

## THE LAST LAP CAN BE QUITE SLIPPERY!

**Today's Text:** 2 Thess. 2: 1-17

### Extracts:

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter ... Let no one deceive you by any means, for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, showing himself that he is God.... The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved... Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father... comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work [2 Thess. 2: 1-4, 9-11, 15-17]

*Lindsey Vonn, a 31-year-old American, is the most successful female ski-racer in the world.<sup>1</sup> Sidelined by injuries from late 2013 to 2014, she looked forward, on her return to active competition, to breaking the World Cup crystal global titles record (20) held by Swedish Ingemar Stenmark (since 1984). She achieved the feat on Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2016. But, the day before, she had posted on **Facebook** a video of an angry outburst in which she destroyed her bindings with a hammer following a race where one of her skis detached. Even though she had deleted the video and apologised for her outburst, it did not go down well with her ski supplier, where she has a 10-year contract.*

*Given her age and achievements, Vonn may well be in the last lap of her career. For just a moment of losing her cool, she could lose a lucrative contract. Indeed, the last lap can be slippery for every one of us. You may be close to the crowning end of your studies, or the peak of your career, ministry or politics. How can you avoid those unanticipated slips that can spoil it all? In today's Bible verses, Paul opens our eyes to slips that believers awaiting the Lord's imminent return could face. There are certain principles/lessons that we can learn therefrom to enable us to walk boldly through our last lap on earth and in all our endeavours. Read on!*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: "Lindsey Vonn wins record 20<sup>th</sup> World Cup title but falls out with sponsor," Saturday, 20 Feb. 2016; <http://www.bbc.com/sport/winter-sports/35622327>; and "Lindsey Vonn," From Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lindsey\\_Vonn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lindsey_Vonn)

## 1. Background: Watch out for those slips!

Today, the journey between Cairo (Egypt) and Jerusalem (Israel) takes less than one hour by air and less than a day by road.<sup>2</sup> In those days when Jacob and his family moved to join Joseph in Egypt on chariots, I doubt if it took more than several days to make the same trip. Yet, when the children of Israel were led by Moses out of Egypt over six thousand years ago, it took them forty years! On that journey, they were God-led for “at the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped” [Num. 9: 18]. Why did such a relatively short journey take so long?

It might perhaps have been shorter because in the first month of the second year after they had departed from Egypt, they had reached the Wilderness of Sinai where God gave them the Ten Commandments [v. 1]. Not quite long after, God commanded Moses to send twelve spies (one from each tribe) to go and spy out the Promised Land (Canaan) [Num. 13: 1-21], suggesting that they were quite close to their destination. The spies returned after forty days and brought two different reports. The minority report, prepared by Joshua and Caleb, was *faith-filled* and encouraged the children of Israel to go and take possession in accordance with the word of God. The majority report by the other ten was *fear-filled*: Canaan was occupied by giants and “we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight” [vv. 26-33]. For their disbelief, God punished the children of Israel, saying, “According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection” [Num. 14: 26-34].

Look at how slippery that last lap of their journey to the Promised Land became. The children of Israel had sojourned in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years [Ex. 12: 40]. They had been miraculously delivered from the ten plagues that God had inflicted on the Egyptians. God had taken them on dry land through the Red Sea where the Egyptian troops that tried to stop them were all drowned [Ex. 14: 1-31]. Through Moses, they had received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai [Ex. 20: 1-17]. *But just at the threshold of entering the land flowing with milk and honey, they fumbled.* We all face similar situations each new day.

The word of God says, “A good name is better than precious ointment, and *the day of death than the day of one’s birth*” [Eccl. 7: 1]. Interestingly, we celebrate our birthday every year but death day comes only but once! So, if “happy death day” is better than “happy birthday,” then we ought to pay more attention to it than we currently do. *We know that we will surely die one day but we do not know the day or the hour. We also know that Jesus will return one of these days but we do not know the day or the hour. Therefore, preparing for one is like preparing for the other. Does that not suggest the need for us to pay more attention to this last lap in our lives?* The word of God also says, “If you faint in

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.entfernungsrechner.net/en/distance/city/281184/city/360630>

the day of adversity, your strength is small” [Prov. 24: 10]. So, *what should you focus upon if you want to avoid the slippery points in your last lap and win the crown of life at the end?* That is where today’s Bible verses, based on Paul’s Second Letter to the church at Thessalonica, the second chapter, will be most helpful to all of us.

*Paul addresses the concerns of believers as they eagerly await the return of our Lord, Jesus Christ. He draws attention to significant developments close to Christ’s return which are akin to watching out for slips that could jeopardise a “happy death day” as we close out our last chapter here on earth in triumph.*

Let us pay attention to the following points in Paul’s said letter:

a) *You will have to deal with the Great Apostasy*

Paul wrote, “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the **falling away** comes first, and **the man of sin** is revealed, **the son of perdition**, who **opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God** or that is worshipped, so that he **sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God**” [2 Thess. 2: 3-4].

Paul had similarly warned the Ephesians where he said, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood, for I know this, that **after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore, watch**, and remember that, for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” [Acts 20: 29-31]. The falling away from the truth, popularly referred to as the Great Apostasy, was predicted by Jesus Himself while He was still on earth [Matt. 24: 10-11] and it is reportedly with us already!<sup>3</sup> **People in authority over us (by position or influence) may turn us away from the truth of Christ and we go along with them zealously, thinking that we are on the right track to salvation. We begin to give ourselves the impression that we are the only ones who will be raptured or saved. Everybody else is lost!**

False prophets and false Christs are everywhere today- in every denomination of the Christian community! Right now, for example, the Anglican Community is thorn between the American group that is tending towards solemnizing same-sex marriages and the African Community that

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<sup>3</sup> David Kyle Foster, “Are We Living in the Days of the Great Apostasy?” 6/30/2013; <http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/40017-are-we-living-in-the-days-of-the-great-apostasy6279Shares>

is threatening to break away if such were allowed. Economic hardship everywhere is creating high unemployment among youths and minorities. That is the breeding ground for crooks, using *the spirit of divination* [Acts 16: 16-24] to make money from unsuspecting prospects. In most congregations today, emphasis has shifted to prosperity preaching instead of salvation. Paul is saying to every one of us, “Beware!” The apostate is already here with us.

b) *Satan is behind it all!*

Paul adds, “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved, and for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” [2 Thess. 2: 9-11].

*Who is Satan and why is he at war with us?* Remember that he was originally a citizen of heaven. He was “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” He was the anointed cherub that God established on His holy mountain. He was perfect in his ways from the day he was created until iniquity was found in him [Ezek. 28: 12-16]. *He rebelled against God in heaven and there was war. God’s forces, led by archangel Michael, defeated him and his angels and they were cast down to the earth* [Rev. 12: 7-10]. *That was how he slipped into the Garden of Eden as the serpent! He deceived Eve and her husband, Adam, to eat the forbidden fruit. God then promised to send the Seed of the woman (i.e., the Messiah) who would bruise Satan’s head while Satan would bruise His heel* [Gen. 3: 1-15]. *Having failed to stop Christ’s redemptive work, Satan now transforms himself into an angel of light (along with his ministers), pretending to minister righteousness* [2 Cor. 11: 14-15] while *making war on those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ* [Rev. 12: 17].

Unless believers have such a total picture of what they face, they could find themselves focusing on the dribbler instead of on the ball!<sup>4</sup> *Anything that takes us away from Christ and His salvation ministry for us is from Satan.*

From the foregoing, we see Paul encouraging believers in the Thessalonian church not to snatch failure from the jaws of victory. They needed to hold fast to their faith and on to Christ’s promise for them. That is also his admonition to us today, this moment. But how can we hold fast when the slope is getting so slippery?

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[http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume\\_15/FocusontheballnotonthedribblerVol15No416Mar2014.pdf](http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_15/FocusontheballnotonthedribblerVol15No416Mar2014.pdf)

## 2. But stand fast!

Paul admonished the Thessalonians to “***stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, ... comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work***” [2 Thess. 2: 15-17]. How can we hold fast when the terrain is getting more treacherous? Here are a few things that you can do to stand fast:

### a) *Trust but verify!*

We know that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God [Rom. 10: 17]. Satan and deceivers know this. That is why they try to take control of who and what we trust. For example, when Satan confronted Eve in the Garden of Eden, she asserted the truth of God, namely, “You shall not eat [the fruit of the tree], nor shall you touch it, lest you die.” But Satan planted doubt in her mind by saying, “You will not surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” [Gen. 3: 1-5]. Instead of sticking to what God had commanded, she succumbed to Satan’s deception. One lesson we should learn from that is not to take your trust of God’s word for granted. Verify it when you are challenged!

For example, when the Samaritan woman that Jesus had met by the well ran to tell her people, “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” we are told, “Many of the Samaritans of that city ***believed in Him because of the word of the woman.***” Then, the people had a direct encounter with Jesus and they said to the woman, “Now ***we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world***” [Jn 4: 27-42]. ***Trust but verify! Go to the Scripture yourself, all of which has been given by the inspiration of God and it is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness to make the people of God complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work*** [2 Tim. 3: 16]. ***Trust your overseer, bishop, pastor or shepherd but verify from the word of God through His Holy Spirit*** [Jn 16: 13-14] ***that you are being led along the right path.***

### b) *Fear God not death!*

For fear of death or loss of position or privilege, many of us succumb to a delusion or a lie that flies in the face of our faith in Christ. For example, the usually bold Peter denied Jesus thrice out of fear of death, having seen what pains and hardships the Jewish and Roman authorities had inflicted on Jesus during His Passion [Lk 22: 54-62]. But the same Peter enjoyed sound sleep when Herod arrested him and put him under maximum

security to be killed a few days later [Acts 12: 1-7]! Faith in Christ and His saving grace had made him fearless- finally! Take the example of Kim Davis, a Kentucky (USA) clerk, who was held in contempt of court for refusing to issue same-sex marriage licenses as her official position required her to do by law, following a recent US Supreme Court ruling. She preferred jail to doing what she said was against her conscience and her religion.<sup>5</sup> In the end, she kept her job but did not need to be the one to sign! Therefore, it is better to fear God than death or deprivation.

*In sum, the road to Rapture or death is not paved; it is narrow and windy; and the race is not to the swift. Both events are known only to God the Father. Therefore, focus on your last lap; watch out for the land mines that Satan is deliberately laying on your path. With your faith in God through Christ Jesus, you will arrive alive! That is Paul's message for us today.*

### **3. Conclusion: Jesus is returning soon- but don't panick!**

The ascended Christ told John on the island of Patmos, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to give to everyone according to his work." What is your work? Can you afford to remain unjust and filthy? Or would you not rather be righteous and holy still? Surely, He is coming quickly [Rev. 22: 6-20].

*We do not die by age or position. We do not know the day or the hour we shall be called home. How will you feel on the day it happens when you hear the angels of God saying to you, "Happy death day!"?*

*So, watch your last lap on earth. It can be quite slippery!*

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<sup>5</sup> Jason Hanna, et al, "Kim Davis released but judge bars her from withholding marriage licenses," *CNN*, Sept. 9, 2015; <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/08/politics/kim-davis-same-sex-marriage-kentucky/>