

"Running the Race"

Part 1

12:1-4

Introduction: Tonight in our study of the book of Hebrews we have come to a very familiar passage of Scripture.

Notice Hebrews 12:1-4

There are only 4 verses here but there is much to be considered within them. These verses contain the application of the previous chapter. In the verses which we are about to look at the writer is going to illustrate the Christian life by picturing it as a foot race. This analogy is used other places in the Bible as well. Let me show you what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians because this will give us insight which will help us greatly in the passage we are in.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

²⁴ *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

²⁵ *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

²⁶ *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

²⁷ *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

When Paul wrote these verses he had in his mind the Roman games which took place in his day. They ran races then just as people do today and they received awards just as people do today. I have underlined and bolded a few words in this passage which we need to consider.

In verse 25 Paul tells us that every man who enters into the race is TEMPERATE in all things. This means the person who is entering the race is self-disciplined. The idea is they were very careful about what they ate in their training and before the race. There may have been foods they craved but they exercised self-discipline and would only consume that which would prepare them for the long race before them.

Paul also stated that those who ran in the games of his day did it to obtain a CORRUPTIBLE CROWN. The reward for the winner was a pine wreath which would

eventually dry up and fall apart. But in contrast to that the believer runs the race of the Christian life for an INCORRUPTIBLE CROWN. In other words our crowns are eternal.

Paul then referred to himself as a runner in the Christian race and he tells us that he BRINGS HIS BODY INTO SUBJECTION. The idea here is that he made his body a slave. He exercised stern and rigid discipline. Now this was critical as he ran the race of the Christian life because there are penalties for those who do not run by the rules. Just like there are penalties for those who do not obey the rules in a track meet or in the Olympics the same is true in the Christian life. Paul stated that he did not want to be a CASTAWAY which means he did not want to be disqualified. There are many who have been disqualified in the Christian race in the sense that they did not exercise self-discipline and they stepped into a life of sin and God then "placed them on the shelf". They were disqualified. They did not lose their salvation but they were set aside by God and would never reach their full potential here on this earth.

Now let us get back to the thought of the race. The "race" of the Christian life is not a sprint but it is a marathon. It lasts from the time we are saved until the day we leave this earth. There is one more point we need to see about the race in the words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 9.

1 Corinthians 9:25

²⁵ *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.*

The words "*strive for the mastery*" are all one word in the Greek and it is the very word which we get the word "AGONY" from. The point is for those who run a marathon there is much agony which they must endure and it is the very same way in the race of this Christian life. There are times when it is painful and it is extremely difficult. There have been many believers who started the race but due to distractions, temptations or difficulties they basically quit. We need encouragement for this race which we are in and this thought brings us to where we are tonight.

I. The Call to Self-Discipline

Notice Hebrews 12:1a

The writer now points back to all those whom he has mentioned in Hebrews 11. As he points to them he tells the Hebrew believers and you and me that we are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses.

Now there has been much misunderstanding concerning what is said here. There are many who have taught that all these Old Testament saints are in heaven watching down upon us as we run the race in the big arena of life. That is NOT what the writer means here. Those who have entered into heaven are not looking back to earth watching us and cheering for us as we run the race of the Christian life. Heaven would not be very joyful if once we get there we could then look back to the happenings on the earth. Those who are in heaven have their gaze fixed upon the throne of God and all the wonders and the beauty which exists there.

To better help us to understand this let me explain that the word "witness" can have two different meanings. It can refer to a person who watches something which takes place **and it can also refer to someone who testifies**. An example would be in a court setting where a witness steps up to testify of something which they know to be true. This is exactly what the writer is referring to here. In chapter 11 we looked at all of those of the Old Testament who, with their lives, testified that it is possible to live by faith and that faith in the promises of God gives us a foundation which we can plant our spiritual feet on as we face the trials and the storms of this life.

Notice Hebrews 12:1 again.

As we continue to read this verse we see that we are to lay aside or CAST OFF 2 different things which can easily BESET us. The word "beset" means "to hinder" or "to be cumbersome". There are 2 things listed here which can very easily interfere with our ability to run in the race.

1. **Every weight** - The "weight" referred to here is anything which can entangle us in the Christian race. Let me show you the Words of Jesus in Luke.

Luke 21:34-35

³⁴ *And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged [**weighted down**] with **surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life**, and so that day come upon you unawares.*

³⁵ *For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.*

³⁶ *Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

I need to explain what Jesus is referring to here when He speaks of "surfeiting and drunkenness".

The words are taken from what happens to people who drink alcoholic beverages. It starts with small drinks and they become "giddy" (this is the thought in the word surfeiting) because of the alcohol and as they drink more it leads to drunkenness or to the point where the alcohol gains control over them.

Let me make the application for our lives. We live in a world where there are many temptations which Satan uses to entice us or which our flesh sees and then desires to have. When we do not exercise the self-discipline to look away from that which our flesh lusts after they we begin entertain ways in which we can get what our flesh desires. The lack of self-discipline allows us to become "giddy" over the thought of gaining what our flesh desires and the next thing we know we have become "drunken"/controlled by the lust to have what the world has to offer. When the believer falls into this they will twist and distort the Truth in any attempt to justify that which the flesh desires. The believer then becomes more entangled in the affairs of this world. James explains how it all happens.

James 1:12-15

¹² ***Blessed is the man that endureth temptation:*** for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

¹³ *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*

¹⁴ *But every man is tempted, when **he is drawn away of his own lust**, and enticed.*

¹⁵ *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

If we are going to run the race the way in which God desires for us to run we must exercise self-discipline and cast off any weight which can entangle us.

2. **The sin** - Not only are we to lay aside every weight but also the sin. It is impossible to run the race when a believer is entangled in sin. I think it is important here to consider the context of the letter and the sin which had hindered these Hebrew believers. The sin which they are being called to lay aside is the sin of unbelief. The writer does not say lay aside every sin nor does he tell them to lay aside sin although both should be done. He tells them to lay aside THE sin and I believe THE sin which he is referring to is the sin of unbelief. They were not trusting God and so their unbelief was hindering their performance in the race.

Application:

All sin hinders the believer but we often focus only upon the sins which are visible and we tend to look over the sin of unbelief. We can NEVER run the race consistently if we are guilty of the sin of unbelief. Faith is the subject here and faith is what allowed the people in Hebrews 11 to please God.

Notice Hebrews 11:39

They obtained a good report through faith.

Now let us notice what else is required to run the race in a way that pleases God.

Notice Hebrews 12:1 again.

Now the writer tells us that we are to run the race with PATIENCE. The word "patience" here refers to "PERSEVERING ENDURANCE".

Notice the words of Barclay:

"Endurance is needed to run that race. Endurance translates the ancient Greek word hupomone, "which does not mean the patience which sits down and accepts things but the patience which masters them... It is a determination, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on and refuses to be deflected."

This helps us to understand that the Christian life is not a life of ease and comfort. Let me show you the words of Pink on this thought:

"The principle thoughts which are suggested here are that of rigorous self-denial and discipline, vigorous exertion, and persevering endurance. The Christian life is not a thing of passive luxury, but of active "fighting the good fight!" The Christian is not called to lie down on flowery beds of ease, but to run a race, and athletics are strenuous, demanding self-sacrifice, hard training, the putting forth of every ounce of energy possessed. I am afraid in this work-hating and pleasure loving age, we do not keep this aspect of the truth sufficiently before us: we take things too placidly and lazily. The charge which God brought against Israel of old applies very largely to believers today:

Amos 6:1a

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion...

To be at ease is the very opposite of running the race with persevering endurance".

If we are going to run the race to please God we are going to need to persevere through difficult times. It requires that we just steadily press on. We do not sprint but we stay the course and when we come to a hill or a mountain we persevere up the steep grades knowing that when we reach the top there will be a breeze and it will be downhill on the opposite side.

James 5:7-11

⁷ Be **patient** therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long **patience** for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

⁸ Be ye also **patient**; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

⁹ Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

¹⁰ Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of **patience**.

¹¹ Behold, we count them happy which **endure**. Ye have heard of the **patience** of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Conclusion:

We are in a race and it can be very difficult at times. Quitting is not an option. Our Lord did not quit when He was hung upon the cross. He persevered through the pain and the shame so that we could be blessed with eternal life. Let us remember from what we have looked at on Sunday evenings. There is sufficient amount of grace to get us through whatever we face.

Romans 5:1, 2

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

² *By whom also we have access by faith **into this grace wherein we stand**, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*