

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Completing The Course”

Now as you're well aware the book of Hebrews was written to a group of downcast, downtrodden, and depressed people who were thinking about throwing in the towel on this whole “Christianity” thing and returning to the ways of Judaism. and The author has been vehemently, passionately seeking to persuade them otherwise. Because all of those things contained in the law, the various rules and regulations, the rites and rituals were all meant to simply take us by the hand (as it were) and lead us to Christ. and Now that Christ has come, the dispensation of the law is fulfilled, it's finished (mission accomplished), He is the *fulfillment* of all of that which those things foreshadowed. and Once the substance has come we leave the shadows behind, those things were never meant to make one righteous, they were meant to demonstrate the fact of our *unrighteousness* and that we *needed* to be made right before God. They were to set the heart in the proper position to receive Christ; and since Christ fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law on our behalf, the good news is that God will accredit His righteousness to us if we'll simply believe Him for it, turn *to* Him and trust *in* Him by faith. and In reality (the author has declared and demonstrated) that righteousness before God has *always* been imputed on the basis of His grace through faith and has *never* been accredited on the basis of the works of the law, or legalism, the do's and don'ts of man.

For the just, (that is those who will stand justified before God) shall live by...what? Faith, not law, not legalism, not trusting in what I can do, but in what He's done for me in Christ; faith is a prerequisite for righteousness in the sight of God. Every aspect of our lives as believers regarding our relationship with God is directly impacted, and influenced by faith. and This really isn't just a NT concept; it's simply the fact of God's revelation to man throughout the entirety of His word regarding how it is that He will relate *to* us, and associate *with* us. and He has opted to do so through His own sovereignty on the basis of faith. For with out faith it's impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

So throughout Ch 11 the author gave scenario after scenario, scriptural illustration after scriptural illustration regarding the reality of faith in the lives of those whom God chooses to use and approves of. He demonstrated that it's by faith that we're accepted *by* God, that we are pleasing in the sight *of* God, that we live in obedience *to* God and lead a life set apart to Him regardless of the ebb and flow of this world and whatever the current tide of the pop culture may be. We've learned the fact that true faith will be reflected in our lives by the way that we respond and react to God's Word. If we truly believe what God has said, our lives will demonstrate that accordingly. Faith will cause us to hang on loosely to the things of this world and look forward to the future of the heavenly hope, faith will work sacrifice and separation (or sanctification) in our lives, it will cause us to walk in victory, and endure hardship, difficulty and persecution patiently. Faith maintains the eternal perspective.

So with all these demonstrations (the upwards of 20 different situations he drew to our attention, then he didn't run out of examples, he ran out of time) now in Ch 12 he makes an application to you and me. You know the NT draws several different analogies from this life in seeking to explain the Christian experience; what it is, what it's like, what we're to do and what we can expect.

For instance Jesus likened the kingdom of God unto a farmer who sowed seed into various plots of soil. and The idea there is that God's word is like the seed, and we're responsible for scattering it into the hearts of those people in the world around us. Some hearts won't receive it, some won't really respond to it, others will take it in but not go the distance and others will bring forth lasting fruit to the glory of God. and So the human heart was likened to different types of ground and how they respond to the seed of the word of God.

Paul spoke of the Christian in a few different ways, he spoke of the believer as a soldier, and that as a soldier we're to stand firm and not be moved from our position, and we're to be adequately equipped if we're to wage wise warfare. and So we have the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, our feet are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, we have the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, and the shield of faith with which we're able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. He spoke of the Christian as a fighter, a boxer, and as such there was objective before him, and so it was necessary to train and discipline himself in certain ways so as to accomplish his objective. and Each of these illustrations help paint the picture for us as to what the Christian life is, what it's like, things we're to do, what we can expect (resistance, reception, rejection, whatever).

Here in Heb Ch 12 the author draws our attention to a runner, a track and field type guy and he likens the Christian experience to a race. and The idea that he's communicating is that, "Hey, all these guys and gals who've gone before us have ran their race and completed their course by faith, let us do likewise."

Vs1-2

Vs 1 begins with the familiar word, "Therefore" which is a word that let's us know that he hasn't left the context of Ch 11 even though someone saw fit to make this Vs the 1st of Ch 12. The Ch has broken; his flow of thought has not. and He's been sharing with us and showing to us all these people who've obtained a good testimony and were well pleasing to God even through adverse conditions, various difficulties, and afflictions through faith. Remember the point of Heb Ch 11 isn't to say, "Man these guys were really special, no wonder they're recognized in the 'hall of faith' they're cut from a different mold, I could never measure up to that." That's just the opposite of what he's been seeking to communicate. He's been seeking to communicate that hardship and difficulty is common to the believer and there are those who've gone through much worse than what we have and yet they've completed their course, and obtained a good testimony in the sight of God through faith.

If they can have faults like us, then we can have faith like them. Ch 11 is a giant, “You can do it” motivational and inspirational passage, it’s not meant to say, “You’re weak, they were strong” it’s meant to say, “we’re all human, we all go through things, but we serve a great God, and He’s faithful to see us through if we’ll just believe Him for it. After all look at this guy, and this guy, and this gal, and this situation.” and Over and over and over again he’s drawn to our attention that if we’ll just believe God, He’ll be there for us, and be strength and support to us, and do great things through us for His glory. He won’t let us go, He won’t turn away, and He’ll strengthen us day after day, after day. “Therefore, (notice) *we also*,” just like they *did* we can *do*, they did it, now it’s our turn, don’t lose heart, don’t give up, and don’t give in.

He says, “Therefore, we also, since are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.” and As you read this Vs you can be given to the question, “So are you saying that all these people who’ve gone before us are now in the stands of heaven tuning in to us? Are we the original reality T.V.?” We wonder that because of the way it’s phrased. As though we’re in the stadium of life, running our race and we’re being “cheered on” as it were by all these people who’ve gone before us, they’re *witnessing* our race. I mean, is that what this is saying, that people in heaven can actually see what’s going on in our lives, how our walk with Christ is going?

I’ll address that in a minute but before I do I want to draw your attention to something else, this “cloud” of witnesses. and As we know these witnesses are specifically a reference of those to whom he just referred to there in Ch 11, however the application can certainly expand to include anyone who’s gone before us, and faithfully completely their course in this life. But I just wanted you to notice that he uses the word *cloud* as a reference to a very large and dense multitude of people, this throng of people. Because the bible says that one day we’re going to be caught up into the *clouds* to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord. and I’m not so certain that that’s a reference to the clouds of the cumulus or nimbus variety so much as it is that we’ll find our place in this company of the faithful, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye when the trumpet of God sounds and we catch air.

So what about these witnesses? Are they checking us out? Witnessing our activity? Well, there are those who subscribe to just that, very solid and scholarly individuals who will tell you we’re reality T.V. for heaven’s viewers. Now others will say, “Well, I thought that since in heaven there’s no more sadness, how could anyone watch what’s going on here and not be depressed and bummed at the ungodliness and hostility toward Christians, disease and death?” and That’s a good point, however in Luke 16 you find where before Christ was crucified and resurrected there were 2 compartments in hell. On one side was Ab’s bosom (or paradise) the other side was people tormented in flames and between them was a great gulf fixed so that no one could cross from one side to the other. and A man cries out to Ab to have mercy on him and send Lazarus to him with but a drop of water to place on his tongue because he was in torment being in flames.

Now Ab didn't say, "O my goodness, I'm so sorry, I'm so disheartened and brought down by your plight, but there's nothing I can do." He just said, "In life you were comforted, Lazarus suffered, now he's comforted while you suffer, and even if someone wanted to cross over, they can't because of this great gulf between us." But we don't get the picture of everyone in paradise, weeping for those who were on the other side. Evidently they have perfect understanding, a realization of God's justification, and vindication of His holiness. So I'm not so sure that people would be bummed because they were watching the show here on planet earth. However I personally still don't think that people in heaven are tuning in to you and me, for a couple reasons. #1 I'm sure they're more interested in the holy Triune God, and worshipping at the feet of Jesus than they are in me and my life. #2 The context here lends itself to the fact *not* that they're witnesses *of* us, but that they've already been witnesses *to* us of faith and the rewards of endurance. We're not showing them, they've already shown us, their lives are witnesses to the reality of God's ability to bring to full fruition His plan, the course that He's carved out for your life if you'll but trust Him.

The point here is that we're surrounded by all these people in the scriptures and throughout history who've demonstrated to us the fruitful resolve of faith and patience. They've trusted God and inherited the reward, now you can place that same trust in Him as they did and complete your course as well. and So, "...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, that *we* might run with endurance the race that is set before us."

So here's the analogy right? The Christian life is like unto a race, and as you well know it's definitely not a sprint, it's cross country type; it's the long haul, well beyond the marathon (kind of a thing). Now many people treat their Christian life like it's a sprint, and so they go, go, go and give it all they have for a short distance, then they collapse, can't do it, fall back into the world. Then they give it another go, and it's up and down, in and out, there's no consistency, they don't train themselves accordingly. Did you see that there?

There's discipline involved if you want to run a race (at least that's what I'm told, I know it may shock you by my physic but I'm not much into sports). and There's discipline on 2 levels, there's personal discipline (which he brings up here in these 1st few Vs) and Divine discipline which he begins to speak of there in Vs 5. So there are times when God will discipline us, but in the realm of human responsibility we're to realize there's self discipline involved in virtually any event that you want to excel in. If you don't care how you place, or how well you do, then never discipline yourself, sign up for the event (whatever it may be) and see how it goes. Step into the octagon, do some UFC fighting having never taken jujitsu, or learned any self defense techniques, never condition yourself physically, step into the cage and see how you do, you won't last long. Because if you're to do well as an athlete there is a demand for personal discipline. The same holds true spiritually for you and me, if you want to run the race to win, it's going to take discipline on your behalf.

Paul told the Corinthians, "*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes*

for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” 1 Cor 9:24-27

You watch these UFC guys, and man their training regimen is unbelievable, 1 guy in particular who runs I don't remember how many flights of stairs, lifts weights, and does all his cardio with his nose plugged and breathing through a snorkel. It just keeps his body begging for oxygen, I mean I couldn't believe what I was seeing. and He does it for what? Nothing eternal that's for sure, for something that's temporary at best. Now if guys like that are willing to discipline themselves to that degree for the things of this world, how much more should we be willing to discipline ourselves to obtain an eternal reward? To the Philippians Paul said, *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Phil 3:13-14* If you want to run well, if you want to endure to the end and finish faithfully there's discipline involved.

The author here sites 2 things with regard to self-discipline that we need to do if we want to run with endurance and he moves from what we might call the ambiguous, to the obvious. 1st of all if you want to run with endurance you need to lay aside every weight. Again I don't know a whole lot about running but what I do know is that every single ounce of undo weight, a runner wants removed. They don't run in jeans and a sweatshirt, they don't run in steel toed work boots, man they shed those things. Unless it's absolutely necessary, a runner wants it off. They want the lightest shoes they can find, skin tight shorts and minimal shirt requirements. They want weight laid aside. But here's why I refer to it as ambiguous; because since the author makes a distinction between *weight* and *sin* that tells me that the weight, might not necessarily be sin. You see as a believer every choice you make may not be as simple as “right” or “wrong” but it may be more about “does this help or hinder my relationship with Christ, His plan for my life?” and That's something that each individual has to work out between them and the Lord.

It could be something as simple as a certain relationship, a friendship that's not necessarily sinful, but it doesn't help you in your relationship with Christ, it hinders you. It could be material things, by themselves they're not sinful, but perhaps there's something that's hindering your relationship with Christ...So be it people you see, places you go, things you do, or something you have, if the Lord is dealing with you, trying to tell you that it's hindering you, you've got to lay it aside, cut it loose, it's weighing you down, you're in a race and wearing a backpack full of bricks, man you gotta shed that thing.

“And The sin that so easily ensnares us.” This is the obvious, sin has to go. If we do well to lay the ambiguous down, then you know the obvious has to go. Now he doesn't mention any

particular sin here and I'm not sure he has to because our flesh gravitates toward sin in general. It's not difficult for sin to ensnare us, however the context seems to lean itself toward the sin of "unbelief" the antithesis of faith. The enemy of faith is unbelief; it will rob you of your ability to endure.

Believe me when I tell you that to run your race you need, I need, we need endurance. This word "race" here is the word "agone" from which comes our word "agony." This race isn't a walk in the park, there's going to be times where it seems grueling, you can't go on, you've given it all you've got and you're through, but you've got to push through it, you've got to keep going, you've got to endure, not passively, but actively. How? By faith, by casting aside the weight, the sin that so easily ensnares us. You can't passively run a race, it involves commitment, it involves effort, it takes discipline, and so I guess what it boils down to is are you, am I committed to Christ (really) or not. What's it going to take to get you out of the race?

Real quick you need to know that though we're all called to the race, God carves out a different course for each of us to complete respectively. The course I'm to run isn't the course you're to run and visa versa. Don't worry about what someone else is doing, how they're running, the course that they're on that seems so much easier or whatever. Focus on the course that God has called you to.

Vs2

So with all these illustrations and demonstrations of faith before us in Ch 11 one might wonder why Jesus wasn't listed, he saved the best for last. To the negative we're to lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, to the positive we're to look *to* Jesus as our primary example of faithful endurance through tough times and tribulations and realize that He's both the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith. He's the A-Z of our faith, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. The reason you have faith is because it was given to you by Christ. The bible says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that (that is the faith) not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,*" Eph 2:8 It's all about His work, never about ours, salvation from the beginning to the end is about Him. He's begun the work (which we call justification) and He's going to finish the work (which we call glorification). So if you find yourself discouraged today, not sure if you're going to make it, this should be an *encouragement* to you, because Jesus isn't only the author of your faith, He's the finisher of it as well.

Look unto Him, He's the ultimate example and illustration of what it means to maintain the eternal perspective looking beyond the here and now, the trials, the tribulation, the pain, and

the problems to the pay off at the end. Or as Paul put it in the book of Romans, “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*” Rom 8:18 and When we’re talking about looking unto Jesus, we’re talking about a total lock of focus.

We’re talking about tunnel vision, getting our eyes fixed upon Him at the exclusion of everything and everyone else. This phrase, “looking unto” speaks of a looking *away* from one thing that you might look toward and give your attention *to* something else completely and totally. Unfortunately many believers don’t want to give Jesus their total attention, they want to keep Him in their peripheral vision, looking to just about anything or anyone else 1st, but if those things don’t work out I’ll look to Jesus. and Then they can’t figure out why they can’t carry on, where’s the focus of your heart, what are your eyes affixed to? When you watch runners, they’re not looking all around, they’re focused on the tape, on the goal, they want the prize, they don’t want to vary off course, or waste one step. So to with you, so to with me, we don’t want to waste a single step in this race that God has placed us in, stay focused on Christ...

“Who for the joy that set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Understand one thing about Jesus and His attitude toward the cross, it wasn’t something He looked forward to, that He relished in, or that He was happy about. It was a horrible, undignified, humiliating, (not to mention one of the worst forms of torture ever devised of man) way to die. The word “excruciating” literally means, “out of the cross” a word used to describe something so incredibly painful that it’s unbearable. As a matter of fact He warred with in Himself praying to the Father to take an alternative route if there was another way, the capillaries in His face bursting from stress and anxiety over bearing the sin of the world, the Father forsaking Him. This was not something He joyed over. Crucifixion was devised of the Persians but perfected by the Romans. and It was meant to be an incredibly shameful way to die as the crucified people naked in public places, along the road ways and all the rest. Sending out the signal that this is what will happen to you if you dare defy Rome.

Jesus despised the shame, but He endured the cross, why? Because of what lie in wait on the other side of it. There may’ve been extreme humiliation on this side, but He would receive extreme *exaltation* on the other side of it. Leave the book of Hebrews; turn quickly to the book of Philippians Ch 2:3-11

He suffered humiliation beyond anything we’ll ever know or understand, yet the glorification that followed caused Him to endure. The joy of being faithful to the Father, providing a way for you and me where there was no way. Jesus followed through, He was faithful, He completed His course, and He wants to work in you, and work through you that you might complete yours as well. It’s tough, it’s trying, sometimes excruciating, or humiliating, consider Jesus, keep focused on Jesus, lay aside that weight, and the sin that so easily ensnares you, repent of it, get right of it, and complete the course.

Prayer Points:

Lord we thank You that You're not only the author of our faith, but You're the finisher of it as well. You've begun it and we can count on You to finish it. Help us that we not shrug off human responsibility, may we see the seriousness of the race and discipline ourselves, buffet our flesh, laying aside not only the sin, but even those things that just act as weights, weighing us down hindering our forward momentum, wearing us out. That we might run with endurance the race that's set before us. Jesus may we keep our eyes *on* You and never look away *from* You, have Your way in us.

If you've not entered the race, you've not started the course having never given your heart to Christ you need to realize that part of the joy that was set before Him in enduring all that He did was you. He didn't go to the cross for His benefit, but for yours, and for mine. What's the condition of the soil of your heart today? Don't set your self against God by rejecting His word, His witness, His Son, soften your heart, turn from your sin, and look unto Jesus. We talk about looking unto Jesus, that's a posture of trust, look unto Him, trust in Him, let Him forgive your sin, and give you everlasting life.