

Running By Faith – Hebrews 12:1-3

Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 12:1-3

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This morning I would like to look at the first three verses of chapter 12 and let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have revealed your will to us. We thank you that you have revealed your gospel to us. We thank you, Father, that you have given us your Son to be our Prophet and our Priest and our King. We ask, Lord, now that you would open our eyes and ears to hear from you that which you would have to say to us through Christ by the power of your Spirit through your Word. We ask, Lord, these things looking to you as the faithful God who keeps covenant and we pray, Lord, that you would do so even this morning. In Christ we pray.

Chapter 12 is a... we begin to get to some of the practical application of this book in the sense that we have two exhortations and about five or six commands. In other words, he is working out for us now all that he has been saying. And this morning I want to look primarily at the first three verses. And for those of you who like alliterated outlines, I throw you one this morning. Verse one is our call, verse two is our captain and verse three is our cure.

We have been called to live a life. We are to look to one who is the captain of that salvation and this life is full of struggle and so there must be a cure for the easily disheartened fatigue that comes from the call to the life that we have.

Verse one says, "Therefore..." And you all know the adage. Therefore, what is the therefore there for? Only this word is a very powerful word. This is a linking word not typical of the therefores, a particular word that only appears one other time in the New Testament. And, again, the writer is building upon what he has not only said over the entire chapter, but the great witnesses of what it means to be men and women of faith from chapter 11.

Again, as I say so often, this is another example which the chapter division does not help us. This is an example in which the New Testament is speaking to us and building upon the argument of what has just been said. And that argument is:

“Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”¹

Here is the first of these commands in this chapter. There is actually the way it reads in English it sounds like there is several commands. There really is only one command in this verse which is, “Let us run.”

The Christian life is described to us as a race that is to be run and that race is as long as God in his providence sees fit to make it for you. For some the run is very short and they die at a young age. For others it is a very long race as it extends for 70, 80, 90 years or more.

But he uses an athletic description. It is to run and to run with endurance. This word “endurance” you will see in verse one plays a very important role in this chapter. It appears again immediately in verse two for Jesus endure the cross.

“For the joy set before him, he endured the cross.”² Same word.

Verse three.

“For consider Him who has endured such hostility.”³

It is translated differently, but it appears in verse 27 about God shaking the things which may remain or endure. And we are to let love of the brethren continue or endure. And in verse 14:

“For here we do not have a lasting city,”⁴ or an enduring city, same word, “but we are seeking the city which is to come,”⁵ which is one that will endure.

So we have this phrase. This idea of endurance is not new to the author. All the way back in chapter 10 we are told in verse 36:

“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”⁶

The Christian life is a race. It is a hard race. It is—and this is where I think for those of you who have been blessed with opportunity to do sports you understand something. The hardest part of the race is the end.

¹ Hebrews 12:1.

² Hebrews 12:2.

³ Hebrews 12:3.

⁴ Hebrews 13:14.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hebrews 10:36.

I remember running track and you get to that last curve and your legs feel like they are a pair of cinderblock poles and that is where you have to do what is in track called the kick. And you push. Remember, some of you who like track remember a guy named Dave Waddle who used to run the races and he would always lag way behind, but he would come and win with the last kick, the last curve. And it was always a debate as Dave Waddle wore this funny hat that he would always have in every race and the commentators would always wonder, well, when is Waddle going to start his kick?

Or, as I have told you before, as a swimmer, you always finish the race, the second half of the race is to be faster than the first.

Or if you have played football knowing that coaches will talk about, ok, it is fourth down and you are on the one yard line and you have to defend your goal line. It is the end of the game. Will you have the endurance for that one last play?

The Christian life is a race and it is not a race that is a casual jog. It is not a casual let's walk. It is a race to be run. That is your calling. And it is to be run with endurance. And you have need of endurance. And he is going to explain to us what that endurance is.

What is interesting is that he says, "Let us run with endurance the race."⁷

The word there "race" is the Greek word *αγων* (ag-one') where our English word "agony" comes from. This is not a short sprint. The Christian life is a life that is a race full of agony.

And it should not surprise us the writer is going to tell us in the next verse because we are to fix our eyes upon Jesus who ran the same race and had the same endurance as he endured the cross. And in verse three he endured hostility. And we are not to grow weary.

The calling that we have is a calling to run a race, as Paul will say using a very similar metaphor in 1 Corinthians nine, "Let us run in such a way as to win the prize." And that kind of idea is here.

He says, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us..."⁸

The idea is that you and I are in an arena and the men and the women in the stands are the saints that have gone before us in chapter 11 and the many countless others that were not recorded. And they stand as witnesses in three ways. They stand as witnesses to us as what the race looks like. They stand to us as witnesses in terms of witnessing our own race as they cheer us on. And they stand as witnesses of what the race entails.

But they are there cheering us on. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church and the saints that have gone before us are part of that Church. And the saints that will

⁷ Hebrews 12:1.

⁸ Ibid.

come after us are part of that Church. And we are in this arena. And they are cheering for us having showed us the way, having run before us.

When I was a senior in high school I had the privilege of going, flying down to Dallas, Texas to be part of the 1975 AAU national championships and swam there. And though my particular race was not of any noteworthiness, I remember a particular race in which there was a man who I don't remember his name. But he was swimming either 100 or maybe 200 yard breaststroke. And he set an American record.

Now if you know anything about swimming you have all these different teams represented, but swimming at that level is pretty much an individual sport. And it is if you... and you can picture. You have maybe watched them in the Olympics. You know a breaststroke and the head keeps popping up, popping up, popping up. And we stood there and as this man is coming home on maybe the last length or maybe the last 1500 yards, it was clear from the clock up on the wall that he was on an American record pace. And the entire natatorium stands up for this man. They don't even know him. I didn't know him, didn't know his name. But the entire natatorium is chanting rhythmically to the clock and his pace.

“Go, go, go, go.”

And he can hear that. And hearing that he knows from the witnesses in the crowd that he must be on American record pace because they wouldn't be doing that otherwise. And the rhythmic of the, “Go, go, go,” is to help him maintain that pace. And when he touched and the clock stops and it shows, in fact, this man has broken the American record for his event.

Brothers and sisters, we have a much greater cloud of witnesses that stand cheering us, having shown us the way, calling to us so to speak that we would run the race with endurance, a race of agony in this life because they would also testify to us the crown of life, the crown of glory that is at the end of the race is worthy to be had.

And so the writer tells us. “Let us run.” He calls us. He exhorts us. He is, if you will, commanding us to run.

Do not view the Christian life as a couch potato, but one that takes diligently training and work.

Paul will say to Timothy that discipline of the body is of little profit, but discipline for the sake of godliness is of great gain. And it takes discipline to run the Christian life. It takes discipline to read your Bible. It takes discipline to get on your knees and pray. It takes discipline to say no to the flesh. It takes discipline to be able to say, “I will follow the way of the Lord,” even if it is, as we read from 2 Maccabees chapter four last week the way of the mother who sees her seven sons killed in her presence because they refuse to eat the pork that Antiochus Epiphanies is trying to defile the Jewish nation with. It takes endurance to say no to the world.

A friend of mine in seminary, Daniel Wong, was from China. And Daniel was a man who... I talked to him at length about what was the difference between living in America and living in China. And his brother had been beaten to death by the Red Guard in the 60s or the 70s for no other reason than because he was a professing believer.

And I asked Daniel about that and what is it like to be part of an underground church that he would have been at part of it in those years gone past and now living in America and all that sort of thing. And he said to me, you know, living in America was a lot scarier to him than living in Communist China. He said, "You always knew the enemy in Communist China because he showed up in fatigues." He says, "In America the enemy is a billboard, a television show, a song on the radio in the background." He says, "And the wounded people are not bleeding to death physically. They are bleeding spiritually and you can't see the blood."

It was much scarier to him to be a Christian in America than a Christian in Communist China, because you can't see the enemy coming and you don't always know when you have been it. And those around you don't know when you are bleeding. Let us run the race with endurance. It is the call of God on our lives.

And he says we have got this great cloud of witnesses, men and women who have gone before us who did not have the privileges that you and I have. All of the promises were theirs, by way of types and shadows. The revelation was not complete yet. The Bible was not complete. Christ had not yet come. They labored under the darkness of types and promises and shadows. You and I labor and walk and run the life, the Christian life in the fullness of revelation and standing on the other side of the cross of Christ in terms of history and time. And these people are calling to us and cheering to us having witnessed to us that the life of trusting God is great and worthy, whether you are being Abel who says the worship of God according to his Word is greater than any kind of worship that you can manufacture. Or Enoch who would tell us that to walk with God and to be his friend and to please him is of greatest reward. Or whether you are being Noah who preaches against the age he lived in and the judgment of God that was to come upon the world, a herald, a preacher of righteousness and he would tell us today being in the ark was of greater value than being accepted by those who perished outside of the ark. Or whether you be Moses who gave up all of the wealth and the privileges of Egypt and considered the reproaches of Christ, it says, of greater value than all the temple benefits and privileges and positions of influence that he might have had in Pharaoh's court.

For all those who suffered and died being put to death in animal's clothing or sawn in two, were burned at the stake, all of them are in the stands saying to you and to me, "It is worth the race. It is worth the crown. And every ounce of agony that you will experience along the way is worth it."

And so therefore he says, "Let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin."⁹

⁹ Hebrews 12:1.

It probably may be better translated, "Laying aside every encumbrance and ever sin, Run!"

He is laying aside every encumbrance. The word is weight. These are not sinful things. These are the types of things that are in themselves fine and good and wholesome, but they are the types of things that can slow you down.

Well, you remember even from your childhood the footraces you used to have and sometimes you would take off your coat. You would take off your... some would even take off their shoes and want to run with as light as possible. Everyone where you had a foot race or not. Watch the Olympics. Why do the Olympic people wear those special uniforms when they run? They cut down wind, drag and all sorts of stuff. It is because they don't want any extra weight. And why does an athlete trim down and lose extra weight that he has carried? That he might be swifter and faster when he competes.

One writer said, he is referring here to... his reference here to the lightness of the race he bids us to be lightly equipped. For nothing more prevents haste than to be encumbered with burdens.

Now there are various burdens which delay and impede our spiritual course such as a love of this present life, the pleasures of the world, the lusts of the flesh, worldly cares, riches and honors and other things of this kind. Whoever then would run in the course prescribed by Christ must first disentangle himself from all these impediments. For we are already of ourselves more tardy than we ought to be. So no other cause of delay should be added.

All these things encumber us. The writer of Hebrews called us. Whatever is keeping you from running the race so as to win it, whatever is causing you to be burdened so the endurance is harder, so that you can't finish, get rid of it. Even though it is a fine thing. It is not sin to have it. But if it is keeping you from running the race and enduring to the end, then what good is it for you?

Get rid of it. Because what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his or her soul? But these are good things, fine things. They are not sinful things.

I know that because he is going to deal with sin in the very next phrase. But as the author I quoted, he says, "We already ourselves are more tardy than we ought to be."

We have already left a lot of the proverbial water under the bridge. Many of us have been walking with the Lord long enough now can look back and say, "We should have made much more advancement in the race that we have run than we have made."

What are you going to do, quit? What are you going to do, sit around and cry about it? I know this from an experience I had in swimming. One of the very last races I ever swam, not the last race, but it was definitely the end of my career as a swimmer.

I haven't told many people this story, just a handful know it. It is not that I am all that embarrassed about it. It just never comes up.

I am swimming for Arizona State, the conference championships is in Salt Lake City, Utah. And swimming in this... the university of Utah in their pool and I am swimming 50 freestyle, 50 yards. And I have to tell you in my 16 years of competitive swimming I never believed I was so well prepared mentally, physically and emotionally. I am ready to go. I am ready to rip that pool apart. I am swimming in one of the later heats. So all of these heats have gone before me and I am able to see what all the competitors performing are doing. I am watching the big electronic clock and with each heat passes my confidence is growing. I can do this. I can win this.

And then something happened that had never happened before in all the years. I have never seen it happen and it certainly never happened to me before, but it changed everything. My heat was called to the blocks. I got up on my block and the starter said, "Swimmers take your mark."

I reach over and grab the front of the blocks. The gun goes off just like it had thousands upon thousands of times in my life. And I started to dive off the blocks, pulling myself down with what they call a grab start and thrusting my legs forward. And my toes slipped off the edge of the block.

I had never seen that happen and it certainly hadn't happened to me. Instead of pulling myself out, I went straight to the bottom of the pool and I can remember as clear as if it was just an hour ago what I saw at the bottom of the pool. I am watching the feet of all my other competitors going down the pool.

What did I do? Did I quit? I swam faster that day than I swam in my entire life. I almost matched my best time and yet I was giving myself about a three second deficit or more. I swam out of my skin.

Now I didn't win anything. I was eliminated. But I think that is what our author says to us that, you know, we should have made much more. We are tardy and should have been farther down. I know that from experience. I have a mental picture in my mind. And for many of us that is the reality of our Christian walk. We are sitting at the bottom of the pool watching everybody else in the kingdom of God advance.

What are you going to do?

Get rid of the things that encumber you. Run.

And then he says, "And the sin which so easily entangles us."¹⁰

Encumbrances are those things, those weights that are perfectly fine in and of themselves.

¹⁰ Hebrews 12:2.

They are not sin to have. They just make it a whole lot harder to run. But there is a sin that will entangle you, the sin of pride, a love of the flesh, the pride of life, sins that cause you feet to be tangled.

We all have experienced somewhere along the line at least those of us who actually had shoes before they were on just Velcro, what it meant to stand on a lose shoestring. And you fall for it. You stumble. And that is what sin does to you. It entangles you.

The Scriptures, the Proverbs talks about sin being cords and every time you sin that cord which starts as one thin little steel band becomes two and three and then four and then after a lifetime you have got a steel cable that is not easily broken and yet it is keeping you from running and winning and running with endurance to win.

The writers tell us, “Get rid of those encumbrance and get rid of the sin and run with endurance the race set for you.”

That is our call. That is God’s will. It is a call to u to run and to run a race that will be hard as it is full of agony. It is full of defeat, struggles, disappointments, failure, unanswered prayer, broken heartedness, relational rejection.

So you run just like the writer of Hebrews in the 11th chapter said on two occasions.

“All these died in faith, without receiving the promises.”¹¹

And that is the way we run until Christ comes again.

So the call upon your life is to run the race of agony with endurance. And then notice it says, “The race that is set before.”¹²

You don’t have the privilege of defining for yourself the course that you will run. You have got some cross country runners or some former cross country runners in our midst. And when you showed up to the race did you get to tell them which way you would run? No. They said, “This is the course.”

Or we have got some Fargo marathon runners and half marathon runners in our midst and they lay out the course for the runners ahead of time. Can you imagine what confusion would bring on race day if all the racers said, “You know, we see this course. It goes this way. But we don’t want to go that way. We would like to cut this way and go around this other block or down this other road”?

It would be sheer confusion. You would not be able to know.

¹¹ Hebrews 11:13.

¹² Hebrews 12:2.

No, if you are going to run the race, you run the race according to the course that has been set before you sovereignly by those who determine the course of the race. And in your life that sovereign is God himself.

We pointed out last week from the gospel of John, the last chapter, Peter says that when you are young you did what you wanted to do. You went where you wanted to go. But when you are old you are going to be bound and somebody is going to lead you where you do not want to go. And it says that Jesus was speaking to Peter about the way that he would die. And Peter says, what you and I so often say, points to John and says, “But what about him? I want to run his race. And does he have the same race I have?”

And Jesus says, “It is not for you to know.”

And Peter was crucified according to tradition in Rome upside down and John died a very old man. Although they did attempt to martyr him legend tells us. We don't know for sure. He certainly was on the island of Patmos. We do now know of him actually perishing through a martyred death.

But each one of us has a life set before even in one household. And in my household of four there is four different courses, four different races to be won. One crown, one end, but the race set before us is not the same.

And some Christians go, even as we saw in chapter 11, some go through what seemingly is this wonderful life like Enoch who doesn't even experience death and then there is others like Moses who has to give up everything and then spend 40 years leading a stiff necked people that are rebelling against him all the time.

I am sure if we could ask Moses: Would you rather have had Enoch's role in God's redemptive purposes? He would have said, “Sure.”

But in the end it wasn't for him to choose. The life that we live is divinely appointed by an all wise God and a heavenly Father who in his love for you has sworn to bring you to the end.

And so to say, “I don't like the race that God has given me to live, I don't like the life he has appointed for me,” is to say, one, he is not wise or, two, he is not good and we don't want to go down that path, do we?

But the apostle Paul would say in his closing epistle to Timothy, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”¹³

The writer of Hebrews is exhorting you and me so that when we breathe our last and if in his providence our last ones are around us at that moment, we can look to them and we can say as Paul said, “We have run the race, we have finished the course, we have fought

¹³ 2 Timothy 4:7.

the fight, we have run the race of agony with endurance and we can say to our loved ones, ‘It was worth every last ounce of agony. Run.’”

Now we need to realize two things. It is a race of faith. And that faith is not something that is naturally resident in you. Remember this is attached to chapter 11. What is faith? The whole issue of faith, the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen that will run the race to obtain those things that I cannot see with my eyes.

That faith is not natural to you. It must be given as a gift. And the endurance that you need, the endurance of that faith is not natural to you. Physically it is not natural for an athlete to have endurance. He must, she must train for it, must run, must lift weights, must exercise, must swim or whatever the sport is over and over and over and over and over again.

Why does the Bible use as its number one metaphor the Christian life athletics and running and races? Because we need to be reminded that the endurance that we need to run the race of faith, that that endurance is just as much outside of us and must be given to us as the faith itself originates outside of us and must be given to us as a gift from God.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.¹⁴

God must work the grace in us and God must work the faith in us, the faith of endurance. That is why Paul will say back in Romans chapter five. Turn with me there, if you will, just to remind us of a verse, some verses I know you have read. You may even have memorized them.

But Paul says in Romans five, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁵

Now remember that faith that justifies is a gift that God gives through verse two.

“...through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult [we boast, we glory] in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult...”¹⁶ Same word as we exult in the hope of the glory of God, same word. We exult in our tribulations, our afflictions, our agonies.

... knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, [Why?] because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:8-9.

¹⁵ Romans 5:1.

¹⁶ Romans 5:2.-3.

¹⁷ Romans 5:3-5.

That endurance, that perseverance that produces in you the character you need to finish the race must be worked in you and it is worked in you by the Holy Spirit as he takes you through the course that God has appointed for your life that is going to be full of the affliction and the agony.

So that is our call, to run with endurance the race full of agony that God has providentially set before you and me.

So may we be about getting rid of everything and anything that keeps you from running well, whether it be absolutely fine to have whether it be sin itself.

Secondly, let us consider the captain of our souls, verse two. Here is the first command.

“...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”¹⁸

It is interesting that the writer has just told us that we have this great cloud of witnesses. We have got this great cloud of witnesses that are cheering us on. They have run the race. They have finished the course. They have received the crown and now they are calling to us. “Run, run. It is worth it. Run.”

Now the writer says, “But don’t look to them. Fix your eyes on Jesus because he is the goal. Run to him. Run to Christ.”

Another metaphor from sports. But you have seen it. Maybe you have experienced it. The runner is running and he loses the race because just before he crosses the line he looks over his or her shoulder to see where the competitor is.

Do not look to the left, to the right. Fix your eyes on Jesus and run to him, because he is the prize. He is the goal. He is the finish line.

And as you fix your eyes on him, what do you see? But he is the author and perfecter of our faith.

The word “author” there appears back in the second chapter where he is called the perfecter and author of their salvation. The old King James calls it the captain of our soul. Jesus is the author and perfecter, literally, of the faith, it says. I don’t know why the definite article isn’t there. He is the author and the perfecter of the faith. And I believe that, first of all, it means he is the author and perfecter of Christianity, of all that it is and all the promises and all of the doctrines. He is the one who wrote them. He is the initiator. He is the captain. He is the αρχη (ar-khay’). He is the one who stands above and beyond

¹⁸ Hebrews 12:2.

all of it. And he is the perfecter of it. And then he is the fulfillment of every promise. He is the embodiment of every doctrine.

Look to him. Look at him. And what do you see, but one who for the joy set before him endured the cross.

There is a linguistic thing here that is really hard. And it is not clear which way it should go. Most of our translations have gone the one way. “For the joy set before him he endured the cross,” being the joy of bringing many sons to glory. That joy set before him of fulfilling everything the Father had given him which would be us as it says in John 17 verse 24. Jesus says to his Father in prayer, “It is my desire that they would see the glory that you have bestowed upon me even before the foundations of the world.”

And it could be that is what it means. But the grammatical construction here is hard and it may actually be Jesus in heaven sat there and he looked at the joy of his life, an eternal, blessed communion with his Father and the Son. And he saw the agony that he would experience culminating in the garden and the cross and the spitting and the beating and the death and the judgment, the wrath of his Father upon the sin of all who would believe. And contra, the joy that he already was experiencing he willingly set that aside to come and endure the cross for you and I.

One reason why I chose to have for the reading of the law this morning Philippians chapter two is I think that is exactly what Paul is getting at, whether or not this is what the writer of Hebrews means. I think it could go either way. But writer Paul writes:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.¹⁹

He didn't just exist in the form of God, he was God. And for all of eternity he has been in the most intimate, loving, caring, wholesome, blessed relationship that it is possible for you and I to even begin to imagine. And he did not think that was something to be held on with a death grip.

No way, no how am I going down there to die.

No. He does not hold on to that blessed relationship and the peace and the wholesomeness and the rest of heaven. He empties himself taking the form of the bond servant.

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”²⁰

¹⁹ Philippians 2:5-6.

²⁰ Philippians 2:8.

And Paul says, “You are to have that same attitude in yourselves.”

It doesn't matter who you are or what you think you have. Do not so hold on to it that you like Christ would not humble yourselves gladly to become obedient, even if obedience means death on the cross.

I would like to suggest to you it is quite possible that is what the writer of Hebrews is suggesting in Hebrews chapter 12.

Jesus looked at the joy he had in heaven and he looked at what it would cost him personally to come and redeem your soul and he weighed it and he gladly walked away from the joy of heaven in order to endure the shame, endure the cross and the shame in order that he might one day sit down at the right hand of the Father having purchased your eternal salvation.

Fix your eyes on him. Why? One, because he shows you the way in which you are to run. And, number two, he shows you that the running and the enduring is worth it because you are guaranteed to win.

I apologize for all of the autobiographical illustrations this morning. I don't know why they are all popping in my mind, but let me give you two that are not from sports. In junior high I ran for, I think it was student body president. I don't remember the position. But I ran against a guy named John Sutherland and I lost. And that was my first and last foray into running in anything for an election until I got to be in seminary, my last year of seminary I was asked to run for student body and I weighed that John Sutherland experience that was still many years weighing on me and I waited and I thought, no, I am not running. And I as I found out that I would run unopposed. And is said, “Ok. I will run unopposed,” because I knew I could win. I could even beat whoever unopposed was.

That was a joke.

I knew I would win. And so should you and I in Christ know that we win. Run the race. Push through the agony. Push through the cramps. Push through the disheartendness. You will win. Run to Christ.

Whereas Isaiah reminds us that we will run and not get weary. Oh, there will be weariness between now and then, but the moment you cross the line you will find a refreshment to your soul that defies your wildest expectations.

That is one of the things I really hated about sports. Three seconds before the end of the race and three seconds after the race is like an eternity. If you have ever been in sports you know what I am talking about. And you are just about to cross the line or touch the wall or whatever and you don't think you can make it because your body is aching. Your muscles are cramping. You are in oxygen death and three seconds after finishing the race you think, “I could have gone faster.”

Right?

That wasn't so bad. I could have gone a little harder. Three seconds. Six seconds earlier, "I am dying." Finish the race. "I could have done better."

I am telling you that when you cross the line, the finish line where Christ is waiting for you, not only will you win, because Christ has already won the race for us, but the refreshment to your person at every level of your humanity being so rich and profound, the agony will pass into the background or it will be like the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter eight that the struggles, the sufferings, he says, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."²¹

He says, "In us." Not to us, but in us. To cross the line and the agony is gone. And you are not even thinking about it anymore. It is not to be worthy to think about for one moment. All those things that are broke in your heart, that have humbled you, that have sucked the air out of your lungs in disappointment and failure and sin, broken promises, broken relationships, broken hopes, dashed dreams, all of those things that seem so huge, so epic, now will pass away like a mirage for the glory that is going to be revealed in you when you cross the line.

Run. And fix your eyes on Jesus and don't stop running.

So our call and our captain. Now the cure. Because each and every one of us becomes discouraged.

I don't know how many times I quit as an athlete, but they don't compare to the number of times I quit as a pastor. My first foray into the ministry as a youth pastor I quit every Thursday morning for a year and I am not making that up.

So verse three we get the cure.

"For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart."²²

Here is the first command. We had an exhortation, run, in verse one. Now a command. The word to consider is the word to think. We get our word to log or logic, you know, when we... what is a log? When you keep a log, what do you do? You are putting everything down, keeping track of everything. That word, to keep the log, comes from this Greek word.

Know Jesus. Consider him. Reflect upon him. Read the log of his life that we have in the Scriptures and take time to reflect and to weight what you are reading. He endured,

²¹ Romans 8:18.

²² Hebrews 12:3.

same word used for our race. “Let us run with endurance,”²³ exactly the same word. He endured already.

When Jesus showed up he didn’t show up and life was good. He is the Son of God. Everybody loved him. Everyone accepted him. Everything he ever wanted, he only knew the joy of the Christian life, right?

That is not what the writer of Hebrews tells us. In Hebrews chapter five verse seven:

“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death.”²⁴

All the days of his life he cried with tears. How often have you cried with tears in your prayers?

Oh, Lord, help me get the job. Oh, Lord, help me get this. Oh, Lord, keep me from being sick. Oh, help grandmom.

Here Christ came and his life was marked with loud cryings, groanings and tears as he endured.

The writer of Hebrews says back in chapter two verse nine, “But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author...”²⁵

That is our word back in chapter 12. Remember, “Consider the author and perfecter of the faith?”

“[perfecting] the author of their salvation through sufferings.”²⁶

How did Jesus become the Savior? By groanings and tears and sufferings. How will you gain the endurance that is necessary, that is equal to and worthy of a man or woman of faith? It, too, will come through sufferings.

Jesus says in Luke chapter six, “The student isn’t above the master. If they treated me this way, they will treat you this way.”

He says elsewhere, “If they have hated me, they will hate you.”

²³ Hebrews 12:1.

²⁴ Hebrews 5:7.

²⁵ Hebrews 2:9-10.

²⁶ Hebrews 2:10.

He says in John 16, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”²⁷

How did he overcome? He had to come and endure through the middle of it. He didn't overcome it by running around it. That is what you and I do. We have trials and we figure how can we get out of it. How can we go around it? How can we ignore it?

Jesus blasted through it.

Consider him, because if anyone lived a so-called Christian life, I suppose it would be Christ. But sadly you and I have been raised in a generation and in a culture and in a church that has told you that the normal Christian life is the happy life, happy are ye... Come to Jesus. He has got a wonderful plan for your life. He will bless you with blessings untold. Happy are ye. Happy are ye. And you sign up and broken is your heart. Wounded is your mind and you are going, “This isn't what I expected. I thought God was putting me on a course that included a five star hotel and a luxury limousine to get me there.”

Well, if that is what you got, you are in the wrong race. You are in the wrong stadium. And the finish line that you are going to get is not the one you were expecting.

Consider Jesus. If he is typological of the Christian life then why would you think of a moment you deserve something better than him? Oh, foolish sinners that we are.

Well, yeah, Jesus had to go through all that because he was saving me, but I don't have go to go through all that because he saved me. The Father should treat me better than he did his own Son.

Isn't that the way we think? But the writer says, “Consider him. Think on him. Ponder him. Read the log book. Know the Scriptures.”

It pleased the Father to lay upon him stripes for our sin.

He endured such hostility by sinners against himself.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be Christ and having that pathetically weight Pilate say the things he says to him or Caiaphas?

You and I would be saying, “They are fighting words.”

Jesus said nothing. He never defended himself, did he? Why do we consider Christ? The writer says so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Because you will lose heart if you do not consider Christ, if you do not keep your eyes fixed on him.

²⁷ John 16:33.

What is that old chorus?

Fix your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of his glory and grace.

Thank you.

Oh, it is so hard.

Run. Strip down. I am told that the Greeks when they would run in races they would run naked, literally. Get everything off that will encumber you and run and keep running and don't stop running no matter how hard it hurts nor how desperate it seems and keep your eyes on Jesus and consider all that he went through because the end of the race, the crown, the medal, the reward is worth every moment of agony.

And so what we pray for is, "God, grant me the gift of faith to believe you promises. I don't see them with my eyes. I can't hear them in my ears, because what my eyes see and my ears hear says to me, 'Go for the pleasure now. Go for approval of men. Go and trust your bank account. Go and trust whatever. Live here. Live now. You deserve it.' But your promises say something else. Grant me the faith I need to hear and to believe what I cannot yet see or hear. And then as you give me that faith, Lord, grant me the endurance to run every moment of every day, because without that faith that you give, Lord, I have nothing. And without the endurance that I need I cannot finish. So grant it to me for the sake of Christ who has already run on my behalf. Grant richly everything."

Or, as Paul says to the Corinthians, "All the promises of God to you are yes in Christ Jesus."

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we confess that we are so, so slow to believe and so quick to give up. Grant to us, Father, faith and the endurance that we need to run and not get weary. In Christ we pray. Amen.