



Sermon Transcription • Colossians 1:21-23 (NIV)

If We Continue

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[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

You will not be surprised to know that I'm not a runner. [Laughter] There's a story behind that; it actually begins and ends in grade 7. So I turned out for the grade 7 track team because there were some girls I wanted to be around and some of my friends were doing it. And so before - they don't take grade 7 track that seriously, so before the grade 7 first track meet, we only had like two practices and the practices involved mostly walking around the track and being as near to the girls as you could get - that kind of stuff. And so we have the first ... the first track meet, and it was at our school, the eastside of Seattle and I remember the, I remember the coach came and asked me what I'd like to run and I was like, "I don't know." He said, "Are you a distance guy?" And I said, "Probably not." And he said, "So sprinting?" And I said, "Ahhh, naah... I'll do something in the middle." And for somebody my age, something in the middle was just one time around. He said, "Can you run one time around the track?" And I was like, "Yeah, of course I can run one time around the track." He said, "Well we'll put you in that event." Okay, so in the United States dealing with yards, so they called it the 4:40, you're 40 metres here, right. So, I remember standing on the line and they called everyone forward and you're supposed to stand on this line and the guy who holds the gun, and he says, "Ready, mark, set, go." <gunshot sound> And everybody takes off and I immediately realized after about 6 steps that I was probably not going to be winning this race or anywhere near the back of the race. But I didn't want - my biggest fear was that I was going to be so far behind that they would have to hold the next race until I finished and be that guy that everyone's like, "Ohhh good for you [slow clapping]." You know like you just finished, like you only had one leg or something. So I was like okay, I'm going to try and keep up as much as I can and I was running, seriously, as fast as I possibly could and I was keeping up with some of the guys toward the end of the thing - so maybe the first 100 metres, I actually started to feel my lungs started to burn a bit. And I thought, "Oh I hope I can keep this going for the next three quarters of this thing." About a half way through when I started to feel my legs shaking a bit. But it was, kind of when we rounded the turn to come down the back stretch that I - I was already quite a distance behind, but my...people talk about hitting the wall right, that's the language they use, and I had not known what that meant before, was like running, you feel like you're running in molasses. Well that happened to me, I felt like I was in a dream where you know you're trying to run but you can't and you're staying in one place and then, absolutely no joke, the entire side of my body shut down - it was like I had a stroke in grade 7, right in this moment. And I am not kidding, I fell over on the infield cause the left side of my body just kind of tipped over. I'm so happy this was before Instagram, right [laughter], cause I can imagine it's like somebody shot me from the grassy knoll and I just went over, boom, and I do remember laying there on my side not really being



able to move because I was so tired and horrible and my friends were laughing at me, [laughter] so I've never run again. [Laughter]

That idea of running a race though, is a ... is a common image that is used in the Scriptures to describe the Christian life. So if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus here, your life as a Christian is described by many of the Biblical writers as a race. It has a beginning - right you come to faith in Jesus at some point; you pray to receive Christ and you get baptized and then you start this race out and you have a middle to it and then there's the definable end when you die or Jesus comes back, right. So this is considered the great race of faith, and so you have language in the Scriptures that point that direction, Hebrews 12:1,

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

1 Corinthians 9:24-25, the Apostle Paul writes,

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run [Christian] in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”

You're in a race, run to win - that's why you have these posters all over our church with these images on them with people sweating - run to win! And that's because the sermon series that we're just kind of getting into - this is the second week in it - is about the *necessity* for you to continue running the race in order to finally get the prize. Because the question that is raised among many Christians, rightfully so, is what happens if you start the race you know, you get baptized, you pray to receive Jesus, and you're going for a little while but then you stop and people - you walk away from the faith. What do we see about the eternal state, the destiny of those people? Will they stand before God one day and hear his commendation, “Well done.” Or will they hear his condemnation, “I never knew you.” The theological language that we're working with here is the word, apostasy, what do you do with the problem of apostasy. Somebody who starts but doesn't finish is called apostate.

Well we aim to answer that question through just studying several passages. I got to tell you, there are so many passages of Scripture especially in the New Testament that deal with this issue. Every book of the Bible deals with this particular issue at some level or another. So we have selected some of the key ones out and we're going to be studying over the next few weeks. Today we're going to be studying Colossians 1:21-23. Now this passage is so great, imagine that if came right now and I closed my eyes and I just kind of, just spun around and I pointed to somebody in the room and I said, “Come up here.” And you stood next to me and I gave you a microphone and I said, “Okay I want you to summarize the Christian message in a tweetable length. Go.” Some of you have like nightmares about that right there. Like, “Go, explain what Christianity is all about in a short section.” Well what you have here in Colossians 1:21-23 is a great passage of Scripture that does that. If somebody ever asks



you, “Explain the gospel.” Go to Colossians 1:21-23 and say, this is a summary. And here it is, here’s the tweetable form. He reconciled us ... to present us ... if we continue. He reconciled us, to present us, if we continue. You’ll see as we go through this passage, those are the big ideas that he’s working with here.

[He Reconciled Us]

So the first of those, he reconciled us. Colossians 1:21,

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.”

Now I want to - that because of your evil behaviour, the translation is probably better to say, as is worked out in your evil behaviour, okay. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds, and that enmity worked itself out in your evil behaviour. Colossians 1:22a,

“But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death.”

So once alienated, enemies - but now reconciled. So this idea of putting side by side - something we do all the time. There’s a guy sent me a meme the other day. You know a meme, a little picture that has little words on the bottom to make a joke. He’s a guy who works on our staff, and was just before Christmas. And he sent me this picture of me when I came to Northview 10 years ago and a good 30 pounds ago right when I first came and then me now. So side by side, and he said once and now and on the bottom it said, “Blown up like a balloon?” So um, he doesn’t work here anymore. [Laughter] That’s not normally the way you do the side by side, usually it’s, “Well actually you used to be blown up like a balloon but look at me now, svelte and awesome.” Right - maybe you have a haircut that you don’t like, you could put yourself side by side. “Look at me in 1989 with the mullet and the horrible facial hair and now I just don’t have a mullet.” It’s the same horrible face but there’s not mullet there. Once ... now. Once, my house looked like this, and now it looks like this. You’ve seen on Instagram somebody sends you one story, “Look at what we did to our house.” “Look what we did to my hair.” Once ... now. This is the image that Paul’s working with, he’s basically putting before you, “Look I want you to think about what you used to be and I want you to compare it with what you are now Christian.” So once, we were alienated from God and that alienation took the form of being an enemy of God in our minds, we didn’t like him, we were at odds with him, we had beef with him - as my boys say - and it worked itself out in our evil behaviour. That’s how beef works, it works itself out in the behaviour you have towards someone else. That’s how alienation works.

Now listen, there are two different ways that you can be an enemy. There’s two different ways you can be at war with God. One of the ways is what I’ll call a hot war right, “I don’t like God! I hate him and his ways and all his Bible teaching and all this rubbish and I’m going to do whatever I can to live the opposite way than what he tells me too. Arghhh” Shake your fist in his face overt, “We’re at war me and God!” Hot war. Lots and lots of people outside of the church are in hot war with God. Lots and



lots of people who are unbelievers - hot war with God. But you could also be in a cold war with God. It's a little more subtle.

Right, I'm old enough to remember the days of the evil Soviet Union and the Cold War that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union. I remember being in classrooms where they would say, "Alright we're having a nuclear ... ah we're having a nuclear response test. Everyone, there's a bomb about to drop, get under your desks cause they'll protect you." Right, "They're lead lined." Or whatever ... duck and cover and all that kind of thing. I remember Ronald Reagan in the 1980's, the US president, going and telling everybody how horrible the Soviet's were and how wicked they were and the worst people on the planet were them. And they were the enemies in all our movies. But then he'd go to these summit's where he'd meet together, you know in Reykjavik, it was always in Reykjavik - he would meet together with the Russian prime minister or the premier or the president, Gorbachev and they'd be standing there shaking hands and smiling - going through the motions. Right have the flags behind them, "Look how well we get along." But then they'd leave and the truth would come out that they don't really like each other. Listen, you can be at war with God in this cold war way, it's way more subtle. You might go to church, you know do the hand shakes so everybody can see, be involved in the religious setting but still be at war with God because the moment you leave in your mind and heart you're like, "I don't want to do anything he says, but I'm just going through the motions cause I'm tricking him and everybody else." So alienation with God shows up in a hot way and it shows up in a cold way, and Paul's saying, everybody whether hot or cold were at one point alienated to him - enemies in their minds and was working itself out in their behaviour, you can tell by the way they're acting toward him.

But now - so that's the first picture, that mullet picture - but now! Colossians 1:22a,

"But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death."

Notice, just notice the language, *he* - the subject, the actor in this sentence, has reconciled *you* - the object of the reconciliation. It does not say that you and he got together and had a mutual agreement on how you would both be reconciled. It does not say that you have contributed to your reconciliation very much, it says that he reconciled you, *he* chased you down. Have you ever had a disagreement with a friend? The one who is doing the reconciling is the one who's chasing the other down.

Okay so when my wife and I were dating. She doesn't like to remember this story, so I like to bring it up <whispering> don't tell her, okay. We were dating and she and I were standing in the room where I lived in a house with seven other guys, lived in his house. This house was disgusting, like it was really really gross and she would frequently make comments about it and I think at one point I got frustrated with her making comments about it. I'm a relatively fiery guy, have you noticed that a little bit? So I'm a relatively fiery guy and so sometimes little things like, "Hey your house is a bit of a mess." "What!!?!?! WaRahRaRah]Rah!!" I'll freak out about that kind of stuff. We were having a discussion along these lines, which involved me, "WaRahRahRah!" And her, "Waaa!" Crying. And I remember her crying and I remember her saying, "I'm done with this!" And she walked out of the room down to the car. Now I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know, I'm done with this - this ugly disgusting house



you live in; I'm done with this - this discussion; or I'm done with this - Jeff this. Right. So while she's going downstairs and getting in her car and she's peeling out and going backwards and going down, she was going to go down the alley way that was behind our house so she could get out. It occurred to me while she was getting in the car, that "Oh my goodness, this like she might mean the third of those. Like I'm done with this Jeff." I think I was wearing a pair of shorts, it was the middle of winter - wearing a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, no shoes and I ran out the back of the house and I like, I can't remember if I grabbed my bike, I think there was a bike of a neighbor's I grabbed, I remember driving like crazy going down the alley while she was driving away. <physical exertion noises> I was going as hard as I could. She had to stop at the stop signs, but I caught her and I hit the hood <bang on the podium> of the car and I said, "You're not leaving!" Tears. "You're not leaving!" Notice by the way that I am the, I am the God character in this story [laughter] and she is the sinful humanity. [Laughter]

Okay here's a better one that doesn't involve me. You get the idea though right - the image, the reconciliation is something that God is doing for you. He's chasing you down. The God of heaven who've you've wronged and rebelled against, cold or hot, shake your fist at him in one way or another. He's the one who's chasing you down.

I was at a funeral here at our church a number of weeks ago where Vern Heidebrecht, who is the great pastor of this church years before I got here - wonderful man. They were celebrating his life, he had just passed away recently and his granddaughter who lived with Vern and his wife Carol - she lived with them for a number of years, his granddaughter was standing up and describing her grandfather and this is one of the ways she said. She said, "There was one time when I was so sick and tired with living with them, with everything and I didn't want anybody telling me what to do and so I just took off out of the house, right with my stuff packed and I'm walking down the street, I'm done with all of you people right." Shake your fist. And she said, "My grandfather Vern, he, he was in bare feet, right, pajama type thing, just nothing, he was walking right behind me as far as I was going to go, he was walking behind me just saying, 'I love you, we love you. Come home, come home.'" So who's doing the reconciling there, dad is. Who does the reconciling, God does. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. While you were running away, chasing you down. "I will not let you go, I will not let you go." He reconciled us.

You know it's interesting, when you look at this comparison that goes on in the Scriptures that goes the once - Paul loves to use this language, he uses it all over the place. I'll give you a couple examples. But he always does it with a goal. Like there's an application to it for him. I want you to compare what you once were to what you now are for this reason. Notice what he says, for example in Galatians 4:8-9, he says,

"Formerly, [right, once] when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God [But now that you know him]—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"



See you used to be like this, now you're free from that, why are you going back to slavery? Be who you are! Ephesians 5:8,

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. [What's the application?] *Live as children of light.*”

Don't live like you formerly were, live like who you are now. Be who ... be who you are. Imagine if you went to the slums of Brazil and you went and grabbed some person and said, “Listen I want to take you and I want to place you in this house that I've purchased for you on the other side of town. It's got several bedrooms and it's all yours.” You show it to them, they walk around, they're stunned, in awe of your generosity; you chased them down, you've given them this gift. You hand them the keys and the deed to the house and you say, “Isn't this great?” They're in tears, “Yes it's wonderful.” The next morning you show up at the slum where you picked them up and you find them living in the same squalor they were living in before - what would you do? Wouldn't you grab them by the shoulders and say, “What is wrong with you? You don't live here anymore, this is what you used to be, now you own the house!” Be who you are - Christian be who you are. If you're free from sin, live as free from sin. If you are an adopted child of the King, *live* as an adopted child of the king - oh prince and princess. “But I'm so worried.” Why so worried? We are heirs with Christ, sovereign God cares for us, covenant keeping God - that's who you are ... that's who you are.

You know years ago, I've told this story before, there was this - we had to move some chickens. The church I used to work at in New Zealand, we had to move some chickens, we took the dead chickens out of this - was to make some money for the church, we took some dead chickens out and we replaced them with the new chickens. When you're taking the dead chickens out, out of their cages, often times when I started doing it I wasn't very good at it right. Especially I didn't realize they were going to claw you to death. So pulled the chickens out and they're clawing you to death and I'm like, “Yeah!” And you drop them, so several chickens are on the ground and I was like, “Well they're gone.” And the reason I said they're gone is because the door to the barn was wide open, right. So the chickens would drop to the ground and they would run toward the door and I was like, “Ahh now I have to answer for that,” you know, “maybe the coyotes will get them.” So anyway, once I'm done moving all the chickens I thought well I'll go and find the ones that I dropped, so I walk over to the door of the barn and they're lined up! Looking out - open door, to the New Zealand horizon, freedom is out there. And they will not cross the threshold, even though there's nothing stopping them, they're so used to being in the cage that even though they're running around now they still think they're in the cage looking wistfully out there, “Oh I wish I were free.” You are free chicken! [Laughter] But you're still living like you're in a cage. So here's the moral to the story. Don't be a chicken. [Laughter] And I'm telling you what, there are a lot of Christian chickens around, there's so many of us who are living our lives like we are still under the rulership of sin, still under the fear of sin. If you are free, you are free indeed. Be who you are.



[To Present Us]

He reconciled us ... to present us. So he has a goal, look at - I'll start in verse 21 again and I'm going to read a little bit further this time. Colossians 1:21-22,

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. *But now* he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death [why - why has he done this once now thing - why?] to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.”

Have you ever been to a baptism service? If you - listen if you want to be inspired in your faith you should come to a baptism service. It is so cool to see people commit their way to the Lord publically, it's the amazing. Watch the beginning of the race, the start and all these people with excitement in their faces. A baptism service often times you as a family can come and gather around the place where people are being baptized, whether it's at a lake or maybe in a tub somewhere. You gather around and the person who is being baptized is now dunked under the water and they're brought back up. You know, “Baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit and raised to new life.” And they come back up and everybody's like, “YEAAAS!!!” Freaking out they're so excited about it and tears and hugs and you have dessert afterwards. Celebration for the beginning of the race. We are really good folks, in the Christian church, we are really good at celebrating at the beginning of the race. Rightfully so - the danger is that you can be tempted to think after a baptism service as you walk out and think, “Woah job done. I mean in the life of that person, saved. Let's move onto the next.” When actually that's not the way God views it. God views it as the beginning of the race with a lot more race to go. The beginning, quite honestly of the renovation, he didn't save them just to save their souls for heaven. He didn't just save you just to get your soul into heaven, he saved you that he might renovate you. He saved you that you might be holy and he's working toward making you blameless in his sight, so that he will present you one day as the finished article.

We get this in several places in the Scriptures, Ephesians 1:4,

“He chose us in him before the creation of the world [why?] to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

Ephesians 5:25-27,

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and [he, Christ] gave himself up for her [Why would Jesus give himself up for the church? Well,] to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a *radiant* church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Like when he got you, when he got his bride, she wasn't much to look at. But over time he's developed her into a magnificent creature. You do realize that there will be a day where after God is done renovating you he will present you to himself, in heaven, all the people will come around and he



will say, “Do you see this one right here? Bit of a mess when I started, but look at her now. Magnificent.” For all eternity we will celebrate this renovating God who wouldn’t leave you alone but sought your renovation.

We have a good friend who was part of our church here for a number of years. He was one of the elders here and he moved up to Kelowna, I remember when he moved up to Kelowna he said, “You Jeff, you’ve got to come and see this house that we’re going to buy.” And I was like, “Oh.” He said, “It’s got this magnificent view.”

“Okay.” We went up and looked at it with him, drove up in through the woods forever, eventually came out on some street somewhere and I looked at the house and guys there’s no house, like it was just a couple of pillars with a roof over the top and like tarp over the side of a lot of this stuff. Apparently it used to be, it was a Hell’s angels gang hang out for a number of years. And so I walked to the edge of it, and I said, “This is your house?” He goes “Yeah, yeah, just walk inside real quick, just be careful there’s a lot of bats in the - up in the ceiling there. We got to do something about that,” he said.

“Okay! That’s probably a good idea, you might want to start getting rid of the bats.” He said, “Isn’t it magnificent look at the view, isn’t it magnificent?” <Smirking> “It’s not magnificent at all. She’s a bit of a mess. What are you going to do in the meantime?”

“Well we’re going to renovate but we’re going to live in a trailer just outside for the next while.”

“Okay, this will be great. Have you talked to your wife about this?”

“Yeah, yeah she’s all on board.”

“Okay we’ll see.” Anyway for the next couple of years, lived in the trailer but I’d come back every once in a while see this house. Next stage a little bit more was done; next stage, little bit more was done.

Guys, I’m telling you if you walked into this house right now, you would walk in and go, “Ohh my word this is fantastic, look at at that view, look at the handywork, the magnificence of it.” That’s what it will be like.

Listen you do realize that this is what God’s doing in your life right renovating you? Christian he’s making you holy. You say, “Why won’t he leave me alone?” Mmmmmm a renovation. “Why don’t things turn out like I want them to turn out.?” Mmmm a renovation. “It’s like God’s after something in my life that I’m not after.” Right you’re after comfort, he’s after holiness. But there will be a day where he presents you and you will look at it and think, “Oh, oh God, you’re magnificent.”

[If We Continue]

So he reconciled us, to present us ...if we continue. I got to be honest with you, that one right there is probably not the one you would’ve included in the tweet. Paul does, he’s pretty happy with it. If we continue. So I’ll read the passage again. Colossians 1:21-23,

“Once you were alienated from God [verse 21] and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—*if* you continue in [now it says your faith here, the better translation here is the faith. If you continue in the faith] your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.”



That language of established and firm is really interesting. Those words are used in the ancient world to talk about buildings. See you have established and firm buildings and then you have buildings that are not established and firm. In the ancient world if you lived in a city there, it would be very regular occurrence to be walking down the street of your city and hear a distant crashing. And that distant crashing was apartment buildings just failing over. Very common. The ancient writers talk about this as an issue, "One day you might be living on the sixth floor of your apartment building and then you're on the ground." Caused a lot of deaths the building codes in those days. So there are the kinds of buildings that are not established and firm and Paul's trying to get that your mind working there. He's sayin, "Listen some of the buildings are built so poorly and they have such bad foundations they just fall over. You don't want to be that one, you want to be the established and firm one. And the only way that you're going to be that way is you hold true to *the faith*. Established in *the doctrine*."

The Colossian church was facing a problem. The problem was false teaching, there was some people within their church who were saying, basically this that "Listen all this stuff about Jesus is fantastic and believe in Jesus, and grace alone and all, it's so great, it's so great. But God also wants us to eat certain foods like kale," sorry they didn't say kale. It's just a lot of people these days love the kale and I think it's evil, but ... "You need to obey Jesus and this other stuff. See it's Jesus plus not having this or eating these things or not celebrating on these particular days. That makes you a Christian - Jesus plus." And Paul comes at this and says, "Woah, that's a different gospel. That's straying away from *the faith* that you've inherited, and if you guys goes that direction - Colossian church, let me tell you, you are not continuing, and if you don't continue than this once ... now isn't true of you." So just so we're really clear here, the once ... now story; he reconciled us to present us - is only true of those who stand firm in the faith until the end of their lives.

Little theology okay? When you deal with a question that I raised earlier theologically, what do we say about the apostate, what do we say about the person who starts the race and doesn't finish, okay. There are three big views that the church has had over the last number of years. Okay, I'll give them to you. Ohhh flip chart. Okay so the first one is what I call, decisionism. Decisionism is the belief that if you made a decision for Jesus at some point in your life, it does not matter what happens after that moment - doesn't matter if there's any sign of renovation in your life, it doesn't matter if you finish the race, starting is all that matters. If you prayed a prayer on one particular occasion, and you came forward when the pastor said, "Come forward if you want to receive Jesus, or raise your hand." Or at the Alpha meeting at your table, or maybe your parents - if you prayed a prayer that's enough. That doesn't matter what happens after that - that's decisionism. So those people who prayed that prayer, they're saved no matter what, okay. The second option though is the person who gives us the race, lost it, lost their salvation - see they had salvation by beginning it, but then halfway through by not completing they didn't actually, they don't have it anymore. They lost something they had. The third option is that by quitting it shows that they never actually had salvation, because a race, in the race the prize goes to the one who finishes; so you don't, you don't have salvation yet, you have it when you finish.



Now here's my point, I don't want to get involved in the theological debate except to say this. View number two and view number three functionally, meaning at the end of all the things, are the same - they both say that the person who gives up halfway through the race *is not saved*. But number one says, yes they are - and I'm going to tell you, that number one, according to the Scriptures is just blatantly false - it's not true. Now when I say that in classrooms and other places in churches, I always laugh a little because people sit there and I can feel it, they're like, "Noooo, you're wrong." Okay so ready?

I am going to try to dogpile you with Scripture now, alright. So there you are, here comes the Scripture dogpile. First of all, this passage that we're dealing with here, Colossians 1, *if you continue*. Hebrews 3, the book of Hebrews was written to a group of people who used to be Jewish and now are Christian, and the Christian church is being persecuted and so a lot of the people are thinking, "You know if we want to save our lives we just go back to Judaism." So the writer of Hebrews warns them, several times, Hebrews 3:12-14,

"See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that *turns away* from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. [See] We have come to share in Christ, *if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.*"

There's nothing for you back there! You have come to share in Christ, *if you continue* and hold firm to the original conviction til the end. 2 John 9, now John is writing his letter here to a church that has a bunch of people that has gone out and they've started to preach something different, and so the church is trying to figure out, okay so these people who are part of us have now gone out and start preaching something differently. What do we think about them? They've departed from *the faith*, what do we think about them? 2 John 9,

"Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ *does not have God*; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

Acts 14 when the Apostle Paul is coming back from a trip and he's come back to a church he has established, so new converts, people who've just been baptized. He comes back and he's got words of encouragement for them. Acts 14:21-23,

"They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. [And] Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, [right to talk to the believers there] strengthening the disciples and encouraging them *to remain true to the faith*. [This is what they said to the new believers, 'You guys remain true to the faith,'] 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said."

Race isn't done, you just began, praise God you just began, race isn't done. Continue! Many hardships ahead, continue - and you're at risk that you might give up and it will all be for naught.



Finally the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4, about his own life, this man who is a great, great champion of Christianity, great follower of Jesus. Listen to what he says, his dying words, he says, 2 Timothy 4:6-8,

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, [I’m about to die, he knows it, he’s writing to his protege, his buddy Timothy who has travelled all over the place with. I’m already being poured out like a drink offering,] and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight [Timothy], I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. *Now [now]* there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.”

You see the point, here it is, just so we’re absolutely clear. Only those who persevere to the end will be saved. You know it’s funny that last passage - I was at Vern’s funeral, I had knee surgery just a couple days before so I had to sit kind of in the back with my leg up. And when the service was over I kind of hobbled down and I was going through the hallway to head back upstairs so I could put my knee up again. And one of the guys - I’ve taught classes on this subject several times around our church and other places, and one of the guys who was in one of my classes about this - was like 6 weeks where we looked at every passage in the New Testament, it talked about this. This guy who had been in this class, he said to me over everybody - there was a whole bunch of people out in the hallway, greeting each other and sharing memories about Vern. And this guy, he said, “<hollering>Jeff, he made it.” Above everybody. “He made it. He finished the race.” That’s right, he made it, he kept the faith. May that be said of all of us on the day of our funeral. He reconciled us to present us if we continue. Let me pray for us.

Father, I’m so thankful for this passage of Scripture and for the challenges that it lays forth and I know that theologically this probably raises all sorts of questions in the minds of people, and I pray that they’re response to that would be they’d come back, hear more what it is that you have given to us here. Father, I’m convinced that you’ve placed these things in Scripture as a means to keep us in the faith that we will hear these words, take heed, and pay more careful attention to the salvation that is so great. So God I pray that you’d help us to not drift away, but instead Father, pay that attention to it. Would you by the power of your Spirit make that a reality and we’re thankful for the promises of Scripture, that say that you who began this good work in us would be faithful to complete it in the day of Christ. It’s in that sense now, Father we commend ourselves to you in Jesus name, Amen.