

Pilgrim Leader: Walking with God through Jesus Christ

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Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0 : 00] The title of this sermon is Pilgrim Leader Walking with God Through Jesus Christ. And we've chosen these two very short verses from Hebrews chapter 12, which you can open your Bibles there if you want.

And we've chosen these verses for a very simple reason. We want to communicate the fact that the Christian journey from beginning to end is centered on Christ Jesus through and through. The Christian journey is a long, winding, often meandering path towards new life.

But it's not a journey that starts with us and then Jesus completes it. Or a journey that Jesus starts and then we have to complete it. It's a journey that from beginning, middle to end, Jesus starts, he sustains, and he completes it.

And the thing is, is that I think this is actually a great encouragement for us. Because we encounter a lot of difficulties along the journey. Yes, the journey is full of life. Yes, we're heading towards glory.

But there's a lot of difficulty in the middle. Because we know trials and we know temptations. We know disappointments and we know difficulties. We know hurts and we know hurdles.

[1 : 09] And these things are made even more acute by the fact that we're in a culture where we feel the pressure, like our back is up against the wall. And so what happens here in Hebrews chapter 12, 1 to 2, is that a good pastor is exhorting Christians who are experiencing difficulty in the midst of their journey.

And he's saying to them, stay the course. Keep running the race. Don't give up. Keep on going. And keep your guys fixed on Jesus the whole entire way. So two exhortations is the way he encourages us.

And let's just take a look at them briefly, each one. The middle of verse 1 is the first exhortation. He says, Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

How do we do that? Beginning of verse 2. Looking to Jesus. This pastor in Hebrews begins by naming what hinders us from running the race well.

And he exhorts us to leave it behind. Notice how he describes it there. He says, The sin which clings so closely to us. Which so easily entangles us.

[2 : 15] I think here he's pointing to those particular sins for each one of us that tend to be the ones that trip us up the easiest. Those things that lure us away from the path most easily.

But notice how he says, Not only the sins that entangle you. He says, Lay aside every weight. Notice that language. It's the sense of something that weighs us down and disables us from running a race.

I think this refers to sin, but I think it refers to a whole lot of other things as well. It could refer to the guilt and the shame that we feel because of sin. Or, in other words, it could be the way we've experienced sin against us from other people.

The way in which resentment settles in. And that can weigh us down. Or, it can be things that are really, really good things in our lives, but we get attached to them in an inordinate way, and they weigh us down.

So there was an example, for example, there was a point in my life where I was reading a lot of books. Well, that's been most of my life, but I was reading a lot of books, and I realized that these books, which are really, really good things, actually became a weight that were weighing me down from looking to Jesus.

[3 : 32] So I had to enter into a period for a few months where I laid them aside so that I could set eyes on Jesus. Or it could be the natural burdens of life. We have kids up here.

Those of you that are parents know that when you're a parent, you have a lot of burdens for your kids. And what does the author of Hebrews say? He says, Look to Jesus.

Lay these things aside and look to Him. In the book, Pilgrim's Progress, which a lot of the sermon series is designed on, you all should read this book, if you haven't already.

The main character, Christian, sets out on this journey. And in the very first paragraph of the book, he's on a journey with a really heavy burden on his back, a really heavy weight.

And he's on his journey, and he comes across something called the Slow of Despond, which is kind of like a murky, muddy pit of fears and doubts and disappointments.

[4 : 31] And he just makes it out of the Slow of Despond before he comes across another journeyer who's called Mr. Worldly Wise. And he enters into conversation with Mr. Worldly Wise.

And Mr. Worldly Wise says, You know what? You know how you can get rid of that burden? You don't need any help. You can get rid of it yourself. Live a moral life. You can do it on your own power.

And Mr. Christian tries his advice, but just finds that his burden gets heavier and heavier and more crushing and crushing. Eventually, he comes to a place where he meets a man of despair who's trapped in an iron cage, which is kind of exemplifies what it's like if we don't get rid of our burden.

It's a man who has carried his burdens for so long that his heart is hardened, and he's given up, and he's given up into the lusts and the pleasures and the profits of this world.

And so Christian is on this journey with this heavy burden on his back for some 20 to 30 pages, and he doesn't know what to do with it until finally he reaches this point where he climbs up a hill and he catches a glimpse of Jesus on the cross.

[5 : 39] And I want to read to you the description of what it says. It says, Just as Christian comes up with the cross, his burden is taken from his shoulders and falls off his back and begins to tumble down and tumble down and tumble down until it comes to the mouth of a grave where it falls in never to be seen again.

Then Christian was glad, and he felt light and said with a merry heart, He has given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death. And Christian stood a while and looked in wonder, for it surprised him a whole lot that the sight of Christ on the cross should actually ease his burden.

He looked, therefore, and he looked again, and springs that were in his head begin to water down his cheeks. See, brothers and sisters, that's the whole point of this passage.

The pastor exhorts us who are burdened and carrying weights, and he says, Lay aside every weight and sin which so easily entangles you and look to Jesus and experience relief.

There's a second exhortation he gives to encourage us. It's at the end of verse 1. He says, Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

[6 : 59] And once again, how? Verse 2, looking to Jesus. See, Jesus doesn't just want to deal with our sins and burdens. He actually wants us to lead us into a whole new way of life.

And the interesting thing is that this way of life that he wants to lead us into is a way of faith. But in our passage, faith is not primarily something that we do, although that's true.

It's actually first and foremost something Jesus does. Look how Jesus is described in verse 2. Looking to Jesus, who is the founder and the perfecter of our faith.

He's the source of our faith from beginning to end. Now this may sound a bit confusing, but I actually think it's meant to be encouraging. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author wants us to know that Jesus is a human being just like any of us.

Who had to live by faith just like any of us. So Jesus has experienced trials and temptations just like us. He's experienced disappointment and difficulty just like us.

[8 : 03] And he's experienced hurts and hurdles just like us, except with one major difference. Jesus lived in perfect faithfulness to God in the midst of every difficulty that he experienced.

Where we failed, he didn't and remained faithful. Where we gave in and didn't run the race, he kept running the race and was victorious. Now what this means for us is that as a human being, Jesus paved a way of faithfulness to God that was never open to humanity before in our sin.

And he enables us to walk into the path that he has paved. And so what faith becomes for us is not primarily us mustering up the ability to be faithful to God, but faith becomes us looking to Jesus Christ as the one true human being who has been faithful to God.

And over and over and over again receiving from the great resources of faith that he has. And that he gives to us freely as a great gift. See brothers and sisters, I think this is encouraging.

Because when we go through difficulties along the journey in life, who do we want but somebody that can sympathize with us? When somebody's going through a tough time, who do they want to talk to?

[9 : 21] Not somebody that's never experienced what they've experienced, but somebody who's been there before and knows it. And that's Jesus. He's the foundation and the perfecter of our faith.

Hebrews tells us he knows what it's like to be weak and to have to cry out to God for every ounce of faith. So that when we're weak, we can look to him and say, Jesus, you've been here before.

Help me. Hebrews tells us that Jesus knows what it's like to experience temptation. He knows that. And so when we experience temptation, we can actually turn to him and say, Jesus, you've been here before but you didn't give in.

would you give me grace and mercy to help in my time of need. And Hebrews tells us that Jesus knows what it's like to face death. That horrible darkness that hangs over humanity.

He knows what it's like to fear it and have to cry out to God for help in the midst of death. And so he can comfort us and we can turn to him even when we face death and say, Jesus, I'm scared.

[10 : 27] Lord, you've been here before. Would you comfort me and give me hope? All right, kids.

You have one more minute. One more minute. So finish up and we're going to show your pictures soon. That was a bit of a random time to do that.

But here's the summary of it, brothers and sisters. When we look to Jesus, we don't encounter a distant observer. We encounter a sympathetic leader who has walked the walk of faith to the very end and he helps us do the same.

He's determined to help us finish the race. So, brothers and sisters, if you're experiencing difficulty in the journey, lay aside every weight and the 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.

I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.