

XXXI. Run with Endurance

March 26/27/28, 2019

Hebrews 12:1-3

Aim: To emulate the examples of faith, by running our race of faith with endurance, looking to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith.

A. Run the Race (Hebrews 12:1)

1. Encouragement (12:1a)

¹*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...*

Schreiner: The first word, ‘therefore’ (*Τοιγαρουν, Toigaroun*), indicates, along with the context, that the author now draws an application from the ancestors of faith in chapter 11. He did not compose the chapter for historical purposes but to motivate the readers of the letter. He encourages the readers to consider the cloud of witnesses who preceded them and to run the race with endurance until the end, shedding any obstacle and sin that hinders them in the race.

Phillips: The goal of chapter 11 was not mere history but exhortation. This is why chapter 12 begins with the key word ‘therefore,’ demanding that we deal with the implications of what we have learned, applying the lessons of faith to our own lives.

Phillips: There are four things we should notice from this passage, beginning with the context of the Christian life. It is often said that context is the key to interpretation, so the question is this: what is the context, what is the arena, in which you as a Christian should interpret our life? Do you think of yourself living in the midst of a secular society? Or do you think of yourself as part of a particular corporation or organization? Do you think of yourself as part of the family in which you grew up? However you answer, how you conceive of the context or arena of your life will dramatically shape your manner of living.

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews suggests a far different context, namely that Christians should think of themselves as ‘surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses’ who bear testimony to faith in the Lord. This cloud of witnesses refers, of course, to the heroes of the faith presented in chapter 11: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the others. If you are a believer, he says, this is the context in which you should see yourself. This is the body to which you belong, and whose approval you should court. This is the audience, as it were, before whom you live, a great arena filled with the beloved of God, the faithful of all ages, and now is the day when you are running your race to the sounds of their approval and encouragement.

MacArthur: We are all creatures of motivation. We need a reason for doing things and we need encouragement while we are doing them. One of the greatest motivations and encouragements would be all these great believers from the past, their heroes, who lived the life of faith. The ‘cloud of witnesses’ are all those faithful saints just mentioned in chapter 11. We are to run the race of faith like they did, always trusting, never giving up, no matter what the obstacles or hardships or cost. They knew how to run the race of faith. They opposed Pharaoh, they forsook the pleasures and prerogatives of his court, they passed through the Red Sea, shouted down the walls of Jericho, conquered kingdoms, shut the mouth of lions, quenched the power of fire, received back their dead by resurrection, were tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, had to dress in animal skins, were made destitute—all for the sake of their faith.

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a) *Witnesses As Spectators*

Schreiner: The OT ancestors are described as ‘a large cloud of witnesses.’ They are witnesses in the sense that they function as examples for the readers. But it is probably also the case that they are conceived of as spectators as well. They witness by their lives, and they ‘cheer on’ those who are in the race. Indeed the word ‘witnesses’ (*μαρτυρων, martyrōn*) is related to the words ‘gained approval’ (from *μαρτυρεω, martyreō*), which are used in 11:2, 39 as a framework for the chapter. They witness to the readers by their faith and perseverance, and the readers should follow the train of their example. The author emphasizes the large number of witnesses. Perhaps he does so to impress on the readers that many have run the race before them. They are not alone or the only ones to suffer and endure.

Hughes: The scene is a great coliseum. The occasion is a footrace, a distance event. The contestants include the author and the members of His flock and, by mutual faith, *us*. The cloud of witnesses that fills the stadium are the great spiritual athletes of the past, Hall of Faith members—every one a gold medal winner. They are *not* live witnesses of the event, but witnesses by the fact that their past lives bear witness to the monumental, persevering faith that is like Abel’s faith: ‘though he died, he still speaks’ (11:4). Everywhere one looks in the vast arena, there is a kind face nodding encouragement, saying, ‘I did it, and so can you. You can do it. You have my life for it!’

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews does not see these as dead men to be remembered, but living witnesses to be heard. Though dead, they still live, and what was said of Abel can be said of them all: ‘Through his faith, though he died, he still speaks’ (11:4). John Owen writes, ‘All the saints of the Old Testament, as it were, stand looking on us in our striving, encouraging us unto our duty, and ready to testify unto our success with their applauses. They are placed about us unto this end; we are “compassed” with them.’ The writer of Hebrews tells us that the stands are packed with the saints of old. He places them there not merely as spectators, but also as a cheering section. He tells us to pay attention to their testimony, to heed the encouragement they give us.

Phillips: This then, is how you should conceive of your life. You belong to this noble company of God’s people, living in this world but glorifying God through faith. This is the context of your life. You are surrounded by those with whom you will spend eternity, those who will be your brothers and sisters long after everyone else is consigned to judgment. You should hear their voices and conform to the pattern of their faith, not to the pattern of this world.

b) *Witnesses As Examples*

Bruce: In surveying the men and women whose faith was exhibited so signally in pre-Christian ages, our author has said repeatedly that they were well attested by virtue of their faith; to them all, as to Abel, God Himself bore witness. But now they in turn are called witnesses. But in what sense are they ‘witnesses’? Not, probably, in the sense of spectators, watching their successors as they in their turn run the race for which they have entered; but rather in the sense that by their loyalty and endurance they have borne witness to the possibilities of the life of faith. It is not so much they who look at us as we who look to them—for encouragement. They have borne witness to the faithfulness of God. This is one of the early examples of the beginning of the semantic change by which the ordinary Greek word for ‘witness’ acquired its distinctive Christian sense of ‘martyr’ (cp. also Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13).

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MacArthur: I do not believe that the ‘cloud of witnesses surrounding us’ is standing in the galleries of heaven watching as we perform. The idea here is not that we should be faithful lest they be disappointed, or that we should try to impress them like a sports team trying to impress the fans in the bleachers. These are witnesses *to God*, not *of us*. They are examples, not onlookers. They have proved by their testimony, their witness, that the life of faith is the only life to live. They are not looking at us; we are to look at them. Nothing is more encouraging than the successful example of someone who has ‘done it before.’ Seeing how God was with them encourages us to trust that He will also be with us.

2. Encumbrances (12:1b)

Hughes: The call to divestment here, the throwing off of everything, has reference to the radical stripping off of one’s clothing before a race, as in the Greek custom of the day. And the writer orders a double divestment—first, of all hindrances, and second, of sin.

Phillips: The Christian does not have an easy calling, and just as if we were athletes training hard, the writer of Hebrews gives us training instruction: ‘Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely.’ He speaks here of two things.

a) *Weight*

...*let us also lay aside every weight...*

Schreiner: The middle clause of the verse explains *how* the race is to be run. The readers must ‘throw off everything that hinders’ them. Possibly the author refers here to in that impedes believers as they run the race. Or alternatively the author does not refer to sin but to things that may be good in and of themselves, and yet they prevent one from running the race. Probably the author refers generally to anything that can hinder us in a race, whether it is sin or other things in our lives which, though not evil in themselves, can hinder us as we run with perseverance.

Bruce: The athlete must discipline himself; he must divest himself of all superfluous weight, not only of heavy objects carried about the body but of excess bodily weight. There are many things which may be perfectly all right in their own way, but which hinder a competitor in the race of faith; they are ‘weights’ which must be laid aside. It may well be that what is a hindrance to one entrant in this spiritual contest is not a hindrance to another; each must learn for himself what in his case is a weight or impediment.

MacArthur: An ‘encumbrance’ (*onkos*) is simply a bulk or mass of something. It is not necessarily bad in itself. Often it is something perfectly innocent and harmless. But it weighs us down, diverts our attention, saps our energy, dampens our enthusiasm for the things of God. We cannot win when we are carrying excess weight.

Phillips: The writer starts with weights or, as some versions put it, hindrances. In the ancient Greek games, a runner trained to make his body lean. Then, before the race began, he stripped off his long garments to run completely naked. The Greek word for hindrances may be used in both of these ways: of excess body weight and of weighty garments. The writer of Hebrews tells us that anything that slows us down must be discarded if we are to run well. Perhaps it involves your lifestyle. For instance, many Christians today have bought into the entertainment culture, giving vast hours to mindless television, unwholesome literature, and objectionable movies. We should ask ourselves, ‘Is this a help or a hindrance to me spiritually?’ Hindrances can be career ambitions, hobbies, associations and friendships, habits and preoccupations. Any of these may or may not be a problem, and it will vary from person to person. But each of us should look at

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the things in our lives and ask, ‘Is it a help? Is it a hindrance?’ If it is the latter, then the wise believer will let the hindrance go, not wanting to be weighed down in the race.

Hughes: Our divestment means we must ‘lay aside every weight’—literally, ‘the weight that hinders.’ Not all hindrances or weights are sin, however. In fact, what is a hindrance to you may not be a hindrance in any way to someone else. A hindrance is something, otherwise good, that weighs you down spiritually. It could be a friendship, an association, an event, a place, a habit, a pleasure, an entertainment, an honor. But if this otherwise good thing drags you down, you must strip it away.

MacArthur: We do not know exactly what sort of things the writer had in mind regarding spiritual encumbrances, and commentators venture a host of ideas. From the context of the letter as a whole, I believe the main encumbrance was Judaistic legalism, hanging on to the old religious ways. Most of those ways were not wrong in themselves. Some had been prescribed by God for the time of the Old Covenant. But none of them was of any value now, and in fact had become hindrances. They were sapping energy and attention from Christian living. The Temple and its ceremonies and pageantry were beautiful and appealing. And all the regulations, the dos and don’ts of Judaism, were pleasing to the flesh. They made it easy to keep score on your religious life. But these were all weights, some of them very heavy weights. They were like a ball and chain to spiritual living by faith. These Jewish believers, or would-be believers, could not possibly run the Christian race with all their excess baggage.

b) *Sin*

...and sin which clings so closely...

Schreiner: Believers should also put off ‘sin that so easily entangles.’ The word for ‘entangles’ (*εὐπεριστάτων*, *euperistaton*) has the idea that sin easily ensnares and trips believers up as they run the race. The author recognizes the power and attractiveness of sin. The Christian life is not easy; it takes strength and discipline, just as ardor and determination are needed to run a race.

Bruce: But there are other things which are not perfectly all right in their own way but are essentially wrong; there is ‘sin which so readily ensnares us.’ Our author is not referring so much to some specific sin, but to sin itself, as something which will inevitably encumber the runner’s feet and trip him up before he has taken more than a step or two. This appears to be the sense of the common reading here, the adjective *euperistatos*.

Phillips: When we turn to the matter of sin, the situation is far more serious. Hindrances weigh us down, but sin entangles our feet, possibly bringing us up to the ground. The point is that sin entangles us. We take sin lightly at our great peril. Therefore, we must be wise regarding sin, seeking grace from God to be free from actual sin that we know about, while shunning the temptations to sin that abound. Think, for instance, how quickly and thoroughly a great man like King David fell into sin when he allowed his heart to lust after Bathsheba. How entangled he became, and what a horrible impact that sin had on his life and on his whole family, even the entire kingdom!

Hughes: The sin that we are especially commanded to cast off is described as ‘sin which clings so closely,’ which is an apt description of what sin repeatedly does. But the most sobering thing we see here is that the ‘sin which clings so closely’ to us refers to the specific sin(s) each of us, individually, is most likely to commit—a ‘besetting sin’ as it is termed in older translations. We each have characteristic sins that more easily entangles us than others. Some sins that tempt and

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degrade others hold little appeal for us—and vice versa. What sin is it that so ‘easily’ entangles you or me? Covetousness? Envy? Criticism? Laziness? Hatred? Lust? Unthankfulness? Pride? Whatever sin it is, it must be stripped off and left behind.

MacArthur: An even more significant hindrance to Christian living is sin. Obviously all sin is a hindrance to Christian living, and the reference here may be to sin in general. But the use of the definite article (‘the sin’) seems to indicate a particular sin. And if there is one particular sin that hinders the race of faith it is unbelief, doubting God. Doubting and living in faith contradict each other. Unbelief ‘entangles’ the Christian’s feet so that he cannot run. It wraps itself around us so that we trip and stumble every time we try to move for the Lord, if we try at all. It ‘easily entangle us.’ When we allow sin in our lives, especially unbelief, it is quite easy for Satan to keep us from running.

Hughes: If we are to finish well in faith, we must strip our souls naked of ‘every weight, and sin which clings so closely’ to us. What is called for here, I believe, is a conscious, systematic divestment of all sins and hindrances—a divestment that is regularly performed. Remember, all it takes is *one* sin or *one* hindrance to sabotage the runner’s soul!

1. Endurance (12:1c)

...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... ^

Schreiner: The main command, found at the end of the verse, fits with the purpose of the letter as a whole. The readers must ‘run the race’ set before them with perseverance until the end. The ancestors of faith listed in chapter 11 kept running the race when it looked as if they wouldn’t triumph and despite suffering and opposition.

Hughes: Properly divested, there remains one great thing to do—and that is run. We each have a specific course mapped out for us, and the course for each runner is unique. Some are relatively straight, some are all turns, some seem all uphill, some are a flat hiking path. All are long, but some are longer. But the glory is, each of us (no exceptions!) can finish the race ‘that is set before us.’ I may not be able to run your course, and you may find mine impossible, but I can finish my race and you yours. Both of us can finish well if we choose and if we rely on Him who is strength and our guide!

Phillips: Verse 1 concludes by telling us that God has marked out a race for us. He has laid out a course for our lives. There are places we are to go, things we are to do, challenges we are to confront. We do not know where this course winds on its way to heaven, nor, frankly, is it important for us to know. Our calling is to ‘run with endurance the race that is set before us.’ Many Christians spend far too much effort trying to figure out what lies ahead, when our calling is to persevere in faith wherever God should lead us. This metaphor of life as a race was common in ancient literature as well as in the Bible (cp. 1 Cor. 9:24-25; 2 Tim. 4:7-8). The writer of Hebrews applies the same terminology to us.

Bruce: There they are, then, and with their record to encourage us let us in our turn cultivate endurance like theirs as we run ‘the race for which we are entered.’ Even those who have greeted the promise to which Old Testament saints looked forward, who live in the aged of fulfillment, continue to need patience (10:36). Christ’s people, while they wait for His second appearing to bring them final salvation (9:28), must still endure, like Moses, as seeing ‘the Invisible One’ (11:27). True, they have greater incentive and fuller encouragement than any of their predecessors who lived before Christ came, but they too have their contest to engage in,

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their race to run. In the Christian contest the prize is assured to all who compete lawfully and run with patience endurance. ‘So run,’ said Paul to the Corinthians ‘that you may obtain’ the prize (1 Cor. 9:24); and our author’s advice to his readers is to the same effect.

MacArthur: The key phrase of this passage is ‘let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.’ The Christian race starts with salvation. Unfortunately, many people are not even in the race, and many Christians could hardly be described as running the race at all. Some are merely jogging, some are walking slowly, and some are sitting or even lying down. Yet the biblical standard for holy living is a race, not a morning constitutional. ‘Race’ is the Greek *agon*, from which we get agony. A race is not a thing of passive luxury, but is demanding, sometimes grueling and agonizing, and requires our utmost in self-discipline, determination, and perseverance. ‘Endurance’ (*hupomonē*) is steady determination to keep going. It means continuing even when everything in you wants to slow down or give up.

Hughes: The secret is to ‘run with endurance.’ Endurance is that determination, unhasting and unrelenting, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on, and which refuses to be deflected. Obstacles will not daunt it; delays will not depress it; discouragements will not take its hope away. It will halt neither for discouragement from within nor for opposition from without. It is quite within the reach of every one of us to manifest positive, conquering patience—putting one heavy foot in front of the other until we reach the glorious end. The race is not for sprinters who flame out after 100 or 200 or 400 meters. It is for faithful plodders like you and me. Fast or slow, strong or weak—all must persevere.

Phillips: How liberating it is for the Christian to realize that his or her true calling is the race of faith in the living God: to persevere in the various settings where God will place you, to hold fast your convictions and your obedience to God in different settings and seasons of life, to grow in grace and to glorify God through faith all the way to the end of your life. This is our victory: not worldly standards of success, but enduring in faith to the end.

Phillips: This is our calling, the challenging race of a life of faith. Notice what kind of race we run. It is not a short sprint, and we will not finish it with a reckless burst of energy. It is a long-distance race, and our great virtue is not speed but perseverance. Many experience the flush of excitement at conversion, only to find that enthusiasm must be converted into endurance. What Jesus said to the church at Thyatira should be true for us as well: ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance’ (Rev. 2:19).

B. Look to Jesus (Hebrews 12:2)

1. Example (12:2a)

a) *Jesus, the Focus*

...²looking to Jesus...

Schreiner: Believers must run the race with endurance, which is just another way of saying they must persevere to the end. The author then tells them *how* to run the race. First, he says in verse 1 that they must lay aside every hindrance to running well, i.e., the sin which can trip believers up in the race. Second, they run with endurance by ‘keeping [their] eyes on Jesus.’ Jesus is the supreme exemplar of faith, and believers will be motivated to continue their journey if they look to him.

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MacArthur: We are to be *filled* with the Spirit, and when we are, our focus will be on Jesus Christ. It is not that we try hard not to look at this or that or the other things that may distract us. If our focus is truly on Jesus Christ, we will see everything else in its right perspective.

Phillips: This leads us to what I often call ‘the all-purpose Christian advice,’ from Hebrews 12:2, which gives the encouragement of the Christian life: ‘looking to Jesus.’ This is the ‘secret’ of the Christian life, the encouragement we need for our faith: to place our eyes not on the world with its enticements and threats, not even on ourselves with our petty successes and many failures, but on Him who is the source and fountain of all our spiritual vigor.

Bruce: Everything that would encumber him or divert his attention must therefore be put away, and the athlete must keep his eye fixed on the goal toward which he is pressing. Our author now exhorts his readers to keep their ‘eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom faith depends from start to finish’ (NEB). The earlier witnesses supply incentive in abundance; but in Jesus we have one who is *par excellence* ‘the faithful witness’ (Rev. 1:5).

Hughes: Now, stripped bare of any weights or sin and running with perseverance, we are given the focus that will ensure our finishing well—and that is, of course, Jesus. By insisting that we focus on Jesus, instead of the name Christ, the writer is calling us to focus on Jesus’ humanity as we saw it here on earth.

b) *Jesus the Pioneer*

...*the founder*...

Schreiner: Jesus is described as ‘the source and perfecter of our faith’ (*τον της πιστεως αρχηγον και τελειωτης, ton tēs pisteōs archēgon kai teleiōtēs*). The word rendered ‘source’ (*αρχηγον, archēgon*) by the HCSB is translated various ways: ‘founder’ (ESV); ‘pioneer’ (NIV); and ‘champion’ (NLT). Jesus is the pathfinder for faith, functioning as an example, which also accords with 2:10.

MacArthur: In 2:10 Jesus is called the author of salvation. Here, He is the ‘author’ (*archēgos*) of faith. He is the pioneer or originator, the one who begins and takes the lead. Jesus is the author, the originator, of all faith. He originated Abel’s faith, and Enoch’s and Noah’s, as well as Abraham’s, David’s, Paul’s, and ours. The focus of faith is also the originator of faith. But I believe the primary meaning of *archēgos* here is that of chief leader, or chief example. Jesus Christ is our preeminent example of faith. He was ‘tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin’ (4:15). Jesus lived the supreme life of faith.

Hughes: We are to focus on Him first as ‘founder’ (*archēgos*—literally, ‘pioneer’) of our faith. Jesus is the pioneer and founder of all faith in both the Old and New Testaments. He initiates all faith and bestows it (cp. Eph. 2:8-10).

Phillips: There are three ways that verse 2 encourages us. First, it shows us Christ as the premier example for our faith. The Greek word translated as ‘founder’ (*archēgos*) is better rendered ‘forerunner’ or ‘pioneer.’ It describes one who goes ahead to blaze the trail and overcome barriers.

Bruce: He is faith’s ‘pioneer and perfecter.’ Jesus, that is to say, is presented as the one who has blazed the trail of faith and as the one who Himself ran the race of faith to its triumphant finish. But in what sense is He the trailblazer or pathfinder of faith? We can understand how He is called the pioneer of salvation in 2:10; apart from Him there is no Savior. We can understand,

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too, how for His people in the Christian age He provides a better example and incentive in running the race of faith than all who went before Him. But when we consider that they did go before Him, how can He be called the *pioneer* of faith? Our author's answer might well be that they did not really go before Him; *He* went before *them* as truly as He has gone before us. 'Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt' (Jude 5), who accompanied and nourished that same people in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:3ff.), is perhaps envisaged here as having led all the people of God, from earliest times, along the path of faith, although, since His incarnation and passion, His personal example makes His leadership available to His people in a way that was impossible before.

c) *Jesus the Perfecter*

...and perfecter of our faith...

Schreiner: The pairing of the word 'pioneer' with 'perfecter' suggests that both words should be read together so the verse teaches both that Jesus is the exemplar of faith and that He also initiates and completes the faith of believers. The author encourages believers, reminding them that the one who was the source and originator of their faith will also complete and perfect it.

Bruce: Not only is Jesus the pioneer of faith; in Him faith has reached its perfection. The whole life of Jesus was characterized by unbroken and unquestioning faith in His heavenly Father (cp. Mk. 14:36). It was sheer faith in God, unsupported by any visible or tangible evidence, that carried Him through the taunting, the scourging, the crucifying, and the more bitter agony of rejection, desertion, and dereliction.

MacArthur: Jesus not only is the 'author' of faith, but also its 'perfecter' (*teleiōtēs*), the One who carries it through to completion. He continued to trust His father until He could say, 'It is finished!' (Jn. 19:30). His work was finished not only in that it was completed but in that it was perfected. On the cross, Jesus' work was both over and finished—perfected. It accomplished exactly what it was meant to accomplish.

Phillips: Similarly, the word 'perfecter' (*teleiōtēs*) connotes the idea that Jesus is the supreme and perfect example of faith, especially since the Greek text speaks of *the* faith rather than *our* faith.

Hughes: But still more, He is the 'perfecter of our faith.' His entire earthly life was the very embodiment of trust in God (2:13). He perfected living by faith. He lived in total dependence upon the Father (10:7-10). It was His absolute faith in God that enabled Him to go through the mocking, crucifixion, rejection, and desertion—and left Him perfect in faith.

Hughes: Do we sense the need of faith to run the race? Then we must 'look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.' That is, as the Greek suggests, we must deliberately lift our eyes from other distracting things and focus with utter concentration on Him—and continue doing so. This is fundamental to a life of faith and finishing the race!

2. Effort (12:2b)

...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...

Schreiner: The believers are to run the race to the end, just as Jesus completed His course. He endured the suffering and shame of the cross. The shame of the cross was proverbial in the ancient world. He was fortified to bear up under the agony of such a death on account of 'the joy

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that lay before Him.’ Hence, He could scorn and despise the temporary shame, acting bravely since He knew something far better was coming.

Bruce: No; He ‘bore the cross, despising the disgrace.’ To die by crucifixion was to plumb the lowest depths of disgrace; it was a punishment reserved for those who were deemed most unfit to live, a punishment for those who were subhuman. From so degrading a death Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute. But this disgrace Jesus disregarded, as something not worthy to be taken into account when it was a question of His obedience to the will of God. So He brought faith to perfection by His endurance of the cross—and now the place of highest exaltation is His.

MacArthur: The world has already mocked faith, just as they mocked Jesus’ faith. But in faith, Jesus ‘endured the cross, despising the shame.’ Why should we not also trust God in everything, since we have not begun to suffer what Jesus suffered? It is good to glance at the examples of the cloud of Old Testament witnesses, but it is imperative that we *fix* our eyes on Jesus (cp. 2 Cor. 3:18).

Hughes: Along with this we ought to focus on Jesus’ attitude—‘who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.’ Some people wrongly imagine that because Jesus was a divine man, the physical and spiritual sufferings of the cross were somehow less for Him. What wrong-headed thinking. The *physical* pain He endured was absolute. But the spiritual pain was even greater because His pure soul, which knew no sin, became sin for us, inducing a heretofore unknown pain. And we must also absorb the fact that He ‘endured the cross, despising the shame.’ That is, He thought nothing of its shame—He dismissed it as nothing.

Phillips: Jesus endured both suffering and shame on the cross. The Hebrew Christians were in danger of shrinking back from these very things, just as we find them so difficult to endure. It was by faith that Jesus ‘endured the cross, despising the shame,’ persevering to His appointed end and thus entering into His glory in heaven. He ‘is seated at the right hand of the throne of God,’ because He faithfully endured suffering and did not fear the world’s contempt. This provides an example for us, that we would bear the cross in our own lives.

Phillips: Jesus is not only the example for our faith, but He is also the object of our faith. He waits at the finish line for us; it is to Him and for Him that we run. We endure and persevere because we want to know Him and join Him and share the blessings of His salvation. This again explains why the cross is emphasized here, for the cross is not only the greatest example of Jesus’ faith, but also the focus of our faith in Him. We see His blood shed for our forgiveness; we see the wrath of God spent on Him, and we find our safety there—our righteousness at His cross. To be a Christian, then means to rely on His atoning blood, on His finished work for our salvation, and to hold this gospel as the great treasure of our heart.

3. Exaltation (12:2c)

...and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

a) Joy

MacArthur: Jesus did not run His race of faith for the pleasure of the race itself, though He must have experienced great satisfaction in seeing people healed, comforted, brought to faith, and started on the way to spiritual growth. But He did not leave His Father’s presence and His heavenly glory, endure temptation and fierce opposition by Satan himself, suffer ridicule, scorn, blasphemy, torture, and crucifixion by His enemies, and experience the misunderstanding and

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denial of His own disciples for the sake of whatever few pleasures and satisfactions He had while on earth. He was motivated by immeasurably more than this. He ran for the joy of exaltation (cp. Jn. 17:4-5). Jesus gained His reward by glorifying His Father while on earth, and He glorified God by totally exhibiting the Father's attributes and by fully doing the Father's will.

Hughes: How and why could He do this? Because of 'the joy that was set before Him'—which was rooted in His coming super-exaltation when He sat 'at the right hand of the throne of God.' His exaltation, with all that it means for His people's shalom and for the triumph of God's purpose in the universe, was 'the joy that was set before Him.' We can list some specific aspects of His joy. There was the joy of His reunion, as it were, with the Father. David's words suggest the idea: 'In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore' (Ps. 16:11). Then there was the joy of being crowned with honor and glory and having all things put under His feet (2:6-8; cp. Ps. 8:4-6). There was also the joy before Him of bringing many sons to glory—making us part of His joy.

Phillips: Jesus is our example in perseverance, and also in spiritual joy: 'for the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross.' That is an amazing statement and it says much about His faith. We may conceive of Jesus' joy before the cross in a number of ways. First, Jesus took joy in doing His Father's will (cp. Jn. 4:34). Jesus also looked forward to His future reunion with the Father in heaven and to receiving His delight with the greatest of joy. He rejoiced at the knowledge of what His suffering and death would accomplish, namely, the redemption of a people for Himself. In short, Jesus rejoiced because He saw the crown beyond the cross; he saw the purchase of His blood, even the church that would be His bride forever in the regenerated glory of the endless age to come.

b) *Enthronement*

Schreiner: Jesus was rewarded for His obedience with the reign at God's right hand. The author picks up again one of the central themes of the book. The prophecy of Ps. 110:1 is fulfilled in Jesus who is seated at the right hand of God, reigning over all (cp. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12). Just as Moses renounced the temporary pleasures of sin for the sake of the reward that lay before him (11:24-26), so too Jesus endured the cross for the reward. The application to the readers is clear. They too must endure to the end, being willing to endure any suffering since they know they will ultimately enjoy a great reward.

Bruce: The pioneer of salvation has been made perfect through sufferings (2:10; 5:8ff.), and has therefore taken His seat 'at the right hand of the throne of God.' His exaltation there, with all that it means for His people's well-being and for the triumph of God's purpose in the universe, is 'the joy set before Him,' for the sake of which He submitted to shame and death. The throne of God, to which He has been exalted, is the place to which He has gone as His people's forerunner (6:20). That is the goal of the pathway of faith; the Pioneer has reached it first, but others who triumph in the same contest will share it with Him.

MacArthur: The prize Christians are to run for is not heaven. If we are truly Christians, if we belong to God by faith in Jesus Christ, heaven is already ours. We run for the same prize that Jesus ran for, and we achieve it in the same way He did. We run for the joy of exaltation God promises will be ours if we glorify Him on earth as His Son did. We glorify God by allowing His attributes to shine through us and by obeying His will in everything we do.

Phillips: Third, we fix our eyes on Jesus because He is the source of our faith. It is in this sense that the translation 'founder and perfecter of our faith' has real merit. Jesus is not merely an

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example, like some long-dead hero. Nor is He the object of our faith as a mere philosophical ideal. Rather, He is an active recipient of our faith, active in inspiring and empowering faith in us because He lives now. Faith in Christ produces union with a living Lord who reigns in the heavens, who is seated at the right hand of God's throne in power. Therefore, when we fix our eyes on Him, He works in us by His power, sending God's Holy Spirit to sustain us in our trials.

Phillips: This encouragement—'looking to Jesus'—is vitally important in such a difficult race as ours. Those who fix their gaze on the world and the things of the world will be conformed to its pattern. But in a still more powerful and reliable way, those whose gaze is fixed on Jesus will find themselves changed into His pattern—not merely because of the working of our own hearts, but because of His active and transforming work through the Holy Spirit. With our eyes fixed on Him, we are, Paul says, 'being transformed into [His] image from degree of glory to another' (2 Cor. 3:18).

Hughes: On this matter of focus, understand this: even though the great gallery of past saints witnesses to us, our central focus must be Jesus—*sola Jesu!* Focus on Him as the 'founder' and originator of faith. Focus on Him as the divine human 'perfecter' of faith. Focus on the joy that enabled Him to endure the awesome agony of the cross and dismiss as nothing the shame. Focus on His joyous exaltation—and the fact that you are part of the joy.

C. Consider His Example (Hebrews 12:3)

³*Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

Schreiner: Jesus' role as an example continues to be expanded upon. The readers must run the race to the end by looking at Jesus who endured the cross. The readers are urged to consider Jesus, and again His endurance is featured, which is just what the readers need as well. Jesus faced remarkable 'hostility' (*αντιλογιαν, antilogian*) of sinners against Himself. Probably the author alludes to a similar hostility which the readers experienced, so he calls upon them to consider their brother (2:10-18; 4:14-16) and Lord who was not exempt from the same opposition by sinners. The author is concerned that the readers will 'grow weary and lose heart.' By considering what Jesus suffered, they will have a fresh resolve in a world that remains unfriendly and opposed. Giving up is another way of describing apostasy. It is the converse to enduring to the end, and Jesus endured by looking to the ultimate reward.

Bruce: Christ has thus become His people's supreme inspirer of faith. When they became weary on the way, and grow faint at heart because there seems no end to the trials they have to endure, let them consider Him. He suffered uncomplainingly the hostility and malevolence of sinful people; the recipients of this epistle had not been called upon to endure anything like their Master's sufferings.

MacArthur: When we get weary in the race, when our faith runs out and we think God has turned His back, when it seems we will never get out of the mess we are in and we are sure our faith cannot hold on any longer, we should read this verse. Part of the purpose for 'fixing our eyes on Jesus' is the same as that for considering the 'cloud of witnesses'—our encouragement. Those saints were heroes of faith; He is the epitome of faith. Nothing we will ever be called to endure will compare to that which He endured.

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Hughes: In capping his famous challenge to finish well, the writer gives the idea of focusing on Jesus a dynamic twist by concluding: ‘Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.’ The phrase ‘grow weary or fainthearted’ was sports lingo in the ancient world for a runner’s exhausted collapse. Thus, the way for the Christian runner to avoid such a spiritual collapse was to ‘consider Him’—that is, to carefully calculate (we derive our word *logarithm* from the Greek word translated ‘consider’) Jesus and His endurance of opposition from the likes of Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate. We are to remember His confidence and meekness and steel-like strength in meeting His enemies.

Phillips: Lastly, we find in this passage a cure for weary hearts. This is what verse 3 says. Here the writer of Hebrews anticipates a problem and prescribes its cure. This verse assumes something believers know all too well, namely, that from time to time Christians grow weary and become downcast. If you feel this way, you are not exceptional; this is something you should expect. Especially when faced with prolonged difficulties of trials, even the strongest Christian can experience spiritual depression. The cure for this, he says, is to consider Jesus in His own struggle with the opposition of the world.

Phillips: This may sound similar to the exhortation in verse 2 to fix our eyes on Jesus, but there is a difference in emphasis here. In verse 2 the Greek word *aphoraō* meant to look away from one thing to another; the emphasis was to keep looking away from distractions and to fix our eyes on Jesus. Here in verse 3 the writer uses a different word, *analogizomai*, which means ‘to consider intently.’ This is an accounting term related to the English word ‘logistics’; when we speak of ‘logging’ something in, we mean that a record should be kept of what transpired. The point here is we should meditate on or reflect on, take stock of Jesus’ life and death as it relates to our own struggle, and especially remember how God ordained His suffering for His and for our glory. We are to remember that beyond the cross there lies a crown; it was so for our Lord, and so it will be for us (cp. Rom. 8:18). This is the cure for our hearts when we grow weary in the long race of this life of faith.

Phillips: How do we consider Jesus? By consulting what the Bible says about Him. We read the Gospel accounts and learn what Jesus said and did and how God delivered Him. We read the Epistles, which explain the significance of His life and death and resurrection. Indeed, in the Old Testament we see Christ in His work, as He is prophesied and represented by various types and symbols (cp. Luke 24 re the disciples on the road to Emmaus).

Hughes: No one can miss the superb wisdom of this passage: we must be totally absorbed with Jesus. This requires negation—turning away from those things that distract us—and then the positive act of consciously focusing and meditating on Jesus. This is why we must read and re-read the Gospels. This is why our worship must be Christocentric. This is why *He* must be the measure of all things.

For next time: Read Hebrews 12:4-17.