



Running with Thankful Confidence

Scripture Reading: Revelation 1:4-8

Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile on May 6, 1954. Up to that point, runners and their coaches in Europe, Australia, and North America had been aiming intently toward the goal since at least 1886. But they'd never quite made it; many weren't sure anyone could. Then after Bannister broke the barrier with a 3:59.4 time, an Australian runner named John

Landy beat Bannister's time by over a full second. Within a year or so, three others broke the four-minute mark and over fourteen hundred have since. It seems that one person breaking the four-minute mile barrier opened the door for others to follow suit.

It makes me think of a guiding principle that has given me courage to step out when facing challenges and opportunities that feel like a stretch. Through the years, I've told myself that if someone else can do something, I can, too. And while I now know that this attitude isn't entirely correct (I am, for instance, quite incapable of running a four-minute mile no matter how many other people can), the perspective has been helpful in encouraging me to "go for it" when tempted to do otherwise.

Encouraging this attitude stepping up to what seems an overwhelming challenge is the reason the New Testament book, *The Revelation to John*, was written. Christians living in the region the author calls Asia, now in and around Turkey, were undergoing increasingly difficult times. Their faith in Jesus was being tested. They were being tempted to imagine that living a life of faithfulness to Jesus was not realistic or even possible. They lived in a society that looked down on their faith. Persecution was an increasing threat and the challenge of living according to the teachings of Jesus was increasingly difficult.

To encourage them, the Apostle John wrote the words in this coming Sunday's reading from Revelation, "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." There is so much in just these two verses, but for now, let's focus on this:

Imagine what John's description of Jesus as "the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" would have meant to those going through such difficult times:

- Jesus is the ultimate "faithful witness" even through persecution and death; you can be faithful, too.
- Jesus is the "firstborn of the dead"; you can run the race of faith with perseverance assured that life beyond the barrier of death can be yours.
- Jesus is the "ruler of the kings of the earth"; you can live and die confident that no power on earth can defeat the One you trust and serve.

There may be different times and situations in which one or another of the phrases is especially helpful. For me this week, I've especially been drawn this week to the phrase, "firstborn from the dead". It has been a reminder that the greatest barrier of all has been broken by Jesus and that we who follow him can be assured that, as the Apostle Paul puts it, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

(Philippians 4:13) Amidst our Thanksgiving celebrations and as we look toward Christ the King Sunday this coming weekend, it is worth keeping in mind this greatest reason of all for giving thanks. Christ Jesus has run the race of the life of faith and shown us it is possible to succeed and flourish through it all. By his grace and with the power of his Spirit, we can persevere. We can run the race and live this life with thankful confidence looking to, trusting in, and following him who is “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Prayer:

Almighty God, who is and who was and who is to come, we praise you. Thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, to free us from our sins and lead us through death to new life. By the power of your Spirit, enable me to run the race of faith with perseverance looking to Jesus, confident that as I follow him, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Help me now to live this truth with thankful confidence in you, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

Suggested Verse for Meditation and Memorization:

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Revelation 1:4b-5

Things to Try:

- Continue or start the practices of giving thanks that we suggested last week including:
 - Take a moment right now, count your blessings, and thank God for them.
 - As you begin each day, thank God for five things you are grateful for as you look to the day ahead. (writing them down will make this exercise even more helpful.)
 - As you end each day, thank God for five things you are grateful for as you look back on the day. (writing them down will make this exercise even more helpful.)
 - Go out of your way to thank someone who has blessed you.
 - Take three minutes before or after lunch to look out the window, notice God’s blessings, and give thanks for them.
 - Talk with God about the challenges you are facing, the worries you are dealing with. Balance your statements of concern with statements of gratitude for God’s presence, power, and provision.
 - Put an object in your pocket or in another place that will lead you to notice it and say a prayer of thanks each time you notice it through the day.
- As you reflect on the meditation/memorization verse, think of the ways in which each phrase in the verse serves as an encouragement to you in a different way.
- Each day, name a way one of the phrases within Revelation 1:4-8 can make a difference for how you think or act as you seek to be faithful to God.

Further Suggested Readings:

- Hebrews 12:1-3
- Philippians 10-13
- John 18:33-37
- Psalm 93