

Ben Libby

Sermon

March 28th, Lent 6, Palm Sunday

To Jesus Christ who, being found in appearance as a man, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, to Him be eternal glory. Amen. Our sermon text this morning is taken from Hebrews, chapter 12, the first 6 verses.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us get rid of every burden and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us. 2 Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal. In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God's throne. 3 Carefully consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinful people, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood in your fight against sin. 5 Have you also forgotten the encouragement that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard the Lord's discipline lightly, and do not become weary of his correction. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and he corrects every son he accepts.

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

How do you feel about running? Many people love it. Especially at this time of year. The weather is becoming more pleasant per day around here. It's not fun to run in bad weather. It's much better to run on a sunny day, where you don't need to wear multiple layers to keep you warm.

I don't think it would come as a huge surprise that I am not a fan of running. Running just to run seems insane to me. No doubt there are many benefits to being an active runner. The cardio workout you receive is great for your health. But I never understood people who run because they actively enjoy it. To me, running is work. It is something that can be good for you, but to me, it's not something particularly enjoyable.

At the same time, the concept of running is a great comparison to what we are all doing here. Life is a run, a race. This is a picture that the Bible makes reference to several times. The Christian is like a runner running a race. The finish line is when we finally rest. In the meantime, all we can do is keep on putting one foot in front of the other. Are there times when this race we run, this life we live, is enjoyable?

Most definitely. We have been blessed immensely. But at the same time, it is still running. It is work. Sometimes it can take everything we have just to simply roll out of bed. This life we live, at times, is a slog. But it is still the race we must run.

How are we supposed to do that? Well, it's not by sheer grit and determination. If that were the case, we would never make it. Instead, we have been given a few motivating factors. This text lays them out quite nicely. What are the keys to our Christian race? Good coaching, focus, and conditioning. These things make it possible to run our race with confidence. These things are not found within us, rather they are instilled in us by God. It is only through our Lord that we can run. And so, we run for Him, and we run through Him! And so we pray: SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. AMEN...

As was mentioned in a previous sermon, I watch a lot of college basketball, particularly in the month of March. Whenever a game is about to tip-off, usually the analysts will list a few key factors. Keys for success. I always enjoy these, sometimes because

what they list is obvious. Other times I enjoy them because as simple as they may be, they can also be incredibly hard. "This team needs to score in transition to win". "This team needs to shoot well from the perimeter to win." "This team needs to defend down low effectively to win." These are all things that every team would like to be doing, but at the same time they are sometimes very hard to accomplish.

Our text starts out by listing a key to a successful Christian race. It's as obvious as it is important. It's also incredibly difficult: **Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us get rid of every burden and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us.**

Today is the last Sunday in Lent. That means it is Palm Sunday. This was toward the end of the long road Jesus ran. It all led to this. This was always where His road would end. He was born for this moment. As He rode into Jerusalem that Sunday, he was on His last lap. When He got to the cross, that was the finish line and the end of the line.

The book of Hebrews is essentially a sermon. It has a continuous line of thought that runs throughout. Our text starts out with that great summary word, "**Therefore**". So it's important that we understand "therefore what"... The previous chapter 11 is all about the saints who went before us. The writer brings up all these examples of people, who by faith, did incredible things. People like Abraham, Moses, and King David by faith in the LORD were able to achieve incredible feats during their run. But, many of them suffered. And all of them, except that incredible case of Enoch, died. They all died, some in horrendous ways. All of these examples are why he now says "therefore", and he will go on to get to the point their lives produced...

That term, "**cloud of witnesses**" has always intrigued me. The word for "witness" in Greek is "martyr". We think of a martyr as someone who is executed for their religious beliefs. But that is not all that a martyr is. What do they do? They witness! The heroes of faith all witness to the fact that what they believed in, the LORD, was worth believing in. If Jesus wasn't exactly who He claimed to be, then why would

the Apostles be willing to die for His cause? Their deeds and deaths all witness the validity of His life and death.

But, why are they a cloud? What does a cloud do? It shades, it blocks out some of the harmful rays of the sun. If you were running on a dry and hot day, wouldn't it be better if there were some clouds in the sky? When we run our race, we look to those who have gone before us. Their lives provide us with a game plan as to how we are to run.

But, as great as those people were, they still had flaws. But their faith is not all they had in common. So was their sin. Abraham, Moses, and David were all great men who had great faith. But they also had sinful pasts. We can learn a lot from them. But they are just as sinful as we are.

But, the main thing that we can learn from them is that, in spite of their sinfulness, they were still able to run their race successfully. How so? **let us get rid of every burden and the sin that so easily ensnares us**

Every sin that we commit is an impediment to our running. We need to get rid of it. If you were about to run a marathon, how would you dress? You wouldn't run in jeans and a coat. You would dress lightly, in clothing that wouldn't restrict your movement.

There is only one way we are able to run properly. It is to get rid of anything that would impede us. How do we do this? We repent! Only God can remove sin from us. And, as equally as important, only God can remove guilt from us as well. That's the part of sin that goes unmentioned. We sin all the time. We know that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us those sins. But guilt can still linger. The guilt can slow down as much as the sin itself. But the LORD also removes the guilt. The only way we can be assured of this is by looking at the WORD! **I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psa 32:5 NKJ)**

To be able to have a successful run, we need good coaching. It's imperative. We need to learn how to crawl before we can walk, and we need to learn how

to walk before we can run. The only way we are able to do this is by being coached by the Word. There we can see the many witnesses before us who ran the race we would run. There we see the One, Jesus, who never got tripped up. He ran His race to the fullest. He is our Redeemer and the ultimate example of how to run. When He entered Jerusalem that Palm Sunday, His race was almost over. He would continue to run it perfectly, and that's why we have hope. Who better to learn from than the One who ran it perfectly?

2 Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal. In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God's throne.

Good running requires good focus. If your focus isn't right, then your run will suffer. I have been told it's best to keep your eyes up when running. I tend to look down at my feet, or up to the sky. But if you do that, your breathing suffers. Also, it's hard to see ahead what might be in the way if you are looking down instead.

Where are we to look when we are running our Christian race? We look to the cross. It is our focal point. But, if we look elsewhere, we will most definitely get tripped up. Our spiritual enemies will do anything to distract our focus. Things like politics, or social media, or yes even sports can be spiritual distractions. These things are not evil in and of themselves. But the enemies of the faith will use them to distract you from your goal. If you focus on anything other than Christ crucified, your run will suffer.

In basketball, there are many ways in which the crowd tries to distract the opposing players. They will chant taunts. They will wave things behind the basket when the road team shoots free throws. They will jump up and down and get loud to try to rattle them. It's quite striking this year not having full crowds at games. The crowd is normally such a factor at these games. To have them significantly reduced is jarring.

Make no mistake about it, when we are running our spiritual race, we do not have the home-field

advantage. It may seem like it at times. Like at church, when we are among fellow believers. That certainly is helpful. But that's merely a huddle. Most of the time, we are out there in hostile territory. We are behind enemy lines. Look at Jesus on Palm Sunday. There it seemed like a homecoming. The people poured out of the city to see Him enter it. They cried out to Him hosanna. They praised Him. But soon those hosannas soured. They would be turned into "Crucify Him!" This world hates us because it first hated Him.

But focus on His focus. **In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame** Jesus wasn't going to let anything get in the way of your salvation. The joy that was set before Him is now your eternal joy in heaven. He would endure the cross. The shame of it all He disregarded. Shame, agony, pain, hell itself would not distract Him from saving you! He was able to focus on His goal. So our focus focuses on His. Keep those eyes up and keep them focused on the cross!

3 Carefully consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinful people, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood in your fight against sin.

How bad do you want it? What are you willing to do to win? Are you willing to do what it takes? These are questions that any coach might ask of a player. They prepare the players for the fact that it's not going to be easy. The race is hard. You have to be prepared for that fact.

This life is hard. It is highlighted by great moments. But there are certainly lowlights as well. What are we willing to experience as a result of being a follower of Jesus? Are we ready to bleed for this? So far, we haven't yet. But it's certainly possible. Don't put it past this world. Are we ready to die for our faith? Are you willing to bleed for your faith?

Jesus was willing. He bled for your salvation. Our text draws our focus upon that fact. It tells you to **consider it carefully**. The race is not easy. No matter what, it's still a run. It's still a struggle. But He didn't

lose heart, even when He had to die. Shouldn't we have the same attitude?

How can we be prepared for this? Well, God prepares us. Everything that we struggle through is strengthening us for our run. One does not simply wake up one morning, declare that they are running a marathon, and just go out and do it. I suppose there are some who could do that. But almost anyone preparing for such a lengthy race would most certainly train for it. **5 Have you also forgotten the encouragement that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard the Lord's discipline lightly, and do not become weary of his correction. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and he corrects every son he accepts.**

This is why correction is so important. It trains us up. It's sure important when you raise children. They need to learn from early on that not just anything goes. They don't always simply get what they want. There are consequences for things. These are all facts for any of us. The earlier we learn these things, the more prepared we are for life. Discipline over taking your brother's toy may seem like a pretty insufficient thing. But it's an important teaching opportunity. You don't get to do that. Not in this particular circumstance, and not in other future opportunities.

We need to learn how to endure. We need to learn how to take hits and get back up. Because that is exactly what will happen in this world. That is what conditioning is. It is learning from pain. It is becoming hardened by hard things. That's why we train. So that when the moment comes, we are prepared.

Again, turn your focus to Jesus. How was He prepared to go to the cross? His whole life was preparing Him for that moment. He was constantly in the Word, being about His Father's business. He lived a perfect life. He never had to be picked up because He never fell. We on the other hand are quite a different story.

But, isn't that why we are here today in the first place? To be conditioned by the Word? To learn from what Jesus did and learn why He did it? Are we not being disciplined when we come to church? Here, we confess our sins. It's one of the first things we cover in

our order of service. We simply have to get it out of the way. We are sinners and deserve full temporal and eternal punishment. But He is quick to remind us that we are forgiven. We confess our sins, and hear what He says: **"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."** (Joh 8:11 NKJ)

Yes, I love sports. It's great for many reasons, but perhaps the most important one is the lessons that it teaches. They tell us that things won't always go our way. It's a struggle. You have two different teams who are trying to beat each other. One wins, the other loses.

But running is a whole different animal. It's a personal thing. You are not trying to beat another team most times. Most times you are trying to beat a time. How can we be prepared for our run? What are the keys to success when it comes to the race of the Christian? You need to be well-coached by the Word. You need the focus that keeps the eyes on the prize. And, you need to be conditioned to be prepared for it. We don't know how long our run will be. That finish line for some is a great distance off. For others, they may be about to start their last lap. Our goal is to keep on running until we cross to heaven, and then we will rest. What was Paul's conclusion with his finish line in sight? **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.** (2Ti 4:7-8 NKJ)

The One who wore the crown of thrones is the same One who gives the crown of righteousness. Without Jesus, it would be impossible for us to run our race. He was the first One to do it. He did it perfectly. We, therefore, focus on His run to improve our own. We see that He never falls where we do. But when we fall, we see Him there on the cross, picking us back on our feet. It's a slog at times, but it's one worth slogging through. Why? Because at the end of the line we win the righteousness He won for us. All praise and thanks be to Jesus, the master runner, who we run through and whom we run to. AMEN!!!