

****Bumper Video –**

Welcome to the 2nd week of the Steps series...

Last week we challenged you to re-think salvation... Not based on the **41000** Christian Denominations & Organizations... Not based on a religious **requirement list**... Not on a few scriptures... But we base our salvation on the entirety of Scripture and ultimately on Jesus Christ!

Salvation is Jesus. Salvation isn't a denomination, it isn't a requirement list, it isn't being a spiritually superior person, it isn't even being granted access to heaven. Salvation is Jesus! Salvation is found in no one else and nothing else.

When our salvation is based on Jesus and a relationship with Him... that means every step towards Jesus is a salvational step. Embracing Jesus is always salvational.

Jesus instructs us to Endure to the end and Paul told us to continue to work out our salvation. We challenged you to live life like today is the day of salvation.

Today I want to talk to you about our **FINISH LINE**.

The New Testament 6 times refers to the Christian life, a saving relationship with Jesus, as a race. It's important to notice that the purpose of the race isn't to beat other people... That's very different from how we think of races in our culture.

Most people can name the fastest man in the world. He won gold in the men's 100 meter the last 2 Olympics... **Usain Bolt**. Can anyone name #2? No... because we think races are about being the fastest.

The New Testament context isn't about being the quickest or the strongest

Ecc 9:11 The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong...

The New Testament Race is about Finishing and receiving the prize. This race is about crossing the finish line. Everyone who crosses the finish line wins and receives the prize.

Religion has often made people think that this race is about being the quickest, strongest, most spiritual, most holy... I want you to know it is really good news that this race isn't based on that... Because none of us would have a shot at winning 1st place. Only Jesus Christ ran this race well enough to finish in 1st place... We all have sinned and fallen short of that glory.

If you've been running this race to be the quickest, the holiest, the strongest and most spiritual, in hopes that you might win your salvation I've got bad news for you! You've already lost. Jesus has already taken 1st place.

He was tempted in every way... Jesus Wins!

Every race has competition. So who is our **competition** in this race?

Christianity has made the mistake of thinking other runners are the competition. One church on this side of the street thinking they serving God better than the church on the other side of the street. The Baptist thinking to himself... "I wish I could get those Methodists saved..."

Saved to what...? To your denomination... To your requirement list... or to Jesus!

We are a non-denominational church but can I just take a moment to say... We love Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalian, Pentecostal, Church of Christ...

We are called to be 1 unified body of Christ. Other believers aren't our competition!

But nonbelievers aren't our competition either. Christianity has often made the mistake of thinking nonbelievers are our competition. We have wrongly gotten up in arms over the 10 commandments being placed in public courthouses. Our motivation HAS NOT BEEN the Glory of God but a competition with nonbelievers.

Our King Jesus has commanded us to go out and bring in the unbeliever! They aren't the competition in this race.

Believers & Nonbelievers aren't the competition...

Here is your competition... **False Finish Lines!**

There is only 1 finish line in this race. Anything that distracts you from that true finish line... That is the competition. Anything that sets itself up as a finish line to stop you from running this race... That is the competition.

First you really need to see that **Jesus is the Finish Line.**

Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."(NIV)

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter (finisher) of our faith...

Jesus is THE one and the ONLY who could declare "It is finished." He did so on the cross.

Philippians 1:6 ..He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Jesus is Salvation. And every step toward Jesus is salvational. Jesus Christ is the Finish Line! He is the goal. He is the completion we have been longing for. He is the focus of this race.

False Finish Lines

A False Finish Line will tell you "You don't need to take another step – You've already crossed the finish line."

Universalism says everyone has already crossed the finish line. This belief system says everything is a finish line... We know that Jesus is the finish line. He is the way the truth the life... no one comes to the Father but by Jesus.

Denominations almost always propagate the false finish line of "you don't need to take another step – You've already crossed the finish line. Think about it..."

In 1517 **Martin Luther** was living in a world largely controlled by one Christian Denomination – The Catholic Church... He felt like there were more steps than what his denomination was teaching... He started searching scripture and praying... He started taking some steps toward Jesus... Then God gives Him an essential revelation...

We are saved by grace through faith – This was a huge step! Martin Luther was now living out his Christian race by Grace through Faith and not by works, trying to earn his salvation.

He posted his “95 theses” publicly and started telling people about this brand new step and many flocked to this new found freedom even at the risk of persecution. PRAISE GOD somebody took a step! How exciting! Wow I wonder what step & revelation God is going to bring to this group of people next?

They never took another step... They formed the Lutheran Denomination and announced “This is it! We have found the finish line. Come join us on Sunday mornings.”

Did God have more steps for them... You bet He did!

All throughout history we see this repeated over and over... From the Anglican Church there was a group of people searching and they stepped into new areas and formed the Baptist church... But they made the same mistake... They proclaimed they found the finish line... but so did the Methodists... so did the Episcopelians... so have the Pentecostals...

Denominations are basically a group of people that have said “we have found the finish line...” come join us on Sundays. They often proclaim their requirement list to be the finish line...

Redemption Church! We are a non-denominational church, but you hear me well. It would be so easy and natural for us to make the same mistake. To say we have found all of God there is... to say we have found the finish line in our requirement list... to say that we have found the finish line in our contemporary style and church culture. Let us never do that!

Jesus is the Finish Line! We aren't the finish line! We are still running this race towards Jesus Christ! This race is done only when we see our savior face to face and he says Well done!!

False Finish Lines are the competition! A False Finish Line will tell you “You don't need to take another step – You've already crossed the finish line.”

A false finish line will also try to distract you by saying “Over Here Over There”

This race is hard... it is grueling... and will really test you.

A false finish line will try to distract you with something easy or with something false.

Something easy

Materialism, Greed, jealousy, envy... Looking at the celebrity of this world will get you off course.

Katy Perry & Miley Cyrus... Christians... They claim to still be Christians

You can be successful, wealthy, popular and still run towards the true finish line of Jesus... But be careful always! Finish lines don't share the same space... You can't 2 masters!

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.(NIV)

You can run towards Jesus and be wealthy... But Jesus and the desire to be wealthy can't share the same priority spot. If you aren't wealthy will you stop running towards Jesus...? Jesus has to be the #1 priority of this race.

If I become wealthy or popular and well respected and my pursuit of Jesus – Great! Praise God!

But If I become a poor man that is disliked or unknown but I still cross the true finish line that is Christ Jesus THEN I WIN!

Philippians 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ(NIV)

Something False

Luke 17:23 Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them.(NIV)

It isn't enough to find the find the finish line. Once you have truly found it you can't be drawn away from it. Look here is the finish line. No there is the finish line.

Ephesians 4:14 ...no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Every 10.5 hours a new Christian denomination is formed. This isn't because they are always getting a new revelation of Jesus... It is often because they have found something false and are believing it to be the finish line.

Focus on the true finish line – Jesus Christ! Whatever it takes to get one step closer to Jesus is worth it in this race. There are some things we need to get rid of on this quest for Jesus.

Sin

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.(NIV)

Sin is a big problem! It hinders and easily entangles. Throw it off and run the race marked out for us...

Religion & popular culture has often taught us that if we can clean up our act... if we can be better people... If we can master sin...

LET ME HELP YOU! I want to help you out with the subject of sin. Sin will trip you up on this race.

We have never mastered sin! You can't be good enough. You can't be Holy under your own power and by your own actions. Not going to happen. We have never mastered sin!

Only Jesus Mastered sin, death, hell, and the grave.

Romans 6:9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.(NIV)

Romans 6:10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.(NIV)

We try not to fall into sin but we always eventually do... but not Jesus. He has mastery over sin & death!

We can't master sin, but we can choose a new master!

This is what Paul is trying to tell us in **Romans 6:22**

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God...

The one who mastered sin is now our master. There is only one person you can really trust to be your master. He alone really loves you enough not to abuse His power. He alone is patient and just. He alone is the great physician and the supplier of all my needs. His love is unconditional so even when you mess up this Master hasn't changed his mind about you.

He's not just my savior He's my master!

Have you been trying to master sin? You need to change Masters today! Why not take that step today. Why not come up to this altar today and when someone comes up to pray for you tell them "I want to make Jesus my master today." Do it today!

"But Pastor Chris... Jesus is my master but... I still have trouble with sin. What do I do"

We all have trouble with sin... and if we say we have no problem with sin... we lie. The Bible says it...

1 John 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.(NIV)

Let me give you a different way to think about sin...

Love Jesus more than the competition

Addicted to drugs or pornography and you feel that draw to fall back into sin... You are standing at the crossroads of 2 finish lines... You stand at the crossroads of 2 masters... Remember you can't serve 2 masters.

You have to decide who you love more... Jesus or the competition... **Love Jesus more than the competition**

When you are at this crossroad, it is no longer about saying to yourself... "I have to do good I have to do good." It is about saying about saying "I love you Jesus" or "I don't love you as much as I said I did."

Puts it in a perspective.

You are having trouble with hate and un-forgiveness... No really you are having trouble loving Jesus.

Having trouble with stealing? Having trouble with honoring your parents? Having trouble with obedience? Taking God's name in vain? Not letting your conversation be pure? Having trouble loving your spouse, your family, brothers & sisters in Christ? - No! Really you are having trouble loving Jesus.

Love Jesus MORE than the competition.

But Pastor... You don't know what they did. You don't know the hurt they caused...

No I don't. And I don't mean to make light of the pain you are facing, But you listen.... You need to take this next step. It's a step away from this heartache and a step toward the master...

We have focused on the next step other people need to make more than the next step we need to make! You can't win a race if you are focused on another runners footsteps. You have to focus on your own.... Keep your steps focused toward the finish line.

Redemption Church! Are you focused on the finish line? Are you focused on Jesus? Do you love Him more than the competition?

2 More major points and I'll be done...

Being told you need to take another step is not an insult.

We are talking about continuing to work out your salvation... We have declared boldly that there are steps that everyone in this place needs to make.

That might make you feel a little uneasy... or even insulted. You might be thinking... I have known Jesus for years... I have been used by God... God has spoken to me... I have seen miracles happen when I pray for people... I have had amazing moments with Jesus... how can you say I have another step to take...?

Check out what Jesus said to the apostle Peter...

Luke 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.(KJV)

"When you are converted..." When you turn around and get things right Peter... Peter could have been offended... He was walking with Jesus... doing miracles... he was close to Jesus and had the keys to the Kingdom..

But we know that Peter kept following after Jesus and in Acts 2 He was Filled with the Holy Spirit and stood up and indeed strengthened the brethren!

Being told you need to take another step is not an insult.

We are in a race... of course there is another step!

People are told to take another step a lot in Scripture...

Acts 8 Phillip ministers to Samaria

Acts 18 Aquilla & Priscilla show Apollos a more adequate way...

Acts 19 The Disciples of John meet Paul... Here is their conversation... Paul asks them...

Acts 19:2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."(NIV)

Acts 19:3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied.(NIV)

Acts 19:4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."(NIV)

Acts 19:5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.(NIV)

Acts 19:6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.(NIV)

Redemption Church! Don't be offended with me... but we have many more steps to go in this race. Every step is important because every step takes us from this world to the next world... it takes us from death to life... it takes us from sickness to health... Every step takes us closer to Jesus!

1 More point...

MUSICIAN

Is this race timed?

Is there a time limit to this race? Yes!

Your race will be concluded in 2 ways.

#1 Your final breath. If you die then your time is up. Simple right?

#2 If Christ returns and you haven't been running this race towards Him... If you have been refusing to embrace Christ... When that trumpet sounds you have to be ready.

You dying and Christ's return... we have no idea when these could happen... I can't guarantee you it won't happen today... So how important is it that you run this race today and everyday?

You have until now until the moment of your final breath or Christ's return... I believe that you can live your entire life going after the wrong finish line but on the last day you can find Jesus the True Finish Line... His mercy & grace endures!

There is a lot of hope in that!

BUT I believe God wants you to know that while His grace & mercy endure... God's conviction has a shelf life.

Have you ever felt God dealing with you to take a step? Have you felt your heart be convicted? Have you known God wants you to do something or to stop doing something? You know what that feels like...

That feeling doesn't endure... God's Spirit isn't always going to draw you and pull at you just like that... That feeling has a shelf life...

Why? Because God values your free will. If God kept convicting you constantly and with greater strength pulled at your heart... that would be infringing on your free will. Eventually he would force you to take this step.

If God pulls at your heart to take a step and you don't take that step... I can't guarantee you will ever feel that strong presence or conviction again.

Paul testified to a governor named Felix... Felix was under conviction...

Acts 24:25 As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."(NIV)

We never know of a time when Felix finally gave His life to Christ. God was here in this moment... but this moment won't endure...

BIBLE STUDY STORY...

If you feel God dealing with you... I beg you to take that step. Don't take this moment for granted...

If you haven't felt God deal with you in a while... What was the last thing he dealt with you about... Do that today!

What is your next step today? Are you going to take that step today?