

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS (MATTHEW 6:19-34)

A major theme to our message last Sunday, as we looked at **Hebrews 13**, and gave it some context to the book of Hebrews, was in the Greek word "agonizomai", which means to "strive, to struggle, to fight, to labor fervently."¹ To agonize. The Apostle Paul used an analogy of our walk of faith in Christ as actually the running of a race. In **1 Corinthians 9:24-25** Paul asks, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. [We have a responsibility then in that, don't we? Also, making sure that we do indeed get that prize.] And everyone who **competes for the prize is temperate in all things**. Now they [those not of Christ] do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown." Obviously more than one person will receive "THE PRIZE", but his point is clearly that not everyone who seems to be running the race of the Christian faith will receive "THE PRIZE". One may retort back, "I'm just putting my trust in Jesus!" Sounds good, praise the Lord! But Paul said, "everyone who **competes** is temperate in all things." That word "competes" is that Greek word "agonizomai". "Everyone who "strives, struggles, fights, labors fervently" (for THE PRIZE), is to be temperate in all things. That word "temperate" is the Greek word "egkrateuomai" (eng-kra-TEU-o-mai). It means to exercise self-control! What do we know about self-control? It is part of the fruit of the Spirit of Christ! "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (**Galatians 5:22-23**) It wasn't just Paul that had that message. The Apostle Peter said to be "diligent to make your call and election sure." (**2 Peter 1:10**) Diligent, "spoudazo", "To be diligent, to make every effort, to hasten, to be eager."² So what is "THE PRIZE"? In Christ, we are rewarded with eternal life, being joint-heirs with Jesus, and receiving an "imperishable crown". The Apostle Paul said, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (**Philippians 3:13-14**) While it can be understood that the prize IS "the upward call", yet what was Paul and what are we really reaching for and focused on? Paul also said just prior to that, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of **the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, **that I may gain Christ**." (**Philippians 3:8**) As God told Abram (Abraham), who was later called the father of our faith (**Romans 4:16**), in a vision God said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your **exceedingly great REWARD**." (**Genesis 15:1**) We'll see how that applies to us as we go along in this message, according to God's Word. It leads to the simple question, do you want Christ Jesus, and all that follows, or do you want what can be attained in this world?

1 <https://biblehub.com/greek/75.htm>

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4704.htm>

How our running the "race of faith", so to speak, in Christ, relates to the book of Hebrews is that the author gives many examples of those who lived an active faith in God in **Hebrews 11**, and then begins **Hebrews 12** saying, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith [THE ULTIMATE PRIZE], who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." So not only are we to let go of the sins that weigh us down (and leads to death), we are also then "striving" and making every effort to the finish the race to receive THE PRIZE! And Paul used the Greek word "hupomone" in saying we are to run with endurance. That word means, "endurance, perseverance, patience".³ Patience also is a part of the fruit of the Spirit and patience/perseverance is developed through...tribulation. Paul says in **Romans 5:1-5**, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**, through whom also we have **access by faith into this grace** in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also **glory in tribulations**, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." In other words, we are not just to suffer on this earth on our own and for no reason. We are encouraged in **Hebrews 4:16**, telling us, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain **mercy** and find **grace** to help in time of need."

Getting then back to that word "Agonizomai", it is also the word used in what Jesus said in **Luke 13:23-25**. Jesus was asked, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, "**Strive** [agonizomai: strive, struggle, fight, labor fervently] **to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'** But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last." In case one were to think that perhaps the wrong word was used in translating what Luke recorded Jesus as saying, to "Strive [agonizomai: strive,

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5281.htm>

struggle, fight, labor fervently] to enter through the narrow gate", Matthew records Jesus as saying, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and **difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.**" (Matthew 7:13-14) To clarify, we're not trying to earn our salvation, we're doing everything possible to make sure we are on the right path.

That word "difficult" is actually the Greek word "tethlimmene". The root of that is "thlibó", same with thlipsis (tribulation) and "it primarily conveys the idea of pressing or compressing, often used metaphorically to describe situations of affliction, distress, or trouble. In the New Testament, it is frequently used to depict the trials and tribulations faced by believers, emphasizing the pressure and challenges encountered in the Christian life."⁴ Jesus reassures us, yet also warns us, saying, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation [pressure-thlipsis, the root being thlibo]; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Jesus also used that same word thlipsis (tribulation) in the parable of the sower, saying, "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles." (Matthew 13:20-21) We are told, once again, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." As Jesus promises, "in Me you may have peace" and "in the world you will have tribulation".

The Apostle Peter elaborates on that, to give us a better understanding, in his 1st epistle saying, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should **follow His steps**: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, **when He was reviled** [To assail with scornful or abusive language⁵], **did not revile in return**; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having **died to sins**, might **live for righteousness** [bearing fruit of the Spirit]—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now **returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**" (1 Peter 2:21-25) The Apostle Paul said the same thing in **Romans 8**, saying that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, **if indeed we suffer with Him**, that we may also be **glorified together**" (Romans 8:17). Also as the Apostle Paul told Timothy (and us) "if we endure [in Christ], we shall also reign with Him". (2 Timothy 2:12)

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2346.htm>

5 <https://www.wordnik.com/words/revile>

Why must we strive, struggle, fight, labor fervently? We are in a spiritual battle between God and the devil for our souls, yet the outcome is determined by us. God is presently building His eternal kingdom from one person to the next, through Christ Jesus, and it is up to us whether we want to live according to God's sovereignty, His righteousness and justice and holiness, whether we do love God as He first demonstrated His love toward us, or whether we will choose to live for ourselves in pride and selfishness and the satisfying of our flesh. Will we choose the broad way or the narrow way?

The Apostle Peter warns us, "Be sober, be **vigilant**; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, **seeking whom he may devour.**" (1 Peter 5:8) Be sober, be vigilant [watchful-gregoreo]. Yet we are told, "Unless **the Lord** builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless **the Lord** guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." (Psalm 127:1) We're being told to be sober and vigilant (watchful) yet also we are told that the only thing that will stand is what God builds (through Christ). As Jesus said, "**I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**" (John 15:5) That is very similar in tone and meaning to what God told the Israelites, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may **love** the Lord your God, that you may **obey** His voice, and that you may **cling to Him**, for He is your life and the length of your days." (Deuteronomy 30:19-20a) When those trials or tribulations come, what or who are you clinging to? What path are you on?

I am certainly not intending to shake anyone from their faith in Christ Jesus. For it is, as Paul said in **Ephesians 2:8-10**, "For by **grace** [the favor of God] you have been saved through **faith [believing on and putting your trust in Christ Jesus]**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." The next verse then clues us in to what that "agonizomai" means for us. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Paul could have stopped short by just saying, "**for we are His**"! He really would have been saying the same thing, just as the Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 6:20**, "For you were bought at a price [the shedding of Jesus' blood, the sacrificing of His body]; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." As we looked at **Hebrews 12** recently, we are also told to not "despise the chastening [disciplining] of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom **He receives.**" (**Hebrews 12:5-6**)

So, from time to time we may have the Lord correcting us, the world and the enemy of our souls coming against us. Sound impossible?

Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who **diligently seek Him.**" What are we focused on, what path are we on? Are you sure? We are told to be sure! To those who are willing to follow Christ, to live in and according to His Righteousness, the Apostle John says, "But as many as received Him [Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (**John 1:12-13**) That is, as Jesus said we all must be, to be saved, we must be born-again, born of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. A couple of chapters later John records Jesus as saying, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But **he who does the truth comes to the light**, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (**John 3:18-21**) Jesus also said, in **John 14:6**, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." He is not speaking on a one-time experience but that He is our Way, our Truth, and our Life. In Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" He says:

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MATTHEW 6:19-34

[Lay Up Treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21)]

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

[The Lamp of the Body (Matthew 6:22-23)]

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. [What is your focus on, where is your heart?] But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

[Do Not Worry (Matthew 6:25-34)]

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say

to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

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Our sole treasure is in Christ Jesus. As we "agonizomai" in the "thlipsis", as we strive in the pressure (tribulation), we are clinging to Jesus, and obeying Him according to His Word. Our sole mission then is in sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Christ Jesus as we following Him to where He leads us. "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore **by Him** let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to **do good and to share**, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Hebrew 13:12-16)