



ENCOURAGED IN THREE WAYS

Hebrews 11:39 – 12:2 *And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The situation before us seems to be that these Christians had grown weary in well doing. A lot of time had passed since they were fired up for Jesus like they used to be. Hebrews 10:32-33 says "Recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle...and you had compassion on the prisoners..." In 5:12 it says, "Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again." They have begun to coast and, as 2:3 says, "Neglect so great a salvation."

It is easy to get passionless, dead, dutiful, and in a rut as far as the things of God is concerned. The writer says in 3:12, "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief leading you to fall away from the living God." And in 12:12-14 he says, "Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that which is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Hebrews 12:1 is a trumpet call to see our life as a race that is to be run with passion and zeal and energy and discipline. When he says "lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely" he means get serious about the race.

TEST YOURSELF

Are you running or are you coasting? Verse 1 tells us to "throw off the weights and sins." That means getting things out of your life that lead you toward worldly-mindedness and putting things in your life that make you more heavenly-minded. It means hiding God's Word in your heart and meditating on it day and night, exhorting one another every day. Remember, the great danger is that we might begin to coast instead of run and play around instead of fight.

THREE MOTIVATIONS FOR THE RACE

1. LOOKING BACK TO WITNESSES

The first motivation to run the race of faith is found in verse 1: “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...” As we run, there is a big, dense crowd of saints pressing in on the track. These saints are the people described in Chapter 11 and all the others that have finished the race. How is this supposed to motivate us?

FIRST, the point of calling these people witnesses is not so much to say that they are watching us, but to say that they are near enough for us to watch them while we run. The same power that helped David the adulterer, Peter the impetuous, and Thomas the doubter is there for me.

The second way is found in 11:39-40. The “Therefore” at the beginning of 12:1 points us back to 11:39-40. These people did not receive what was promised, since God has foreseen something better for us. The something better is the last phrase of verse 40: *That apart from us they should not be made perfect.* In other words, God says no one gets the glory of final perfection until all the runners have finished the race. So run the race, knowing that every believer of every time is in it together. They finished the course, and you can too! They are pulling for you –COME ON!

2. LOOKING UP TO JESUS

It might be very easy to hear the command, “Run the race! Fight the fight!” and conclude that obeying that command and finishing the race and making it to glory depends decisively on us. But that would be a mistake. JESUS is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He does this in three ways:

(1) He has given a foundation of our faith from start to finish. He pioneered by enduring the cross and despising the shame, and He perfected by sitting down triumphal at the right hand of the throne of God. Our redemption, the foundation of our faith is complete.

(2) He has given a perfect model for faith from start to finish. He trusted His Father from beginning to end in his earthly race

(3) He is the giver and sustainer of our faith from start to finish. God who began a good work in us is going to complete it-through Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

3. LOOKING FORWARD TO JOY

When we look to Jesus, one of the things we see (according to verse 2) is that his pioneering and perfecting work of redemption was sustained by the joy that was set before Him. Verse 2: “Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.”

What joys do you look forward to in life? If you are a college student, perhaps you look forward to the joy of finishing your degree.

If you are a young person newly engaged, perhaps you look forward to the joy of marital bliss.

If you are an apartment dweller, maybe you look forward one day to the joy of owning your own home.

What would bring joy to the heart of Christ? The verse says: "FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM." What was that joy?

- It was the joy of doing God's will
- it was the joy of fulfilling His mission
- THAT JOY WAS YOU
- THAT JOY WAS ME

I don't know of any greater way to encourage your heart today than to tell you that in the eyes of Christ, He endured the cross, despising the shame, for the **JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM. THAT JOY WAS YOU. THAT JOY WAS ME.**