

Sunday Morning Message

December 6, 2015

Stay in the Race

Topic – Christian Maturity

Text – Hebrews 12

Congregational Reading – Hebrews 12:1 - 2

Introduction

The Apostle often pictured the Christian life as a race. However, the type of race equated with our lives is not a sprint but more of a marathon. Here in verse 1, we see that this race will involve endurance (patience). Consider the following passages of Scripture from Paul's other letters:

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. (1 Corinthians 9:24 – 27)

Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? (Galatians 5:7)

In the chapter 11 of Hebrews we learn all about faith. We get the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

We also learn that faith pleases God and that without faith it is impossible to please God:

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6)

I Consider the Watching Crowd (v. 1)

A The faithful men and women from chapter 11

In chapter 11 we see many examples of faithful men and women from the Old Testament. It is certain that these are the men and women who at least partially make up the "cloud of witnesses" who are watching from Heaven as we run our race here on earth. The "therefore" in verse 1 connects us to the people in chapter eleven.

B The people in Heaven who are not included in chapter 11

There are a lot of people who are cheering for us today to keep running. Though it is not clear from the Scripture the extent of the view of our lives that the people in Heaven

can see, it is apparent that they can see, or at least are aware of, what is going on down here.

- C The faithful men and women of today who are watching us
- D Lost people today

People who are alive and on earth today are watching us, and whether they no it or not, they are depending on us to remain faithful, and to keep running our race for the Lord.

II Consider the Waiting Crown (vs. 1 – 24)

The crown is being able to finish the race while remaining faithful to your calling. We all want to see Jesus at the finishing line in Heaven, and we want to hear him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Paul said at the end of his life, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:* (2 Timothy 4:7)

Notice v. 2 "*Looking Unto Jesus*". He is our Crown. We need to keep our eyes on Him throughout the race or we will get discouraged and quit, or get sidetracked and end up in the wrong place.

A The Race Requires Endurance (vs. 1 – 13)

The word *patience* in verse 1 means cheerful endurance. If we are to be able to endure, we must shed the things that will slow us down and eventually drop out of the race. These are the *weights and the sin* referred to in verse 1. Weights are anything (good or bad) that slow us down. *The sin which doth so easily beset us* is rooted in unbelief or lack of faith. The word "beset" (εὐπερίστατος – *euperistatos*) conveys the idea that this sin is constantly plaguing us and opposing us like a competitor in a race. Some think that this sin is different for every believer and call it a *besetting sin*. It may be lust or covetousness or whatever sin in somebody's life that is a continual problem.

1 Through Trials and Persecution (vs. 1 – 4)

The example is given of the Lord Jesus who endured through intense suffering. He *set [His] face like a flint* (Isaiah 50:7) as he headed for the cross.

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:2-4)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more

precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:3-9)

2 Through Chastening (vs. 5 - 11)

The reference here is to Proverbs 3:11 - 12. Also, Job said:

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:" (Job 5:17)

Correction is a part of life. Swallow your pride, embrace it, and learn from it.

Notice the phrase in v. 10, *"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure"*. This does not mean that our earthly parents enjoyed punishing us. It simply means that they punished us because they thought it was best. The same idea is conveyed in Isaiah when it states, *"Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him"* (Isaiah 53:10). God was not amused or entertained to see His Son suffer, but it He knew it was what was best for us.

3 Through Encouragement and Strengthening (vs. 12 - 13)

These verses are pure encouragement. Encouragement is an extremely powerful tool to help people stay in the race. We will often grow weary in well doing, and sometimes all that we need is somebody to cheer us on to keep going.

B The Race Requires Diligence (vs. 14 - 24)

1 Follow Peace (v. 14)

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:18)

2 Follow Holiness (v. 14)

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1Peter 1:15-16)

3 Focus with Persistence (vs. 15 - 24)

a Forsake your flesh (vs. 15 - 17)

Our flesh will cause us to miss the blessings of God. Bitterness, immorality, and unbridled appetites will war against the will (the race) of God.

b Forget The Old Covenant (vs. 18 - 21)

Paul paints the picture here of fear that the people had for God in the Old Testament, which caused even Moses to "quake".

"And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." (Exodus 20:18-19)

c Focus on the New Covenant (vs. 22 – 24)

The overall theme of this letter to the Hebrews is that Christ is better. Paul is reminding them here that they don't want to go back to the old because the new is so much better. We are not afraid of God in the New Testament. We have been granted access to Him through the blood of Christ.

III Consider the Warning of Consequences (vs. 25 – 28)

This is the fifth and last of the warning passages found in the letter to the Hebrews. (see Hebrews 2:1 – 4; Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13; Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20; Hebrews 10:26 – 39) As with the other four warning passages from Hebrews, we need to be reminded that this warning from chapter twelve is not teaching that a Christian can lose his salvation, but it may be warning against a loss of reward for the believer. It can also be warning about a false profession. Not everyone who professes to be a Christian is genuine.

The great difficulty with all of these passages is that there is language given that seems to indicate an unbeliever is in view. In v. 25, the phrase, "see that ye refuse not him that speaketh" gives the idea that an offer is being considered but not yet accepted. However, there is also language that indicates that a genuine believer is in view. In v. 25, the pronouns, "we", and "us" are used, which tell us that Paul included himself as part of the group. The only other plausible explanation is that Paul used the terms "we" and "us" in reference to his inclusion in the Nation of Israel, but I don't think that is the case. The problem is, however, that the consequences mentioned in these warnings for "turning away" are very severe and sometimes, on the surface, appear to be referring to Hell.

Notice the phrase, "*For Our God is a consuming fire*". This phrase is very similar to the phrase in chapter 10:

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31)

Is this a warning to Hebrews who are yet unsaved to not reject their Messiah who is clearly better than the shadows of Judaism, or are they written to genuine Hebrew believers in Christ, admonishing them to stay faithful to Christ and His church? Whoever was in view at the time of the writing, I believe that a practical application can be made to either group, and even can extend beyond Hebrew people to Gentiles today. Perhaps the Holy Spirit intended this to be somewhat ambiguous in order that a dual application could be made.