

Hebrews Chapter 12B

Last week we began looking at what I called the Marathon of Faith.

Running a Marathon, OR from my experience riding in a cycling marathon always results in the body experiencing great fatigue.

- The first day of the marathon begins with great excitement and a lot of adrenalin. There are 9000 cyclists riding in various teams.
- There are people on the street corners cheering you on.
- But the second day of the marathon you begin the ride on your own, the teams are scattered. Enviably at some point in the day you find yourself riding alone.

It is at that time when I usually begin to talk to myself:

- How far is the next pit-stop? Boy my but is really sore from this seat. How much further do I have to go? Did this odometer stop working?
- Oh great a hill! I don't know if I can make it. Come on! Buckle down, focus! Keep going!
- I remember motivating myself at one point saying, "I refuse to let these two women pass me!" (foolish male ego!)
- One of the things that I try to do when I start to feel tired is keep my eyes on the cyclist in front of me and focus on matching his cadence.
- I find it easier when I have someone to follow, a model to emulate. AND that is exactly what the writer of Hebrews provides for us here in Chapter 12.

In the first verse of Ch 12 the writer points us back to those heroes of faith that he described for us in Ch 11.

Hebrews 12: 1 **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,**

- All of the saints who ran the race of faith before us provide inspiring examples for us to emulate as we run with endurance the race that is set before us.
- By their example we learn to humble ourselves and lay aside the cares and distractions of this world that hinder our ability to run the race.
 - Abram left behind the land of Ur, Isaac had to set aside his fleshly favoritism,
 - It is not hard to see that running this race of faith requires an ongoing discipline and focus.

OUTLINE For Hebrews 12:2-6

1. The Pattern of Christ
2. The Perseverance of Christ
3. The Produce of Perseverance - Perseverance produces fruit in our life

1 The Pattern of Christ

The example from all of the heroes of faith listed for us in Chapter 11 provide us with great encouragement. BUT there is only ONE runner who actually RAN a flawless race, only one who provides a perfect example for us to emulate, and that is Jesus. In verse 2 of Hebrews 12 the author writes:

Hebrews 12: 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.**

- “**looking to Jesus,**” As I said last week, we are called to look away from everything else and focus our attention on Christ alone.
- He is, “**the founder and perfecter of our faith.**” The word “Our” is not in the original text. Literally translated: He is the founder and perfecter of THE Faith.
- This is saving faith, the faith that He begins and completes in us.

As the founder Jesus is the pioneer, originator, the champion of the faith. As the perfecter he is the finisher, the one who brings faith to full maturity and final completion.

- The words “**founder and perfecter**” could rightly be considered the Alpha and Omega, the commencement as well as the completion of faith.
- Compared to everyone who has ever run the marathon of faith Jesus occupies the highest position, beyond comparison, He is above all others.

Because he is the **Author and finisher of faith**, His example applies equally to those who are just beginning this race of faith as well as those who are in the home stretch.

- So whether you are brand new to the Christian faith or a seasoned veteran, you are called look to Jesus as the perfect example of a living faith.

After introducing Jesus the author moves on to provide an example from his life.

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.

- For the joy that was set before him, that translation actually needs some clarification.
- The wording might be better rendered, “**in place of the joy, or instead of the joy** that he could have experienced, he endured the cross, He bore God’s wrath.

As the sinless Son of God, Jesus enjoyed a perfect life of boundless joy dwelling eternally in the unity of perfect love with the Father and the Spirit.

But for our sake, in order to obtain **eternal redemption** for the people of God, Jesus willingly, set aside the joy of a life lived in unbroken communion with the Father and He came to dwell among us where He gave himself as the sacrifice for sin.

- There was no reason for him to suffer, He had no sin. BUT out of a pure LOVE for his Bride and perfect obedience to his father He endured the cross.
- Through the obedience of faith Jesus endured unspeakable pain and in doing so he was exalted to the right hand of the Father.

- Here again we find Jesus to be an example for us to follow: BY faith he willingly endured suffering and put off pleasure for a season. He put the needs of God's people above his own pleasure and was greatly rewarded in the end.

Isn't this something that we try to teach our children?

We train them to prefer eternal rewards over instant gratification.

- When they are young we teach them to finish their school work before they go out to play.
- When they begin to receive an allowance we train them to give to the work of the Lord and store up treasure in heaven.
- When they become teenagers we talk to them about waiting until marriage to enjoy the blessing of romantic pleasure.

As adults we are still learning to endure hardship with patience by fixing our eyes on Jesus and running with perseverance the race that is marked out for us.

- God's gracious gift of faith enables us, as it did the Lord Jesus, to look beyond the present pain, past the temporary trials to the Father's promised reward.
- If we are going to run this race with endurance, we need the Mind of Christ.

Philippians 2: 5 **Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,**

- The pattern that we see in Jesus life is this:
- Enduring Faith quietly and humbly bears the most severe conditions out of obedience and reverence for God the Father.
- Moving on from the Pattern of Christ we take a closer look at the Perseverance of Christ.

2. The Perseverance of Christ.

Hebrews 12:3 **Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**

- In verse 2 we were encouraged to look to Jesus as we run this marathon of faith.
- In verse 3 that encouragement to look to Jesus is raised to a higher level:
In vs 3 the word of encouragement moves from a SUGGESTION to a COMMAND and from a simple LOOK to a careful consideration or focused evaluation.

Let's take a few minutes and **Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself**

The Gospels provide us with a detailed record of the hostilities that Jesus faced and how he responded to them:

In the beginning of his ministry Jesus returned to his home town of Nazareth. And after reading Isaiah 61 and startling the crowd by saying that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy the crowd rose up and forcibly pushed Jesus to the edge of a cliff attempting to kill him.

- It amazes me how quickly a mindless mob can become violent! LET'S consider how Jesus responded?
- In a wonderful, even miraculous way He simply and calmly walked away.
- But that wasn't the end of his troubles.

From early on in his ministry the Pharisees and Sadducees pursued Jesus. They followed him everywhere he went. They took every opportunity to demean him. They perverted his sayings, they ridiculed his claims. They conspired against him. They were relentless BUT He remained gracious.

In Mark 3:6 They set him up, at Lunch on the Sabbath Day purposefully seating him near a man with a withered hand. They wanted to test him. What would he do?

- When he healed the man. **“they immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”**

The Pharisees of Jesus day provide living proof of the Apostle Paul's Words:
Romans 8: 7 **For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.**

In the hostility of their minds they accused Jesus of casting out demons by the prince of demons. (Mark 3:22)

The author of Hebrews invites us to “Consider Jesus” after healing entire towns, feeding multitudes with just a few fish and a couple of loaves of bread, cleansing lepers, even raising the dead, still they conspired to kill him.

Luke 6:11, **they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.**

John 5:18, 7:1 and many other places the religious leaders **conspired to kill Him.**

John 15:25, **they hated him without cause.**

Consider how Jesus responded when he faced the corruption of men and the open hostility of sinners?

1 Peter 2:23 **When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**

Through the Gospels we see God Incarnate, the second person of the Trinity, the fullness of deity veiled in human flesh enduring the greatest injustice that humanity could dish out and:

- He never turns away from the pain, he never retaliates against his accusers.
- He doesn't respond to violence with violence, instead:
- He kept on entrusting himself to the one who judges justly.
- Even in the end when the violence of man reached a fever pitch Jesus continued to entrust himself to the Father.

After being scourged, beaten beyond recognition.

Matthew 27:27 The soldiers took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him, 8 And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him 29 and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

- NOW, Consider him (Contemplate his life, study Him, gaze at him) who endured from sinners such hostility against himself
- Marvel at his perseverance, stand amazed at the things he endured for you (me)

On the Cross, when every breath painfully forced him to press up against the nails in his feet and every move tugged at the nails in his hands.

He cried out to the Father praying for the forgiveness of those who brutalized him. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34)

He used his failing breath to proclaim the assurance of salvation to one of the thieves who was hanging beside him.

Lu 23:43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Friends, we consider Jesus because He is the ultimate example of a living, enduring faith.

- By faith He endured immeasurable abuse, hostility and rejection.
- The abandonment of each and every one of his disciples when he needed them the most.
- He was betrayed by one of his closest friends,
- Although He is the creator of all things He suffered unmerciful abuse at the hands of his creation.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to **Consider Jesus**, to deeply contemplate the sufferings that He endured SO THAT WE will not grow weary or fainthearted in the trials that we endure as we run the race of faith.

- These words of encouragement are absolutely necessary for all of us who run this marathon of faith.
- Hardship, suffering and persecution are all part of this life in the flesh. Now let's consider what that suffering produces:

3 The Produce of Perseverance

AS we consider the Lord Jesus we see that his suffering was not arbitrary or meaningless. The anguish of his soul had a purpose, his misery produced an abundance of fruit for the glory of God

- We tend to be more willing to endure suffering when we are convinced that suffering produces something that is beneficial.
- I am willing to endure the pain of exercise because it keeps my heart healthy.
- I will endure the pain of the dentist's drill because it will relieve the infection that is driving me insane.

Certainly we would all agree that the suffering of Christ held immeasurable value Hebrews 9: 12 **When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,** 13 **waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.** 14 **For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.**

- The sacrifice of Christ procured eternal redemption for all who would repent of their sins and believe on Christ.

BUT what about the suffering we endure? Does it produce anything of value? Is there any significance for the hardship that we endure? In the grand scheme of things does our suffering have a purpose?

- Certainly the recipients of this letter would have been wrestling with this very question.
- They were enduring tremendous hardship for the sake of the Gospel and it is obvious that they were counting the cost of following Jesus.
- How does the Holy Spirit encourage them in their time of need? He shows them the purpose behind Christian suffering.

Our present suffering should be viewed as the loving discipline of our Heavenly Father. We will look at this in-depth next week but for now let's consider the produce of our perseverance.

Hebrews 12: 4 **In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.**

- First the writer reminds them that they should not overlook the comparative mildness of the suffering that they have endured.
- He just told them that some of their brothers (11:37) **were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated 38 of whom the world was not worthy.**
- Up to this point their suffering involved social and economic losses. Some of them had been imprisoned for their faith BUT none of them had shed blood.

Pointing his Hebrews readers to the Proverbs the Author compares their present suffering to the loving discipline of a good Father.

5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

- What is he saying?

He is telling his readers (*present company included*) that the afflictions we face in this fallen world are uniquely designed by God to produce some very positive benefits in our lives.

- The trials that we face are specifically designed by God for our benefit.

IN the sovereignty of God the trials and hardships that we face become instruments of transformation, enabling us to grow in maturity and character.

- Like the discipline that a Father gives to his children the Lord disciplines every son he receives.
- Rejoice, when you are afflicted, YOU are a child of God!

James 1: 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.