

Text: Hebrews 12:1

Title: "Run with patient endurance"

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Intro: A picture is worth a thousand words. In Hebrews, vivid pictures are worth a lot more than that. The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (4:12). Lives blessed by God are like good ground that produces fruitful vegetation and not thorns and thistles (6:7-8). The promise of the Abrahamic covenant is an anchor of the soul for every believer (6:19). God's chastening in our lives is just like the faithful, loving discipline of a human father, which deserves great respect (12:7-10).

And what you and I are going to face for the remainder of this day and for the rest of our lives is a race set before us that is going to need to be run with patient endurance (12:1). This last picture captures one of the major themes throughout the book of Hebrews.

You may remember that I believe that Hebrews was written by Luke to the Jerusalem church from Rome shortly after the death of Paul and shortly before the release of Timothy from a Roman prison. He had come with the parchments as Paul had asked in his final words to his son in the faith in 2 Timothy 4.

Luke was seeking to combat the temptation of Palestinian Christians to revert back to Judaism. Another theory about the book, which I found to be almost as good, is that it was written to a Roman Jewish congregation, different than the church of Rome we know from the Book of Romans, who in the face of the beginnings of Nero's persecution of Christians were being tempted to be more Jewish than Christian

in their identity and worship. If that were the case, Pricilla and Aquilla would probably be the leading candidates for authorship.

We do not know for sure who wrote the book, or who first read it, but we do know why it was written – to keep Jewish Christians from going back to their old way of life before they found Christ, to keep them from falling back into Judaism. Rather than go back, this author’s passionate plea is “run with patience the race that is set before you” (Heb. 12:1).

I want us to look at how this theme works its way through Hebrews for our own encouragement to not quit on the Lord tonight, but rather to run with patience the race that is set before us. Notice with me three things in this regard:

I. Jesus must be the author and finisher of our faith in order for us to run with patience (12:2, “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”).

Illustration: Have you ever started a book and not finished reading it? Have you ever begun a letter only to come to it weeks later, find it half done and so completely out of date now that you dare not send it? Students can sometimes start their homework or project and fail to finish, and so the teacher has to give them a grade of “incomplete” or “fail” because the work started was never completed.

Application: Jesus never gets a grade of “incomplete” or “fail” when it comes to the start that He has made with our faith. Every time He begins, He finishes. Every time He authors the first page, He completes the whole book. Every project He ever started shall be brought perfectly to its full-end.

Paul told us to be confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). Paul's disciple in this book tells us that Jesus is the author and the finisher of our faith.

Illustration: Poem by Augustus Toplady:

"The work which his goodness began, the arm of His
strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen, and never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now, nor all things below
or above,
Can make him his purpose forgo, or sever my soul from his
love.

"My name from the palm of his hands eternity will not
erase;
Impressed on his heart it remains, in marks of indelible
grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure, as sure as the earnest is
giv'n;
More happy, but not more secure, the glorified spirits in
heav'n."

But in Hebrews we have a unique emphasis on an important corollary to this truth: If Jesus is not the finisher of our faith, nor is He its author. That is a truth that the author of Hebrews wants professing Christians to think hard and long about: "Does what I claim has started, look at all as though it is going to successfully end? If not, can I correctly claim it started? Did the right thing start?"

In order to emphasize the need we have to ask these questions, Hebrews warns the Christian community of the possibility that the reason you are failing to run with patience

may be the fact that Jesus is not the author or the finisher of your faith. These are called the warnings against apostasy, and there are five major passages that contain these warnings (2:1-4; 3:6-4:13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:25).

Bible interpreters have taken one of four approaches to these passages:

(1) Arminian approach – we are being told that saved people can lose their salvation through unbelief. Problems – Jesus is both the author and finisher of our faith; key passages of scripture teach the eternal security of those who are truly born again and justified (John 10:25-30, Rom. 8:28-30, 1 Pet. 1:3-9, Matt. 7:21-23 [“never”], 1 John 2:19). The author of Hebrews gives us many indications that the true people of God are eternally secure (Heb. 7:25, 8:12, 9:14-15, 10:14, 13:20-21).

(2) The hypothetical approach – we are being told what would happen if we could apostatize. The problem with this is that people do apostatize from the faith – there is nothing hypothetical about this fact of life (Matt. 18:15-17).

(3) The loss of award approach – we are being told that true believers will lose their reward in heaven. The problem with this is twofold – (a) the nature of apostasy is worse than carnality – the former does not accompany salvation and the latter can (6:9-12, note “sluggish” in v. 12; see also 5:11); (b) the consequences of apostasy are worse than loss of reward (it keeps us under God’s wrath and away from His rest, 3:10-12).

(4) Calvinist approach – the P of TULIP – the perseverance of the saints. According to this interpretation, the warnings are telling us how the lives of people with a false profession and a true profession of faith in Christ are different. One

Jesus has authored, and the other He has not. That difference will be revealed by whether or not a professing believer apostatizes (here is the logic: 3:6 – we are right now his house, only if we hold fast in the future; so if we do not hold fast in the future, we are not right now his house; 3:14 – we have in the past become partakers of Christ, only if we in the future hold fast; so if in the future we do not hold fast, we did not in the past become partakers of Christ).

Application: So Jesus must be the author and finisher of our faith in order for us to run with patience, which raises an important question we each must answer for ourselves: “Is your profession of faith in Christ a false profession of faith in Christ? Do you tell people that you believe something that you really do not believe?”

If the answer is “No, I truly believe what I profess to believe,” then rejoice that the author of your faith is also the finisher of your faith. Jesus is going to finish what He started, and we can rest in that.

If the answer is “Yes, I do not believe what I have professed to believe,” then the remedy is not to run with more patience or run faster or hold fast harder. The solution is to put away the lie, truly believe – truly put your faith in the sacrifice of Christ for your sins and to claim Him in saving faith as your Great High priest. Some here may need a new profession of faith, because the one you have is a false one.

II. Jesus must be the reason we lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us in order for us to run with patience (12:1-2).

Illustration: I enjoy walking with my dog, but my dog is impossible to run with. She is on the leash as I run, but never headed in the direction I am going. She darts back and forth

entangling the leash around my feet while I am trying to run. I would never think of bringing her along if the point was actually to compete in a race.

Application: This is the picture the author of Hebrews paints for us. Our life as believers is a race that we have to run with patient endurance. Sin is a weight and easily besetting obstacle as we try to run. Running the race requires leaving the sin behind. Hebrews mentions a number of these weights and sins:

1. Failure to pay close attention to what we have heard (2:1, 5:11-14).
2. Failure to encourage one another (3:12-13).
3. Failure to press on to maturity (6:1, 11-12).
4. Failure to attend the assembly times (10:25).

Let's get rid of these dogs and their leashes. We have a race to run. We must lay aside habitual sin in order to run with patience or endurance the race that is set before us.

III. Jesus must be our example of patience in order for us to run with patience (12:2-4).

Illustration: It is interesting how most of the great runners of the Christian faith actually look very little like a runner in a physical sense. Their bodies are often broken. They are often found in hospitals and nursing homes. Or worse yet, many are found in prisons and torture chambers in our evil world.

Application: Jesus did not look like much of an athlete hanging on the cross, yet He is our example when it comes to running with patience and endurance the race that is set before us. We do not have to be in great physical shape, but

we do have to be fit spiritually as Christ was. The book gives us some keys to this spiritual fitness for our race:

1. Look to Jesus – think on Him (3:1, 12:2).
2. Make heart-searching use of the Word of God (4:11-13).
3. Draw near in confession, prayer, and faith to the throne of grace (4:14-16; 10:19-22).
4. Be confident that it will be worth it all (6:10; 10:32-39).
5. Attend the assembly times for worship and discipleship (3:12-13, 10:23-25; 13:1-9, 15-19).
6. Be a faithful pilgrim (11:13-16, 24-26, 38-39; 13:12-14).
7. Respond well to times of discipline (12:5-29).

Conclusion: The author of Hebrews tells us to run the race with patience. Jesus must be the author and finisher of our faith for this to happen in our lives. We must deal with those hindering weights and besetting sins to run this way. And we have to follow our example and use the blessings and resources that come from him to run with patience. Let's not quit running. Keep on with Christ.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching