**Hebrews 12:1-2**

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Good morning!

We are continuing our series in the book of Hebrews **Fixing Our Hearts on Jesus** with a view toward **Run with Endurance.**

I love when the bible uses metaphors.

A metaphor is a way of speaking such that a person applies a word or phrase to something.

Metaphors are a great and powerful tool to reinforce biblical truth to a believer’s life.

Even our society uses figures of speech like this all the time to reinforce something about a person or thing.

For example,

* He has a heart of gold
* He is as strong as a bull
* He is as strong as a rock
* He is fast as lightening

You see, even in our own culture, we use these figures of speech to reinforce something we are saying in a more powerful way.

The Scripture does the same thing – to *reinforce* truth into the mind of God’s people!

A good example of this would Psalm 1:1-3

*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor* ***stand in the path*** *of sinners,
Nor sit in the* ***seat*** *of scoffers!****2****But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.****3He will be like a tree****firmly planted by streams of water,Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.*

In other words, like a tree that is planted near a source of water to receive nutrients in order to live,

so then the Word of God is our daily source of spiritual strength and life in order to remain spiritually strong and healthy in his or her walk with the Savior of their soul, Jesus Christ.

There are scores and scores of examples like this.

Here’s some by our Lord

* “So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am *the* ***door*** of the sheep.” (John 10:7) In other words, Jesus is the only way to heaven. There is no other way or door to get into heaven.
* Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the **Light** of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the **Light** of life.” (John 8:12)

When it comes to hardship, believers in Christ likened to soldiers.

* “Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good **soldier** of Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 2:3)
* “Put on the full **armor** of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:11)
* “I **run** in such a way, as not without aim; I **box** in such a way, as not beating the air”

I think you get the point.

But I say all this to highlight a kind of speech all of us are familiar with in the Bible, and that is race.

Track and Field is something all of us may be familiar with.

So the bible takes that idea and applies it to your relationship with Jesus Christ which means this:

Your relationship with Christ is likened to a marathon race.

It is a long-term journey, marked by perseverance through trials. So you have to spiritually pace yourself.

Christ gives you the persevering power to run the race that is set before as you make your way to the Celestial City of heaven.

In the NT book of Hebrews, we see this metaphor idea of racing used by the writer.

With that in mind, please turn with me to the book of Hebrews 12:1-2 so we can see how this is applied to our lives.

Our emphasis for this morning will be to read through these verse in particular while making

proper application of those passages to our walk with the Savior of our soul, Jesus Christ.

This is the Word of the Lord (read)

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2**fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In the story *Pilgrim’s Progress* John Bunyan writes on Christian’s Journey to the Celestial City, that is heaven, to which he said –

“This hill, though high, I covet to ascend; The difficulty will not me offend. For I perceive the way to life lies here. Come, pluck up, heart; let's neither faint nor fear. Better, though difficult, the right way to go, than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe".

Here’s another quote –

"Look before you. Do you see this narrow way? That is the way you must go. It was cast upon by the Patriarchs, Prophets, Christ, and his Apostles, and it is as straight as a rule can make it. This is the way you must go".

When it comes to the Christian life, God has a provided the way to be with him forever in heaven.

And it is through the Cross of Christ where we receive

* The forgiveness of our sins
* Peace and reconciliation between us and a holy God
* Eternal Life
* Victory over death beyond the grave

But Christ has gone before us into heaven, and a good many have followed after.

But we at least we know the way ahead of us because Christ has blazed a trail of light clear all the way to the gates of heaven.

There’s no question that life on this Narrow road will have its share of providential blessings and trouble.

But that’s ok because the difficulty ought not offend us, for the way to life lies there, and many have undertaken it. So…

**I. Be encouraged by the great crowd of witnesses that cheer of God’s faithfulness.**

Notice what the writer to the Hebrews said to God’s people in verse 1 –

**Hebrews 12:1** “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us” (stop)

I want you to understand that the author of Hebrews draws this image from a giant Roman Colosseum.

Today we call it a stadium where you have a bunch of spectators watching a particular sport like football or baseball,

while the fans are there in the stadium cheering their team on.

The imagery is like that – *but with a difference!*

Because the difference lies in the fact that these clouds of witnesses aren’t merely people watching a football game.

It’s far better than that.

And it’s tempting also to think that they are staring down at us from heaven cheering us on.

That’s not what the writer is conveying to God’s people.

These imagery is that of believers in Christ who have gone before us in their walk of faith with the Savior.

And they are seen *by you* as you run your race of faith, as you make your way to the Celestial City of grace.

A good number of these saints can be read about in the Bible that we read. One writer described it this way:

In the crowd sits Noah, who endured much hardship and faithfully built an ark; and Enoch, who loved God intimately and walked with him; and Sarah, who trusted God’s promise and received power to conceive. In the crowd sit Abraham and Moses and Rahab and all others. (Michael Kruger, Hebrews For You, 192)

I’m sure there are a number of you here today who have loved ones in the faith,

some of which who have passed away and have received their eternal reward.

You remember them and their faith.

They have received “crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to you on that day, and not only to me, *but also to all who have loved His appearing*.” (2 Timothy 4:8)

* You remember their race of faith in Christ and their labor of love they have demonstrated in your life and others.
* You bore witness not just to their faith in Christ, but also to how they race their race of faith through struggles.

Some of you may be thinking about such persons now.

* You bore witness to how the Lord carried them through the tribulations of this fallen world.

They’ve gone on before you! And there reward is great in heaven!

And I would hope to God that as you remember these who have gone before, that it would encourages you to press on “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14-15)

But there may be some here, who are not yet believers in Jesus Christ.

And the writer is saying to you that if you’re not yet in the race that is set before you – *then get in the race!*

Well, how do I do that?

Here’s how you do that –

“If you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; **10**for with the heart a person believes, leading to righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, leading to salvation.” (Romans 10:9-10)

That is how you get in the race of faith!

A good number of you already been running for a while.

You’re seasoned runners and have paced yourself well.

But perhaps there may be things slowing you down as you make your spiritual trek to heaven.

If that is the case, what the writer to the Hebrews said to those believers who have gone before you, he also says to you to…

**II. Lay aside everything that hinders you from running.**

**Verse 1** “let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us…” (stop)

This is an interesting verse.

**1. Every encumbrance.** Now, pause your mind for a moment because this deserves a bit of explanation.

When the says to God’s people to *“lay aside every encumbrance”* – he’s not referring to things that are sinful per se.

That’s why they are called “encumbrance’s” *onkos.* It means

* *“weight”*
* “*stuff”*
* “*bulk”*
* *“excess weight.”*

Those of you who have run in track and field understand that wearing too heavy a clothes will slow a person down while running, right?

The less excess weight you wear, the faster you are able to run because you don’t want too much excess to slow you down in the race to the finish line.

So when you run your spiritual race, if you want to run well, you need less drag.

But if there is anything in your life that is slowing you down, *set it aside!*

In the case of these believers who received this letter, there struggle was the fact that they were

Jews converted to Christ who struggled letting go of their OT rituals/customs.

Things that were no longer required to keep anymore because Christ fulfilled it.

But they struggled because all they grew up knowing and understanding were those kinds of things.

And now, it was those things slowing them down in their race of faith. Now, we don’t live under that context.

We are Gentiles, *not Jews.*

But that doesn’t mean we don’t have things in our lives that doesn’t have the potential to slow us down in our race of faith in Christ.

Again, *we’re not talking about sinful things* – the author will address that in moment –

he’s talking about non sinful things that have the real potential to become *ruling things* in a believer’s life which will slow us down in our faith.

One author said that –

There are many things that could hinder our running, even if they are not bad in and of themselves. Maybe you’ve been sucked into social media, and it’s becoming a weight or a distraction. Maybe you’re watching a lot of television or are preoccupied with sports. These things are no sinful in themselves, but the question is, are they helping you run? It is so easy to spend so much time on other things that you take yourself away from what is better (Michael Kruger, *Hebrews For You,* p. 194)

So the writer tells them that if we want to run our race of faith well, we need to lay aside any and all encumbrances

* Lay aside *“weight”*
* Lay aside “*stuff”*
* Lay aside “*bulk”*
* Lay aside any *“excess weight.”*

But not only are we to lay aside ever encumbrance, the writer moves onto say “and…

**2. The sin which so easily entangles.**

Far more significant than any encumbrances is “the sin” that entangles – sins that ensnare the believer in Jesus Christ.

One hymn writer said

*“Yield not to temptation,
for yielding is sin.
Each vict'ry will help you
some other to win.
Fight valiantly onward;
dark passions subdue.
Look ever to Jesus;
He'll carry you through.”*

Christian, *sin is the default line.*

If there is sin in your life, *you have to get rid of it!*

For these believers who have gone before us, “the sin” that entangled them was the temptation to walk away from Christ because of the ongoing pressure of persecution that was so wide spread throughout the church during that time.

So early on in this letter, the writer tells them to “see *to it* brothers,

that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.” (Hebrews 3:12)

All of us needs to ask is this:

* Is there *a known* sin in your life that has entangled you?
* Are you more enamored by the sins for which Christ had come to set you free from?
* Are those sins the lord of your life, or is Christ the Lord of your life?

You cannot serve two masters!

I don’t know what that is for you.

But what I so know is that sin consumes our energy and keeps us from following smoothly on the Narrow Way.

Sin trips us up far, far too often and will entangle us and trip us up and we will never finish the race if we don’t forsake it.

But sin broadly speaking, is a kind of unbelief that slows you down in your race.

So repent, *get rid of it*!

Let no sin characterize who you are, let righteousness characterize your life.

Otherwise, you are in serious danger of not finishing the race at all. So then,

* Lay aside every encumbrance
* Lay aside any sin which entangles you

Note the end of verse 1 – “…and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (stop)

I just want to highlight two things before moving on to our third point in the outline.

That is, pay attention to:

* Your running
* Your endurance

First, let’s look at your running.

Were you aware that the word for run is from the Greek word *agony.*

In other word, learning to run takes hard work, and at times it’s agonizing!

Learning how to run has a cost and it takes much time.

But along with running comes *endurance.*

And the idea here has to do with running with a determination to keep going and not stopping.

* There’s fortitude in your steps with Christ
* There’s steadfastness in your race with Christ
* There’s constancy in your life with Christ

*Endurance* is not passive by any means, but active. In other words,

Running with Endurance doesn’t sit back and puts up with the trials of life, taking whatever may come.

Endurance stands up and faces the trials of life and actively goes about conquering and overcoming trials.

When trials come upon the shore of a believer’s life,

his trust is in the Lord and is stirred to arise and face the trials head on.

He immediately sets out to conquer and overcome them because he understand that God is allowing the trials in order to teach him more and more…endurance.

Patience is another word for endurance.

So then, the Christian life is a life of steady persistence.

It requires and endurance/patience

So pace yourself with endurance. One writer said –

*“Let us run with perseverance,
Pressing forward by God’s grace,
Looking always unto Jesus,
‘Til we see Him face to face.”*

We are not to be a people who wander about aimlessly during our trek.

We are to follow our Christ who is our spiritual compass…

**III. Fixing our eyes on Jesus to finish the race.**

**Verse 2** “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith”

To put it simply – Christ is…

**1. The “Champion” of faith**

**Hebrews 2:10** “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the *author* of their salvation through sufferings.”

That is to say, it was fitting for God the Father “perfect the author of our salvation.”

In other words, it was necessary for God the Father to use suffering in Jesus’ life in order for him to be

the pioneer/leader of our faith who understands our weaknesses as human beings.

And when Christ did that, he accomplished would none of us could!

* Christ lived a life we could not live
* Christ died a death we should have died

Christ is the author of our salvation because he is faith’s Pioneer.

He is faith’s Creator.

The reason why you and I have faith is because Christ created faith for you and for me.

When Jesus says to his people – “because I live, you will live also” (John 14:9) it’s because he is faith’s inventor.

Christ blazed a trail to the Cross and opened heaven for us by his blood.

Why else would we sing..

*“O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to ev'ry believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.*”

We sing that because he’s our champion of salvation/redemption.

Not only is Christ our champion of faith,

He is…

**2. The Perfector of faith.**

**Hebrews 6:19-20** “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us”

Christ is the "perfecter of our faith” not only in being the originator of our faith – that is true.

But Christ is perfector of our faith because he will be the One to bring our faith to completion.

These verses remind me of a hymn we just sang last week…

* Christian, the day you close your eyes, you will wake up on the golden shores of eternity.

Christian, when you enter into eternity, it is only because Christ pulled you through death and into the heavenly city,

where Jesus entered before us, in preparation for your home coming (John 14)

Verses 19-20 remind me of a hymn we all sang last week

*“That promised land is calling, we're almost home
And not a tear shall fall then, we're almost home
Make ready now your souls for that kingdom come
No turning back we're almost home*

*Almost home, we're almost home
So press on toward that blessed shore
Oh, praise the Lord, we're almost home*

That is why we run with endurance, Christian –

**Hebrews 10:14** “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

In other words, Christ has made you complete and perfect

*“Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me”*

So run your race.

And again, if you are not a believer in Christ, answer his call upon your life, and get in the race and remember

**3. Jesus endured the cross for the sake of the joy set before him.**

**Verse 2** “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Christ saw the end and he knew where it led, and it gave him joy. Christian, the end of your journey is ahead of you. Some of you may see your eternal joy today.

Allow me to close with the last verses of last week’s hymn.

*“This journey ours together, we're almost home
Unto that great forever we're almost home
What song anew we'll sing around that happy throne?
Come faint of heart we're almost home*

*Almost home, we're almost home
So press on toward that blessed shore
Oh, praise the Lord, we're almost home”*