

Are you ready for the Finish line?

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The smart and determined runner trains hard for the finish line. Every nerve, every muscle, every sinew must be strained. His lungs must bellow if he wants to win. And he knows that the worst thing that can happen to him is to start out with a burst of speed only to have his legs give out and his lungs fail as he reaches his goal. So what does he do? Long before the event, he trains. He trains hard to acquire the strength, endurance, proper technique to learn obedience to the rules, because only in this way can he make his dash to the finish a winning success.

Now the alert runner takes note as he runs his course because all along the way there are markers that tell him where he is in the race. This tells him how he must harness his energies, it tells him whether he is near the finish and whether his kick needs to be stronger and higher; whether or not he needs to put all his speed into it or whether he needs to measure his gauge, or his stride.

Now so it is with the Christian. As we move to the conclusion of this system of things, as we come to the finish line, there are markers all along the way that tell us where we are and what we should be doing. I want you to open your bibles to the book of Matthew chapter 24, and this is where the heart of our discussion is going to be tonight. It is going to be based primarily on Matthew 24, although we will be using other scriptural text.

Our interest lies particularly in Jesus statements found in the 24th chapter of Matthew. Here in the 24th chapter of Matthew Jesus said something that certainly ought to catch our attention because it is a marker. It tells us where we are and what we should be doing. Beginning with verse 21 of Matthew chapter 24 Jesus said, "For then there will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the worlds beginning until now, no nor will occur again, in fact, unless those days were cut short no flesh would be saved. But on account of the chosen ones, those days will be cut short." And then Jesus goes on to add other mile post, he says first as you make your dash to the finish; you're going to see a thing called the great tribulation. He said this thing is going to be horrendous. And unless it's cut short absolutely no one would be able to survive it, because it's going to be just that bad. Immediately he says in verse 29, let your eye go to verse 29, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." See that's another marker. And quickly you come upon another marker (verse 30), "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in lamentation, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (verse 31) And he will send forth his angels with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from one extremity of the heavens to the other extremity."

Now what Jesus is outlining for us here is the dash to the finish itself. These markers are

going to come clipping along as we move to the conclusion of this system of things. And the reason why we're raising this question is because once you get into that first marker, it will be a steady and very rapid downhill slide to the goal from then on. It will not be a time for you to adjust your stride, or to rethink your position. It will be a fast moving time. It will happen like this; and then, and then, and then, and then... and then it will be over. What you have not done you will not be able to do. Where you have not adjusted, you will not be able to adjust. You will not find some new supposed strength at that particular time. You are going to run the way you have been trained to run.

Have you been running with the world?

It is just as if a runner who has trained for years for a race, he's not going to all of the sudden on the day of the race change his style, it's too late for that! And chances are if he tried to change during the course of the race, he'd lose anyway because it would cause too much confusion.

Let's take a look at the first marker, go back to the 24th chapter of Matthew and look at verse 21. "For then there will be great tribulation" The first marker opens up with the destruction of Babylon the Great. That is when everything kicks off. Immediately with this destruction of Babylon the Great you and I are in for the race of a lifetime.

Open your bibles to Revelation now and you'll get an idea as to some of the things that will occur once the tribulation begins. It will start with the fall of Babylon the Great. Turn to Revelation 17 and here you will see a very exciting thing occur. Beginning with verse 2, start in part of verse 1, it says, "Come, I will show you the judgment upon the great harlot who sits on many waters, (verse 2) with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, whereas those who inhabit the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

Well cast your eyes down to verse 10, "And there are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet arrived, but when he does arrive he must remain a short while (verse 11) And the wild beast that was but is not, it is also itself an eighth king, but springs from the seventh, and it goes off into destruction." Rev 17: 10 -11

And then in verse 13, "These have one thought, and so they give their power and authority to the wild beast."

And what do they do with this new found power, this singular thought? Verse 16, "And the ten horns that you saw and the wild beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her devastated and naked, and will eat up her fleshy parts and will completely burn her with fire. Verse 17 For God put it into their hearts to carry out his thought; even to carry out their one thought by giving their kingdom to the wild beast."

In other words Jehovah God is going to cause some sort of madness, some kind of crazed madness to come over the world powers in the near future, and they will attack Babylon, and they will rip and tear at her for all she's worth.

If you pay real close attention the stage is already being set for that. Already they have no compulsion whatsoever about putting the religious clergy in jail. They have no sanctity or feeling toward the religious clergy; they are cutting and slashing them in the face in New York. Thieves are breaking into the convents and churches and robbing them, nuns are being raped. They're even breaking into churches and robbing them, they're robbing preachers on the streets. So the appetite to attack Babylon is already there. Jehovah is going to simply open their mouths wide and they will chew her all to pieces and burn what's left. It will be a

most frightening time brothers when that marker shows up. Even the world will be terrified at what they see actually happening to the churches..

Look at what it says Rev 18: 9 “And the Kings of the earth who committed fornication with her and lived in shameless luxury will weep and beat themselves in grief over her...” when they look at the smoke from the burning of her (verse 10) while they stand at a distance because of their fear of her torment and say “Too bad, too bad, you great city Babylon you strong city because...” we don’t have any more Christmas, no more Easter, and we can’t have any more political elections in your churches.

And Babylon will be destroyed. This will not be a funny matter with us either; because once you see it happen the religious clergy will be cut down and the political leaders will obviously know that they are next. They stand back because they see that this must be the hand of God, they will know that something is terribly different here when they see the religious parties and other things being destroyed..

Now this is very important, because once that time hits, what will you and I need? What will we need when we see this system coming to the conclusion?

- **A new car?**
- **A new house?**
- **A new pair of shoes?**
- **A new coat?**
- **A new bottle of perfume?**
- **Fashionable clothes?**
- **Money for the education of our children?**

Once you see that happening it will not be your money; you’re most valuable possession at that time will be your faith in God.. Because once it hits it is going to be furious, no one will survive it except by the grace and protection of God himself. And the question is; will you be ready for that?

Will you have the courage to go out and speak whatever message God will dictate for that particular time and situation if we tremble now, and find it difficult to have a share in the preaching of the good news under these circumstances, if this is our training at this point, Please don’t imagine that you’re going to find some new found courage to get up and to speak when they are busting Babylon all to pieces and anyone who dares to come up and say anything religious whatsoever. Don’t imagine that you’re going to find some new found courage to tell the truth or to speak the truth if you can’t do it now.

And then, immediately after Babylon the Great is destroyed, almost without a break, look at Matt 24:29 –immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Now in what sense will the sun be destroyed and the moon not give its light?

In what sense will the stars fall and the heavens be shaken?

Doubtless in the early part of this great tribulation the many luminaries, prominent Clergymen of the world, the political lights, the economic lights, those who are supposed to know their way out of things; the religious clergy who are supposed to be able to cut a deal with God so that you’ll be saved; the economic prognosticators who tell you how you can make money so that you can be rich; perhaps the political guru’s who tell you how they’re going to work out this world’s problems and situations. When that time hits, the bible will

thoroughly expose them as being nothings and nobody's and they will not be able to save anyone. It will be as if all the stars in the heavens went out, and all the powers of the very heavens will be shaken.

Can you imagine the confusion of the people who put all their stock and faith in the religious clergy only to see them destroyed at the opening of the great tribulation? Can you imagine people walking around the streets looking for whoever might be left of the religious clergy? Looking for them yes! "We want to find you because you know we had a chance to get a bible study, a 19 free week course, and you told us that those Jehovah's Witnesses are not to be fooled with. And you told us that all we had to do was to come down here and sit and listen to you and we'd be saved. And now the church is gone and it's all burned up and this stuff is gone and we don't have a prayer and we don't have a chance, and you fooled us!" And they are going to finish off whose left.

And they are going to find those college professors, "You told us if we listened to you we will have earth's good things. And now the stock market has crashed, money is of no value. You told us that if we just get this education we'll have the good life and now we have no treasures stored up with God and we're facing this great thing called Armageddon that Jehovah's Witnesses talked about all along!" And they are going to finish them off. There will be no light brothers when that time comes, will you be ready for it? Will you have something to say that is worthwhile? Will you have proof at that time that you have been running the race correctly? Why is that such an important question?

Matt 24: 29 – 30 because the Bible says just as quickly as the sun, moon, and stars become dark, the bible says, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven and then all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in lamentation."

Now what is this appearance of the Son of Man in the Heavens?

It is the same thing that is spoken of in Matthew chapter 25: 31-32 – "When the Son of Man arrives in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne and all the nations will be gathered before him (including Jehovah's Witnesses) and He will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." Why?

Turn back to Matt 24 evidently, even the people of the world will know and understand that they are in the final judgment period, and they will see something that will be evident; they will come to discern something that will be evident that this is it!

And they will cry and weep because this will not be a time where they can make any adjustments, have any bible studies, have any return visits, or have any change in the judgments they are about to be rendered.

Are you ready for that brothers?

Do you understand what this actually means?

Once that sign of the Son of Man appears in the heavens, where Jesus sits down on his glorious throne, He (Jesus) will judge you and I at that point in history as to whether or not you are actually a sheep or a goat. You and I will not be able to adjust or modify or rearrange the outcome of that judgment at that particular time.

You will not be able to say to Jesus, "Oh Jesus just wait a minute, I'm disfellowshipped; but let me get reinstated," Oh no, Oh no! You see all the evidence will have been brought into the court as to who you are and what you are as a person. And once he sits down, you will

not be able to change your record, not one iota!

So you can say, “Well Jesus you know I was an irregular publisher, give me a little time, let me...” NO! “I meant to turn my...” NO! Because everything at that point, once it hits, everything that you were from here back will be dragged into that courtroom and Jesus will judge it right then and right there, and you and I will not be able to alter that situation. Not one iota! It will be finished! The judgment will be rendered; it will be cut and dry. You will either be a sheep or a goat. You will not be able to make any adjustment to the judgment. Serious business!

Are you ready for that?

What are you training yourself to be now? What kind of person are you now? Are you trying to get as close to the world as you possibly can?

- by looking like them**
- by dressing like them**
- by acting like them**
- by dancing like them**
- by speaking like them**

Once Jesus sits down on his judgment throne you will not be able to say “Oh let me take this stuff off” Nope, Nope, you had it on then, you have it on now. That’s the way you were then, this is the way you are going to be judged as you stand.

What evidence you brought into that courtroom between now and when Jesus sits down on his throne, that is the evidence that will be stacked up, and that will be the determining factor as to whether we are sheep or goats. Understand that brothers; Understand that.

Let me illustrate it another way; Have you ever seen these advertisements where they have these muscle men, they show you this picture and they say “your body can look like this” They give you the idea that if you just lift up a few weights, if you go on a diet and eat specific food that you too will have these big bulging muscles or you have this shapely trim. Don’t even think that you want to believe that! It takes years of serious training and meticulous dieting. Those pictures that you see don’t imagine that it takes just a couple of days or a few weeks of dieting. Years! Years!

Now once the Great Tribulation starts remember everything is going to happen like this – clap! Clap! Clap! Very quickly, so you’re not going to have time to reach back and develop some kind of spirituality that you hadn’t already developed. Think about it! How long does it take for a person to come into the truth now?

Doesn’t it take a minimum, a very minimum of 19 weeks? (about 6 months) and then they have to go out in the field ministry, so don’t imagine that all of a sudden you’re going to see Babylon fall and you’re going to change your whole record, your whole outlook! NO!

You’re going to run the way you’ve been trained and the way you’ve trained yourself.

Generally speaking, when an emergency occurs, when a crisis happens, people fall back on what they know. They don’t reach back and get something they don’t know. They fall back on what they know.

So if you have known irregularity, if you have known hard-headedness, if you have known

skipping around obedience to the rules, if you have known worldliness, then you're not all of the sudden going to know the truth! You are going to fall back on what you know.

Are you ready for the finish line?

Are you putting distance between you and the world?

Are you claiming to serve Jehovah and at the same time getting close to Satan's world?

Let me share something interesting from the bible; go back to Eph. 4: 20 – Speaking about Christ it says; “But you did not learn the Christ to be so...” As I have traveled around the circuit I can tell and it is very obvious to me that honestly many of us are not training the way we think Armageddon is going to be.. Some of us are too close to the world. Some of us are not running hard like we should. Remember what you learn here in the Kingdom Hall, what you studied in the books, everything you learned in the bible, you did not learn Christ to be that way – the way you see the world. Christ was not anywhere near the world; if Christ were here today do you imagine that he would be walking around in baggy pants or with earrings in his ear? You never read anything in the bible that gave any hint or suggestion that Christ would look like that.

If he were here today do you imagine that he would be dressed up and looking as much like the radical elements the world today? He would never do a thing like that.

The world has the habit of saying, “look at me” When I went to the grocery store the other day, to show you the way things are, here's a woman she's being paid I don't know how much an hour, and you know the world pays much attention to efficiency. They want people to be efficient, so what is she doing? She is trying to wait on me and she's picking up the money but she can't even use her hands with her fingernails!

Now if Christ were here, would he have even resembled or hinted or suggested in any way that the sisters or the brothers go to any extremes. Did you ever read anything in the bible that gave you the idea that Christ Jesus would have been like that or approved of that?

And this is the point that we have to appreciate brothers Armageddon will be the biggest thing that you and I will ever experience. The firmer we are trained to serve Jehovah the better we are going to be when the time comes. But believe me when that time hits you will never be able to reach back and try to grab something that you never trained yourself to be. Give it some serious thought.

Your heart, spiritual lungs, and limbs must be flailing away at trying to be as close as we possibly can to Jesus Christ and the way he trained himself to be, because that's the only way that we are going to be able to win this race.

Now immediately, shortly thereafter, once Jesus does this separating work of the sheep and the goats something very interesting is going to happen. He (Jesus) is going to gather... Let's go to Matt 24: 31- for a minute because these things are going to be happening quite rapidly- otherwise as Jesus said, no flesh would be saved – NO flesh would be saved if it didn't happen in this fast fashion.

Matt 24: 31- “And he will send forth his angels with a great trumpet sound and they will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from one extremity of the heavens to the other extremity..”

At that time there will be no question as to who the anointed are. Who are the true anointed ones? Sometimes we see people who are just barely in the truth partaking of the emblems.

We don't have to judge them, it's not our business, but we will know who they are because once they have been sealed, no doubt many will be gathered at that particular time, you will know for a certainty who those truly are; those who are anointed and those who are fakes. Sometimes in traveling about, and I am not trying to make any judgments, but sometimes I see those who claim to be of the anointed not representing anything that I've seen of the anointed. Sometimes they're the biggest troublemakers in the congregation. Sometimes they cause more fights, literally fighting I've actually seen that. Difficulty and trouble that they cause within the congregation; I went on a bible study and this person wasn't baptized and they were sitting there figuring out whether or not they were of the anointed.

Well, when Jesus gathers his anointed ones you know it might prove to be a bigger test on you than you think. If you and I have the habit of not listening now, when most of the anointed ones are gone off the earth and there is nothing left hardly but those of the great crowd, will you listen then?

Will you say, "Well you know you're not of the spiritual anointed. They've all gone to heaven. Who are you to be telling me? I didn't turn my time in back then when they were here on the earth and I'm turning it in now to you?"

You see brothers that wrongheaded spirit, or lack of cooperation can get you in serious trouble and can create an attitude problem in you. Jesus said "he who is faithful in what is least will also be faithful in what is much." It's all part of our training.

And then something else will happen, don't imagine that Satan the Devil, who looks around and sees his false religion devastated; he sees economic system that he put together in a shambles, he sees the whole political world he carved and woven all torn apart, don't imagine that he isn't going to come for you! Don't imagine that he's not going to try and get Jehovah back in some way, or that he's not going to strike a blow at the very heart of Jesus Christ himself. Don't imagine that he's going to let it go like that. That he's just going to walk away and get off the field and say that the fight is over. Although he knows its over, don't imagine that he's going to give up like that; because he won't.

And then will come the attack of Gog of Magog. The only way Satan can get at Jesus and Jehovah is to get at YOU!

And who are you? What are you? If you have been hiding it you won't be able to hide it then. Because only those who have absolute faith in Jehovah, and who absolutely put their confidence in Him, and there can be no question in their minds as to whether God will protect us. If you have any questions in your minds, you simply will not make it. If you have any doubts Satan will gobble you up. You will run out in fear and you will be strangled or caught or killed like some young animal in the hands or the paw of some attacking lion.

Any dark secrets, any lack of faith, any bad motives, regrets, misgivings, once the Gog of Magog makes his attack, and you don't have the absolute confidence that you have done all you can... well...

See here's now where the question of whether or not we've been serving Jehovah whole souled will be answered. It will not be answered by a time sheet or by an elder. It will be answered right then and there. And the question is will you be ready for it? Because once he makes his attack, Jehovah is going to come at him with all fury and then you'll finally be in Armageddon. That will be the last of the hoorahs. Once Gog makes his attack on God's people, Armageddon then will begin. That will be when it will all come together.

Oh what a wonderful time that will be brothers! If you and I have worked hard, if we have exerted ourselves, if we have cooperated then you can say to yourself, "You know I'm glad I used all my money to pay for the Kingdom Hall, and I sat down in there and I got the

education. I was sitting in that Armageddon survival class that they had at that Kingdom Hall. They had classes Tuesday, and Thursday, they had class on Sunday, and I was at every last one of them. And now I'm getting ready to go through Armageddon and I'm confident that I have been properly educated, and I've trained myself to run, and I'm ready for Armageddon, because I used everything I had to support the Kingdom; I used my funds, I didn't try to hold back anything knowing that the money was not going to be any good. Ha! You got the last laugh because your financial means had been used to honor and praise Jehovah, and all those others who've been saving theirs they're going to see the stock market crash, they're probably going to see dollar bills, blowing in the streets as worthless pieces of paper! And yours would have served every night purpose to honor Jehovah. Oh what a wonderful time that will be! And then, and then, after the great tribulation begins and after the sun, moon, and stars fall, and the sign of the Son of Man appears in the heavens, the separating of the anointed, the attack of Gog of Magog, the battle of Armageddon, and then... THE NEW WORLD! THE NEW WORLD! Won't you be glad when there will be just the new world? And you'll be glad when you're little legs, your heart, and your lungs come charging over the hill gasping for breath because you knew how to run like you were supposed to, and you'll be saying to yourself, "I'm so glad that I was at these meetings. I'm so glad that I was in the field ministry, and I'm so glad I listened to the elders, I'm so glad that I got away from the world! And you'll fall across the finish line into the New World! Oh won't that be wonderful!

But are you ready for it?

You won't have time to train then, everything will be moving too fast. It will happen too fast. NOW is the time to train brothers. And one of the things that we need to do, we need to train harder to be at our meetings because every meeting is an Armageddon training session. Just like those who pump weights, it may not be the one where they lifted it up like that, it may not be the one that got him the big muscles, it never happens like that. You never pick up a weight one time; it's the consistency and constancy that puts the spiritual bulges on your chest. That's what gives you the neck, arms, legs, the physique of somebody beautiful. Not the one time that you did something, but the consistency and the regularity, that's what produces the ability to run like you're supposed to run. That is what produces strong legs, strong hearts, and strong lungs. That's what produces faith and fearlessness and determination. You can't do it when it starts – You have to do it NOW!

So, are you ready for the finish line?

Are you training yourselves? If the tribulation were to break out tomorrow, can you guarantee that you look enough like Christ Jesus that could get you through? Are you assured that you have proven irrevocably and unconditionally that you are sure that you are devoted to Jehovah whole-solely? Aren't you glad that we have a few more minutes yet before the end comes? And that perhaps, where there is some weakness in our running style, perhaps you have just a little bit more time to finish off that kick, to get your stride together, to learn how to be obedient. Obedience is a wonderful thing.

Let me tell you one little experience before I close, it's an experience that affected me, and I never forgot. For this reason, it taught a lesson; I recall being in a literal race, it was at school. And lined up were some of the boys; and in my mind I could beat them ten ways to Sunday. I knew I could beat them.. When the teacher gave the gun to go, I took off! And sure enough I beat them!

The teacher told me that I got a zero. I couldn't believe my ears, I thought "What? I didn't win?" I not only hadn't won but I got a zero. I was stunned. Well you see, in a race there are these things called lanes, and they have rules, and the rule is that you have to run in your lane, you can't run in the other man's lane.

Well I was all over those lanes, and when I got down to the end of that race, I had lost.

Now, you might laugh, but here's the point, Jesus not only requires that you run the race with good form but he also requires that you run according to the rules. You can run as hard as you want, but when you get down to that point where he sits on his judgment throne and he sees that zigzag, you cut all across the lanes, he may well say that you're a goat and not a sheep, much to your surprise.. We don't want that brothers.

Learn to run with endurance; learn to run with obedience; learn to run hard; learn to train yourself because once we get to the marker of the great tribulation you will not be someone that you are not. You will not prove yourself to be something that you haven't trained yourself to be all along. And I hope we get the message clear – NOW is the time to get ready before the battle of Armageddon occurs, and only then, by such vigorous training will we prove ourselves winners and come across the finish line to our everlasting life and Jehovah's glory.