

Intro: Tomorrow is Patriot's Day in New England, and it is also Marathon Monday. ___ runners will start in Hopkinton and run past a half a million spectators until they reach the finish line on Boylston Street at Copley Square. Now I know many of us would say we would rather run one mile on hot coals than to attempt to run 26.2, but the Boston Marathon is the crown jewel for most long-distance runners in the world. It is the longest standing marathon, this being the 117th running, and it does have a purse of \$150,000 to the winner with a \$25,000 bonus for a course record. Not bad for 3 hours of work!

One of the questions I ask around this time of the year is: "What does it take to train for the Marathon?" Motivation, discipline and determination. Diet and Nutrition are vital. These runners have to be extremely vigilant regarding what they put into their body so that they can establish and maintain a proper recovery regimen. So no alcohol or tobacco. No caffeine. Say goodbye to fast food, unnatural sweets and carbonation. And say yes to plenty of fruit, vegetables and grains, meat in moderation, and learn to get plenty of sleep by going to bed early and getting up early.

Then you have the running itself: for most people it takes months, sometimes years to prepare for a qualifying time. 5k, 10k, Half Marathon, building up endurance, running hills in preparation for the race. Listen to one trainer named Hal Higdon: "The course starts at a height of 462 feet above sea level in Hopkinton, drops precipitously, particularly in the first mile and a half, rolls, descends again through about 4 miles, then flattens somewhat with an occasional hill before bottoming out at 49 feet above sea level at Lower Newton Falls (16 miles). Then begin a series of four hills--what Coach Bill Squires calls the Killer Chain--culminating in the infamous Heartbreak Hill (21 miles). It is not so much the height of the hills (Heartbreak is only 236 feet above sea level), but where they come in the race that poses difficulty for marathoners who have failed to prepare for them. The final 5 miles to the finish line on Boylston Street present a steady, if sometimes unnoticed, descent to 10 feet above sea level, and it is here where the legs of unprepared runners take a beating. If you enter this stretch fatigued and unable to maintain running form--particularly if forced back onto your heels--you will pound the muscles of your lower legs to pulp. This is why you see runners heading home at Logan Airport late on a Monday walking with the stiff legs of the Frankenstein Monster. It is also why their strategy descending stairs for a week after the race will consist of walking down those stairs backwards. The important message here is that to prepare for Boston--and the aftermath of Boston--you must condition your legs by training on hills, not only many of your long runs, but also hill repeats, both up and down hills. You must also lift weights to strengthen your legs: specifically the quadriceps muscles, but also the calf and hamstring muscles. To fail in this regard is to invite injury and to insure an inferior performance."

The training is incredibly rigorous, but all runners discipline themselves, train like mad men, and run because they have a final destination in view.

"Faithfulness, Faith & Our Final Destination"
Luke 16:1-31

The Point: God calls us to faithful stewardship because eternity is at stake.

I. Be a faithful steward by keeping the big picture in view (16:1-18).

Read 1-9

- In vv. 1-9, we come to one of the most perplexing parables in the gospel of Luke.
 - Story: Rich man whose manager is blowing his possessions. He gets called to account in v. 2: "I'm hearing some horrible things about your work. Pack up your office, Give me the balance sheets. You're fired."
 - This puts the manager in well-deserved but major predicament. Dig. Can't do that. I'm too weak. Beg. Can't do that. I'm too proud. What will I do?
 - Verses 4-7 layout his master plan. The last part is key: "so that people will welcome me into their houses." [The idea of being welcomed is prominent in this section of Luke (invitation to the feast, prodigals coming home).] This is a classic case of "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine."
 - And we need to realize that these were large debts! "One hundred measures of oil" would have been about 800 gallons of olive oil, which would equal about 3 years of wages for a day laborer. "One hundred measures of wheat" would have been about 1,000 bushels of wheat, which would equal about 8 years of wages.
 - The reduction of these two bills would have amounted to a year and a half of wages
- In verse 8 we have a surprising and unexpected twist! How do we understand this?
- We should take the parable at face value. "The manager is not commended for his dishonesty but for his shrewdness." (Stein, 412). Parables were usually told to provide one primary point, and the point here is to prepare the future wisely. The manager prepared for his coming judgment. The primary point is that we who know God should be even more diligent and more shrewd in assessing the long-term effect of our actions than those who seek to protect their earthly futures.
 - We too should prepare, we too should live with the bigger picture in mind, knowing that wise stewardship of our possessions in this life will demonstrate that we are prepared for the next. (REVISIT) How?
 - In verse 9, Jesus begins to teach some valuable lessons on stewardship and faithfulness. He begins by saying be generous to others so that you may receive a warm welcome by God and all those who go before you in heaven one day. This is the provides a great paradigm for generosity and meeting physical needs around us, namely, that we do not only want to meet physical needs but also spiritual needs. I take Jesus to mean that through this generosity, people are receiving the good news and will be reunited one day in heaven.

Trans: In reading the chapter, including the parable to come in 19-31, we might think that this chapter is primarily about money and possessions, and that is a huge part of it to be sure, BUT it is certainly about more than how we steward possessions. How we steward our possessions and how we steward our lives are a reflection of our hearts. Jesus is driving us to consider our view of possessions as a barometer of the attitude and faithfulness in our hearts. Jesus is always telling us that what we see on the outside of a person's life tells the story of what is really happening on the inside of a person's life.

Lessons on Responsibility, Action, and Trust:

1) Faithfulness begins with the small things (10).

- Money: Faithful in small things. It was reported to me that one of the young people in our church gave \$1 last Sunday. That's faithfulness in the small things. Start somewhere. We can't all give the same amount, but we can all be strategic, systematic and sacrificial in our giving.
- This goes beyond \$. Leadership. Moses & David were shepherds before they led the nation. My mentors taught me this. God exalts the humble. Work Responsibilities. Why would your boss give you more responsibility, when you can't show up on time and fulfill the smaller details of what has been asked of you?

2) Faithfulness leads to greater responsibility & true riches (11-12).

- Faithful with unrighteous wealth... The word unrighteous here refers to "worldly wealth," material possession which belongs to this life, this age. We know there is nothing inherently good or evil about money & owning possessions.
- Are you faithful with what God has entrusted to you? What do your spending habits look like? Do you live on a budget or do you spend money without accountability?
- Jesus says, if you can't be faithful over what God entrusts you with in this life, both monetarily and with other responsibilities, who will trust you with true riches?
- The converse is once again true. If you are faithful, God will give you greater responsibility and allow you to experience the true riches of his kingdom that never fade. #3

3) Faithfulness flows from a surrender to God's authority (13-17).

- Read 13. "You cannot serve God & money." Jesus says it is an impossibility. We will either serve and worship God, or we will allow money to become an idol that exercises a controlling influence and authority in our lives.
- Whatever dominates our thoughts, desires, and actions is for us an idol, a false god that will overpromise satisfaction and under deliver every time. .
- The Pharisees did not want to submit to the authority of Christ. They were an authority to themselves.

Read 14-15

- Pharisees laugh at his rebuke... "they sneered" at him. (This is how we often respond to criticism: self-defense and self-justification -- blame shifting.)
- God knows our hearts. Jesus tells the Pharisees that their value system is utterly contradictory to the priorities in the heart of God (revise). In fact, those things you treasure are an abomination in God's sight. Abomination refers to that which is utterly detestable.

Trans: The essence of treasuring God above all things and loving what he loves is receiving his word and respond appropriately.

Read 16-17

- The validity of the two testaments. (expound) Love for the Word. How do you know a person loves the word? Not because they've read it, memorized it, _____, but because they keep it! Heed the word, for in it you possess the kingdom.
- For those who hear and heed the word, they are pressing into the kingdom. At all costs... One of my favorite books in the world is by one of my favorite pastors from the 17th century. Thomas Watson wrote a book entitled *Heaven Taken By Storm*. He says, "Our work is great, our time short, our Master urgent. We have need therefore to summon together all the powers of our souls and strive as in a matter of life and death, that we may arrive at the kingdom above." Here's the good news: Watson says this should happen through the ordinary means of grace: Bible intake, prayer, worship, spending time with other believers, etc.
- If you want the kingdom, you will force your way in. When you see the prize, when you know what awaits at the finish line and have a true vision for the glories of the kingdom, you will allow absolutely nothing to stand in your way!

Trans: Jesus calls his followers to a radical keeping of his word. "Whoever does not renounce everything he has cannot be my disciples (Lk 14:33). And Luke inserts some of Jesus most radical teaching in verse 18 to provide another example of radical obedience and

4) Faithfulness should characterize our greatest relationships (18).

- Read 18... Marriage is a covenant relationship where two people become one to reflect God's love for us.
- There are times when every spouse will have thoughts, oh if my husband were more, oh if my wife did _____, they really need to _____. The grass is always greener on the other side. But the call of covenant marriage is not to look for a better spouse but to make our spouses better. Work for the holiness of your spouse.
- Divorce is such a great offense because it violates the picture of Christ's commitment to his bride, the church.
- By the way, when you are faithful in the small things, it makes everything better.

Trans: There is great need to be ready for our final destination. (This is emphasized in greater detail in the parable to follow.)

II. Be ready for your final destination through repentance and faith (16:19-31).

- Jesus continues to address the danger of abusing riches by telling the story of two people: a rich man & a poor man. [The contrast could not be more distinct.] This parable continues to highlight the great reversals we have been seeing throughout Luke's gospel of the past couple of weeks that highlight the paradoxical nature of Christ's kingdom.
- Verse 19 describes the rich man, and Jesus provides two descriptors about him: 1) "Dressed in purple." Now I realize some of you brothers be looking good in purple, but most of us can't pull that off. [Purple was a powerful color in that day, signifying royalty.] 2) "he feasted sumptuously every day." For breakfast Ball Square Café. For lunch: Regina's with ColdStone afterwards. For dinner: Oyster House.
- Verse 20-21 tell us about a poverty-stricken man named Lazarus: he was laid out, covered with sores, a pitiful sight, in the truest sense of the word. It says he longed to eat what fell from the rich man's man table. What is this saying? "The rich man's dogs were better fed than poor Lazarus." (Stein, 423)
- To make matters worse, Jesus says that dogs came by and licked his sores. In Jewish culture at this time, dogs were not "man's best friend" or clutched in the arms of celebrities as a status symbol. They were viewed as "impure, disgusting scavengers." (423).
- The rich man is culpable, not because he had wealth, but because he loved his wealth like the Pharisees. He failed to use his wealth to love God and his neighbor.

Trans: These two men would ultimately reach two different final destinations. Death changes everything and does so permanently.

The Doctrine of Hell:

- Hell is a real. Some people wish to dance around the doctrine of hell but to repudiate hell would be tantamount to repudiating Christ. Jesus, the one full of grace and truth, the embodiment of everything that is good, teaches on heaven & hell, as we've seen throughout Luke, again and again and again.
- ***Hell is a real place of horrible torment and anguish (23-25).***
 - Hell is the place of final judgment for the wicked who persist in their rebellion against God. Hell has been defined as "eternal sovereign justice exacted upon evildoers." (REVISE?)
 - Ironically, the one who would not extend mercy now desires mercy, and he discovers that he has walked past his opportunity for mercy and grace. Hell is necessary to uphold the holiness of God and the justice of God, not to mention, why the cross of Christ if we did not need to be saved from the consequences of our sin, which is eternal separation from God. When we understand that God is far more holy and just than we can imagine and that we are far more sinful than we can imagine, then we will begin to understand more of the necessity of hell. It's hard to believe in heaven if hell is a throw away doctrine.
 - Jesus could not be stronger, and the Bible could not be stronger in the language that it uses to describe the horrors of hell. Hell is horrible beyond description: the place were there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, a place of utter darkness, a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched, it is reserved for eternal punishment, dismembering, cast away from all goodness and joy.
 - Whatever pictures we find in Scripture, do not begin to clue us in on how unimaginably horrible hell will be. As Anglican theologian Peter Toon says, "Fire, darkness, and perdition . . . point to a spiritual reality more terrible than the means used to symbolize and highlight it."
 - This is so important because...
- ***Hell is a fixed place where no one will escape (26).***
 - Jesus says that there is an unbridgeable chasm separating heaven & hell that cannot be crossed.
 - This undercuts annihilationism.
 - This undercuts post-mortem salvation.
- ***Avoid hell at all costs through belief in the Scriptures (27-31)!***
 - If this the plight of all those who reject God and fail to live for his glory, then surely we should want to do anything we possibly could to avoid it!
 - Listen . . . I say none of that to manipulate anyone. I say it, hopefully in the spirit that Jesus said it, "grasp the seriousness of these matters of everlasting life and everlasting death and turn to God.
 - The greatest peril of hell is that a person will spend eternity apart from infinite goodness and glory of God.
 - Cross the chasm through the cross. It's your only hope. No amount of prayers after you die will matter. _____
- Jesus drank the judgment of God's wrath, so that we might experience the joys of heaven. Heaven is the permanent home of the righteous. Heaven is a place of comfort, rest, flourishing.
- The rich man sees this and tries to find consolation by appealing for the sake of his family. Send Lazarus to them.
- But Abraham says, "They have Moses and the Prophets..." The Scriptures!! In other words, this Book contains all of the revelation necessary for us to know what God desires for us and how we can join Lazarus and have eternal life.
- People demand signs. But the Scriptures, not signs are sufficient. Here's the other danger: If someone does not listen to the Word, then even the greatest of all signs will never convince them.
- These words linger with great force in Luke because he will soon tell his readers of one who was resurrected from the dead.

Conclusion: