

HOW TO RUN THE RACE

TEXT: HEBREWS 12:1-3

Introduction:

1. F.B. Meyer, in his commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews, entitled, *The Way Into the Holiest*, refers to Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. He said that as the Emperor Napoleon was leading his troops past the Pyramids, he pointed to these marvels of great antiquity, and said, "Soldiers, forty centuries look down on you!"
2. And then F.B. Meyer added these words, "Similarly there have been summoned before our thought in the preceding chapter the good and great, the martyrs, confessors, prophets, and kings of the past. We have been led through the corridors of the divine mausoleum, and bidden to read the names and epitaphs of those of whom God was not ashamed. We have felt our faith grow stronger as we read and pondered the inspiring record; and now, by a single touch, these saintly souls are depicted as having passed from the arena into the crowded tiers, from which to observe the course which we are treading today. They were witnesses to the necessity, nature, and power of faith. They are witnesses also of our lives and struggles, our victories and defeats, our past and present."
3. Here in our text, we see the Christian life is compared to a race that is to be run. Therefore, these "witnesses" referred to in Hebrews 12:1 are believers that have already ran their race, and now they are up in the heavenly grandstands watching the race down here on earth.
4. A.T. Pierson referred to them as "crowned contestants" who "have honored seats among spectators."
5. Remember, this epistle was written to Jewish believers who were in danger of abandoning the faith, and going back into Judaism. The writer (probably the apostle Paul) encourages them by saying in verse 1, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us..."
6. We are all in this race. The recipients of this epistle would be "stirred and quickened by the thought that they were living under the close inspection" of the heroes of the faith (and others) referred to in chapter 11 (F.B. Meyers, *The Way into the Holiest*).
7. There is a race to be run. If you have been slacking off, there is still time to get back in the race.
8. I like that old chorus:

*I'll be true, precious Jesus, I'll be true,
I'll be true, precious Jesus, I'll be true,
There's a race to be run,
There's a vict'ry to be won,
Ev'ry hour, by Thy power,
I'll be true.*

9. The apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 9:24-27, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 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. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 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."
10. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" (Gal. 5:7).
11. And Paul wrote in Philippians 2:16, "Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain."
12. And he said in Philippians 3:14, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

I. LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT (12:1).

1. There is a distinction between a "weight" and sin. Some things may not necessarily sinful, but if they are slowing us down spiritually it is wise to lay them aside.
2. To effectively run a race, all weighty encumbrances must be laid aside. For example, a runner (especially a long distance runner, and we are in a long distance race) would not run with a heavy backpack or wearing a heavy coat and boots..
3. What then are these weights? Every believer must determine that for himself. What may be a weight for me, may not be for you.
4. It may be some habit that impedes spiritual growth, hinders prayer and Bible reading, etc.
5. For example, there are many devices and inventions in our modern day and age that hinder Christians from serving God -- distractions like the radio, television, the Internet, the telephone, etc.
6. These things may not in themselves be sinful (and sometimes they can be very helpful), but if they are hindering you from growing spiritually they must be put aside (Heb. 12:1).

7. I heard a preacher say he used to listen often to talk radio while driving in his car. Talk radio can be very informative and entertaining. However, most of these talk show hosts are not saved, and some of them are very worldly. Some are very angry. Some even use profanity.
8. Proverbs 22:24 says, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go."
9. Proverbs 29:22 says, "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression."
10. This preacher felt convicted about the worldliness of talk radio and decided that while driving in his car it would be far better to listen to preaching, good Christian music, the Bible on CD or MP3, etc.
11. This preacher wisely laid aside every weight (Heb. 12:1). In fact, before I heard him preach about it, I had already decided to cut back "talk radio" for the same reasons.
12. One of our missionaries had to resign and is now moving back to the USA. His reason: the Internet. The Internet can be a blessing or a weight. And if we are not very careful, it could lead to wicked sin.
13. We need to give this some serious consideration. Some weights can be good things: love of home and family, love of country, a good job, etc. But these legitimate things can become weights if they slow us down in the race God has set before us.
14. Furthermore, all known sin must be dealt with. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1).
15. Repentance is essential. Our Lord said to the impotent man by the pool in Jerusalem, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14).
16. Our Lord told the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).
17. First John 2:1 says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."
18. The Bible is very clear that Christians must make a clean break from all known sins. In fact, the Bible says we are dead to sin (Romans 6:2).
19. The Bible does not identify the sin which doth so easily beset us (Heb. 12:1). A besetting sin for one person may not be a problem for another.
20. However, it does seem likely that the Word of God is speaking here about one particular sin, and that is the sin of unbelief.
21. Hebrews 12 is a continuation of Hebrews 11 ("Wherefore..." -- 12:1), and Hebrews 11 is all about faith (cf. 11:1). Therefore, the sin of unbelief is the constantly besetting sin.

22. Our Lord said that when the Comforter would come, He would “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me (John 16:8, 9).
23. It is not just lost sinners that are guilty of this terrible sin of unbelief. In Matthew 17:20, our Lord rebuked His apostles because of their unbelief.
24. In Mark 16:14, we read that our Lord appeared unto the apostles and upbraided them because of "their unbelief and hardness of heart.”

II. LET US RUN WITH PATIENCE (12:1b)

1. We have need of patience; this is no 60-yard dash. It is a long distance race we cannot even see the finish line up ahead.
2. There are many unexpected twists and turns and obstacles to overcome in this race.
3. Referring to Abraham, Hebrews 6:15 says, "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."
4. The apostle Paul is another good example of patience. Paul referred to his race as a course, and he was determined to stay the course. He said in Acts 20:24, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy.”
5. And Paul did indeed patiently finish his course with joy. Right before he was executed, he wrote to his good friend Timothy, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:7, 8).
6. We all have need of patience. Hebrews 10:36 says, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."
7. Each and every Christian should desire God’s perfect will for their life. And there are many things in life which will have to be set aside in order to run the race and to realize God’s will for us.
8. And Christians should not be satisfied with anything less than the perfect will of God.

III. LET US LOOK UNTO JESUS (12:2).

1. We are to look away from this world and all it has to offer, and looking unto Jesus (12:2).
2. F.W. Grant said, "Christ is the goal; and if our eyes are upon Him, we find at once the perfect example and the energy for the way."

3. The great a cloud of witnesses (12:1) is important, but far more important is we are looking unto Jesus.
4. "Author" (12:2) means "leader." The same Greek word is translated "captain" in Hebrews 2:10, where our Lord is called "the captain of our salvation."
5. Our Lord has been down this course, and He knows how we are to run it. Our job is to follow Him closely. He knows where the obstacles are, and He will guide our steps if we let Him.
6. "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (12:2). Our Lord's course was far more difficult than any other, yet He endured to the end for you and for me (12:2, 3).
7. Many a runner, and many an athlete, and many a fighter has been greatly encouraged to press on because some dear loved one was up in the stands watching.
8. Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ is up in heaven watching you and me. Hebrews 12:3 says, "For consider him..." (cf. Acts 7:55, 56).
9. "Consider Him" when you feel like quitting, and don't quit (12:3).
10. "Consider Him" when you are tired or discouraged or impatient or lonely or frightened. Consider Him (12:3).

CONCLUSION:

1. We are told to lay aside any weights or besetting sin that would slow us down or hold us back in our race. But sometimes there are certain things we refuse to give it up. In fact, some Christians steadfastly resist any efforts to get moving in their race.
2. In that case, God often has to bring pressure upon us to help us get rid of cumbersome weights and besetting sins (cf. 12:5-11).

"The athlete gladly foregoes much that other men value, and which is pleasant to himself, because his mind is intent on the prize; and he considers that he will be amply repaid for all the hardships of training if he be permitted to bear it away, though it be a belt he will never wear, or a cup he will never use. How much more gladly should we be prepared to relinquish all that hinders our attainment, not of the uncertain bauble of the athlete, but the certain reward, the incorruptible crown, the smile and "well-done" of our Lord!" (Meyer).