

The Heavenly Race

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[0 : 00] Chapter 12, the book of Hebrews chapter 12 and we'll read again verse 1. Verse 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.

So our text tells us very plainly and clearly about a race, a race that runs right into heaven. That's the finishing line.

It's in heaven where Jesus is, which I take it is the place that all of us here, young and old, hope to go.

More often, the Bible calls this race, this way to heaven, it calls it a way.

The Christian way, the way of peace, the way of salvation, the way of the Lord, God's way.

[1 : 22] It's not man's way. We do read in the Bible about a way that man has found. There's a way that seems right to a man, but it ends in death.

But that's not the way we're talking about. That's not the race that leads to heaven. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, the life.

And so the Bible, when we want to know if we're talking about this road, this path that leads to heaven, very often it's called a way.

But here, and in one or two other places, it's called a race. So in many ways, it's like the races that we read and see of in television and experience in life.

And there's similarities, there's dissimilarities, which we'll notice as we progress through our message. First of all, I want to talk about entry into this race.

[2 : 31] We have to enter into this race. We have to enter into it. All races have qualifications, right?

Even the school race, you've got to be in the school. You've got to be in the age group or whatever. In golf, you can't just play in the open.

You've got to be off a certain standard first. You have to have the qualifications. You can't go and play in Wimbledon unless you're of a certain standard.

Your team can't play in the World Cup unless it's of a certain standard of qualification. We need to gain entry, in other words, for the races of this world.

Well, this race too, actually, we do need to have qualifications. It's not open to all in creation. There are two main qualifications for entry into this heavenly race.

[3 : 41] One is we have to be made in the image of God. You see, some creatures are not made in the image of God. Although they have life and breath and limbs and can work and breathe and go here and there.

They're not made in God's image. This race is for those made in God's image. It's not for angels. Angels are not made in God's image.

They can't enter this race. They're fascinated in reading scripture about this race. Something they desire to look into and meditate over.

We need to be made in of, we need to be of Adam's race. Angels cannot be saved.

When the sin, that's the end. No redemption for angels. And if you and I have a grumble about our fallenness in Adam, because of our covenant head, Adam.

[4 : 58] If you have a grumble about that and say it's because of him. Be very careful. It's because of him and that structure.

That covenant structure through which we fell. That very structure is the way in which we can be saved. And angels can't.

Because angels were not created in a covenant like we have been created in Adam's race.

We fell through covenant, friends. But we can be saved. Forgiven. Through covenant. Instead of Adam. Jesus Christ. The head. Wonderful. Thrilling. So that's the first qualification. [5 : 58] We have to be made in the image of God. And the second one is, of course, we have to be a sinner of Adam's race.

There was one person that was of Adam's race that didn't sin. You know who I mean, don't you? Jesus Christ. The righteous.

The rest of us have sinned. We've added our own sin. Adam. Adam. We fell in Adam. And we added to that a whole other multitude of sins.

And we have to be a sinner. So, Adam's race. Made in his image. But fallen. These are the qualifications. Now, any sinner can enter this race.

Since day one of the fall of Adam's race, we've been invited. God designed a way, a plan, whereby there is a race that leads to heaven, to forgiveness, and peace with God.

[7 : 11] God. It's a wonderful invitation because it's addressed to those who have sinned. And it doesn't matter what kind of sin you have committed.

It doesn't matter how long you have been a sinner. It doesn't matter if you're getting worse and worse and worse as a sinner. It makes no difference.

What you did last night, what you did 70 years ago, 80 years ago, and you've continued in that path since 80 years, you can still enter this race now and get to heaven.

Isn't that good news? Isn't that wonderful news? It doesn't matter how vain you've been.

It doesn't matter how often you've sworn or cursed or stolen or got drunk or been on drugs or been immoral.

[8 : 17] It doesn't matter how often you've cheated or lied. It doesn't matter how young or how old you have been. It doesn't matter what country you've come from, what religion you are of, just as long as you've sinned.

Music, isn't it? Music in your ears. And as long as you want to run, you can run. You can enter. You can join tonight.

Start running. You've no idea how welcome everyone is. We've no idea, I believe, until judgment day when all will be revealed how welcome the worst sinner in the world is to enter this race. whosoever will let him take the water of life freely. Come unto me, all ye who labor, said Jesus Christ himself, and I will give you rest.

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. No one's excluded. And the only one who can exclude you is yourself.

[9 : 41] God won't exclude you. He doesn't exclude you. The only one who excludes you from entering and running this race is yourself.

Think about it. Now, it's a different race from the races in this world as well. In the races of this world, it's the best.

It's the first who gets the prize. Who is the winner? But in this race, it's not speed that's important. It's direction.

It's direction where you're running to. like running for a train in a railway station with a whole row of platforms and you're going to Aberdeen.

But if you go to the wrong platform, you won't get there. No matter how serious, genuine, earnest, industrious, conscientious you may be, doesn't matter how prayerful you are, if you're running and you're going to the wrong platform, you won't get to the destination.

[10 : 57] Pure logic. It's not like the 100 metres race, the race.

It's not like the 100 metres where you put everything into it just for a short spell. Well, this, friends, it's more like a marathon. A marathon.

You know, anyone can run for a while. Anyone can become a Christian for a little while. We read in Scripture that they, for a season, rejoiced in that light.

For a season. For a while. People do things for a while. But they give up. If you give up, you're finished. People can't stick it out.

It's too much for some people. Jesus experienced a lot of his followers give up. And we read these awful, that awful sentence in John 6, 6, 6.

[12 : 07] John chapter 6, verse 66. Where we said from that point onward, many went back and walked no more with him.

Things were that sign, I can't accept that. I don't like that. Many, not some, many went back and walked no more with him.

And it's been happening since then as well. The race, my friends, for life. It only finishes when you are finished with the world, when you come to die.

The race begins at conversion. The train on the turntable. You don't get it so much now with diesels, but in the olden days, there was a turntable where the train, the puffer train would come up and go into the station, but then it was to go back and go into a turntable where it would do a reverse turn.

Conversions and entering the race is like that. You face a new direction, the direction in which you came from. You're going back. You're going back to God who made you in Adam and created you. [13:27] And I sense this is like joining the army. You get the uniform, you sign on the form, you're part of the team, but you're untrained.

You're untrained. You have to go through the disciplines of the Christian life. Disciples are learners. That's the meaning of the word. They listen and watch the master. All the apostles were with Jesus for three years. They were with him for three years, listening, watching, learning.

They grew in knowledge and experience. They were made humble. Those of you who have done national service will know how humbling it can be to fall in front of your comrades and in front of the commandant or whoever was in charge of things and they would mock you and make fun of you because you've failed.

You need to train. Christians need to be trained in Christ's college. Christ's college is called the church.

[14:43] You join the church for training in the Christian life how we should live, how we should cope with the different things that come up in the race set before us and the path marked out for us.

don't regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. We need to go through the disciplines of rigorous training in godliness.

That is the word gymnasium is there in order for us to show the earnest exercise discipline of the Christian life.

Now then we come to this very sobering point that we have to acknowledge. About this race all of us have a different course from our neighbour.

All of us have a different course from our neighbour. some clearly have a far harder course than others.

[15:58] Some have an easy course. Look around the congregation look at the different Christians. Some have a very easy life and some have a very hard one. Friends that's the way it is.

You have to accept it. You have to accept the course marked out for you. God has marked out the course for you that's different from the one he's marked out for me and your brother or sister in Christ.

That's the way it is. The race that is set before us, the race marked out for us. God from all eternity marked out a particular course for you.

You have to run that one, not your neighbors. There's a very good reason why God has asked you to run your race.

I had a friend, a close friend who knew the Lord, God but he was excellent at telling everyone and knowing everyone in the congregation what they ought to do with the different circumstances, problems and difficulties that arose in the other people's life.

[17:33] He knew and he had excellent answers and he had the right answers and he knew exactly how what they did wrong and how it should be put right.

But this dear friend, his own life was a mess. His own life was a mess. He could put other people right but not himself.

It's like the person we read of in the Song of Solomon who said they made me keeper of the vineyard but my own vineyard I've not kept.

My own life's a mess. I can sort other people's lives. There was a comedian once who was very very famous and he was cheering people up wonderfully and there was this doctor, this Christian doctor who one day had a visit and it was actually from this comedian himself.

He said I can make other people happy but I'm not happy myself. And you know those people that you admire, that you respect, that you try to achieve after and reached, they might not be as happy as you think.

[18 : 58] There is no happiness like having the hole that's in our heart filled with Jesus Christ. used. They made me keeper of the vineyard but my own vineyard have not kept.

So we have to run that race that is set before us, that's marked out for us. We have to run in the circumstances God has placed us in.

You have to run the race with your job, with your boss, with your health. health. Some people begin this race with very bad health and it doesn't get better for them.

That's not in the path, in the road, in the race. You have to run your race with your wages, with your family, your husband, your wife, your children, your parents.

with your house, with your car, with your church.

[20 : 13] We all dream of somewhere better, of better places, better conditions, better circumstances. But unless God himself has called you loud and clear, you must stay where he has placed you because whatever you do, you must not go your own way.

You mustn't go out of the path because that's gone out of the way of God, the way of Christ. Now then, this race, it's a handicap race, children's school, handicap race.

There are handicaps in this race, internal ones, and external handicaps. Internal handicaps.

You have to take with you in this race one of the biggest handicaps that you'll ever have. Every one of us have this handicap, this internal handicap.

And what is it? it's a corrupt nature. You have to run this race with a corrupt nature. Even if you're a Christian, even if you're born again.

[21 : 38] But if you're born again, you've got Christ and the Holy Spirit within you, and to call on help, call help to, for, from. a corrupt nature.

The whole purpose of the race is that as you run, you conquer all these corrupt tendencies that are within you. There are many disturbing and upsetting situations that call for the exercise of the disciplines that we learn in Christ's college, the church.

There's a handicap of the problem of anger. you'll have to cope with anger. You can do it. You know, the time when you're angry with kids, flaming mad with them.

And the story told of a woman who was shouting and bawling at the children, coming in with wet welly boots over the newly polished kitchen floor.

And the phone went. And she was seething and she picked up the phone and, oh, it's you pastor. How are you? What a lovely day. She changed, motivated, because of who she was speaking to.

[22 : 58] Turn to your God and Saviour in those times of anger. problems of pride.

They want to be big in it. They want to do a wee bit boasting. I want them to let them know I've made it here.

I'm not struggling. The Christian has inward handicaps of a fallen, corrupt nature. But we've got Christ to call on.

Part of the reason is we're not practicing righteousness. We're not in the gymnasium of God's righteousness. We're not practicing it. A lot of these things is practice.

The first time you had to pray as a Christian in public, you were all words and thumbs and vowels and so on. Weren't you? Because you weren't practiced.

[24 : 00] You pray with flow now. We need practice at the Christian disciplines. Problems of bitterness, problems of worldliness, problems of revenge.

I'll pay you back yet. I'll pay you back yet. I'll wait my opportunity. I remember when we were in Dundee, we were looking after some children of a friend and, well, it wasn't a friend, but she became a friend because she came to the house every day and she was telling us about what her boss did to her.

And she says, I'm vowing, I'll get my own back at the most difficult time for him. I'll get him back. I was delighted many years ago afterwards I reminded her of it. She actually joined the company and became a director. Things changed, thankfully. But we have to fight that.

That bitterness, that revengeful spirit, jealousy, fighting jealousy, ask God to help. Ask Christ to help you. That's why we read, lay aside every weight, the sin which clings so closely.

[25 : 30] Let us run with endurance the race that's marked out before us. Internal handicaps, but there's external ones too.

There's external ones. Providence, God in his providence can just come into your life uninvited, unexpected, big problem.

Why now Lord? Why now? Like the obstacle race at school, there are things deliberately placed that are really awkward.

So the Christian life, God has planted that there from eternity. From eternity to strengthen you to get over it, to help you with disciplining yourself so you'll be a better Christian and he'll get glory.

When you struggle to overcome anger, wrath, bitterness, or jealousy, he is glorified. You're fulfilling your creation.

[26 : 40] He's getting glory. Look at my dear child here, calling on God's name, praying his heart out. That's glorifying to God. You can deliberately take ill at the most inconvenient of times for no apparent good reason.

Because that's the way God wants it. We're here because of God. It's God's world, not ours. That's where our faith comes in, that's where our love comes in.

Keep running, we mustn't get weary. Satan is looking for an opportunity to really get us. That's his work, that's his business.

There are distractions, there are discouragements, there are so many things to do, duties calling for attention, duties.

One of the big problems for Christians is there's so many duties, legitimate duties. They have to arrange priorities.

[27 : 48] You have to arrange priorities. You can get away with work. I have to go to work so you don't need to go to the meeting.

Work, legitimate work. even the housewife. All the ironing and all the washing. Work. We have to glorify God.

We need, our souls need nourishment and edification to absent ourselves from the ministry of the word where the spirit works when we're assembled together.

If we avoid that place, we are losing energy that we could have had to overcome the problems and difficulties of life.

The goal, friends, is to finish the race. It's a struggle. I press toward the mark, said Paul. I bring my body into subjection.

[28 : 51] Let us test ourselves. I've tested myself here in preparing this. There's something wrong with me. There's something wrong with you if you are just as moody and just as jealous, just as proud, just as peeved, just as vain, and just as discontented as you were 20 years ago in the faith.

Have you grown? Have you developed? Christ's school, the teaching, the church is a teaching place for Christians how to develop in their Christianity.

What a challenge for us. Well, let's finish with an encouragement. Tremendous encouragement. Just think of it.

The image that's posited here for us. Therefore, therefore, that means something's gone before has got relevance to something that's going to be said.

Therefore, therefore, what? Because these great heroes that we read about in chapter 11 of Hebrews, these great people, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, they're surrounding us.

[30 : 17] They're around the race course, as it were, egging us on, encouraging us on. Keep on the track. Keep going. Don't give up.

You're doing well. You're still running the race despite the obstacles, but you've overworked their past. You're still believing. You still love Jesus. You still want to know more of him.

Wonderful. You're still on track. All these people, think of them. They are with you. Remember Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration.

They were old covenant people. Way back, way back, way back, but they'd been updated in what was going on now. They recognized this Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah that was promised by Moses himself and desired to look into and discover more of.

They'd been updated and all the saints have been updated. Your loved ones, your grandparents who know the Lord have been updated in how you're doing in the Christian race. How are you doing?

[31 : 24] Well, they're surrounding you. They're encouraging you. Don't give up. Keep on. Don't give up. The reward's at the end of the road.

The reward is at the end of the road. You know, in the Olympics, if you go off track, you're disqualified, finished. End of story.

You're disqualified. You won't win. You won't get a prize. You get nothing. You're out. This race, friends, if you fall, and be sure, you will.

There's no one perfect but Jesus. If you fall, pick yourself up. Pick yourself up. Repent.

That's what's wonderful about the gospel. It's Christians who repent. It's Christians who believe that repent. It's not just a one-off for unbelievers in order to come and enter into this race and become united to Christ.

[32 : 38] Repentance is an everyday thing. Repent of your sins. Admit it. Confess it to God and you'll get to heaven.

You'll get the prize. You'll be received with open arms. If you still love Jesus after a hard-fought life, with one problem after another, if you still want to adore him, if you still want to admire him and praise him forever, you'll be there and you will be in glory with him.

Keep running. Don't give up. Hold on to Christ. There it is. 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.

May God bless his word to us. Let's pray. Our great God, we ask you to bless us and to strengthen our faith, the little faith that we have and those who have none.

If there are those present who have absolutely none, Lord, grant them the desire to run in this race and they get beside Jesus, to live with him in glory land where there's no sorrow or tears or sighs.

[34 : 16] Oh, Lord, be with us and bless us. Bless our time together. Work, continue to work, oh, Lord, in our hearts and in our lives.

Help us conclude this service by singing praises to your great name, for we ask it all in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.