

## TEXT SERMONS

### “A NEW YEAR, A NEW RACE”

#### Hebrews 12:1 & 2

***“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, 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.”***

Life is analogous to a race. The writer of Hebrews said, “*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*” The beginning of a new year is like the starting line in a race. Hebrews 12 begins by issuing a challenge to all believers to run well the race that is before us. Hebrews chapter eleven, the Hall of Faith of the Bible, is an illustration of how faith was lived out in the lives of others. Hebrews chapter 12 is an exhortation for us to demonstrate our faith. It is one thing to praise the faith of others and quite another thing to practice our own faith; it is easy to admire faith in others but another matter to aspire to live by faith ourselves.

After going through the gallery of some of the greats who lived by faith in Hebrews chapter eleven, we immediately are challenged by the words with which Hebrews chapter twelve begins. The writer depicts the Christian’s life as a race to be run. This is not a race to see who finishes first. All who finish life in faith are winners. The life of faith is called a race because it requires dedication, discipline and determination.

The Christian’s lifetime on Planet Earth is described variously in the New Testament as:

- *A walk to be maintained.* “Walk in love”/ “Walk in the light”/ “Walk in truth” etc.;
- *A battle to be fought.* “Fight the good fight of faith”;
- *A race to be run.* Hebrews 12:1-2

I want to encourage you to *walk* as a Christian ought to *walk*. I want to encourage you to *fight* the good *fight* for the faith. I encourage you to walk and battle, but what I want to emphasize is “*Run*” - *run* the race of the faith-life! There are at least three training lessons about running the race of life in Hebrews 12:1-2. They are: (1) The Individuals Who Preceded Us; (2) The Instructions That Prepare Us; (3) The Inspiration That Is The Pattern For Us. All of which are intended to spur us onward and upward to the finish line. Consider first,

#### **I. THE INDIVIDUALS WHO PRECEDED US.** Hebrews 12:1a

*“.... we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses....”*

##### ***The Faith-Runners Who Evidenced Faith.***

The first two verses of Chapter 12 apply the principles of faith presented in Chapter 11. The individuals listed in chapter 11 were not perfect people but the principle, the power and the possibilities of faith can be seen in their lives. No one of them is a perfect example of faith in all of its dimensions. However, taken collectively, in the various situations they represent, we can see how we can operate by faith in the context of our world today. Abel, worshipped by faith; Enoch walked by faith; Noah worked by faith; the patriarchs waited by faith, Moses witnessed by faith; Joshua warred by faith, etc. “*These were all commended for their faith.*” (Heb. 11:39)

##### ***The Faith-Record That Encourages Faith.***

The persons mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 are listed there to encourage us by the testimonies that the Holy Spirit caused to be written. The persons in chapter 11 are witnesses, not spectators! They are not peering down through the clouds of heaven watching us! They are not witnesses *of* us, they are witnesses *to* us! The testimony of their lives in chapter 11 is witnessing to us that we can run the race before us; that all believer's can finish the race, all believer's can live by faith and that through faith we too can accomplish great things for God. All the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews eleven, and all others who have lived by faith, witness to us of the power of faith.

These witnesses testify to us of several things:

- (1) Living by faith is not a life of ease.
- (2) Living by faith can impact the world around us.
- (3) Living by faith gives purpose to life.
- (4) Living by faith assures us of a better future than the alternative of faithless living.
- (5) Living by faith brings God's approval: *"For by it the men of old gained approval."*  
(Heb.11:2)

Chapter 12 begins with these words: *"Therefore ..... let us.... ."* That is, "They lived by faith – let us live by faith!

## II. THE INSTRUCTIONS THAT PREPARE US. Hebrews 12:1

*".... 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...."*

It must be emphasized that the Christian runner pictured here is not running to gain heaven. In fact, one must be saved in order to qualify for this holy activity. Paul is speaking of the race of sanctification in which we demonstrate, in our running, a holy life, thereby giving testimony to the watching world and the waiting Savior Who has victor's crowns to award faithful runners.

A runner must prepare for the race ahead. He must prepare physically and mentally for each race. The Christian runner in life's race must be prepared in soul, spirit, mind and body. It is not enough to want to run the race of life. We can't run as we want, when, where and how we want. After all, life's race is God's idea and to gain God's approval we must run it His way.

The words in verse one contain three areas of our lives that must be disciplined if we are to run the race of life as God desires us to run it. Therefore, our preparation must include the following:

### **A. Encumbrances Must Be Cast Aside** - *"lay aside every encumbrance"*

The figure drawn for us in this statement is that of a long distance runner who removes all unnecessary baggage that may slow him down. The runner must not allow anything to hinder his running. These "encumbrances" may be lawful but for a runner may prove to be lethal. There are things upon which we waste our time and energies which in themselves are not necessarily wrong, yet they keep us from focusing upon the more important things.

When in training the runner may carry extra weights to help build up stamina. However, when the day of the race comes, they are cast aside. There may be legitimate “weights” in the Christian’s life that are hindrances, not helps. They must be cast aside.

**B. Entanglements Must Be Confessed** - *“the sin which so easily entangles us”*

The Christian runner must not get tangled up in sin. The entangling sin or sins must be confessed. If we would run well, we must run light. We must shed the baggage of sin!

*The Message* states it this way: “Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins.”

If your Christian life is a “drag” get rid of the encumbrances and entanglements that are slowing you down!

**C. Endurance Must Be Cultivated** - *“.....and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us....”*

The secret to running life’s race triumphantly is endurance. The one who endures the various vicissitudes of life is the one who is victorious. The motto of the endurance runner is this: “If the situation cannot be cured, it must be endured.” To keep pressing onward and ever upward when the track we tread is treacherous, when detractors are cruel and attractions allure, requires an endurance born of faith.

The race of life is to be run, not in stops and starts, not in spurts and sprints but with consistent endurance. Endurance involves patience, perseverance and persistence. This race is not to the swift but to the steadfast. It is not a dash but a marathon. The aim is not to finish well ahead of others but to finish well! To be able to say when crossing the finish line, *“I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”* (II Timothy 4:7) That is to endure to the end. And, said Jesus, *“He who endures to the end shall be saved.”* (Matthew 24:13)

Do you know how long a believer has to run the race? We run until God retires us! It is not a relay race, where we hand off a baton to another runner and stand on the sidelines. It is not a series of different races. It is one race that we are continually running for our entire lifetime on earth. How do we endure such a race? We can and will endure because our Lord and Savior has showed us how!

**III. THE INSPIRATION THAT IS THE PATTERN FOR US.** Hebrews 12:2

*“.... 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.”*

***The Forerunner Who Is Our Model*** – *“the author and perfecter of faith”*

Athletes are famous for modeling themselves after someone who has previously excelled in their particular area of endeavor. Large sums of money are spent by the aspiring athlete to pay a champion to mentor them.

The race in which the Christian has entered is not a sport. However, we have the Mentor of Mentors, *“the author and perfecter of faith,”* Who has gone before us and is the Ultimate

Inspiration for us, the Lord Jesus Christ! He “*endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*”

He endured more than we will ever have to endure and we are told to “*consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*” (Heb.12:3)

***The Focus We That Must Maintain*** – “*... fixing our eyes on Jesus.....*”

We are to run looking to Jesus - away from sin, away from self, away from failure, away from people, and away from circumstances – to Jesus. He is the One who perfects faith in us. He is the secret of the life of faith. He is “*the author and perfecter of our faith.*” He will never change, He will never fail.

Too many Christians spend time in vain regrets over past failures or in measuring themselves by looking at other people’s progress. How important it is to fix our eyes on the eternal goal set before us and to see no man, but Jesus only. The more we are attracted to Christ, the less we’ll be distracted by the crowd!

Roger Bannister was the first man to run a mile in 4 minutes. Three months later, John Landy beat his record by 1.4 seconds. Finally the two men met for an historic race. As they went into the final lap Landy was ahead. He was haunted by the question, “Where is Bannister?” As Landy neared the finish line he could not resist the temptation to look over his shoulder and the instant he did, Roger Bannister passed him on the opposite side to win the race. Afterward Landy was interviewed by Time Magazine reporter and he said in that interview, “I made the mistake of looking back. If I had not looked back I would have won the race.”

Keep your eyes on Jesus! Look back and you will be defeated; look at yourself and you will doubt; look around at circumstances and you will be discouraged; look at the crowd and you will be deceived; look to Jesus and you will be declared “Winner!” at the end of life’s race.

Eugene Peterson, in his *The Message*, translates Hebrews 12:2 as follows: “*Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honor, right alongside God.*” What a Pattern! What an inspiration!

### **Summation**

From biblical history we have the record of many individuals who have successfully completed the race of life; we have ample instructions for us to run faithfully and we have the perfect Pattern in the Person of the Lord Jesus to inspire us to victory.

In the Olympics we often hear it said, “Go for the gold!” In the Christian’s race of life, there is something better than gold awaiting us. The apostle Paul, who also was a runner, and speaks of the reward at the end of the race in these words: “*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that*

*will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly....”* (1 Cor. 9:24-26) In Paul’s day the Olympic champions were given a crown made of laurel leaves. The crowns that Jesus gives are eternal!

### **Conclusion**

I conclude by giving you four challenges for charging ahead:

- **REMEMBER.**  
*Remember that victorious saints preceded you.*  
There is a company of witnesses that testifies to us - **Be Glad!**
- **REPENT.**  
*Repent of the sin which hinders your progress -*  
There is a devilish culprit that seeks to stop us - **Be Guarded!**
- **RESOLVE.**  
*Resolve to finish the race God has set before you -*  
There is a definite course laid out - **Be Going!**
- **REFOCUS.**  
*Re-focus on Jesus who set for us the example -*  
There is a Divine Companion ahead of us - **Be Gazing!**

And, **get on God’s track team!**

#### **It Will Be Worth It All**

“It will be worth it all  
When we see Jesus;  
Life’s trials will seem so small,  
When we see Christ.

Just one glimpse of His face,  
All sorrows will erase;  
**So bravely run the race,**  
‘Till we see Christ!”

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