

# The Race That Is Set Before Us (with apologies for the loss of sound quality towards the end)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1 and 2. Please turn with me. It's going to be most helpful for this morning's message from God's Word if you have a copy of God's Word in front of you.

And keep it open, whether it be on a smart device or with paper. 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, 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.

May God bless us this morning as we gather together in worship around his Word with an understanding of this as holy inspired Word.

I like what Barclay, the Scottish out of Glasgow, commentator, pastor, preacher, says about this passage.

He says that it's an image that grasps a hold of us as runners.

[ 1 : 51 ] Are we casual? It asks us, are we a casual stroller through this life, in the course of this life that is set before us?

Just meandering and wondering about. No real purpose, no real goal in mind. Perhaps we're not strollers, we're tourists.

I'm going to go over here for a season. I'm going to visit and I'm going to sightsee. Oh, I'm going to look and comfort myself with these things and these pleasures, these sites, these foods, these activities for a season.

Looking and going places for myself like a tourist. Or are we a pilgrim? Are we on a journey?

A journey from a beginning with a beginning and an end, but it's not a maze and it's not a circle.

This morning we are, I want us to see, that we're on a journey, or as the author of Hebrews says, we're on a race that is set before us.

[ 3 : 06 ] We're on a course that God Himself has designed for us. And He's designed it for us each individually. My course does not look like your course.

It's no harder. It's no less. You have a course. Are you strolling? Are you like a tourist?

Are you like a pilgrim who's resolute and you're on a journey with a destination in mind? I want to show you two things. First of all, I want to show you that this is a race.

I want to show you the image of a race. I want to show you the image of a race. And then secondly, with the acronym R-A-C-E, I want to show you the instructions of how to run this race.

The image of a race and the instructions of a race. First of all, the image. I was taught, and this is a good Bible study technique, by the way, for you, that whenever you come to the word therefore, you always ask, what's the there for?

[ 4 : 22 ] Well, therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, this points us back to chapter 11. Chapter 11 ends, it's the hall of fame of faithful.

It's the hall of fame of those who faithfully have run and completed the race. Their faith in God intact.

Verse 39 of Hebrews 11 ends, And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us, they should not be made perfect.

I'm not going to exegete that passage, but the author of Hebrews is pointing us to the image of a race that has spectators.

Now, these are not called spectators here. They're called a great cloud of witnesses. And the word for witnesses are martyrs. Others, those that are particularly noteworthy for persevering, enduring to the end, even upon the pain of death, holding on to their faith in God with the hope, not the stoic, Spartan attitude of, I don't know where I'm going when I die, but I'm going to hang on to my values to the very end.

[ 6 : 03 ] No, they died even with joy as pilgrims, knowing that this home is not their home. They are citizens of another kingdom. And that death is but a shadow that they pass through immediately into their heavenly reward, the very throne room of God.

It's these who are spectators, men and women who are martyrs, who are witnesses of keeping the faith. But they're not spectators who are fickle, who are watching us in the race set before us as Christians, who criticize us when we fail, when I'm filled with doubt, or when I stop following, or when I'm found to be faithless.

They're not booing, they're not criticizing, they're not saying, get them out of the race. No. They're filled with encouragement.

We can say they understand. We can, and I would encourage you to do this. It's a great Sunday afternoon activity. You can do it now. If you like, you can begin to glance at Hebrews 11.

Choose one out, one who is mentioned, maybe those that were not mentioned, the some who refused to bend the knee to anyone but God.

[ 7 : 42 ] Pick one out for yourself. But if you do, whether it's Moses or Noah, whether it's Jacob or Joseph or Abraham, whether it's Rahab, don't see their face as someone that is shaking their head at you, but someone like a good coach is coming alongside and saying, hang in there.

It's worth it. Hang in. Hold on to your values. Hang on to your integrity. Hang on to your faith. Hang on to God.

Hang on to Jesus. It is true. And we have finished the race and we testify with our lives and our stories in the Bible of this to you.

Let me give you an illustration of the image of the race. I used to live in Park City, Utah for many years.

Now, that's in the Rocky Mountains in western United States. And my little town of Park City every year had a 5K and a 10K race. And I would always participate with my mates and my friends from church in the 5K.

[ 9 : 03 ] But one particular year, I was really encouraged to go for the 10K. Now, I had not trained. And they ran alongside of me having trained all year for this.

So the race starts and we're in the crowd and the better runners, they advance to the front and then they're out of sight. And then I'm kind of back with, and this is, I don't want to be offensive.

It's really, I'm trying to laugh at myself, but I was back with the women who were in various stages of pregnancy and even had strollers. And so I'm puffing along and I'm in this 10K and I'm like, why didn't I go for the shorter race?

This is a longer race and this is a mountainous territory. So there's hills and then there's downhills that were not much better. my friends who had finished miles ahead of me circled back and stood alongside of the course, particularly at the difficult moments.

And they would shout at me, hang in there! Three miles to go! You're going to get a break when it levels off around the corner.

[ 10 : 21 ] The author of Hebrews, and we don't know, by the way, who the author of Hebrews is. Some say Paul, but then the language, though he is giving us an athlete running a race as an image, there's other evidence that no, this is not Paul.

Paul always identifies himself in a letter. Maybe it's the great orator and preacher. Gospel-centered preacher Apollos. Maybe this is his letter.

Maybe it's Luke, but then Luke gets, we have questions because Luke was more Gentile and this book of Hebrews has so, it takes us on the inner workings of the Hebrews and Judaism and the Jews, the priest and the sacrifice and the temple and the approach to God.

It's all about access to God and his throne now being made possible because of Jesus. There's one last candidate and I favor him.

Barnabas. Have you ever heard that? Barnabas was a Levite, so he was very familiar with the priestly roles and duties of the temple and tabernacle of his clan, but he was also nicknamed the son of encouragement, the encourager.

[ 11 : 49 ] And as you see this race, I really pray that you be encouraged and that you would understand that chapter 11 with these heroes of the faith, men and women who have kept the faith, they're not to condemn us or judge us, but encourage us that we're men and women just like us.

Just like us. I mean, Samson is in this list. But he made it to the end, but I wish I could rewrite a few of those years with Delilah.

We've got some folks in here. We've got Rahab in here. A prostitute. But it says that in verse 31 of Hebrews 11, she did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Are you a stroller? Are you a tourist? Are you a pilgrim runner running with a destination in mind? I think if you're a stroller and a tourist, these coaches on the line would tell you, pick it up a bit.

You're not a stroller. Hey, listen. This is a race. This is a race that is set before you. Run it. Full of faith. Run the race that we ran.

[ 13 : 20 ] Like coaches, they give us instructions. They give us four instructions that I can see in these two verses.

The first instruction is to remove. The second instruction is attitude. The third instruction is consider. And then the last instruction is enjoy.

And the time that remains, let me share these with you. First of all, remove. We're told, lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

And some of your Bibles may say, entangles. The sin that entangles. Now, the author here would have seen runners running a race.

And probably in all likelihood it was more a marathon, not a circular track in the Coliseum. And they would have been simply not seating, but the spectators, these witnesses, are those that have finished the race and they're along the course.

[ 14 : 33 ] That's the image. And these runners would have begun by coming out with great flowing robes.

Kind of the gold track shoes of the day. They would have come out and you would have known, wow, that's a star.

I remember seeing him race before. But as they get into the starting blocks or they come up to the starting line, they would shed that coat. You can't run in that coat. It'll weigh you down.

I remember seeing in the Olympics, different sort of race, a swimming race where the American Michael Phelps came out of a little swimmer's hut, which if you've ever been to a swimming pool, it's actually rather chilly there.

The water is cold. It's not warm. But he came out of his little hut and he had a parka on. And he comes up and as he's getting ready and the race is getting ready to begin, he sheds the parka and he's down to just speedos and a swimming cap.

[ 15 : 42 ] I had a roommate in my university who was a swimmer. He was on an athletic scholarship. He even shaved his body so he didn't have body hair to weigh him down or serve as an obstacle in the race.

I wonder what is weighing you down? Shed it. What does God, your God, look at you and say, that's weighing you down?

Not to discourage you again or beat you up, but to say, little one, do you understand that in following me, this is a distraction? Maybe it's the weight of commitments.

I'm over committed in other areas. I have so little time to take up the Bible and read or maybe worship or fellowship with others or time for prayer.

Maybe it's relationships. Maybe it's social media. It can eat up so much. What is it that's a weight that just keeps you from even running?

[ 17 : 05 ] And then he says, secondly, we're to remove the sin that clings so closely. Time does not permit me to go as deep as I would like here, but let me say that he does have a specific sin in mind.

Some have said, well, he's talking about a besetting sin that each of us as individuals may have. Maybe it's an addiction or use the language of an idol.

Maybe it's that thing that we go back to again and again. Maybe it's that thing that we've justified.

We said, you know what, that's just the way life is for me. We minimize it, we rationalize it.

No. This is the author of Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 2. If you've got your Bible still open and I hope you do, verse 1.

Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. Hebrews chapter 3, verse 12.

[18:10] Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to what? Fall away from the living God.

Hebrews chapter 4, verse, let's see, verse, let's go back to verse 1.

Hebrews 4. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear, lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. And that was referring back to verse 19 of Hebrews 3, so we see that they were unable to enter, and that's the promised land, because of what's the sin?

Unbelief. The writer of Hebrews sees unbelief, a lack of faith or trust in God behind every sin.

Unbelief is the sin beneath the sin. And again, I wish that I could spend more time here, but let me give you a quick example. The sin of anxiety. Now, I know I've touched a nerve.

[19:29] We all have obstacles and difficulties in the race set before us. But there is a sin of anxiety. I'm not talking about those that have medical depression or those that have circumstances in their lives such that they're more prone to anxiety and worry.

But the anxiety and worry that I'm talking about stems from unbelief. In Matthew 6, the Lord Jesus Christ on the Sermon on the Mount said, do not be anxious.

Don't fear. Don't be anxious about what you're going to eat, what you're going to wear, what you're going to do, how you're going to live. Look at the birds. He wasn't being naive.

He said, they don't toil. They don't worry. They've got to eat, but they don't have a care because their Father in Heaven cares for them.

How much more value are you? If you don't believe that you have a Father in Heaven, if you don't trust your Father to care, if you don't know that He sees and He will provide, then it's all on you.

[20:48] You're not a son and daughter. You live like an orphan. Now, I'm familiar with the sin of anxiety and worry, but behind that is disbelief and distrust that God really cares for me when things get difficult.

The Hebrew writer is saying, that sin is like a rope, and it will tangle you up in the race that is set before you.

It will tangle you up because if you continue to distrust the Father, eventually you'll say, I'm not following Him anymore because He doesn't take care of me like I feel that He should.

But all of these witnesses along with Jesus would say, no, no, He is your Father. There are obstacles in the race.

There are challenges in the race, but He is with you, He is for you, He knows, and He will provide. Secondly, and more brief, attitude.

[21:52] This is where it says run with endurance the race. This is not simply physical training and endurance. Paul says in Corinthians that physical training, he says this in Timothy as well, it has some value.

value. But there are also spiritual muscles that train us to run this race. This endurance is a mindset.

It's an attitude. It's a determination, a resoluteness. It's faith. It's saying, I have decided to follow Jesus.

No turning back. No turning back. I'm determined. I have... Are you determined? Have you ever made that conscious decision?

For some of us, we need to count the cost again. Don't be a stroller. Don't be a wanderer around. Don't be a tourist simply for yourself.

[22:57] But be a pilgrim and say, I have decided to follow Jesus. I am determined. And, by the way, you're not following. You're not enduring.

Your faith is not something that is strengthened by yourself alone. Your faith is in the object and the person of Jesus Christ.

He says, run with endurance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus, the founder and the perfecter of our faith. The runner is Jesus.

Not the hall of fame in Hebrews 11. Jesus was actually the runner coaching from the sidelines them. He was the rock that traveled with Moses.

He was the preacher alongside of Noah when he built the ark. He was the fourth man in the fire with Daniel.

[ 23 : 59 ] He was the powerful soldier captain on the hillside at night with Joshua. And I could go on and on and on.

And they would say, don't stay in the race because of us. Stay in the race because, look, that we follow Jesus as well. Make it your determination and your resolve.

A fresh determination. Today, as I would, they might say in the military, sign up for another tour of duty. Re-enlist, but do it consciously.

Thirdly, consider. Consider. So remove the weights. Deal with unbelief. Have the right attitude, an attitude of commitment.

Resolve. Not halfway. And then third, consider. We see this in verse 3 that Bill read earlier.

[ 25 : 02 ] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. And in verse 2, it says, looking to Jesus.

Now, when this word for looking here, it means, it could be translated properly to say, looking away from what you're looking at, look to Jesus.

Looking away from this, look to this. In fact, I've got in my notes a little comic, an image.

I've got a character that has eyes that are really focused over here, but then now his eyes are over here. It's good coaching in a race.

Look where you're running. Consider looking at your coach. not a quick glance, but a long look.

[ 26 : 19 ] You can't look in two directions at the same time. In looking to Jesus, let me tell you what's afoot here.

It's a great, great, great truth. Even a proverb. the direction that you're looking in determines the direction that you're going in.

The direction that you're looking in determines the course of your race. The direction that you're looking in determines where you're going. And the author here comes along, and I believe again, it's Barnabas, and he's saying, hey, particularly if you're weary, I've got so many difficulties.

Are you looking to Jesus? And I know, I'm over the time that I allowed myself, but I can't resist. Let me give you a quick look at Jesus right now. Hebrews 4, verse 14.

Please go with me. Hebrews 4, verse 14. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.

[ 27 : 34 ] that's his race. What it means is he's gone all the way from heaven to earth, back through earth.

He went through the veil of tears, the valley of sorrows, the cross, the grave, death, resurrection, back to heaven where he's at the right hand of God.

That's who we're looking to. Jesus, the Son of God. let us hold fast our confession.

Let us resolve. Let us keep running. Let us hang on to our faith. Let's remove the weights.

Let's challenge the unbelief and keep our confession even by our look to him. For we do not have a high priest, verse 15, who's unable to sympathize with weaknesses, but who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet is without sin.

[ 28 : 39 ] Where are you looking? For many of us as Christians, we have a daily look, we have a practice, which I commend a spiritual discipline of a daily look at the Bible.

this is called God's word. And in this, we see Jesus. We see God. And yes, we see ourselves in relation to him.

I would encourage you to not do this with your spiritual discipline. I would encourage you as my friend and mentor used to say, that's his time to meet with his father in the morning.

But it's also a time that we can look to God's word and to see Jesus once again. And to see him for us.

To see him not simply even on the sidelines of the race that he's completed, saying, let me be an example to inspire you, but to see him through the Holy Spirit coming alongside, like in an army drills, where that one soldier, he might have started out fast in the front, but now he's lagging behind the back, and a couple of his mates will drop back, tuck an arm into each arm, and they'll help him see Jesus like that.

[ 30 : 09 ] He's the runner. Look to Jesus. Are you looking, or is it just a glance? Just a little glance, just a little systematic reading. Are you reading this like an athlete saying, I want to run.

Encourage me, even Jesus. And then lastly, enjoy. Here it says, and again, this is the example of Jesus.

Jesus is the founder and the perfecter of our faith. So our look to Jesus is to look to his character and look to what he has done for us.

And it's not a quick glance. But in looking at him, look at how he endured pain, the cross, the shame of injustice and laughter.

It said that he even despised the shame. That meant that he didn't just laugh and say, ha, ha, ha, you know, I'm not ashamed.

[ 31 : 15 ] It meant that he came to that obstacle of shame and it didn't put him off. He kept going. What allowed him to endure? What allowed him to keep steady on?

What allowed him, even when people were shaming him and there wasn't one voice to say, I love him and I'll die alongside of him. There wasn't one.

What kept him going through that shame? and it says, the joy set before him. You can learn more about this joy if you read his last prayer, John 7.

I had a preach. I had a preach. I could get excited about that. I could get the courage about that. I could run a little longer, a little farther.

I could face some more difficulties if I set that joy before me. To know that there is a finish line and to know there is a finish line for the very arms of Jesus saying, heaven awaits you.

[ 32 : 40 ] Heaven with me, with those, all these witnesses, all believers awaits me. I'm going to end here and I'm going to pray.

And in my prayer, I'm going to pray for three groups of people. I'm going to pray for those that are faithful, steady on runners of the race.

I'm going to pray for those that are running the race right now of faith that they put into Jesus. It's just weary and that it's uphill right now and it's hard.

And then I'm going to pray for those of you that you're not on the race, you're not running the race. Oh, you've got a race set between you, but you haven't made the decision yet to run this race.

You're still doing life on your terms. You're still doing life without Jesus. Heavenly Father, for those who are running the race, we have our own witnesses here at Lasca City Free Church.

[ 33 : 59 ] We have those that are great examples of a life of faithfulness, of trust in you by looking to Jesus. Jesus, we commend them to others.

Help us to seek them out, but also, Father, I pray that they would continue to encourage us. Father, dear of those in our congregation and our community of faith, that they are faithful.

They are with you. We who are running the race right now, with our eyes fixed on you, need to turn back and encourage them.

Come alongside them, strengthen them, and not strengthen them in and of ourselves. Not strengthen them by simply saying, look at me and how I am, but strengthen and encourage and say, look to what gives me strength, even Jesus.

Look to how Jesus endured for you. Look to Jesus. Father, for those that are filled right now with difficulty and weariness, Jesus, just as you did for Moses, it says that Moses was able to endure because you, God, who were invisible, became invisible to him.

[ 35 : 32 ] Jesus, for those who were weary, those perhaps who were counting the cost again, living a life of faith and trust in you right now is so challenging, perhaps even persecuted.

Lord Jesus, would you appear more visible? Would you find us to look to you and to see that we would look for you and to you until our faith makes you come in the sun?

Our faith turns to the sight and the one visible. That we would see you in the pages of scripture, we would see you in worship, we would see you in the songs of praise, we would see you in the prayers of others, we would see you at work in our life, even through the challenges that we face, we would see you experience you coming alongside me.

And then finally, Father, you meet the one who's just meandering to love, no real purpose, don't dare to think about how things end, don't think about when it's finished, what's on the other side of the line.

But Father, even now, they're beginning to encounter things, their seed, their women. Father, would you meet them at the point of their greatest need?

[ 37 : 08 ] Would you meet them right now? And would you invite them to join all the saints in this race, this life, that they would begin to see this life not as a prudence for themselves, but to see this life as a golden path that leads all the way to home with you?

Father, would you allow them to see the course that's set before them? Holy Spirit, would you lead them to take those next steps in the race of faith, that they would put their small faith, that they would put their small faith in you, Jesus, and trust.

Father, we ask that you would bless us from your word this day, even in our worship, we pray in Christ's name, Amen.