

The Epistle to the Hebrews

February 20, 2022

Hebrews 12:1-2

Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Look To Jesus

Introduction

Since it has been a couple of weeks since we finished chapter 11, I would like to review a key idea before we launch into Chapter 12. The saints of old were looking not only for a city whose architect and builder was God (Heb. 11:10), but also to a person, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. God allowed them by faith to glimpse the Messiah or Christ in the future. It was this vision of Christ that motivated them to endure. I believe Moses left Egypt partly because God had given him a glimpse of the presently invisible Messiah and the coming of the New Covenant. If we are to endure to the end, we too must be looking to the unseen Christ. We by faith must discipline ourselves against sin and live to bring Christ glory. This takes us back to verse 1 of chapter 11, “**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**” By the faith Christ gives to us this is not an overwhelming task, but daily stepping out to live with a heart of faith. We have assurance by relying on Christ’s power.

After coming through chapter 11 of Hebrews, where are we? Has the testimony of the heroes of faith left us encouraged to continue our walk of faith? The text today is the proper place that Chapter 11 should lead us to. The original scribes should have kept these 2 verses as the end of chapter 11. Reading verses 1 and 2 of chapter 12, “**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to**

Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Run With Endurance (v. 1)

The imagery created by the apostle is a race in the coliseum in ancient Greece and Rome. The Greek word for ‘race’ used here is *agōna* which denotes conflict. It is race filled with conflict or battle. This is the same imaginary Paul used when he wrote to the Corinthian church, ²⁴“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly ... ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control ...” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) Athletes train to build muscle and for the body to develop muscle memory, so that, the actions become automatic. This is what we are to do - train and build faith, so that, living in faith becomes more automatic and we have endurance against the evils of the world. We run a race filled with conflict from the world.

Those Old Testament saints have finished their race. The patriarchs of chapter 11; Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, as well as many others have already finished the race. They saw the finish line and raced with endurance, they ran strong in the midst of conflict and battle, and at death they crossed the finish line in faith. Multitudes of every generation have been a part of the same race. They also crossed the finish line. The author of Hebrews ran the race Christ placed before him as he lived and wrote the words given by God. These divine words call his readers to endure and run and now it is our turn to race on with faith.

The “[great a cloud of witnesses](#)” is growing all the time. As believers, one-by-one crossed the finish line and they are taking their place in the “[great a cloud of witnesses](#)”. This great cloud is like a roaring crowd at a track meet and they not only lift us up by their example but are literally cheering for us as we run – encouraging us to run with endurance. The sound is deafening as each believer today finishes the race. The result is the greatest win, far more than an athlete winning a gold medal for first place and world recognition. Each one enduring and crossing the line receives God for eternity.

The apostle continues by challenging believers with two great strategies for the Christian life.

Lay Aside Every Weight And Sin (v. 1)

The Christian life is an endurance race. It is not a 1000-meter sprint. One key element and hard training to finishing a race well is to become as aerodynamic as possible. In the Greek Olympics the runners ran naked in order not to be encumbered by anything. Today Runners wear skin tight light clothing and light shoes. A marathon runner would be foolish to carry a fifty-pound backpack while he ran. It would affect his movement and rhythm and slow him down tremendously and wear him out prematurely and might cause the runner to not even finish the race. The apostle compares carrying this heavy weight to sin. In the same way that carrying a 50-pound backpack while running slows one down so too sin keeps one from performing as they should. The writer of Hebrews advice; cut loose the dead weight of the world, unencumber ourselves of sin.

We are to run the race and endure and set aside sin. In this first verse of chapter 12, he tells us to “[run with endurance the race that is set before us](#)”, in other words just like Moses had a race to run and Joseph had his race, we too have

our own race. Ours is not a race that is like anyone else's. Our race as with everyone else's is a unique race. Everyone's life is different. Our sovereign Lord has placed each of us here at this time but we all run a different course; it is the course that God has set before each of us. My race will not be like yours. Some of the things I struggle with along the way may not be your struggles. However, the finish line and the strategy are the same. Each of us is to "**lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely**" and look to the finish line and keep running and endure the trails of life.

Paul's strategy was much the same, reading from Philippians chapter 3, he says, ¹² "**Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.**" ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ **Only let us hold true to what we have attained.**" God gave Paul these words – hold true, endure and strain forward to what lies ahead and press on to the finish line – heaven.

Paul also shows us how to cut loose the sin that entangles us and weighs us down, slowing our run. He tells how to lay it aside and keep our focus on Christ. Putting on the faith given by God the Holy Spirit through Christ we can endure and let sin die. Paul wrote, ⁶ "**We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.**" ⁷ **For one who has died has been set free from sin.** ⁸ **Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.** ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has

dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ **So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.** ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but **present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.** ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6:6-14) Also, realize that this laying aside of sin is a life-long process. We are pack rats of sin. Pack rats make poor athletes because they carry the excess weight of sin. Let go of all things that hinder our running the race.

Many seek to look like athletes or appear to run the race by faith. They drape themselves in religion as if it were the right running clothes or a fashion statement. Some seek to look like they are running by faith by false humility or piousness. However, these self-serving efforts are of no value when seeking to lay aside sin. Exercising faith in Christ is the only way, the one right way. As we seek Christ and learn of Him and His ways and love Him more and the more our affections for Christ rise and we become spiritually stronger. Christ becomes our treasure - not our sin. Letting go of the weight of sin is easier if we love Christ more than we love sin.

Sin's ploy is to cause us to become attached to it. It is like a drug addiction. Why cannot an addict stop? He finds some security and fulfillment in the exercising of his addiction. Sin works the same way. Why cannot a gambler stop losing his paycheck every week? In some twisted way the idle he thought he could control at first is now controlling him because he finds some fulfillment in the exercise of the sin. He tells himself that it only will take one time of winning the Lottery to recover all his losses. An alcoholic tells himself, "I can stop at any

time I want to” but it is lie of Satan to keep them addicted. Those kinds of lies are the way sin works. Without Christ one cannot pry these sins that cling to us off. It is a spiritual race with conflict and we do not have the power to kill sin we must have Christ’s power.

So, if one is to cut these sins loose, one must see Christ and understand that in Him all spiritual power and the benefits of a life are filled by Him with joy and peace plus an infinite number of additional blessings. The one who plays the lottery in an addictive way seeking riches can stop and cut it loose when he discovers the riches of Christ. A drug addict can stop when he discovers the glory of Christ and desires Him more than the high or the rush the drug provides. We can cut away these sins when we grab hold of Jesus. We are weak but Christ is stronger than anything in the universe.

God allowed Moses to see into the future and glimpse Christ and by faith Moses was able to release the weight and sin of the riches of Egypt. It took Christ to cause Moses to see the futility of earthly wealth when compared to heavenly wealth.

Look To The Founder and Perfecter Of Our Faith (vs. 2)

Runners are always challenged to not look back or look behind them if they begin to hear footsteps. This looking back often costs them their stride. In a footrace one’s stride can be the difference in winning and losing. The apostle tells us to keep our eyes and concentration on Jesus. If we are to look to Jesus, we must look away from other things. We cannot have our vision fixed on our sin or possessions and on Jesus at the same time. Where Paul and the writer of Hebrews used athletic competition to make their point, Jesus makes the same point using farming. “Jesus said ..., ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is

fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62) One cannot plow straight if he is looking back. So, we understand, taking our eyes off of Jesus is the same as looking back and looking to the world and this makes one **not** “**fit for the kingdom of God.**” This is why the apostle writes in verse 2, “**looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**” In a horse race, a horse can be distracted by the other horses running, if this is the case, they put blinders on the horse so he cannot see what is to his sides but can only look forward. It is the word of God that help not be distracted by the activity around us and keeps us looking forward to Jesus.

Follow the Faithful – Look To Jesus

We have learned through many examples in Chapter 11 how others looked to Christ. We saw Abel’s faithful commitment to offer a blood sacrifice. Noah, by faith, persevered for about 100 years to build the Ark on dry land; he looked to and trusted in God. Abraham believed God and he was counted with Christ’s righteousness. Moses saw the One who is invisible and his life immediately was altered. Once these saints, by faith, saw Christ they never looked back. Even if they heard Satan’s footsteps behind them - they kept their focus on and looked to Jesus and ran the race filled with conflict with endurance. These patriarchs and millions upon millions of others have given us the example of a life lived by faith and they are cheering us on as we run for eternal life with Christ. Fix your eyes on Christ like the Old Testament saints did and never look away. Fix your eyes on Christ like the New Testament saints have done and are doing and never look back.

We are to look to Jesus by faith because our faith comes from Him. It originates with Jesus. Here is a key concept if we are to run the Christian race with

endurance; **we not only receive faith initially from Christ, but we receive faith daily from Christ.** He is “**the founder and perfecter of our faith**”. Faith was originally created by Christ and distributed to His people. He then is working with us to perfect that faith. We should look to Him for faith and look to Him daily to have our faith perfected.

At this point one might ask, “How is our faith perfected?” Jesus works faith through us by God the Holy Spirit. As we run the race of the Christian life, the Spirit of Christ supplies the necessary help to run with endurance and help to finish. Paul declared this truth, ¹⁴“**For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,** ¹⁵**from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,** ¹⁶**that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,** ¹⁷**so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹**to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**” (Ephesians 3:14-21) What does amen mean? Correct; ‘truly’ or ‘so be it’! We are affirming the truth of the Word of God in our lives. How do we access this spiritual strength? My beloved, listen, it is not by focusing on the Holy Spirit but by focusing on Christ the One He glorifies.

Imitate Christ

We look to Christ as the saints of old did. We look to Christ because He is the supplier of everything, we need to run the race of life with endurance. As we

read in verse 2, “[who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.](#)” Then, finally, we look to Christ because in Him we find a clear example to imitate.

Jesus endured the cross by looking past it to the joy that would follow. He shows us how to endure hardship. When we enter into a difficult situation, do not ever think the rest of your life will be as hard as the situation that you find to be difficult. By faith look to the promises of God. Look past the challenge and see Christ seated on the throne. Look past the hardship and see the kingdom of God. Remember, we are only on this earth for a while. Christ wants us to prepare for heaven by imitating Him and running with endurance.

Because Jesus endured the cross we are reconciled to God. Because Jesus did not quit but stayed the course and ran with endurance His race – there are multitudes blessed. He did that as He looked to the joy of having for Himself a people for God. Jesus looked forward and never looked back as His race led Him to the cross. Sometimes as we run the race we are led to places of struggle. As I said earlier the Greek word used for ‘race’ denotes a race run in the midst of conflict. We must always remember there is a Savior named Jesus Christ who endured more pain and heartache than we ever will. He kept running and finished His course. We too must endure as we run the race set before us. Look to Jesus and look away from all other things and run with a heart of faith. Run hard and run long and listen to the cloud of witnesses cheering us on and look ahead into the future and see Christ at the finish line. He waiting for each of us.

If you are taking God lightly or acting Christian or you believe in your mind but not your heart and soul – then it is time to get serious – it is time to quit

pretending and repent and be saved. If your desire Christ to be in your heart and soul come forward and let me pray with you. ----- Amen!