THE CROWD AND THE FINISHING LINE

Posted on November 29, 2019 by Eddie

We can learn from the Old Testament, from church history and from contemporary Christians, but ultimately our goal is Jesus and we need to fix our eyes on him.
Category: Observations

Like many runners, I was transfixed recently when Eliud Kipchoge ran a marathon distance in under two hours. I know it wasn't a race and it doesn't count as a world record, but it was still impressive. When he broke away from his pace makers and sprinted to the line, I was in bits. Frankly, I could run half a mile at the pace he managed, much less a marathon.

Of course, this was his second attempt at a sub-two hour marathon. His first try at the target was on Monza race course and he missed his goal by a very narrow margin. One of the things that he identified as a problem at Monza was that he was too far from the cheering crowd, so in Vienna the route was chosen so that people could be close to him and cheer him on his way. Crowds do help. Even running in a small, local half-marathon, it gives you a little spring in your step when kids hold up their hands for a high-five as you go past.

The writer to the Hebrews understood this and after giving a list of some heroes of the faith in Chapter 11, he goes on to write:

> *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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross,scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

It's as if Abraham, Sarah and the rest are in the stands, cheering us on as we run. There is something about knowing that we are the inheritors of a long history of believers who have lived through good times and bad and held on to the faith which is an immense encouragement. If people could put up with being sawn in two, then we can surely run our race.

However, as I've recently been meditating on this passage, I'm particularly struck by one thing. The writer doesn't tell us to fix our eyes on the crowd, on the examples from the Old Testament (or indeed from church history), but on Jesus.

Changing the running analogy, somewhat, it is fascinating to watch sprinters in action. They are obviously aware of the crowds; high on adrenaline, they might clown around before they get on their blocks and after they cross the line. However, when they are running, they are focused on the finish; eyes bulging they stare at the line and strain hard to get to it.

We can learn from the Old Testament, from church history and from contemporary Christians, but ultimately our goal is Jesus and we need to fix our eyes on him. He has run the race before us (taking a much more difficult route than we have to) and he is the one we have to follow.

Just a thought.