

31—Hebrews 12:1-2—Let Us Run With Endurance

I. Introduction

A. Life is sometimes described as a rat race.

1. I used to run the race of life without asking the important questions.
 - a) Like why are we running a race and where are we going?
 - b) What is the finish line? What are the rules of the race?

B. Do you feel like life is a race?

1. It seems competitive. Is it a sprint or a marathon? The clock is ticking. If you run faster and longer than anyone else you win, right?
2. Win what? The book of Ecclesiastes unpacks a race.
3. Solomon concludes there in chapter 2 with this—So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

C. Life is a race to be sure but the question is, what race are you in and what is the finish line? In our text this morning, we are commanded to run with endurance the race that is set before us. Let's see what that is.

II. Main Point

A. The main point is simply—let us run with endurance to Jesus. He is our prize!

III. Outline

- A. Two Ways to Run with Endurance
- B. Let Us Run the Race Before Us
- C. The Finish Line is Jesus—Running for Joy

IV. Exposition

A. In our text this morning, we have some practical things that we must give our attention to in order to run the race with endurance. The first encouragement is knowing that we have in our possession this great cloud of witnesses.

1. Chapter 12 begins with therefore which points us back to chapter 11 but now applies what we've seen from those who endured in faith to the end.
2. We have this collection of people like us who had all the same weaknesses we have but by God's grace endured to the end.
 - a) Their lives are a witness.
 - b) Their testimony roots us on.
 - (1) There's this great scene in the movie *Facing the Giants* where the coach requires one of the linemen to carry one of his teammates on his back the full length of the field.
 - (2) So the lineman is crab crawling while his teammates rides on his back down the field.
 - (3) However, he begins to run out of steam but the coach gets down on the ground beside him telling him not to give up. Keep pushing. Finally the kid collapsed saying I can't go any further but the coach had him look where he was at—he had crossed the goal line.
 - c) When you are struggling to press on, we have many people from not only chapter 11 to look at but many others even in our lives that have fought the good fight of faith to the end.
 - d) Their lives are meant to root us on to the finish line.
3. As I look around the room, I am reminded of ways I've seen you persevere in faith through hard things.
 - a) You should realize that people see your faith and are encouraged to press on too.
 - b) I've listened to you talk about past medical events that were difficult but the Lord saw you through them.
 - c) I've heard the difficult family problems that you have stood firm in the truth and God carried you through it.

- d) That cloud of witnesses is ever growing. We too can be an encouragement to others as we endure this race to Jesus.
- 4. The second way we are instructed to run the race with endurance is by putting off weight and sin.
 - a) Running a race takes discipline. That first way we just talked about is discipline too.
 - (1) You have to discipline your mind to think about those examples of faith.
 - (a) In the midst of struggle, we are often thinking of everything but what we ought to be thinking about.
 - (b) We can learn to discipline our mind to put on those thoughts of others who have finished the race already and take captive those thoughts that we need to stop.
 - b) However, we are often hindered in the race. That means there's a negative type of discipline we need too.
 - (1) We need to fight to put off every weight and sin so that we can endure the race.
 - (2) I remember using weighted donuts on our bats when warming up in the on-deck circle.
 - (a) But using these weights actually negatively trains your body to swing differently as the weight pushes the bat down and out as you swing.
 - (b) When you take the donut off, your muscles have to readjust to swing level without it. And they say you actually swing slower after using the weights.
 - c) So, what does that mean for us spiritually because I believe these weights are not the same as sin. In fact, they could be seemingly good things.
 - (1) If this life of faith is a marathon, we certainly do not want to be wearing a lead jacket during the race. It's not a sin to wear the lead jacket but the finish line is worth putting off the weight.
 - (2) I think some people simply do too much. They never say no to anything. They run themselves ragged and are really not very helpful to those they are helping.
 - (a) And then your family or church get your leftovers...if you have any.
 - (b) "We are not just aiming to be faithful for a few miles, but for a lifetime." (Tim Challies)
 - (3) In that same vein, some are perfectionists about things that do not need that much attention.
 - (a) Too much time is spent to make things perfect when you need to settle for less than perfect on things that simply do not matter.
 - (b) The other side of that is that nothing means anything and people try to do the very minimum.
 - (4) One more example of weights—I think we often do things alone when we should bring other people into our lives.
 - (a) Trust me, I know...no one can do it the way you do. If you want something done right then do it yourself.
 - (b) Have you ever considered that you might benefit others in some really significant ways by bringing them into your life?
 - (c) Do not run this race of faith as though you are alone. Christ is with you and we are together in this race.
 - (5) These three things are not necessarily sinful but they are weights that hinder us in the race to Jesus. There are more things that you likely struggle with but I hope these will help you consider the weights that you need to put off.
 - d) Next, we are to put off sin that easily ensnares us.
 - (1) It would be hard to run with a rope twisted around our legs. So too, it is very difficult to run the race entangled in sin.
 - (2) Running a race takes discipline and training. A lazy runner will lose the race. An undisciplined runner will lose too.
 - (3) But what kind of sin easily entangles us?
 - (a) If you notice, the text doesn't say "sins" as you might expect. It simply says sin.
 - (b) This idea is common in the scriptures.
 - i) The Law is often spoken of as a whole. To break a commandment like not loving your neighbor means you have broken the Law of God.

- ii) You can't simply say that you failed at loving your neighbor but affirm that you were too busy loving God.
- (c) The same is true here. The root sin we all struggle with is unbelief.
 - i) Unbelief reveals itself in other sins like pride, fear, and doubt.
 - ii) While those are sins too, they actually point to something deeper—unbelief.
 - iii) Unbelief, as the song says, is sure to err. It is the thing for which separates us from God.
 - iv) Only faith pleases God. We must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
- (d) So, if we fight unbelief, we will destroy those sins of pride, fear and doubt.
- (4) Pride can respond in several different ways to the race set before you.
 - (a) I'm going to run my own race however and whenever I want.
 - (b) Or pride plays the victim card and just sits around recounting their sad story like my shoes are wore out.
- (5) Fear is concerned about what others think.
 - (a) The onlooking crowd of the world jeers at you for believing in such crazy things.
 - (b) They mock like they did Jesus—Matthew 27:41-43 the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him."
- (6) Doubt manifests itself in thinking that God will measure you on how good you are instead of how good Jesus is.
 - (a) Doubters think that God could never forgive someone like me.
 - (b) Or they think God has forgotten about them and he has left them to themselves.
- e) It's hard to run the race when you do think you are entitled to have the trophy while sitting on the sidelines.
- f) It's hard to run the race with endurance when you fear what the spectators think more than what God thinks of you.
- g) It's hard to run the race with endurance when you think that race is over before you even get started. You say, I can't do this, even though we've just looked at men and women just like ourselves that trusted the Lord to the end by his grace.
- B. Well we've talked about how to run the race by knowing that we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us and by putting off unnecessary weight and sin that easily entangles us. Now we hear the command to run the race with endurance. It sits at the center of this passage with examples of how to run the race on either side.
 - 1. Verse 1 ends by saying—let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.
 - a) One writer said this—"The New Testament frequently uses the imagery of the footrace to portray the Christian life. This imagery appropriately represents various aspects of our salvation. God calls us to this race (Phil 3:14). We train for this race (1 Tim 4:7-8). Our training entails strict self-control (1 Cor 9:25). Anyone who runs this race must compete according to the rules (2 Tim 2:5). There is a prize to be won (1 Cor 9:24), and anyone who seeks to win the prize must run with singular devotion, with one's eye on the prize who is Jesus (Heb 12:1-2)."
 - b) I've observed in my life a troubling problem where people who made a profession of faith and then acted like they had crossed the finish line and go on living their life as if nothing has changed.
 - (1) It seems clear to me that when the dead are raised like Lazarus, he did not crawl back into the tomb. When blind Bartimaeus received his sight he didn't wear a blindfold.
 - (a) If you get married and think the wedding ceremony was all you needed to do to have a marriage you will be miserably mistaken.
 - (2) How do we know that we have come to believe in Christ for salvation?
 - (a) 1 John 2:3-6 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a

liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

i) Walk or run the race...this is the result of salvation.

c) We are called to run the race of faith to the finish line and we do that purely by God's abundant grace through faith.

(1) If you are not in the race then you are not in the faith.

(2) We are called to run with endurance.

(3) Endurance means the capacity to hold out in the face of difficulty.

(a) It is to be patient. To have fortitude, steadfastness and perseverance.

(b) We do this with lots of things in our lives. Some of us endure great difficulties for our kids, our jobs, our friends, our finances and for our hope of vacations and retirement.

(c) I could unpack what we are willing to do for these things which would almost be embarrassing.

2. Secondly, we are called to run with endurance the race that is set before us.

a) Like the verse referenced earlier, we must run the race according to the rules.

(1) A race has a defined route. It has a beginning and a finish line. If it is a foot race then you cannot jump into a car during the race. You cannot take shortcuts.

(2) Spiritually speaking, Jesus is our beginning and end as we are about to discuss. He also laid out the route.

(a) He demands that we be born again, repent, come to him, believe in him, love him, listen to him, abide in him, take up our cross and follow him, love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, rejoice and leap for joy, fear him, and though there's many more he ends with make disciples of all nations teaching them to observe all that he has commanded.

(b) The simple fact is, God created the world. And we are his creation. Therefore we are accountable to him. He demands that we live a certain way that is very good for us.

i) And because we disobeyed him, we need forgiveness to restore that broken relationship with the Lord.

ii) He has provided that salvation through his Son, Jesus.

iii) If we will repent and place our faith in him we will be forgiven and counted righteous.

C. That gets us to the final point this morning. Looking to Jesus, the finish line and prize!

1. This is another way to describe how we are to run with endurance the race set before us.

a) The first in verse 1 had us looking at the great cloud of witnesses but this one has us looking at Jesus.

b) We've also looked into our hearts and lives to put off every weight and sin that so easily ensnares us.

c) Now let's consider what Jesus has done for us so that we now can run the race with endurance.

2. With the time remaining, let's think about just how amazing Jesus is so that we want to look to him as we run the race set before us.

a) To the founder and finisher of the faith.

(1) We could say it like this—he is the source and perfecter of our faith.

(2) Indeed he is the ultimate example of faith. He trusted the Father perfectly all the way to the cross.

(a) In other words, he ran the race set before him all the way to the end, trusting his heavenly Father.

(b) We are to see in Jesus how to run the race with endurance.

i) I often think it's not possible for me to respond the way he did.

ii) But then I think of Stephen responding the same way Jesus did at his death.

iii) Listen, it's not in our own strength that we endure under trial.

iv) All of those in chapter 11 endured by faith as our great God worked in them to accomplish anything that happened.

- b) How do we look to Jesus the author and end of our faith? What does it look like?
 - (1) I personally feel like Peter—he was very bold to ask Jesus that he would walk on water. And as long as he was looking at Jesus, he did. But he took his eyes off of Jesus and looked at the waves and he started sinking.
 - (a) Within the span of a few minutes, we can go from trusting the Lord and to looking at the waves.
 - (b) The beautiful thing is that when Peter cried out for help, Jesus put him back in the boat.
 - (c) That's who Jesus is!
 - (d) If you have faith in him, he continually shows you steadfast love.
 - i) The way he showed Peter steadfast love was by allowing him to sink into the sea.
 - ii) Peter, this is all me...you must simply trust me...look at me.
 - iii) When he sinks he pleads for help and Jesus delivers.
 - iv) That is how looking to Jesus, the beginning and end of our faith, works.
 - v) He who began a good work in you will complete.
 - (2) But practically speaking how do we do that? I mean Jesus isn't visible to us.
 - (a) We do that by the ordinary means of grace.
 - i) We read God's word.
 - ii) We pray.
 - iii) We gather with the body of Christ.
 - iv) We come to the Lord's Table and feast on his grace in the Supper.
 - v) And many more things God uses to fellowship with him.
- 3. But seriously, how can we be joyful when this world is so evil and broken?
 - a) We are commanded to run with endurance the race set before us...a race with many obstacles to be sure.
 - b) Jesus ran the race set before him with joy through many obstacles.
 - c) He didn't look at the cross but rather he looked past it. The cross wasn't the end. Resurrection was.
 - (1) But the cross could not be bypassed. The path to resurrection was crucifixion.
 - (2) He was innocent. Perfectly righteous. Yet God's will for him was death on the cross.
 - (3) So, he was dying a death he did not deserve and took the sins of humanity on himself.
 - (4) The cross communicated to a watching world that this man was guilty even though he wasn't.
 - (5) They nail him to this tree before everyone naked and exposed.
 - (6) And yet, he was not ashamed of it. In other words, being unafraid of the shame he endured the cross.
 - (7) It's really hard to look to Jesus when you are ashamed of him and the truth he demands.
 - (8) But if you are not ashamed of the gospel it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.
 - (9) And if you look to Jesus, your finish line and prize, you will be where he is—as the presence of God, forever!
 - (10) One way that would greatly glorify the Lord is to believe that Christ took your sins upon himself on the cross and for you to run in that forgiveness.
 - (a) He took your baggage that you might run freely in his righteousness.
 - (b) Do you see Jesus as a worthy prize to give your all and run the race with endurance to the end?