

The Race of Faith

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Date: 02 March 2022

Preacher: Rev Kenneth M Ferguson

[0 : 00] chapter 12 and the beginning of that chapter. Hebrews 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 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.

The epistle to the Hebrews was written to Hebrews who had embraced the gospel, and we find a number of indications throughout the epistle as to the way they embraced it. It says that they were enlightened and also that they were involved in serving others, obviously under the influence of the Spirit of God, and they were showing themselves to have embraced the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we find at various points throughout the epistle to the Hebrews that the writer is showing them that they are not as fully committed now as they had been at the beginning. For example, in chapter 2, we find at the beginning of the chapter, therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

And also in chapter 4 at verse 11, we read this, He is talking about many who had left the land of Egypt among the children of Israel, but who never actually entered the land of Canaan.

And the reason for that was that they did not exercise faith. And he is using that example to prompt them to a more thorough following of the Lord in their lives.

And it says also in chapter 6 at verse 11, And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the full assurance of hope until the end.

[3 : 34] Unbelief and disobedience were what prevented others from entering the rest that the Lord had promised his people in the land of Canaan.

Unbelief and disobedience were what prevented others from entering the land of Canaan. And the writer here in chapter 11, he highlights the essential nature of faith in the life of those who have run that race of faith during Old Testament times.

He starts early on with Abel and works through various giants of the faith down through the years. He comes to David and Samuel and so on as proof of those who had followed the Lord faithfully and obediently and obediently in their lives.

And now they have passed into glory, into the ultimate rest that God has prepared for his people.

And the writer, I think he is well aware that those to whom he is writing know about the Ismian Games or the precursor of the Olympic Games, where people used to run and combat in various ways.

[5 : 10] The Ismian Games were taking place in the vicinity of the city of Corinth. And the apostle, it's as if he sets verses at the beginning of chapter 12, in the center of that marvelous arena, where the saints of old, mentioned in chapter 11, as it were, are looking down now upon the saints to whom the apostle is writing.

These Hebrews who had embraced the gospel. And it's as if he's placing them in this marvelous arena, and the voices and the witness of these long-gone saints of old are speaking to them and encouraging them to run their race in faith, looking unto Jesus.

And I'd like to say a few words under three headings. First of all, he talks about the kind of preparation that is necessary in order for us to run the race of faith properly.

That's the first thing. The second thing is that we are to commit ourselves to a wholehearted running of that race.

And thirdly, as we run the race of faith, he tells us that there is a focus we need to have and to hold.

[6 : 48] That is, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. Well, a few words under these three headings.

First of all, the preparation. Therefore, he says, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The people mentioned in chapter 11. They have run their race. And now it's as if they are looking onto us, New Testament believers. And the exhortation is that we need a particular preparation in order to follow their example. That is, to run our race to the glory of God, to live our life in a God-glorifying manner. And what does he say?

[8 : 03] Well, first of all, he says this in the middle of verse 1. Let us also lay aside every weight on the sin which clings so closely.

Those of us who sometimes look at games on TV, people who are running our race, let's say it's 100 meters, well, they appear at the starting blocks, maybe with outer garments on, but when the time comes for them to start their race, they take these outer garments off and they are dressed merely in attire that's suitable for running that particular race.

And that's the kind of picture we have here. Let us, he says, lay aside every weight. Every weight. Doesn't matter what weights they were carrying into the stadium.

They have to leave them aside. And so it is in the Christian life. There are many things that will prevent you and me from living my life and your life to the glory of God.

There is worldliness in all its forms. There is the power of the flesh. And there are the wiles of the evil one.

[9 : 46] The world and the flesh and the devil. That trinity, as it were, will clutter your life and my life in such a way that we will not be able to run our race to the glory of God.

We must lay aside these things. What things are they in spiritual terms? Well, the apostle Peter says this.

He speaks in similar terms to the apostle here. And he says in 1 Peter 2, put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

And like newborn babes, long or desire the pure spiritual milk that you may grow thereby.

These elements that are so destructive to a Christian's life, put them away.

[11 : 02] Ask the Lord to show them to you. And then when he shows them to you, confess them and seek forgiveness for them and seek to be rid of them by the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit, turn your back upon them.

And then when the apostle Paul is writing to the Colossians, he says this, chapter 3, verse 5, put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness.

Which is idolatry. The apostle Paul knew very well the things that want to attach to you as you walk through life.

And he says, for you to run your race properly, you have to deal with these things. Otherwise, they'll bring you right down.

And then he says something else as he tells them how to prepare. Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

[12 : 21] Well, the sin, probably of original sin, which is the root, as it were, of all of our sins.

And it clings so closely to us. And even having been born again, that sin of our fallen nature will seek to reassert itself because we have, as the confession of faith says, a remnant of corruption within us still, even as believers in Christ.

A remnant of corruption. And it will seek to rise up and dominate your life. But I think, given the way the apostle here is writing to the Hebrews, when he's talking about sin which clings so closely, I think probably he's talking about the sin of unbelief.

Because that was their problem, I think. That they weren't really committing themselves fully to the Lord like the people in chapter 11 had done.

They weren't fully committing themselves. And it says here, let us cast that sin away.

[13 : 53] this sin clings so closely. The picture we have there in the original is, it's as if it's like one of these long garments that the people in the East wear or used to wear.

It's as if it's all around you. And that's the way sin is. And the sin of unbelief was for these people.

And each of us must seek the grace of God to be able to do what he asks us here.

Lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. Ask the Lord, give me faith. Give me stronger faith. Increase my faith.

We often feel, don't we, like the man who said to the Lord Jesus, I believe. Help thou my unbelief. Ask the Lord, strengthen my faith.

Increase my faith. That I may be able to run this race in a God-glorifying way. So that's the first thing. A word or two on this preparation.

[15:04] But secondly, he asks them and he joins in with them when he says, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

He doesn't say, let us amble along. Let us go for a gentle stroll.

Doesn't say that. He says, let us run. And that talks about full commitment. It talks about a wholehearted giving of oneself to following the Lord and doing the Lord's will day by day in whatever circumstance you find yourself, whether it's in a family circle or an employment situation or in a social gathering, doesn't really matter.

We are called upon to engage fully as Christians. Show your light. Speak words appropriate to the situation.

Let us run. And he says, let us run with endurance the race set before us. The word race in the original has this connotation that it involves agonizing.

[16:36] It's an agonizing race is the Christian life. It's not a walk with folded arms, shall we say.

It's full commitment and expect difficulties and expect trials and expect heartbreaks, expect disappointments.

That's the way the runner in the race very often experiences the race. Run, he says, with endurance. endurance. What does he mean by run with endurance?

The race set before you. Well, the race may have elements in it that you didn't really expect to be in the Christian life at all.

just like the different kind of races there are in the Olympic Games. There is the short 100 meters and then there's the 500 meters and all the way up to the marathon.

[17:47] And the person who is running the race with hurdles, he's got problems that the man running the 100 meters doesn't have.

And the man who's running in the marathon doesn't really have much to do with the man who's running the shorter distance, the 100 meters.

It's as if it's a different kind of race altogether, different elements in it. And things crop up that we have to deal with.

And so it is with the Christian life. We don't know what's in our Christian life laid out for us until we reach that point.

And sometimes there are situations that surprise us, that disappoint us, situations we didn't expect, the hardness of my heart under the gospel.

[18:53] Sometimes I read the Bible and really I don't feel I'm connecting with it. Sometimes when I hear a sermon I can't follow it.

Sometimes I can't follow the experience of older Christians as I listen to their testimony and their experiences. I really can't understand it. And sometimes I feel that the Lord has not spoken to me for a long, long time.

And the greatest thing I long for is to have a moment of his fellowship and to see a glimpse of his glory. Let us run with endurance, patiently wait for the Lord.

Patiently deal with the situation as you have it. Prayerfully deal with it. And sometimes prayer is such a hard exercise to fulfill.

When you feel your heart hard and you feel worldliness seeming to fill your mind and tying your affections, as it were, to the earth rather than having your affection set upon the things that are above, we need to wait upon the Lord.

[20:18] Wait upon him. So as you go on, you must continue trusting in an unseen God, trusting in an unseen Savior.

You haven't seen him with your bodily eyes, God God. Like these people in the Old Testament hadn't seen him either. Nevertheless, they believed in him unto salvation and lived their lives focusing on him and longing for him.

And so it is with ourselves. A Christ we haven't seen has been made precious to us, and we must continue to look to him.

We must have repentance in our life. We must have obedience in our life. We must have self-denial in our life as we journey on, as we run this race with patience.

But then the third point is that he tells us what focus we need to have. That is one with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

[21 : 46] Looking to Jesus. The word here, looking, means looking away from anything and everything else that would seek to draw your attention and focus upon the Lord Jesus.

Give me eyes, O Lord, for yourself, not for anything or anyone else, as a Savior. Looking unto Jesus, the Savior who is able to save me to the uttermost.

Jesus, who gave full satisfaction to the justice of God by the obedience of his life and his atoning death upon the cross.

To Jesus who rose on the third day, triumphant over death and the grave, and who now sits at the right hand of the majesty on high, looking unto him and relying upon him.

Isn't it amazing when you look at the song of Solomon in chapter eight, I think it's verse five, it says, who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

[23 : 09] That's the church in the Old Testament, and that's the church in the New Testament also, coming up from this wilderness, on this wilderness journey, leaning upon him, looking to him, following him, and in a sense, emulating him, copying him, because it says here, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and he is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

He had great difficulties, he had trials and afflictions, whose sorrow was like unto his sorrow, who had such a difficult race as he did, he ran it though, and it says here, for the joy set before him, the joy set before him, primarily was that he wanted to glorify his father in heaven, by fulfilling the task the father had given him to do, and secondarily, the other aspect of his joy was that he would save his people from their sins, but he has promised a joy for all of his people, who prepare this way, and who run this race, and who look to him, he has promised that he has gone to prepare a place for them, in heaven, and if

I go and prepare a place for you, he said, I will come again and receive you unto myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, has he become precious to you? Have you something like Moses of old, turned your back upon the best things that this world can offer?

When it says of Moses here, you refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

[25 : 39] He had seen something more glorious. He had tasted of something sweeter than the best things in this world. That's why he was able to turn away from the things of Egypt, because he had looked in the face of the Lord with the eyes of faith, and the Lord had revealed himself to him in a saving way.

Well, these three points, then, the preparation that we have asked of us here. Lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and then also the engagement to run with endurance, the race that is set before us, and the focus, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. May God bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Help us, O Lord, to take to heart what the Bible is asking of us, and give us grace, the grace of faith and obedience in order to comply with what you ask of us.

We haven't got the ability ourselves, apart from your grace being administered to us, and enabling us to do what pleases you.

We thank you for your kindness in giving us this opportunity to meet with your people here. We pray for your blessing to be upon them, every soul here, every family circle, and every circumstance that each one has.

[27 : 31] We thank you that you're able to undertake for them and do for them exceeding abundantly above what we are able to ask or think. Remember, those who are ill and laid aside, we ask, Lord, that you would bring healing where that is in accord to your will, and where it is not, that you would prepare by your saving grace those who must descend into the Jordan of death, that they might meet their Lord in peace.

Bless us now, Lord, we pray, as we sing your praise in conclusion, and forgive our sins in Jesus' name. Amen.