

Transcription of 17TM821

Hebrews 12:1-4

"Your Turn To Run"

January 1, 2017

Shall we open our Bibles this morning to Hebrews 12:1?

Paul wrote this letter of encouragement to Hebrew Christians who had come to know the Lord, and, because of their Jewish backgrounds, were suffering tremendously at the hands of their families. But now things had gotten worse - the Romans had begun to kill Christians, especially in places where the Romans had great authority, like in and around everywhere. And these Hebrew believers who thought the Lord would be back by now started to think about going back. "Maybe if I go back to my old Judaistic roots, then I can escape some of the hardships and difficulties." And so Paul is given the unenviable task of writing a letter to them to say, "Look, you've gotta hang in there! Where are you gonna go, anyway?" He spends ten and a half chapters going through Jewish things - the sacrifices, the offerings, the priesthood, the feast days - everything that (in the Old Testament, the tabernacle) said this is where Jesus is; this is what will point you to Him. And, after ten chapters and eighteen verses, he finally stops in verse 19 of chapter 10. He says, "Therefore, brethren," and he goes to the application section. But it is really just to say, "Look, you've gotta hang in there. I know the Lord isn't back. I know things are hard. But where are you gonna go? You've met Jesus. He's the One that you're supposed to know and to wait for."

We start a new year today having to still be here, waiting for the Lord to come back. I remember in 1973, when I got saved, I thought the Lord would be back that year. And then '78 was a good year, and '82 wasn't bad, and '87 still waiting, and '91 He wasn't here, and 2004 - where is He? And 2017. Running out of years. Come on, Lord. You've got to be quick.

But Paul takes that stand with these suffering Christians and says, "You've gotta make it work. You've gotta hang in here." So I thought there couldn't be a better message for us than something out of Hebrews that says hang in there one more year. The Lord is coming.

Well, after those ten chapters where Paul said to them, "Let us draw near with a heart that is fully assured of our faith" (verse 22), "let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" (verse 23), and "let us consider one another to love

and good works" (verse 24), just hang in here, "the just have always lived by faith" (verse 38), you then come to chapter 11, which we spent a lot of time on on Wednesday evenings recently; where Paul gives us a list of some heroes of faith - guys and girls who walked with God in very adverse situations, much like these Hebrew Christians to whom Paul was writing and who ran their race, who finished the course, who didn't cave in or turn back. And he pointed them out, never once mentioning their sins or their failures or falling. And they all had them, but God was interested in their faith - stories of lives that they knew well who had gone before, who pleased the Lord. From great deliverance to death, rather than compromise; forty verses of "here're a bunch of folks who've run the race."

So this morning we want to just look at the first three verses of chapter 12. Because Paul then beckons those to whom he is writing (and I suspect to us as well) that, having a rich heritage in the church like we do (centuries of people who've come and gone, serving the Lord, in less-than-ideal circumstances), this is our generation, this is our time. We're supposed to be running this race now. Paul loved illustrations. He particularly liked the picture of running the race. He wrote to the Corinthians, "Hey, make sure that you run to win"; he wrote to the Galatians, "Run well"; he said to the Corinthians, "Don't run in vain". And so, here's a new level that Paul takes us to as he speaks to these Hebrew believers to tell them to run ahead but also to live up to the standard that had been set for them by previous generations.

Verse 1, "Therefore," Paul said, "we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls."

I was a young pastor when I got a call from Calvary Costa Mesa many years ago. I was in my twenties, I think, and I was asked to come and teach the men's retreat at Calvary Costa Mesa up in the mountains; and I immediately got sick. I was a young guy and didn't have a lot of confidence, and I knew that Pastor Chuck would go to every one of those things and sit in the front row, and he had (like) a poker face. He would sit like this (Pastor Jack crosses his arms in front of him). You didn't know if he was happy with you or if he was about to kill you. And I thought,

"I'm going to die!" But it was like five months away, so I said, "Oh, I'd love to," and I hung up the phone, and I thought, "What am I doing?!!" And the last couple of weeks before then, I've never been so nervous in all my life. Pastor Chuck was my pastor! I didn't want to disappoint him. But I was nervous. Worked harder on studies than I think I've ever done in my entire life. Drove up the mountain, hadn't eaten for a day and a half, stomach hurt....."Oh, my gosh. This is going to be horrible." And I didn't have to just teach once; I had to teach six times. I wasn't happy. I got up there, and they put us in our room, and I got to the little meeting area. And, looking around, I said, "Where's Pastor Chuck?" and the guy goes, "Oh, he's sick this weekend. He's not coming up." "Yes, Lord," (Laughing) "You are grateful for Your....." (Pastor Jack is singing) Oh, I was so happy. But I remember how I felt.

Twenty years ago or so I was a chaplain with the LA County Sheriff's Department, and a man had been shot and killed in Manhattan Beach - one of the officers. His little nephew was in the back seat. A bank robber had run out of the bank and killed him. And he was just about to get married, and they didn't have a church affiliation, and so the Chief of Police there asked if I would do the funeral. We knew him pretty well, and I said, "Well, sure." He said, "Well, there's going to be 5500 officers, and the Governor of the state is coming. So is the Mayor of the city and channels 5 and 7 and 9 and 4. They'll all be there. And we're going to close the 105 freeway so you can get to Inglewood Cemetery for the interment. And I hope you'll be all right with that." I said, "Oh, yeah, I'll be fine." I hung up the phone and said, "What am I doing?!!" And I felt the same way again. Self-conscious. I know the Lord blesses His Word. I know that God can use you. But, you know, sometimes you're just kind of well aware of where you're standing. And I've learned over the years to, I think, rest in His work. But it was a pretty frightening experience.

And I suspect that that's what Paul is doing here with these people. He says to them in verse 1, "Look, we've got a big crowd watching us run." Right? "We have, in the stands, folks who have done well. Big names in the seats. Past hall-of-famers." And he is challenging them from the standpoint of, really, the only race that mattered in the 1st century - the big race of the marathon - where you come into the coliseum after that last mile; and there in the stands, all of these folks sit, and they watch you. Gold medal winners from the past. Now, not in terms of being a live event where those in heaven are leaning forward and watching you squirm, but in the sense that he says of Abel (in chapter 11:4), "He's dead, but he's still

speaking." In other words, his reputation continues to make noise and make waves. And so Paul, in writing to these Hebrew saints - having given them every reason to stay with Jesus and then given them a whole litany of people who did well in the worst of conditions, says, "Look, it's your turn to run. It's your responsibility to run now. And Moses knew how to run, and he did well. And those who took out Jericho - they knew how to run, and they did well. And those who quenched the powers of fire, they stood fast. And the fellow that was sawn asunder with a wooden saw or those who were mocked and scourged - each of them, all of them, ran and finished." And Paul encourages these guys, "Hey, look around the arena! Look up in the stands. Moses stroking his beard. Rahab giving you a big royal wave. Jacob smiling. Gideon waving the flag. And you're on the field, you're on the track, you're in the starting blocks. It's your turn to run now." And your heart is racing, and the gun goes up, and you're afraid. But you want to do well. And it's not an easy place to run, and life seems to be getting more difficult every day.

Well Paul gives them four things to do, and I want you to write down (if you take notes) four words that I hope will help you this year to do well running the race while you wait for the Lord to come for you.

The first word is the word "**Divest.**" Now we read it here in verse 1, "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us." Divest. Divest is usually a financial term that means get rid of the stuff that's taking your portfolio into the tank; things that aren't making you money but losing you money. Get rid of those things that are not helping you. And notice that Paul begins with some pretty logical counsel to the church that he's going to encourage to run. He said, "You'll do your best running when you're not weighed down." That makes sense, doesn't it? Nobody runs a marathon in combat boots (unless you're in the service). You can use weights to train, but on the day you have to run, you try to wear as little as possible. I don't know if you've ever seen marathon runners, but they should put some clothes on. They don't look very acceptable to me. Put on something! But I think the whole idea is the less I wear, the quicker I go. And I guess that works for them. But it can be downright embarrassing.

Now, look, Paul puts them into two categories, these things. He calls them (notice in verse 1) every weight ("lay aside every weight") and second of all the sin ("lay aside the sin which so easily ensnares you" or easily takes you over, if you will). One of them not sin - just weight; and the other one sin. That, I think, becomes

very obvious. But the weight sometimes is less noticeable, I guess, because not everything that weighs you down is sin. They are things that, in and of themselves, can be very good, fine in and of themselves. But they become a problem when they slow down your walk, your run, your walk with God, your race. That's when you begin to say, "Hey, this is a weight in my life. Not a sin, but a weight." And everyone agrees with your sin (that's a problem), but when it comes to weight, usually everyone has a different opinion. I'll give you a personal example. I love hockey. We've been going to the Ducks games since they built the stadium in '93. But I've missed every Sunday and Wednesday game since they started because, as much as I love going, I'd rather be here. If I start bailing out on you on Wednesday - "Where is he?" "He's at the hockey game." - it may not be a sin, but it would certainly be a weight. Right? I could argue with, "Hey, what's wrong with hockey? I happen to like it." But not so much that it begins to tear away at my spiritual life. When we made the playoffs and had the Stanley Cup ten years ago or so, unfortunately half of those games were on Wednesday night. "Oh oh oh. Lord, why is it on Wednesday night?" (Pastor Jack says this in a whining tone) It was a weight. So we have sold all of our tickets on Wednesdays and Sundays since we've bought them. But there's just a choice that you make. You don't want to let things slow down your walk with God. It's the most important thing you have.

We have parents here that have kids they so love that they put them in soccer and baseball and basketball, and we don't see them for six months at a time. And if you talk to them about it, "Hey, you should be in church," they'll say this, "What's wrong with basketball?" And you'll say, "Nothing. But it seems to be slowing you down, and it's certainly going to be a problem for your kids down the road." We have men here that will not make church on Superbowl Sunday. I can tell you some of them. I know exactly where they sit. (Laughing) And they'll say this, "What's wrong with a football game?" And the answer is, "Nothing! Until it begins to slow you down."

Notice what Paul said. "Hey, look at the crowds. Look at the people that've run before you. Look at your heritage. Now you run, and get rid of the weight that's slowing you down." Hindrances slow us down. It can divert your attention. It'll sap your strength. It'll take away your desire to run well. And it doesn't matter what it is. It could be a relationship that's slowing you down, or it could be an entertainment that you love, a sport or an activity, a place, a habit, a pleasure, an honor. Whatever it is that slows you down, divest yourself of it, and run the race.

Because you're not just running to finish. That's dumb. "I finished." Good for you. You came in dead last. Run to win! Run to win.

So, divest yourself of weight. And I must tell you, you have to decide for yourself if it's a weight because outwardly we can't say that's a sinful practice. It's not. It's just when it takes the place, and it begins to bog down your walk with God. If you're always having to do something else - you just can't get to church, you can't open your Bible, you just can't pray - it can be absolutely things that are upstanding in your life, but if they are slowing you down, get rid of them. Divest.

The second part of this, and it's an interesting phrase that Paul uses, is "the sin which so easily ensnares us," or, if you will, there is a sin that seems to hamper you. I am convinced, having pastored for many years now, that every person in the church - seeking to serve the Lord - is hampered by some personal besetting sin; something that is unique to you, isn't always for everyone, but it repeats itself. It hinders your progress. If we stick with the running analogy, it's the hamstring that continually acts up when I start running again. "Oh, I thought it was better. Now it hurts again." Or the back that just doesn't really participate, and every time you start to go at it, it's your back. Not everybody else's. This is your ankle that hurts. This is something that you suffer from. This is that bad form in your running, you know. And everyone seems to have one. For some people, it's lust. For others, it's just being angry or selfish or jealous. But it's a besetting sin. It's an easily-snaring sin. It's something that you battle with that others might not. Maybe you're just not a person that regularly tells the truth. Or, you're constantly afraid of things. And you have to ask yourself - what sin easily entangles me? What am I dealing with so that I can run better? And it's something that you have to not only be aware of and identify, but then consciously and systematically say, "Lord, take this out of my life. I want to run well, and this has slowed me down for years." Maybe you're covetous. You talk about living without everything, but you really want everything. Or you're on the other spectrum. You're just a lazy person. And that's your besetting sin. You can't get up out of bed without, (Pastor Jack yawns while he says), "Oh, I just need another hour." And God can't really get you running because you can't get out of bed. Maybe you're a critical person, or you're prideful, or you're hateful. Or maybe just unthankful. It's the easily-ensnaring sin. It's something that steps in, and it's a problem that's yours; not anybody else's. It's your problem, and you've got to get rid of it if you're going to run - like the crowd of past witnesses ran, whose lives now beckon you to run. Divest. First words. The weight, the easily-ensnaring sin.

Secondly, "Run." Easy. Notice verse 1, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Once you lighten the load, you'll have only one thing left to do. Get going. Run. Now here's the thing about your life and mine. We have a specific course mapped out for us by the Lord that is unique to us - to every one of us individually. Some people's paths seem relatively flat, straight. Others seem to have been given a course that is always uphill and very crooked. All are long. Some are longer. But here's the glory. The glory, without exception - no matter what course God has set before you - is that you finish well, finish the race. Right? That is what He wants for you. I may not be able to run your race. I talk to people in counseling, and I shake my head and say, "Man, I wonder what I would do in that situation. Oh, I'm glad that's not me!" But they probably look at my life and say, "I'm glad that's not me!" I can't run your race, you can't run my race. But it's the race that God enables for each of us and the course He's laid out. But we will do, both of us, well if we finish well. Paul, in 2 Timothy 4:7 said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." That was all that mattered to him. "I've done and accomplished all that God wanted me to do." That was his point. That was his interest. Run.

And notice the words here, "Let us run with endurance." Here's something to learn - life is not a sprint. You know that? It's not a 100-yard dash. It's not twenty seconds, ten seconds, and you're finished. The race is not for the sprinter, this walk with God. It's not for the sprinter. It's for the plodder. And whether you're fast or you're slow, whether you're strong or you're weak, our job is to persevere to the finish line. The word, by the way, for running is the Greek word "agon," where you get the word "agony" from. The Lord does not expect you to go out for a nice run. The Christian life is a hard way of life. It's not a leisurely walk. It's an agonizing pursuit. It's going to demand full attention. And Paul says, "Get rid of the weight, get rid of the ensnaring sin, and get to the agony part. Devote yourself to it."

In 1981 (it's been a while ago), Bill Broadhurst - who was an Olympic hopeful - entered The Pepsi Challenge 10,000 meter (10K) race that they had every year in Omaha, Nebraska. The problem for Bill was, eight years earlier, he had had a stroke, an aneurysm in his brain, that had left the left side of him paralyzed; and any hope that he had of running in the Olympics was gone. But he had worked real hard to even just be able to get out there in this 6.2 mile race; 1200 men and women showed up on this very kind of overcast July morning. And the gun sounded,

and the runners surged forward - everyone but Bill, that is. He had a stiff left leg that he had to kind of pivot to throw forward, and it dully hit the ground, and then he had to turn on it, kind of plopped again and again. It was just excruciating to watch. The pack quickly moved away. Bill began to sweat, pain in his right ankle every step. But he was determined. The best runners finished in well under 30 minutes. Bill finished in 2 hours and 37 minutes. By the time he got to the finish line, most of the folks had gone home; except for a fellow named Bill Rodgers who, in 1981, was the most famous marathon racer that the world knew. And Bill Rodgers had easily won the 10K race that day, but he had waited around with his gold medal to hang it around the neck of his good friend, Bill Broadhurst. And he said to Bill, as he hung it around his neck, "I've never seen anyone run as well as you. You finished last, but you came in first with perseverance and endurance."

That's what this word "running" literally means. You've got to keep at it. God has called you to run - not to be hasty but not to rest; not to hurry but yet without delay. Determined, even when you're exhausted. Because that's the calling of God to us. Lay aside the weight, the sin. Run! Put yourself in the place where you realize this is a hard way of life, but nothing should halt your progress. In fact, the word "endurance," running with endurance, the word "endurance" in Greek is the word "*hupomone*," and all it means is without quit or without letup. So that God's heart for us is that we should run without a desire to quit no matter how hard things get. This is the life God's given to us. This is the heritage that we follow. This is what Christians have done since they've been known to be saved. Run! No matter how hard.

It does seem to me that sometimes we run into Christians who seem to be sprinters. They're out of the gate quickly. They get a Bible big enough to choke a mule, they put ten stickers on their car, they have a witness shirt for every day, and then they're gone in six months. It's kind of like they looked up and went, "We've got to go all the way down there?" "Yeah, it's going to be far." "How far?" "Like 50 years, maybe." "50 years? Quit." And there's halting and sitting and weakness and obstacles, and they don't endure very well.

But, look, nothing makes less sense than being in a race and having little desire to win. I don't understand that at all. We have a lot of sports teams here at the church, and for years I played on the softball team, and my wife came to most games. And it was great to witness to folks. Baseball fields are pretty disarming. Right? But there's sometimes that she wouldn't come to the games, and then I'd

get home after maybe, sometimes, a 9:00 game (later in the evening). And she'd say, "Well, did you win?" And I'd say, "No! We lost." And then she said this, "Well, did you at least have fun?" I'd say, "I thought I just told you we lost!" (Laughing) "There's no fun in losing!" Second place nobody remembers. That's not how we want to win. We don't want to play, we want to win. Most saints are content to be saved, sit and watch and wait for the heaven train to come by. But Paul said, "Hey, run, man! Everyone races. Only one gets the prize." That's his motivation to us. Overcome, endure. It requires sacrifice. But there's a prize that's waiting. And Paul says to these saints, as to us, "Come on, man! Run to win!" "Yeah, but it's hard. It's hard!" (Pastor Jack says this in a whining tone) Yeah, it's hard, but it's going to be worth it. If you want to see the fruit of God in your life, you'll run that way. So the second word is "run."

Third word is "**Focus.**" Verse 2, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Stripped of all of the weights and hindrances, and the sin which easily besets you, ready to run with perseverance, knowing it's a long haul, and it's going to be difficult, his third bit of advice to them is while you're running, keep your eyes on Jesus. "Looking." The Greek word for "looking" is only found here. It's the word "*aphorao*," and it means to fill your field of vision with only one thing. It's almost the word that's used to describe when you put blinders on horses so they're not distracted by what's next to them in running, so that they'll run straight. Paul says to these Hebrew believers, "Get your eyes on Jesus." Look, nothing hinders running more than having your eyes in the wrong place. You ever try running and you think your shoelace is untied, so you look down? You look really stupid running all of a sudden. Or looking up at the sky because you hear something or behind your back because you hear something? It doesn't work. You can't run while you're looking all over the place.

Ten or fifteen years ago, I was going regularly down to Huntington Beach to run on the bike path (or on the little path that runs along). But we used to go surfing there a lot, so sometimes the surf would be so good. And I hate running. I hated it. Even when I liked it, I hated it. (Laughing) So I would always longingly look at the beach. My wife never liked running, so she'd take a bike and water and ride circles around me and run up ahead and come back, "Want a drink?" Okay. Then laugh at me. She thought it was a dumb idea. There was one Saturday that we were there I'll never forget. The waves were perfect. So I started running and

looked at the waves and went, "Ah, I need to be out there. What am I doing up here?" Well, without looking forward, I ran into a woman walking a Chihuahua. I didn't just run into her. I launched her. She hit me (sound of a slap), or I hit her, and she went back six feet, right on her back. There were a lot of people there on a Saturday morning. This is what I heard, "Ooohhhhhh." The little yapper dog started yappin'. My wife went and took off on the bike. (Laughing) Wanted nothing to do with me. And I thought I'd killed the poor woman. Honestly. I thought, "I'm cooked. This is not going to be good." And I looked back, and she was mad. And she got up and kind of dusted herself off. "I'm so sorry." I started talking as fast as I could. "I didn't mean.....I wasn't looking.....I didn't.....(unintelligible words)" and then she, "It's all right." Yip, yip, yip. She walked away, she said (loudly), "Just watch where you're going!"

It's all Paul's saying to you. Watch where you're going. Run. Keep your eyes on the Lord. Look, if you are used to looking at other Christians, I guarantee you you're going to stop running so well. You're going to find people who disappoint you, who fail you, who let you down, who are bad examples to you, who seem (at best) lukewarm. You're going to find plenty of reasons to say, "I'm not going to do it. They don't do it, I'm not going to do it." If you look around at other churches, you'll probably do the same thing. If you look at the world, or maybe you look at the difficulty of the course that God has set before you, you're going to be tripped up. You're going to be tripped up by somebody else's sin, by their lack of diligence, by the hard road, by the unfairness of your life. I've always found myself disappointed with others and they with me. But I've never looked at Jesus and been disappointed. Ever. You look at Him, you just go, "That's the way I want to be." But you look at anything else, and anything else and understand these Hebrew Christians had a lot to look at to discourage them from running well. And Paul said, "Run well. '**Aphorao**.' Just get your eyes on Jesus."

I'll tell you a story about a famous run. There was, in 1954 - in August (August 7, 1954) - I know that's a long time ago, but there is a black and white YouTube of this if you want to go look it up. They used to hold the British Empire Commonwealth Games every year in Vancouver, Canada. It was one of the largest track meet events in North America. But this one was particularly important because it brought two guys together that were the only two men alive at the time that had run a mile in under 4 minutes. Not a big deal today, but it was then. And they were both in prime shape, in the best shape of their lives. It was called, for years, the "miracle mile," and it brought together this fellow named Roger

Bannister (he was a Brit who was the first one to break the 4-minute barrier) and a guy named John Landy (from Australia) who had just broken his record. So there were two guys in the race, both of them sub-4-minute milers, both in peak condition, both willing to put their reputations on the line in this event that was, at the time, world renowned. When they began to run, Landy thought the best thing he could do (and there were four laps) is on the second lap to push as hard as he could; to not wait until the final bell lap but just to get out early and go hard. And he did. He went so hard, he got a 70-yard lead. Now that's ridiculously far ahead in a mile race. And it forced Bannister to change his tactic as well, and he did everything he could to close the gap so that by the time they got to the bell lap, they were only three yards apart. And they were running in absolute stride so that it was almost like they were synchronized in motion - Landy in front (the current record holder), Bannister right behind him. When they got to the final turn, and they were roughly 80 yards from the finish line, Landy (in the interview that he gave after the race) said, "I couldn't hear Bannister's footsteps anymore." They were running in such synch. He said, "So I thought I would look to see where he was." And the minute he turned around, Bannister said, "Thank you very much." Well, he didn't say anything, he just went right by him, beat him to the tape. He ran 3:58.8. Landy ran 3:59.6. Eight tenths of a second for doing this (looking back). These guys would only race one more time. And by the time they raced again, I should tell you they were well over the hill, and it was just old guys trying to be young guys. Really wasn't the same. But it was the only race in history, at the time, that both men finished in under 4-minute miles.

But it's a pretty good, I think, example of fill your view with Jesus because you start looking around anywhere, and you're just going to slow down. Your Christian life is not going to be all that it could be. By the way, and maybe off the topic, it was that same race that a fellow named Jim Peters, who was the current world record holder in the marathon, entered the stadium. And like they do today in the Olympics, marathon runners run 25 miles around town or wherever, and then they come into the stadium for the last four laps so the crowd can cheer and all. Peters came into the stadium 17 minutes ahead of his nearest competitor. He could have walked. He didn't. He ran. And collapsed. And he laid on the tarmac there while every runner ran by him. He finished dead last because, somehow, he wasn't able to run wisely.

Well, the year after this big race between Landy and Bannister, they decided to bronze sculpt these two men at the finish line. And it stood for years at a place

called the Empire Stadium in Vancouver. It got moved now to the Pacific National Exhibition Hall. If you just happen to be there, it's still there. But Landy showed up for the dedication, and they said to him, "So, how does it feel to be part of history?" And he said, "You know, the Bible says that Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt." He said, "I looked back, and look, I'm turned into a statue of bronze." (Laughing) But he's right. I mean, how bad is that?

So these Hebrew Christians, they were distracted by stormy waters that they found themselves in. There were family and friends who had turned against them. Nero was coming to the throne. Things were getting harder, if not worse. And they needed to just refocus on the Lord. And maybe we do as well. It's easy to blame other people for why we do poorly. But if we keep our eyes on Jesus - if He fills your horizon - if you'll joyfully fix your eyes on Him, nothing will slow you down; not other people's failures, not the world around you.

Notice that by using the name Jesus - and you'll find that to be so in the Bible, rather than Jesus Christ or the Christ - when just Jesus' name is used like this, it is always a reference primarily to His earthly ministry, to His life upon the earth, to His humanity. And it is almost as if Paul is saying to us, "Look at Jesus. He ran the perfect race." The word "author" is "*arkagos*." It means to be the architect or the pioneer of your faith. If you ever want to learn to run well, just keep your eyes on Him. He did a good job running. In fact, He ran the perfect race. You don't get too far behind Him, don't get out in front of Him. Just be there when He is, and He'll finish, He'll perfect your faith as well. Be like Enoch. Stay in contact. Be like Abel. Stay in contact. And Jesus endured it all because He had an eye upon the prize. "For the joy set before Him endured." Now, you're the joy set before Him. You're the fruit of His death. You've come to get saved. You've come to surrender your life. You are the fruit of His labors. And now God has fruit for you to produce. So, keep your eyes on the Lord, "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross." I had someone say to me one time, "Well it's easy for Jesus. He was God." No. It was harder for Jesus because He was God - to not sin. You know what I do when I'm frustrated? I sin. If I get mad, I just yell. Then I feel better. Oh, I have to repent, but I feel better. You do that, too. You relieve the pressure by sin, sometimes. Right? And then you go back to the Lord, "I shouldn't have done that." Jesus didn't do that! He just kept His eyes on the Father. The physical pain He endured was absolute, the spiritual suffering of becoming sin, and separated from the Father was beyond our comprehension, but He did it "for the joy set before Him. He endured" (same word, by the way) "though He despised the

shame." And now He has rest. He sits at the right hand of the Father, and He gathers the fruit like these sit in the stands around us. Look, there are plenty of examples in Hebrews 11 of how to run. There is no better example than Jesus of how to run. He's the ultimate example.

Final word. Verse 3. "**Consider.**" "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." Consider, take full notice of, figure in. Because sometimes when we become discouraged, and we want to give up and feel like we can't run, I guess the equivalent would be (in the running circles) you hit the wall, you go bonkers, you collapse in exhaustion, you just don't think you can go any further. If you want to avoid a spiritual collapse, consider Jesus. Now the word "consider" in Greek is the word where we get our English word logarithm from, "*analogizomai*." It means to analyze or to figure in Jesus. Or, when you're worried about how hard life is going, just think about what Jesus went through. Right? In verse 4 it says, "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." Or, if you will, remember what He went through. You'll never be asked to suffer like Him. So verse 3 is really for whiners. Next time you start whining, consider Jesus. "But it's so hard." (Pastor Jack says this in a whining tone). Shut up! Look at Jesus. It's not that hard. Look what He went through for you! Look how He stood before Pilate and before Herod and before the Sanhedrin and before those who beat Him and crucified Him. You'll never be asked to suffer as He did. So consider Him. Figure Him in the equation next time you want to complain about how hard life is as a believer. And in the western culture, that's ridiculous. We don't suffer at all.

Four words. What's the first word? You guys are terrible. Again? **Divest.** I'm not even going to do the 11:00 service now, I'm so discouraged. I got my eyes off the Lord and on you. Divest. Right. Get rid of the hindrances, the weights that even aren't sin, and whatever that besetting sin is in your life. Jesus said, "If your right hand offends you, cut it off" (Matthew 5:30). He didn't mean that literally, but He did say, "Take whatever drastic measures are necessary to be sure that nothing hinders you from going forward." Second word? **Run.** Better. Yeah, you did better. Run. Run with patient perseverance, run the race that God has marked out for you, put one foot in front of another. It's a long marathon race. Don't quit. Thirdly? **Focus.** Fill your field of vision with Jesus. He's the pioneer of our faith. He'll finish what He started. If you keep your eyes on Him, you'll never be discouraged. You'll find nothing to slow you down. Look around here, you'll find all kinds of reasons. Look up here, you'll find even more. But look to Him, and you

won't fail. And what's the last one? **Consider**. Don't whine too much. Consider Jesus. He paid an awful price so that you and I could live. Whatever little suffering you face to put Him first is nothing compared to what He paid to get you to life.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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