

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: In Perseverance (Part 3)

Acts 14:8-20

8 At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 9 This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, 10 said with a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he leaped up and began to walk. 11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have become like men and have come down to us.” 12 And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out 15 and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. 16 In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” 18 Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them. 19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

Back in High School I was on the cross-country team. I used to run....long distances, somewhere between seven to twelve miles a run several days a week. Notice I said, used to. Back then, I was serious about running; today, not so serious. I have no coach pushing me, demanding more of me, expecting me to run further or faster. Today I can decide whether I want to run or not; and for too long it has been “not.” If fact, I would wonder if I could run a mile without something serious happening to me. The point is, I am no long a real runner. Before I used to push to the finish line no matter what, no matter how hot I was, no matter how hurt I might be because, well, runners are just freaks that way. But today, when I do run, which is rarely, I stop when I want to. Back then I was truly a runner; today I am at best a very casual jogger.

I think there is a sad parallel between this illustration of running and what we often think about the Christian life. But as there are real runners and casual joggers, there are so-called “Christians,” and then there are Christians, if you see where I am going. There are those who are serious about running the race for Christ, and there are others who view the whole thing as an optional jog or even just a walk through the park.

The question for us is this, how can we tell the difference between a casual “Christian” and a committed *Christian*? And which are you? Is it difficult to know the difference between the two? When I was a runner, our coach used to talk to us about “the Wall.” What is “the wall?” The “wall” was a point in a long distance race where your body hates you and decides you are a complete fool for putting it through such stress and all your muscles and joints start to ache, breathing gets shallow and all you want to do is slow down or stop. Our coach would challenge us to mentally push through the wall, to determine before the wall came that when it came you were going to run harder and faster. He told us that two things would happen as we did this. First, many so called runners in any race would at this point just fall back and fade out, so as we pushed through the wall, it was our opportunity to pass others in the race. A second benefit of pushing through the wall is that your body, which has been calling you names up to this point,

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releases a peptide, called endorphins, into your system that causes body to relax and feel good. It is called the “runners’ high” and it was always welcomed in any race and once you hit it, the rest of the race was much easier. So, if you want to tell who the real Christian is, watch what happens when he or she hits the proverbial “wall.” Where is this professing Christian when life gets hard at home, when difficulties come at work, when the church body needs more time and commitment. And whatever the wall, the “walls” always come, do they not? I believe Paul had an insight into this when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24, **24 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.**

Are you winning in your walk with Christ; are you winning in seeing your spouse or children walking closer to Christ because of your efforts, are you winning in being a light of gospel morals, ethics and truth to those with whom you work; are you winning in the disciplines of bible reading and prayer; are you winning in regularly sharing your faith in Christ alone for salvation; are you winning in your increasing involvement and commitment to the local body of Christ to which you belong? It sounds like work, right? It sounds like a lot of work, right? Yet Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 to say, **25 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. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**

The point is this; if we would finish the race, we must push; push ourselves and push one another. In a word, we must persevere. If you want the prize of the Christian life, you must persevere. If you want the Father to be well pleased with your life, you must persevere. You must learn how to handle the walls of the Christian run. To be sure, we can only persevere by the grace of God, not by some personal resolve to simply push past the wall. But the person who fails to push him or herself is in great danger. Jesus said, **“My sheep hear My voice and they follow (constantly, consistently, persistently, relentlessly) follow Me** (John 10:27).” Does that describe you? Do you want it to describe you? Do you want to be known to others as an ardent follower of Jesus Christ? If you do, you must learn to persevere in the ministry, in the service of and to God.

Recently, but had the opportunity to remind some of our people of the three things we value most as a church. **First**, we value a high view of God. We want you and whoever comes to this fellowship of believers to have the highest and clearest understanding of who God is, what God is like, and what He requires. **Second**, we value a high view of Scripture. We believe that the Scriptures alone are the authority for everything concerning our faith, that is what we believe, even down to everything we practice, that which we do. But there is a **third** value, we value a high of the church. Increasingly, the church is viewed as just a club, and optional entity in which I may either choose to belong or not to belong, that I may choose to participate in at my convenience, or not participate at all of it does not suit me. And we have forgotten that implied in the gospel itself, implied in what it means to be a follower of Christ, implied in what it means to understand that I am a sinner and that Christ has died for me a sinner so that he might give me his righteousness in place me into an entity, the body of Christ, the church for his glory, for the well-being of the others whom he has saved, as well as for my own benefit. The church is not optional for the believer, the church is the natural outflow for the believer. Technically speaking, biblically speaking, the church and one’s commitment to the church is not even an option for the believer, not that church is to be some burdensome obligation, but that is where Christ is. Christ died for the church, He gave Himself for the church, and He said that He would build His church. Where else would the believer want to be but committed to, connected with, and serving in the

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context of the church to see Jesus Christ and the salvation that he brings proclaimed, communicated, clarified, experienced, and embraced.

Sometimes we who so aptly defend the necessity of a high view of God, and a high view of Scripture, betray ourselves when we are not careful to maintain a high view of church. That people know that our commitments to God is demonstrated in our commitments to the body of Christ. That the church in her activities, the church and the people contained therein with all of their struggles, their problems, even their joys and triumphs are to be mine to participate in and with because of I belong to Christ and Christ belongs to me then I belong to you and you belong to me.

Now, I need to get off my soapbox on this matter in communicate with you the connection between all that I have just said in this text that we will be looking at. I would submit to you that the apostle Paul in his missionary team, by going out on this first missionary journey, the first time anyone has ever tried anything like this, to go from town to town, placed the place, and even from person-to-person, to personally proclaim the salvation that is found in Christ alone, that this action demonstrates Paul's high view of God and in conjunction with that his high view Christ, his high view of the Scriptures as he is constantly appealing to the Scriptures to demonstrate that Jesus Christ must be believed upon, must be trusted, must be seen for who way is as Lord and Savior, and finally he demonstrates the highest you of the church, as he is ultimately concerned that not only are people coming to Christ for salvation, but they are experiencing Christ in the community of believers. He is going from town to town seeing people come to Christ, and then we will see even as he writes letters to some of these very places his concern is how do you function together, how do you lived together as believers, how do you minister together as believers. And that is what we find Paul doing; he is proclaiming the kingdom of Christ and longing for people to become part of the body of Christ.

And what we have noticed through Acts 13-14 is that the wonderful news that while man has been separated from God because of his sin that God has provided the remedy, the queue or for those who would recognize that they are in fact sinners of, those who have fallen short of God's glory whoever missed the mark of God's standards in themselves and would churn to Christ would plead with Christ to impart to them his righteousness so that they could be right with God. Anybody who desires to be right with God has the solution presented in Jesus Christ. And yet as we have noticed, people preferred to do things their own way rather than God's way. People rebel against the exclusivism of Christ. Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life no one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6)**. And what happens when you begin to say things, or do things, that are unpopular with other people? You will receive opposition, and sometimes that opposition turns into outright hostility. And when we have that kind of conflict, what do most of us want to do? We want to shrivel up, shrink back, tone it down and sometimes just give up. What we have seen in the example of Paul is a man of perseverance; a man who practiced the precept of being steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because he knew that his toil was not in vain if it was in the Lord. That is perseverance in ministry. That is a Christian. Does that describe you question would that be which you say characterizes the people of Hope CBC?

As we come to the next section of the text, we see Paul continuing in this vein of perseverance. He just been run out of Iconium now he is headed towards a city called Lystra. In continuing our theme in our challenge of being resolved to live to the glory of God submit to you we must continue in our resolve to persevere in ministry. In all of Paul's opposition thus far, there is not one of us who would have criticized him if he gave up and went home to Jerusalem. But Paul knew something that we need to well remind ourselves, that with every opposition comes an

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opportunity. Yes, Paul got run out of one city, but only to go to the next to see God do something miraculous. I would offer you and our text that there are three key events through which Paul demonstrates his own perseverance in ministry in spite of opposition. We will see first a miracle, followed by a misunderstanding, and concluded with a mob.

The town of Lystra was a smaller city than most to which Paul visited. In some ways, it was not seemingly important. While it was a Roman colony, it was more of an outpost. Lystra was more backwoods and commentators described the people as being half-barbarous, filled with mostly uneducated Lycaonians who had their own language. This would be a much more dangerous place to be in than the more civilized cities as Rome did not keep near the order in such a place as Lystra.

So, some eighteen miles south and east of Iconium, Paul and Barnabas make their way to this tiny town. Why do they go there? Well, we need to be reminded that no place is too small in which God can do great things. Lystra was the home of Timothy, the man who would be Paul's great joy and fellow co-worker in the gospel and to whom Paul would be a mentor. Let us note the three events that take place in Lystra.

I. A great miracle (8-10)

8 At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 9 This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, 10 said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk.

This account reminds us of an important truth about providence, about the way or the reason things happen the way they do. Usually, when things do not go our way, we forget that it may well mean that things are going God's way. God will often close one door, as He did in Iconium and then open wide another door. It is clear to see that one of the reasons the Lord allowed the door to shut in Iconium was because He had other people ready and waiting for the gospel to come to them in Lystra. I believe that one of the reasons for Paul perseverance to keep going and keep sharing Christ was because he knew this truth. If things get shut down in one area, it means God is moving him on to another opportunity. The same principle is at work in us. You are where you are because God has brought you to this opportunity. Maybe you came here out of a bad situation; maybe you are here because of something good, but whatever the case, you are here to impact this congregation, your family, this community and everywhere you go with the life-changing power of the gospel proclaimed.

So we read here how Paul came upon a crippled man in Lystra. His feet, powerless, this man had never walked before in his life. Yet, God set up an appointment for him with Paul. Verse 9 tells us he was listening; the word there meaning to truly *listen to the point of understanding*. Here is Paul, doing the only thing he knew to do, tell the people about the person and work of Jesus, and God met this lame man with faith, granting him the ability to understand, to such a degree that our text tells us Paul could see it. Oh, what a delight for the preacher when the attentive ear also portrays a hunger and understanding for truth. So, in the midst of all these people, Paul **“fixed his gaze”** – locked his eyes and attention on this man and told him to do something extraordinary. “Stand upright on your feet!” Jesus had done this as well as Peter back in Acts 3. And before anyone could accuse Paul of being cruel, asking this lame man to do something he never had before, the man **“leaped up”** (no flimsiness, or stumbling) and began to walk. Can you begin to imagine the shock of all this?

But why would Paul perform such a miracle? Let us remember the biblical purpose of miracles; they are given in order to validate, prove as truth, the ministry of the Word of God.

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Miracles get people’s attention and allowed the apostles to have open doors for ministry. Miracles validate the message of Christ. In other words, we are being given reasons to believe that what Paul taught was directed by God because of this miracle. But have you ever done something for a good reason, but other people mistake that reason? For not only was there a great miracle in Lystra, but second...

II. A great misunderstanding (11-18)

11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have become like men and have come down to us.” 12 And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

The story here takes an interesting turn. For most of us, it seems the people’s response was rather strange. Some gifted teacher comes in and preaches a powerful message and the next thing you know, the people are calling him and his companions gods? Why did they do this? Glad you asked. Their response makes more sense to us when we realize that the people were influenced by a great legend. For generations, the people in and around Lystra had been told a story about the gods Zeus and Hermes. The two gods once made a trip to earth in disguise. They traveled from house to house looking for shelter, but no one would give them hospitality. According to the legend, there were finally two old peasants, Philemon and his wife Baucis, that took them in. Well, Zeus and Hermes were not impressed by this lack of hospitality and thus wiped out the entire population of the area with the exception of Philemon and Baucis. As a reward, Zeus and Hermes made Philemon and Baucis, the guardians of a splendid temple. That was the legend. So now, Paul and Barnabas come into town, Paul speaks, which was the role of Hermes while Barnabas stood by. In the course of the sermon, Paul heals this lame man and thus the people, determined not to make the same mistake as the former occupants of the land, sought to honor Paul and Barnabas as Zeus and Hermes.

It is interesting to note that the people interpreted this event through the grid of their worldview. A worldview is the way you seek to see and understand the world around you. We all have a worldview. But when an unbeliever sees God work or hears God’s Word proclaimed, he will inevitably come to wrong conclusions. Why? Because he is blind and his heart is darkened to the truth. He needs his worldview changed.

So here are Paul and Barnabas, surrounded by a crowd was yelling with excitement; proclaiming them gods, and bringing them sacrifices. What would you do? I mean, it sounds perfect, right? The people think you are a god and you could tell them to do or believe anything you wanted. The proverbial keys to the city were theirs for the taking. Oh the temptation, having just been run out of two cities to now be treated like gods. Paul and Barnabas were sitting on easy street and could have settled in for their own personal ease and benefit.

Then we wake up and remember this is Paul and Barnabas, two men committed to proclaiming and clarifying the truth about Jesus. We will see that they would not allow anything to diminish Jesus and they will work twice as hard to clear up this misunderstanding of who they are. Beloved, our enemy, the devil, loves confusion; he is the author of nonsense and misperceptions. Sometimes he cannot do anything to stop the right and true proclamation of the Word of God, but as soon as it goes forth, Satan will seek to muddy the waters with unbiblical thoughts and notions and worldviews. Why? Because he wants as many distractions as possible to lead people away from the truth. Do not think that we are beyond, or above being equally

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misunderstood when we do share the gospel. Let us notice that Paul and Barnabas corrected three wrong perceptions, perceptions that we ought to be ready to clear up if they happen to us.

First, we must correct misperceptions of who we are. Notice in verses 14 and 15 the response of Paul and Barnabas, “*But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you...”*”

When we serve God, sometimes people look at us as though it is our talent, our devotion, our own hard work, our own doing that has made something succeed. To be sure serving God is hard work and God does use our talents, and God wants our commitment, but the purpose is always to point people to Jesus, not to ourselves. When we serve God, we are not to be content with bringing attention to the ourselves as messengers or servants, but rather the Author and Master of the message. As some of you know, when people tell me at the end of a message, “Great sermon pastor, that was well done” I will always say something like, “Praise the Lord” or “Just follow Jesus.” It is not about my craft as a sermonizer, but about the Christ of whom the sermon is directed. We must correct misperceptions about who we are.

Second, we must correct misperceptions about our message. Sometimes people take things in ways we never could expect, right. Well, the people of Lystra misunderstood the message and notice there in verse 15 what Paul and Barnabas said, that “[we] and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God...”

They totally missed the point of Paul’s message. Here it is clarified. The message is not about worshipping two men as gods, but rather the gospel, the message was one of *repentance*. Notice the call to “turn from these vain things to a living God.” Turn from what, from their worldview, their superstitions to the truth of God’s Word. Beloved, let us remember that there is a monumental difference between “attracting a crowd” and “building up the body of Christ, the church.” Sadly, too many churches teach that salvation through Jesus is nothing more than just adding Him to your life. Nothing needs to change, just know Jesus is your fire insurance policy and go on living however you like. But that is not the implication of the gospel. In the implication of the gospel is that I am a sinner, I do not choose God natural and I need to repent, I need to turn from myself and look to Jesus for forgiveness and grace and righteousness. You and I must also tell people to *from* the worthless things of this earth *to* God. We must correct any misperceptions of our message.

Third, and finally we must correct any misperceptions of God. Notice Paul doing this starting at the end of verse 15 and on through verse 17 where we read, it is God, “**WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.16 In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.**”

Notice that Paul emphasized truth about who God is, the Creator, to this group of unbelievers. In simple terms, Paul was informing these people that they had it all wrong, that neither he nor Barnabas were Gods because there is only one true God, only one Creator and it is He (notice this), “**gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons...**” In other words, Paul says in effect, “It is God who gives you your needs and your food and yet you do not acknowledge Him. It is time to turn from such hearts of ignorance and ingratitude and to worship God alone.” So, how did the people respond to Paul’s stirring sermon on repentance? We read in verse 18, **Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.**

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Was there a deficiency in what Paul preached? It would not seem he got through to the crowds, and isn't the goal in preaching to turn people to God? Well, yes, that is the first and most desired goal, to see people come to embrace the truth about who God is and what God has done for us in Jesus. But remember, there is another reason for telling people about Jesus. The first is in the hope of conversion, of seeing people come to faith; but the second in condemnation; that upon hearing the truth, people must either respond with repentance, or they will reject the truth. So, Paul may not have gotten a lot of conversions, but ultimately, his job, and our job in sharing the things of God with others is not changing hearts, for that is the work of the Holy Spirit; our job is to tell people the truth. Paul did God's work in God's way. We could also argue that Paul's message actually kept people from making a false and impulsive commitment to Christianity. He was not using manipulative techniques and playing on emotions. Paul was not seeking ignorant and meaningless decisions that would fade away the next morning. He persevered in telling the people what they needed to hear, the truth about God.

So get the scene, Paul preaches the gospel, a lame man is listening attentively, Paul, by the power of Christ, heals the lame man; the crowds go wild calling Paul and Barnabas gods and wanted to offer sacrifices to them; Paul tells them there is only one God to be worshipped, seeking to correct their misunderstanding and now the crowd that was just cheering turns on him.

III. A great mob (19-20).

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

I am amazed at how easy people can be swayed by peer pressure and the latest opinion polls. Just moments before, Paul is like a rock star and now his body is pummeled with rocks and supposed dead. One second Paul is a god to be worshipped, the next he is a criminal to be destroyed.

How did the crowd change so quickly? Our text tells us that Jews from Antioch and Iconium came in and **“won over the crowds”** – they persuaded the people with their arguments. These men not only ran Paul out of their towns, but they traveled over 100 miles to discredit him in another. Talk about people who thrive on controversy. Do you know the type? A person who will not help his neighbor across the street but would travel a 100 miles just to provoke trouble?

Can you imagine how Paul felt? All he was doing was sharing the truth about Jesus, longing to help people know God and not only did he get run out of cities, but those people came looking for him in the next. What would you do? Give up? Maybe? Yet not Paul. What happens to him here would shape his thinking for the rest of his life. Listen to what he wrote to a young pastor named Timothy some 20 years later as he is expecting his own execution while in a Roman prison. Any why is he in this prison? For sharing the truth about Jesus. He wrote in 2 Timothy 3:10-13... **10 Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! 12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 13 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.**

Beloved, is ministry, is serving God difficult? Absolutely! Is it easy to give up, feeling neglected, unappreciated, marginalized at best and perhaps hated at worse? Yes. I am fairly certain that there is one of us in here who have come even close to experiencing what Paul did. But notice the resolve of Paul there in verse 20. It almost gives me chills! What an example of perseverance! Hated, stoned and left for dead, what did Paul do? Notice verse 20 again, **But**

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while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.

Can you believe it? Rather than hightailing it out of Lystra under the cover of darkness, we see that Paul got up, dusted off his cloak, and headed straight back into the very city where the people had just tried to kill him. I imagine that must have impacted the many of the people as many of the very people who just tried to kill him had to ask themselves where does such courage and perseverance come from. Oh that we would be so resolved to talk to one another and to others about Jesus no matter what.

As I close, let me remind you of what persevering Christians know to be true about sharing the truth of Christ with others. **First**, we are not responsible for being successful, if by success we mean that every person we share with makes a profession of faith. That is not what we are called to do. This leads to the **second** reminder and it is this, that all we are responsible to do is to proclaim the truth about Jesus, who He is, what He has done, that there is salvation, reconciliation with God and the hope of eternal life in no other person than in trusting Jesus.

Our goal is not “results” but rather faithfulness. Have you been a faithful witness of Jesus this past week; to your family; to your friends, in the work place, anywhere you go? Will you resolve to be a faithful witness of Jesus in the week ahead. Make it your goal to simply tell or talk to one more person this week about Jesus than you did last week. And maybe some of you have sought to do this for some time and your life feels like you have hit the runner “wall” I spoke of earlier. So what is my exhortation to you...by the grace of God, push through it, be resolved to be faithful in the race knowing that the spiritual endorphins will kick in as you are obedient to be a witness for Jesus.

And let me say that I know there are some of you who have never entered the race. Like many people who wonder why anyone would want to run five, seven, ten or even just one mile thinking that such people are just crazy, you hear the truth about Jesus having died on the cross to take His people’s punishment for sin; that He died in our place, but that He rose again, thus confirming that all that He has said and taught about God, living for God, delighting in God’s Word, well, it just seems crazy to you. But it is the truth of God’s Word. Two thousand years and counting and even the skeptics and rejecters have not been able to refute the essence of the gospel, that it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Would you, if you think running with Christ is crazy, just ask God to open your heart to the truth that you were actually created to run with Jesus; to endure with Jesus, and to be saved by Jesus. And let us all run the race resolved to do so with perseverance!

Soli Deo Gloria

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