

## 1 Olympic Faith

## 2 At a Glance

- Yesterday, the Thirtieth Olympiad opened in London, England.
- Of the 6.3 billion people in the world, there were probably only four people who weren't aware of this fact.
- For the next few weeks, images of athletes will be filling our television and the news reports out of London will continue to dominate broadcasts and the internet.
- So how can the preacher NOT talk about something everyone else is talking about?

## 3 The Queen's Grand Entrance

## 4 Facts & Figures

- 4bn Estimated global audience for the opening ceremony.
- 10,500 Olympic athletes competing for 205 nations.
- 32 Olympic sports venues.
- 700,000 (approx) Total capacity for all venues.
- Equestrian is the only Olympic sport in which men and women compete against each other on equal terms.
- £10bn (\$15bn) Estimated amount of revenue the Olympics will generate for the British economy.
- The London 2012 Olympic gold medal is made up of 92.5% silver, 1.34% gold and the remainder copper.
- 5,000 Estimated new homes available to East Londoners after Games, 3,600 of which to come from the Olympic Village site.

## 5 The London Olympics

## 6 Olympic Faith

- Throughout these games, the core values of the Olympics are being highlighted, values such as tolerance, solidarity, peace and friendship.
- To this list, we might add "faith," because faith is what allows each of us, in a well-conditioned body of Christ, to run with perseverance "the race that is set before us."

## 7 The Power of Faith

- Hebrews 11:29–34 tells us that faith is what enabled the people of God to . . .
  - pass through the Red Sea,
  - take down the walls of Jericho,
  - conquer kingdoms,
  - administer justice,
  - obtain promises,
  - shut the mouths of lions,

- quench raging fire,
- escape the edge of the sword, and
- put foreign armies to flight.

## 8 The Power of Faith

- In addition (Hebrews 11:35–12:2), faith was seen in the lives of people who were tortured, mocked, flogged, chained and imprisoned.
- Faith was evident in people who were stoned to death, sawn in two, and killed by the sword.
- Faith sustained God’s people when they were destitute, persecuted, and tortured, and it set the stage for God’s greatest work in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

## 9 Olympic Faith

- We’re talking Olympic Faith—faith that moves mountains that is only has to be as big as a mustard seed.
- Faith that can help us to press on toward “the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).
  - Faith that can propel us upward when life pulls us downward;
  - Faith that helps us move forward, when stress and conflict threaten to pull us backward.

## 10 Olympic Faith

- When we crash headfirst into hardship, it’s important to remember that we’re not alone.
- Just look at the field of athletes in London — there’s not an Olympian today who hasn’t overcome obstacles in order to make it into the Games.
- They have faced injuries and personal failures, mental and physical challenges, financial and emotional stresses.
- While they may never have been tortured, mocked or flogged they have certainly put themselves through struggle, strain, challenge and competition, and now they are sitting at the top of their fields, along with the world’s finest athletes from 205 countries around the globe.

## 11 Cloud of Witnesses

- They are surrounded by “so great a cloud of witnesses” — a field of fellow champions, past and present.
- Today’s competitors are moved and motivated by the athletes all around them, as well as by the spirit of the Olympics, which has inspired people for thousands of years.

## 12 Cloud of Witnesses

- That’s the challenge for us, as we focus on Olympic Faith: to return to our roots, to embrace the people of faith who have gone before us, and to carry forward the tradition of record–breaking reliance on God.
- In order to achieve our personal best, we have to reach beyond ourselves.
  - Olympic athletes are constantly looking beyond themselves to gain motivation, insight and ideas from their colleagues and competitors.
  - In the same way, we are inspired by the faith of God’s people in every time and place, and we can learn from the way in which our fellow believers have dealt with hardship and suffering.

### 13 Rosa Gutierrez

- Rosa Gutierrez has been on the run for most of her life, running hard in competitive races such as the Stockton 10–miler, the Gasparilla 15k race and the Rotary Mission Ten.
- She runs between 80 and 90 miles a week, plus regular swimming and weight training, and she is able to cover long distances at the impressive pace of six minutes per mile.
- Yet, throughout her training, Rosa has kept this passage in Hebrews in mind: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (12:1).

### 14 Rosa Gutierrez

- When she runs, Rosa remembers the men and women of faith who have gone before her, including her mother and her father.
- They moved from Mexico to the United States with nothing in their pockets, but managed to raise 11 children and live good and faithful lives.
- They are, for Rosa, witnesses of what it means to overcome life’s obstacles by faith and trust in God.
- They have helped her to see that when the race is tough and everything seems to be falling apart, there is still something within her that is strengthening her, encouraging her, and calling her to persevere.

### 15 Rosa Gutierrez

- That’s why Rosa is dreaming of something besides gold medals and personal glory.
- Her highest aspirations are spiritual growth, drawing others to the Lord, and the glorification of God in everything she does.
- For Rosa, the race of faith is even more important than the Olympic marathon. “Whatever the outcome, God will be in the midst of it all, . . .” she predicts.
- She’s got Olympic Faith.

### 16 Faith & God’s Strength

- Far too often, we allow ourselves to be frustrated by failure, and hamstrung by hardship.
- We fail to grasp, as marathoner Rosa Gutierrez has done, that even when the race is tough, our bodies are aching, and everything seems to be falling apart, there is still something within us that is strengthening us, encouraging us, and calling us to persevere.
- We tap into this power by faith, by a willingness to rely on God through every failure, disappointment, personal hardship or disaster.
- We gain access to God’s strength, encouragement, and perseverance by looking beyond ourselves, by learning from the stories of faithful people, and by trusting God to help us to complete our race.

## 17 The Millennium Matrix

- In his book, The Millennium Matrix, Rex Miller has focused on community as one of the key characteristics of a living church in the years to come.
- Looking at contemporary culture, he notices that there is an intoxicating mix of fellowship, celebration and enterprise in Harley Davidson gatherings, folk–arts festivals, Grateful Dead revival concerts, MAC World, Bill Gaither concerts and even Mary Kay and Amway conventions.

## 18 The Millennium Matrix

- He notices that each of these gatherings has consistently grown over the past 15 years, and they have been unusually effective because of the synergy of interaction and fellowship.
- Out of this observation, he recommends that we reclaim the image of the church as the community of faith — the body of Christ — and come together in ways that help us to remain connected in our daily lives.

## 19 Body of Christ

- We chose the name Ekklesia for our church because it represents what church is suppose to be all about—a dynamic living organism (people) and not a building or a service.
- In other words, the church is the community of God that builds itself up in love as each part functions and does its work.
- However, to faithfully do this we might have to overcome setbacks, trouble, disappointments, and perhaps failure.
- But if we surround ourselves with people that have Olympic faith—who have gone through the same kinds of things and overcome, we should find a great source of encouragement and help.

## 20 Village of Champions

- The Church of Jesus Christ is much like the Olympic Village, where different people from all over the world gather because of a common interest.
- For athletes, that common interest is sports, but for the people of faith that common interest is Jesus Christ.
- However, because we are one body, we don't compete against each other.
- Instead we encourage and support one another and seek to spur one another to run the race of perseverance marked out for us and do so by competing according to the rules God has given us.

## 21 The Prize that awaits Us!

- Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (1 Cor 9:25 NIV)
- Therefore let us spur one another on to victory by encouraging each other not to give up or quit.
- Instead, let us fight the good fight of faith and in the midst of our trials apply virtue and persevere in doing what is right.
- If we do and encourage others as well, we will receive the prize that will last forever— even eternal life.

## 22 Communion

- Tonight, as we take the Lord's Supper, let us be reminded that we are part of one body.
- The body needs us and we need the body. Great strength is provided by the mutual edification that comes in community.
- In other words, we are team players and as we come together in community and incorporate real community ethics, victory becomes a high probability.
- So let us not live out our faith in isolation or independently, because if you look closely, there are all kinds of heroes around us who do indeed have Olympic size faith.