

"Running the Race"

Part 3

Hebrews 12:1-4

Introduction: Currently we are in Hebrews 12 where the writer is encouraging his readers to run the race with endurance. He has pointed them to Jesus who is the Supreme Example of what it is to live by faith and they were to "LOOK UNTO HIM".

Notice Hebrews 12:1-2

The word "looking" here means "to look away from all distractions of the world and to focus upon a distant object".

Notice Hebrews 12:3

Jesus endured what His enemies brought against Him and the writer exhorts his readers to do the same. They were like Jesus in that they were facing persecution from their own people who were fellow Jews. The writer therefore was concerned that they would grow weary which means discouraged, and then they would just give up the race.

Now the normal response would have been to complain about how difficult it was to live where they were living and face what they were facing. This now brings us to the next verse.

I. **The Reminder**

Notice Hebrews 12:4

Now there are many who see this verse as saying these believers had not suffered any physical persecution. Those who hold this position on this verse believe the "SIN" spoken of here is the persecution which was brought against the Hebrew believers.

Now let me remind you when we started our study of this letter we looked at some of what the early church went through. Let us notice a verse relating to the time period of this letter.

Acts 8:1

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Now I want you to notice the words of the Jewish scholar Adolf Saphir:

"Then arose another persecution of the believers, especially directed against the apostle Paul. Festus died about the year 63, and under the high priest Ananias, who favored the Sadducees, the Christian Hebrews were persecuted as transgressors of the law. Some of them were stoned to death; and though this extreme punishment could not be frequently inflicted by the Sanhedrim, they were able to subject their brethren to sufferings and reproaches which were felt most keenly. It was a small thing that they confiscated their goods; but they banished them from the holy places. Hitherto they had enjoyed the privileges of devout Israelites; they could take part in the beautiful and God-appointed services of the sanctuary; but now they were treated as unclean and apostates. Unless they gave up faith in Jesus, and forsook the assembling of themselves together, they were not allowed to enter the temple; they were banished from the altar, the sacrifice, the high priest, the house of Jehovah.

According to history some of them had been killed for their faith. I find it hard to believe in the setting of their day that some of them did not suffer even to the point of shedding blood.

So that raises a question, "What was the writer speaking of here in Hebrews 12:4?"

The context here is focusing upon Jesus as our Supreme Example and laying aside every weight and sin which can so easily beset the believer. So the thought from the writer is they were to look away from the world and all of its temptations and then set their focus upon Jesus and how He endured as He walked the face of this earth and was also tempted just like they were.

Now as they read this they may have pushed back a little claiming it was very difficult on the path which they were given to walk.

This then is where this verse comes in. With Jesus in mind the writer reminds them they had not yet resisted unto blood as they were striving against sin. Let me show you what I believe the writer was thinking about.

Luke 22:39-44

³⁹ *And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.*

⁴⁰ *And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.*

⁴¹ *And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,*

⁴² *Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

⁴³ *And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.*

⁴⁴ *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

That night in the Garden as Jesus came under spiritual attack the pressure on Him was so great that His blood was forced through the pores of His skin. The condition is known as "HEMATIDROSIS" - sweating blood due to release of adrenaline under extreme emotional or physical stress.

This is what I believe the writer is referring to here. They never resisted temptation to the point that the stress and pressure were so great that it forced the blood through the pores of the skin. The reason they had never faced this was because they would always give in before it ever came to this and so do we. Another reason they had never experienced this was because God always makes a way of escape.

1 Corinthians 10:13

¹³ *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

Jesus had resisted unto blood and so they could look to Him as the example to follow. He knew what it was to face temptation. He knew what it was to come under spiritual attack and feel unbearable pressure. Now because these Hebrew believers would often give into the temptation the writer will now step right into the next section.

The Chastening of God

Hebrews 12:5-24

Part 1

Notice Hebrews 12:5-7

There is much here to be considered so we shall go slowly through these thoughts.

The writer now is reaching back to the Old Testament into the book of Proverbs in verses 5 and 6.

Proverbs 3:11-12

¹¹ *My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction:*

¹² *For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.*

Now here in Hebrews the writer makes a shocking statement. They had forgotten the Truth which is that God chastens all of His children because He loves them.

Application:

There is something here that I need to point to briefly. We tend to forget many Truths found in God's Word especially when we are in the midst of a trial or a storm. Let us notice what God said to Israel.

Deuteronomy 4:9-11

⁹ *Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;*

¹⁰ *Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.*

¹¹ *And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.*

This is why it is so important that we stay under the teaching of God's Word. The more the Truth is embedded into our minds the easier it is to remember it and the less likely we are to forget it. Those who received this letter were Hebrews who prided themselves in knowing the Old Testament and yet they had allowed this Truth to escape their minds.

Now let us get into the meat of these verses. The writer is reminding the Hebrews about the chastening of God and he gives them 2 warnings concerning chastening which we shall see in a moment. But first of all we need to look at the meaning of the word "chastening".

Here is how the Blue Letter Bible defines the word:

1. *the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment) It also includes the training and care of the body*
2. *whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing passions.*
 1. *instruction which aims at increasing virtue*

Martin Luther's words shine much light on the idea behind the word "chastening".

"The purpose of discipline is the maturity of the son. *God's purpose is not to persecute us, but to perfect us. Chastening is not the work of an angry judge as he punishes a criminal. It is the work of a loving Father as he perfects a child. **This chastening is not always because we have sinned. Sometimes God permits suffering in our lives simply to build us up and help us mature.** We experience **God's education** through hardship or affliction. So the preacher to the Hebrews, who exhorts his flock to "endure hardship as discipline," is enjoining them to a most positive pursuit that has as its goal the very growth of their souls."*

We need to hear what is being said by the definition of the word and by the words of Luther. Chastening is not always because of sin. God's chastening is for the purpose of bringing His children into maturity. So God's "process of educating us" can come through hardships in this life also and it often does. I believe that is one of the main thoughts here for the Hebrew believers who had received this letter. The path which they were given to walk was not smooth. It was difficult under the pressures they were facing but this was something which God permitted so as to bring them to spiritual maturity. Let me show you a verse that we are moving toward.

Hebrews 12:11

¹¹ *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: **nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.***

Let us notice the words of Wuest.

"Chastening was used of the whole training and education of children. It speaks also of whatever in adults cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions. It speaks also of instruction which aims at the increase of virtue. The word does not have in it the idea of punishment, but of corrective measures which will eliminate evil in the life and encourage the good. Here, the persecutions were used of God in an effort

to clarify the spiritual vision of the readers as to the relative merits of the Old Testament and the New Testament, warning them against returning to the temple sacrifices and urging them on to faith in the Messiah as High Priest. The readers, in their action of leaning back towards the Old Testament and by their avowed purpose of returning to it in order to escape the persecution, had forgotten the lesson of Proverbs."

Now let us get back to the 2 warnings.

Notice Hebrews 12:5 again.

1. **They were not to despise the chastening of the Lord.**

The word "*despise*" means "*to regard lightly*".

The idea is that when we are faced with difficulties or correction from God we are to pay very close attention in the midst of it all. God has allowed us to be where we are so as to bring us to spiritual maturity. We are to look at each situation through spiritual eyes.

These situations are the classroom of God and it is His goal to see that we get a Master's Degree.

The Hebrew believers did not see the importance in the trials which they were facing and therefore they were doing all they could to escape. They saw returning to the old life as their means of escape and therefore they were 'despising' God's chastening. They did not see any reason to stick around if they could escape.

Application:

This is what we need to guard against in our own personal lives. When the path becomes long and rugged we want to look for something easier. We must remember that if the path we are on is in the will of God then the ruggedness and length are part of God's work in our lives to bring us to maturity.

Conclusion:

I will close with a few words from Martin Luther:

"As James Moffatt said, "To endure rightly, one must endure intelligently."

If we have an informed, intelligent, Biblical understanding of the afflictions that come our way, and we believe God's Word, we will endure. The correction of David, the prevention of Paul, the education of Job—this is sanctifying material for the reflective heart.

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The hostility of sinners is real and it is wrong and responsible and guilty. But it is also - and this is a great hope for us - it is also the loving, painful discipline of our Father in heaven. God is not coming to his children late after the attack, and saying, "I can make this turn for good." That is not discipline. That is repair. It's the difference between the surgeon who plans the incision for our good, and the emergency room doctor who sews us up after a freak accident. This text says, God is the doctor planning our surgery, not the doctor repairing our lacerations."