: 8**– **Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9– But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.**
 - 2) Never underestimate your opponent.
 - 3) Never let your opponent get into your head.
 - 4) Keep your eyes open for the way of escape and for opportunities. (**I Cor 10:13 / Col 4:6**)

IV. FOCUS ON THE GAME AT HAND ... ON THIS OPPONENT.**A. All athletes know the importance of focus.**

1. Boxers go to remote places to train.
2. Coaches try to protect their players from distractions.
3. Players must put aside the past.
 - a. They must forget the mistakes and defeats of the past.
 - b. They dare not rest on their laurels, on past victories.

B. Christians are also instructed to focus on their present opposition.

1. Christians must forget the past.
 - a. **Phil. 3: 13-14** ... Forgetting the past, I press on ...
 - b. **I Cor. 10: 12** ... Do not become over confident because of past victories.
2. Keep your eyes focused squarely on the goal.
 - a. **Col. 3: 2** ... Set your mind on things above.
 - b. The goal is Heaven and it takes a strong faith to get there.
3. Do not allow yourself to be distracted.
 - a. Paul warned the youth evangelist not to get entangled in daily life. ... **II Tim. 2: 4**
 - b. **Luke 16: 13** ... Too many Christians get so involved in daily life that it becomes a distraction or even the center of their lives. That's what Jesus was referring to when He said, "No man can serve two masters."

C. Focus, concentration is what the Hebrew writer meant when he said, "Cast aside all encumbrances and the sin that so easily entangles us" (eliminate all distractions)

1. Athletes wear weights during training to develop strengthen and endurance.
 - a. Basketball players wear ankle weights.
 - b. Boxers practice with weighted gloves.
 - c. Runners wear weighted vests.
2. Those weights are never used during the competition.
3. Christians must put aside everything that distracts or encumbers one from serving God.
 - a. **I Pet. 5: 6-7** ... Cast all of your cares on Jesus. (**Don't be burdened .. carry weight**)
 - b. **Heb. 12: 1** ... Cast aside sin.
 - c. **I Cor. 7: 25-38** , **II Cor. 6: 14f** ... Do not have relationships that hinder service.

CONCLUSION :**A. The Christian is in a lifelong race. (Heb. 12: 1-2)**

1. In many ways success in our Christian race mimics the athlete's competition.
2. The Hebrew writer encourages us to run our race with endurance. (**marathon**)

B. Motivation is the most fundamental of coaching skills.

1. The Inca Indians used to kill the losers. (**New meaning to the term "sudden death."**)
2. The Romans highly rewarded the winners.

C. God motivates mankind both ways.

1. Those who serve faithfully to the end will be rewarded.
 - a. **Rev. 2: 10b** – "...faithful until death and you shall receive a crown of life."
 - b. The Apostle Paul always kept this in mind.
 - 1) **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.
 - 2) **II Tim. 4: 7**– I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; **8**– 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.
 - c. That same promise should motivate us.
 - 1) **Heb. 10: 35**– Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.
36– For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.
 - 2) Three books of the bible were written with the theme of staying faithful.
(**Job , Hebrews , The Revelation**)
2. Those who do not persevere to the end will be rejected and isolated from God.
 - a. Paul was always aware of that possibility. ... **I Cor. 9:26-27**
 - b. All we have to do to win our race is to finish.

D. "Quitters never win and winners never quit."

1. Imagine if Abraham had stopped trying to father a child at age **99**. !!
2. The crown awaits us just across the finish line. (**Winners dig down for a last surge.**)
3. Our faith is our victory. **I John 5: 4** – For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith.

Like the athlete, the Christian puts his whole heart into it and does not give up.