

STUDYING THE WORD, LOOKING TO JESUS, PERFECTING OUR FAITH - Part two

Sunday, January 2nd, 2021, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2152

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IPAD TEXT - Hebrews 11:39 - 12:2 - “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, [40] since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. [12:1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

After a rather detailed look at the setting of this text we launched into the members of this group of witnesses to faithfulness under the first point of the teaching. We looked at *Noah* in *verse 7*, *Abraham* in *verse 8*, and then *Sarah* in *verse 11*.

Let's finish the list and then look quickly at two more points:

- d) **Joseph (22) - “By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.” - IPAD TEXT**

Long ago God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be taken into Egyptian captivity for about **four hundred years**. Somehow Joseph knew about that promise. **Nothing had happened to even hint at its fulfilment during Joseph's entire life**. He now faced death with the yoke of captivity as firmly in place as ever.

Remember Joseph. In the face of certain death he continued to believe **nothing would thwart the plan and love of God**. He knew that his not being around to **see it** didn't diminish God's future for the people of Israel. God's plan isn't thwarted by death. Not one bit. Remember Joseph's bold confidence in God's word.

I'm reminded of Paul's great words in **Romans 8:38-39** - **"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."** - IPAD TEXT

In a world where it **looks** as though death changes everything, ***in God's plan, it changes nothing.*** Joseph's command about taking his bones when they leave Egypt is given to remind me that ***the truth of God's promise isn't going to be hindered by my death, or your death, or the death of any of your loved ones.*** Our passing on has no effect on the truth of God's promise or His ability to include us in it.

We are ***in*** on God's future plan for the ages. His delivering work stands firm. ***Remember Joseph.*** He died not seeing God's promised deliverance. But he died confident in God's ability to perform His word.

- e) **Moses (24-27) - "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, [25] choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. [26] He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. [27] By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." -**
IPAD TEXT

If I look more to **this** world for reward than the **next**, I won't make it to the finish line. God's keeping power doesn't work for those who set their hearts on the pleasures of this world. God's keeping, sustaining, purifying power is only manifested in lives obsessed with the reward of the coming age of glory.

Moses is the classic example of an **unbribed** follower of God's promise. He is one who refused to be seduced or distracted by the visible, touchable, material world around him. **Remember Moses.** His is an **un-kidnapped heart**. He shows us **what it takes** to inherit the promise of God.

And that leads right into the **second point of instruction in this great text:**

- 2) **"LET US ALSO LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT, AND SIN WHICH CLINGS SO CLOSELY, AND LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US"(12:1b)**

The **"sin which clings so closely"** is anything that keeps you from running the race **flat out**. In other words, it doesn't have to be something sinful **in itself**. Anything **becomes** sinful when it diminishes your spiritual **stamina** or **appetite**.

That's why those things are called the sin "**which clings so closely.**" They are hardest to deal with because they're the hardest to come to terms with as being sinful. They are **close** to us. They feel as though they are so germane to what we are all about. They feel like **temperament**. We can easily label them as **goals** and **aspirations - even identities**. They're the natural **environment** of our culture. They're the things **everyone does** and **no one can live without** and **no one can condemn**.

All these things - **even** these things - must be "**laid aside**"(12:1). This New Testament imperative is almost totally foreign to North American evangelical Christianity. "**Laying aside**" is the call to sacrifice other legitimate uses of time, energy and resources for the cause of Christ. The call is to **relinquish** as we race after Christ.

"**Lay aside.**" Note the verbs. There are parts of my life too precious for my sense of self to **just fall** off like dead leaves. There is nothing automatic here. Nothing that doesn't hurt some.

And here's why. You and I can't race after Christ without sacrificing much that feels precious only because we haven't yet fully seen Christ as glorious as He truly is. When we **see** Jesus these **clingy sins** will drop off like ridiculous, useless distractions.

That's exactly what the Apostle John tells us - **1 John 3:2-3** -
“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”
- IPAD TEXT

But that's not where we are right now. Right now it takes much more effort to lay aside precious feeling sins. Right now they must be **“*laid aside.*”** This takes great faith. We must trust our Lord's commands when we don't yet see the full blessing of them. That's what the Bible means when it describes the **“*fight of faith.*”**

Our text says we are called, not just to ***like*** Jesus, or ***think of Him with fondness*** at times, or cling to some kind of ***belief in His Person or existence.*** We're called to ***race*** toward Him. We're called to pursue Him as the chief ***goal*** and ***object*** of our running here on earth. Listen, you're not in the ***rat*** race along with the rest of this decaying, perishing world. You are in the ***Christ*** race. That's what you're to be chasing and you must never forget it.

And like this cloud of witnesses - these **witnesses to what the genuine life of faith is all about** - like **Moses** - see that you don't let **anything** turn you aside from the business at hand. Resist anything that would hold you back. Rather than be hindered, or controlled, or diverted by present concerns or affections, **deal with the threat of distraction and seduction before those things trip up your soul.** Learn the art of what our text calls "**laying aside**" weights that don't facilitate the running of the race for Christ.

This is the image the writer of Hebrews paints for us. Because you aren't out **for a stroll**, because the finish line comes sooner than many think, **lay aside everything that would hinder and dilute your concentration on the finish line.** This was not just some cheap locker room pep talk. The writer of this epistle had good reason to be concerned about these Christians:

IPAD TEXT - Hebrews 10:32-36 - “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, [33] sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. [34] For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. [35] Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. [36] For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”

Recall former days when you were once more drawn to Jesus. There are people here who need to do that as we enter a new year. In another text the writer says these people were starting to fade - **Hebrews 2:1 - "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." - IPAD TEXT**

Underline those words, “***much closer attention.***” What are you presently doing to give ***much closer attention*** to the things of God than you were one year ago? What are you putting into place to ***counterbalance*** the incessant pull of secularism on your mind and your schedule?

The Bible says you don't have to give that the **same** attention as you gave it before. You must give it **more careful attention** than you gave it before.

See also **Hebrews 3:17-4:1 - "And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? [18] And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? [19] So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief....[4:1] Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it."** - IPAD TEXT

See also **Hebrews 6:11-12 - "And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, [12] so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."** - IPAD TEXT

"Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." Remember the witnesses who have gone before. That's what their example is all about. Relate their experience to yours. Look at your life passing by. You only get one chance at the prize. Don't get side-tracked. The church desperately needs that reminder today.

3) **"LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US, LOOKING TO JESUS, THE FOUNDER AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH"**

As we approach this new year, I want to especially underscore those words ***"the race that is set before us."*** Jesus has gone this way before. That's what the rest of **verse 2** is all about: **Hebrews 12:2 - "...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."**

- IPAD TEXT

Above all, remember Jesus. He has marked out the lanes for the race. He has given all of us ample provision for ***growth. The resources are all there. He has established a course for the perfecting of your faith far into a year you can't even see yet.*** You do not travel this way alone.

He is **"Founder and Perfecter"** of our faith (12:2). That means He doesn't just ***start*** things. It's His very nature to ***finish*** them. ***He encompasses the way we walk.*** He knows what will work and what won't. Don't make your own rules for the path you take. He's been over the whole course. He knows the best way. Keep your eyes on Jesus.