

Hebrews 12:1-2

Through the years there have been sermons that I have preached that people have taken personally. Those are the ones that generally generate the most powerful responses...and not good ones. :-) In the vast majority of those cases, there was nothing personal intended by me. It was just taken personally by the hearer or hearers.

Well, that is not the case this morning. I want you to take the message personally, because it is meant to be very personal. It is about you.

As we enter into this Christmas season, I want us to remember, maybe the most amazing truth in Scripture: That His Name would be called “Immanuel” which means God with us! Think about that.

1. God could have sent us a list of laws, expectations, and regulations...and He did through Moses, but He didn't stop there.
2. He could have sent us records of His miraculous works...and He did in the history books, but He didn't stop there.
3. God could have sent us representatives to speak on His behalf...and He did in the prophets, but He didn't stop there.
4. God could have written us poems and songs to show His love for us...and He did in the Poetry books, but He didn't stop there.
5. God went even farther...farther than any one could ever dream, and became man... Immanuel...God with us!
6. Let that soak in.

Now let me ask you what more could God do for us that He hasn't already done?

1. Yet many of us...and I know this for a fact...**many of us are wandering aimlessly in our spiritual lives helplessly complicating everything to the point of misery.**
2. We spend our time parsing verbs, measuring ourselves by the Puritans, going to conferences, listening to non-stop sermons, trying to find our way only to discover that...like a brand new toy
 - a. It feels wonderful for a little while
 - b. But it doesn't last, and we just get more miserable by the moment.
3. We look in the mirror and see
 - a. A perfect religious appearance
 - b. An understanding of the deep doctrines of Scripture
 - c. A well ordered life, family, and church, but can we say that we see, “God with us?”

To experience “God with us” will require us to simplify...to return to the basics.

1. The major league ball player still practices the basic swing
2. The NFL football player still backpeddles every day.
3. Because, despite their extensive knowledge and experience, if they miss the basics...

Let's spend some time returning to some of the basics today and next Sunday.

READ/PRAY

We see three main things.

I. Lay Aside

This phrase gives a picture of someone who is laying something down while at the same time he is pushing it far away from himself.

1. It means to lay something down and to push it out of reach.
2. It implies a deliberate decision to make a permanent change of attitude and behavior.
3. This is more than just a Sunday morning feeling.
4. It is an attitude changing, behavior changing, life changing decision to lay aside...

A. Encumbrances

1. Things that slow you down in your pursuit of Christ
2. Not forbidden by God, not sin in and of themselves...just things that distract you, bog you down, and slow you down in your pursuit of Christ.

It is a most lamentable thing to see how most people spend their time and their energy for trifles, while God is cast aside. He who is all seems to them as nothing, and that which is nothing seems to them as good as all. It is lamentable indeed, knowing that God has set mankind in such a race where heaven or hell is their certain end, that they should sit down and loiter, or run after the childish toys of the world, forgetting the prize they should run for. Were it but possible for one of us to see this business as the all-seeing God does, and see what most men and women in the world are interested in and what they are doing every day, it would be the saddest sight imaginable. Oh, how we should marvel at their madness and lament their self-delusion!

Richard Baxter.

B. Sin

1. Sin is anything you think, say, or do that breaks God's law.
2. It is a falling short of the standard that God has set.
3. We need to make an attitude changing, behavior changing, life changing decision today to lay it aside...to push it out of reach in one of 2 ways.
 - a. **Repent of Sin:** Stop wallowing in your sin and turn away from it.
 - b. **Receive Forgiveness** of Sin: Stop wallowing in the guilt of sin and receive forgiveness. Accept it.

We need to lay aside encumbrances and sin this morning.

II. Run

A. Run Your Race

1. Physical trainer will tailor-make a plan for you and your body
2. The Spirit of God will tailor-make a plan for you as well
3. You can't follow someone else's plan and improve physically like you could if you followed your plan....it is the same spiritually.'
4. This is one of our major mistakes...
 - a. We look at others and emulate them
 - b. Or we look at others and try to get them to emulate us.
5. My traumatizing experience as a child...chicken with its head off.
 - a. Many are running with 0 direction in life.
 - b. But many of us are running 1000 directions in life...spiritual directions, because we are trying to run someone else's race!
6. Run the race that is set before YOU!
 - a. Go to **Scripture**
 - b. With the Help of the **Spirit**
 - c. With the Intent to **Submit**
 - d. With endurance **Staying** until you hear from God...then submit, with the help of the Spirit, to what He has shown YOU in the Scripture.
 - e. Reading the NT through twice is a glorious idea.

B. Run with Endurance

1. Hebrews 10:36
2. Faith is the key to gaining and maintaining this endurance
3. What is faith? Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
 - a. It is hearing from God by His Spirit through His Word
 - b. *It is believing what you heard by obeying what you heard as you wait for the fulfillment and culmination of what you heard.*
4. Hebrews 10:37-11:40: Notice how forward looking these people were!
5. He began with endurance in 10:36 and ended with endurance in 11:1...and where is the endurance built up and found...in faith...in believing what you heard by obeying what you heard as you wait for the fulfillment and culmination of what is promised.

C. Run to win

1. Don't walk this race or jog this race, but run!
2. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.*

III. Look

Field Day 1987 was lost because I was looking back instead of ahead.

A. Look at Jesus

1. Adam and God walked together in a special way, until Adam fell
2. Then God came looking for Adam at the appointed time and he wasn't there.
3. So God gave the law and the prophets, to serve as and interim until the fullness of time had come.
4. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.
 - a. God with us!
 - b. Hebrews 1:1-3
 - c. The Bible is not the end, but a means to an end...Jesus!
5. Look at Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith who is awaiting us at the Finish line!

B. Fix our Eyes on Jesus

1. Jesus did not come to serve as a jumping off place so that we can go farther.
2. He is the end goal!
3. 2 John 1:9 *Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.*

Conclusion:

There is no reason for us to be wandering aimlessly in our spiritual lives helplessly complicating everything to the point of misery.

1. We need to stop and consider what we need to lay aside

Some of you are burdened down with encumbrances/weights that are keeping you from running the race. What are they? You know what they are that hinders you. What will you do about it? You know what needs to be done. Will you do it?

Some of you are burdened down with sin. Do you need to repent? Or do you need to receive forgiveness?

2. We need to focus on running the race set before us

Some of you are running, but you are running around like a chicken with its head cut off. You need to run your race!

1. Scripture
2. Spirit
3. Submit
4. Stay

3. We need to focus on Jesus!

Are you looking to Jesus? Are your eyes fixed upon him?

Are you even in the race? THE GOSPEL.