

**Running Toward Christ
Hebrews 12:1-3**

This morning we will be returning to our ongoing examination of the Book of Hebrews.

But, before we can continue, we will need to remember certain things about this book.

(1) First of all, we will need to remember why this book was written. The book of Hebrews was written to strengthen the faith of a small group of Hebrew believers living in Rome, who under a great persecution, were actually thinking about leaving Christ in order to return to back to Judaism or some form of it. This is the first thing we need to remember.

(2) So what else do we need to remember? As we look back over the course of our present ongoing study of the Book of Hebrews, we need to also remember how this author has already sought to strengthen the faith of these struggling Hebrew believers. So what have we seen so far?

(A) First of all, we have seen that the author initially sought to strengthen their faith by focusing on the superiorities of Christ and on matters related to that superiority in **Hebrews 1:1** through **Hebrews 10:39**. So what else have we seen?

(B) After focusing on the superiorities of Christ and on matters related to that superiority, we have also seen this author further seeking to strengthen their faith by helping them to better understand what biblical faith is. And how did he seek to do that? First of all he provided a working definition of biblical faith and then he provided Old Testament examples of it in **Hebrews 11:1-40**.

And this is where we left off. So what did the author do next as he continued to strive to strengthen their faith? This question brings us to **Hebrews 12:1-3**, which will be the passage that we will be examining this morning.

So let me now read this passage for you, "**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. (3) For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**"

MESSAGE

So based on these verses that we have just read in **Hebrews 12:1-3**, how else had the author sought to strengthen the faith of these struggling Hebrew believers, beyond what we have already considered? And what is the answer?

This is the answer: The author in Hebrews 12:1-3, comparing the Christian life to a long distance race and those running in that race sought to further strengthen the faith of His readers by **exhorting** them to do three things.

So what is my hope for this morning's message, as we examine these three exhortations? My hope is this: that as we examine these three exhortations, that our own faith would be strengthened. And that, as our own faith is strengthened, that it would not only produce in us a greater determination to run this race, but it would also produce in us a greater assurance that our faith is indeed genuine and saving. This is my hope for this message this morning.

So how does this passage that introduces these three exhortations begin? This passage begins with these words, "**Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us.**"

These words are obviously transitional words. The author had just spoken about Old Testament examples of biblical faith in **Hebrews 11** and he is now going to use these transitional words, to link what he had just said about these examples of faith, to what he was about to say or in other words to the three exhortations that would be immediately following.

So let us now look at these transitional words and try to get a better understanding of what these words mean and how these words prepared the way for these three exhortations.

So let us begin with the word "**witnesses.**" So, first of all, who are these witnesses? The "**witnesses**" that are described as "so great a cloud surrounding us" are all those faithful Old Testament saints that had already been mentioned in Hebrews 11.

So if these are the witnesses, that were surrounding these struggling Hebrew believers, like "**so great a cloud,**" how were these witnesses able to continue to bear witness to these struggling Hebrew believers in light of the fact that all of these Old Testament examples of faith were very much dead when this epistle was written? Great question! So what is the answer?

The "witnesses" or in other words these Old Testament examples of faith in Hebrews 11 were able to continue to bear witness to these struggling Hebrew believers through the **biblical accounts** of their lives of faith.

So now let me ask you this question. If it was through the biblical accounts of their lives of faith that made it possible for these Old Testament examples of faith to continue to bear witness to these struggling Hebrew believers, then what would they have been saying to them as they bore witness?

This is what their lives of faith would have been saying! "**Don't quit, no matter how severely your faith may be tested, for just as our Lord has promised, you will be rewarded for your faith.**"

And it is this witness of these Old Testament examples of faith that will now pave the way for these three exhortations detailed for us in **Romans 12:1-3.**

And which of these three exhortations will we begin with? We will begin with the second exhortation, at the end of **verse 1.** And the reason why we are doing this is because this exhortation provides the foundation for the other two.

So what is this exhortation that we will consider first that appears at the end of **verse 1**? The exhortation that we will consider first is, "And let us run with **endurance** the race that has been set before us."

So what does this mean? If we are going to understand this exhortation, we must first of all understand the race that has been set before us or in other words we must first of all understand the race that has been set before every true believer. So what is this race?

The race that had been set before every true believer is the race of **faith** that every true believer enters into when they first come to Christ by faith and embrace Him as our Lord and Savior (Ephesians 2:8-10).

So once a person believes that they have entered this race of faith by faith what must they do in order to be assured that they have not deceived themselves and that they are actually in this race and thus saved?

Those who believe that they have entered this race by faith must continue to live by **faith** if they want to continue to assure themselves that they are actually in this race of faith and thus saved (Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 3:38).

What does Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatian 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38 all declare that the "**righteous man shall live by faith.**" Or in other words the one who has been declared righteous by God and who therefore been entered into this race of faith will continue to live by faith.

Why will they continue to live by faith? It is because God is faithful. What did God say in **Philippians 1:6**, "**For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.**"

So with all these things in mind, hopefully we can now appreciate the urgency of this exhortation to struggling Hebrew believers at the end of **Hebrews 12:1**. These struggling Hebrew believers, based on **Hebrews 10:34**, were sufferings imprisonments and the seizure of their property because of their faith and they were contemplating turning away from Christ and from following Christ.

In the mind of this author this was crunch time. Would they reveal themselves as truly being in the race of faith by living by faith or will they reveal themselves as frauds who had never truly committed themselves to the race of faith.

So now this author is adding his voice to the voices of these other Old Testament witnesses, when he cries out to them at the end of **Hebrews 12:1** "**Let us run with endurance the race that has been set before us.**"

So you this morning might be in similar place as these struggling Hebrew believers in Rome as your own faith is being tested. You might consider yourself to be in a bad marriage and it has been going on for years. You know what Christ has said about marriage that what God has joined together let no man separate but you are so tired and so worn out that you are seriously considering quitting on the marriage.

So what is God saying to you this morning through this passage? "**Don't quit but rather let us continue to run the race that God has set before us with endurance.**"

So hopefully this is a message that will resonate with all of us here this morning if we are professing believers. So let us dig in and get prepared for this battle.

So how are we going to do that? This question brings us to the other two exhortations. So now let us go back to verse 1 but this time we will go to the beginning of the verse rather than to the end of the verse. And what is this second exhortation that we will be considering?

The second exhortation that we will be considering is, "Let us also **lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.**"

So if we are going to get serious about running this race of faith with endurance, what is one of the things that we will very much want to give attention to? We will very much want to give attention to "**laying aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us.**"

So what does this mean? First of all we need to understand what an encumbrance is? An encumbrance is simply referring to something that has

weight or mass. It is something that by itself appears to be perfectly innocent and harmless.

But it certainly would not be innocent or harmless in running a race and who would want to finish that race? So within our faith that we are now considering, what might be these encumbrances that we need to lay aside?

The "encumbrances" are those things within our lives that are not sin but will make it more **difficult** for us to run the race of faith that has been set before us with endurance.

So what might have been some of those encumbrance that these struggling Hebrew believers may have been seeking to carry with them that would not have made their race of faith more difficult? We will have to speculate that certainly any former attachments to Judaism in terms of their traditions and various ceremonies and rituals certainly could have been one of these encumbrances.

What about us? Could we also have encumbrances that might be making it difficult for us to run the race of faith with endurance? Of course we can!! How about anything that we are giving our lives to that is keeping us from prayer, time in the word, the fellowship of the saints, services to the saints, or outreach into the world with good works and the gospel of Christ

So what is the other thing that we need to lay aside? We will also need to lay aside the sin that so easily besets us.

Obviously all sin is a hindrance to living the Christian life as God meant it to be lived. And therefore this could be a reference to any sin that might creep into our lives and entangle us. But more likely the sin here is specific.

The reference to "the sin that so easily entangles us" that makes it so difficult for us to run with endurance the race of faith is **unbelief** or in other words doubting of God and what He has said in His word. So what is the third and final exhortation?

The third and final exhortation that we will be considering is "**fixing** our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2-3).

Let me read these verses for you and what do they say? They say this, **"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."**

If we are going to run the race of faith that has been set before us with endurance we must strive to fix our eyes on Jesus rather than on our lives and our difficulties.

So why is this so essential? We need to fix our eyes on Jesus because He is the author and perfecter of our faith.

So in what sense is Jesus the author of faith? Jesus is the **author** of faith because He is the originator of faith in fact He is the originator of all faith. So if you have faith where did it come from? If I have faith where did it come from? It came from Christ, who is the author or originator.

So in what sense is Jesus the "perfecter of faith"? Jesus is the perfecter of faith because he was able to bring His perfect life of faith to **completion** when He through His death fully satisfied the debt we owed to God because of sin.

And how was He able to do this? How was He able to endure all these sufferings and in essence say to shame "I despise you and I will not yield to you!"?

He was able to do this because He was looking at the joy set before Him. And what was that joy? It was the joy of knowing that, once His perfect life of faith was completed on the cross of Calvary, His faith would be brought to completion in the way that He would most certainly enter into the throne room of God and once again take His seat at God's right hand.

So in light of this insight into how Christ was able to endure His sufferings and despise the shame of the cross what did the author say next in **verse 3**? He said this, **"For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."**

So why were these concluding words so important for his readers to hear after these three exhortations?

They were important to hear because these words helped his readers to understand that if they were going to run the race of faith with endurance, laying aside every encumbrance and the sin that so entangles us, they would most certainly have to fix their eyes on Jesus and more precisely the sufferings of Christ if they were going to endure their own race of faith and therefore be able to look forward with the same joyful anticipation of their own entrance into the glory that was awaiting them as they like Christ will enter that same throne room and enjoy the fellowship with Christ forever.

CONCLUSION

May we, with our eyes of faith fixed solely on Christ and all that He suffered, joyfully run with endurance the race that has been set before us, knowing that at the end of our race there is a **heavenly reward** awaiting us.