

Title: Run with Endurance pt.2
Text: Hebrews 12.1-2
Theme: Living as if you can see what is not yet seen
Series: Hebrews #46
Prop Stmt Faith is living daily as if the promises of God have already been fulfilled.

Read Text:

For several years I have run marathons. I am not convinced that it is the smartest thing that I have ever done, but it does allow me the freedom to keep eating peanut M&M's. The most prestigious large-scale marathon in the world, by most accounts, is the Boston marathon. It is my goal to run that some day. However, I have to qualify for it and thus far have not been able to do it. And yes, peanut M&M's may have something to do with that. Some days I have more motivation than others. On Tuesday of last week I came home and did not feel like running. I felt like sitting down and reading a book. I felt lazy, uninspired, apathetic and unmotivated. I saw the couch, my book and a bowl of M&M's that together formed a trio that was singing to me and I was listening. Their song of rest and indulgence was enchantingly good and I was listening and agreeing until Cathi said – "Are you going running?" I said something lame about getting home too late and not wanting to mess up her dinner schedule, y'know trying to make it sound like I was being sensitive to her. She didn't let me get away with it and a few minutes later my shoes were laced up and I was back at it.

Now generally, I am not one who relies on someone else for motivation. But there are times when I need it. This text is full of plural pronouns, which make it clear that we will not run well, if we try to do this on our own. The point isn't that if you run by yourself that you may get discouraged and fall to the side, although that is certainly the experience of many. The point is, IF you are running the race that God has set before you, it is (as the text states) "the race that is set before us." Faithful running means to run on a team. Running with a team can slow you down. Running with a team can get in your way. Running on a team means that you get involved in the "issues" of the team. Running on a team means that you have to show up for practice because others are depending on you. Running on a team means that you are responsible for more than just yourself. The life of a believer is a life of faith. It is a long obedience in the same direction. It is a long run marked by steps of faith whose every stride is driven by the choice to live as if God's promises have already been realized even though we know that they have not all yet been fulfilled. Some days, when the breeze is in our back and the sun is soft on our skin we may get a glimpse of the lights of the city. Other days, when it is cold and rainy, we lace 'em up, and keep running driven by the knowledge that we do not run alone.

The call of these verses is to run with endurance. We noted last week that we do that because others are depending on you, others are watching you and by running with others. There are 3 more things that are necessary for an enduring faith.

1. **By getting rid of every hindrance.** (v.1)

“let us also lay aside every weight”

Good long distance runners do not run in cowboy boots and trench coats. They wear the lightest clothing possible. Fact is, equipment is a very important issue. If your shoe rubs a bit, that’s okay if you are wearing it to church. But, if you are going to run 26 miles in it, then you are going to have some serious problems. The weights that this verse speaks of are the things (not necessarily sinful) that are getting in the way of your faithful endurance.

Did you ever see that guy, General Larry Platt a couple of years ago auditioning for American Idol singing, “pants on the ground?” Do you remember the words? “Pants on the ground, pants on the ground, lookin like a fool with your pants on the ground...” Now, while some of us have a difficult time figuring out why someone would buy pants and only pull them up to their knees, the truth is police officers love this style. There have been so many stories of a guy running from the cops when his pants fall down around his ankles and he trips and falls and is stuck. Now, some of you laugh at that, and some of you may not like the style, but guess what? Some of you are lookin’ like a fool with your pants on the ground. You have hindrances that are weighing you down and distracting you from faithful endurance. (I tried to get Nathan to do that as our closing song, but he failed to grasp the obvious value of its contribution to our hymnody.)

If, for example, you don’t have time to read the Word and pray because you are on Facebook, then while Facebook may be okay for someone else, it’s not for you. If you cannot afford the time to be involved in the lives of other people by serving in the ministry of the church because of your cabin, or because of your boat, or because of your season tickets, or because of your hobbies, or because you signed your kid up for 14 sports leagues, or because of your constant traveling, then while those things may not be a sin, they are a distraction for you. That is what is so difficult about hindrances. We ask the wrong question about them. We ask, “What is wrong with this?” That’s the wrong question. The question should be, “How does this activity help me help others run with endurance?” Good things can be weights that keep us from the best things. And when that happens, we end up giving up what really matters for what is not bad, but it just doesn’t really matter.

What is your hindrance? What are the weights that are getting in the way of your faithfulness? What are the ok things that have gotten in the way of the best things?

2. **By confronting our sin.**

“let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely” (1)

We are also commanded to lay aside every “sin which clings so closely”. I have chosen to make two points out of this because the idea for the weights seems to be things that are not wrong in and of them selves but have become a distraction. That means that there are

some things that you need to get rid of because they are weighing you down, but they may not be weighing another person down. Of course there may be some things that weigh them down that do not weigh you down. When it comes to hindrances, one size does not fit all. But, that is not the case with sin. Sin is something that we all have to confront. The problem with sin is that we not only have to confront it, we have to keep on confronting it. Every single day, we wake up to a war. Sin does not take a day off. Sin does not take a break. We have to confront the sinful desires of our hearts every single day by preaching to ourselves instead of listening to ourselves. Know what I mean?

This past week I was running. My target was six miles. At four miles my body started talking to me. It was saying things like, “Hey, you can take a breather. You don’t want to strain anything. You can slow down and walk for half a mile. After all, you’ve already probably done more than most today. You can do more later on.” And on and on this went. It was ridiculous. I had already determined that for that day I was going to run the entire six miles at a particular pace and I was not going to walk and here my body was attempting a coup. There was an insurgence, an uprising, a rebellion on the part of my body and I ended up in an argument with my body. I literally said, “You can walk, but not til you’ve run six miles. You can take a breather then, but you cannot take a breather now.” Now, I recognize that it would not have been a sin for me to have walked in the middle of that run. But, one of the disciplines that I was attempting to work on in my own life is the discipline of preaching to my self instead of listening to my self. Let’s do some comparison between what this text tells us that we need to preach to ourselves and what our hearts tell us.

a. God calls evil – “sin” while our hearts labels our evil as “not so bad.”

We love to hear the stories of people who are worse than us and pretend to be shocked – don’t we? And as soon as we do that, what do our hearts tell us? They say something like, “Hey, dude, I know I’m not perfect, but holy cow, I ain’t that bad!” And in that moment – what just happened? Think with me! As soon as I focus upon the failures of others my heart takes that story and elevates it as the new standard of righteousness and assumes that you if compare my sin to that egregiousness then I look “not so bad.” You and I can justify all sorts of sin by claiming that we are not as bad as someone else. The obvious problem is that our hearts have grabbed onto the wrong standard of righteousness. As long as we find hold up others, we assume that God is going to grade us on a curve. Our 75 on the test looks pretty good to someone else’s 35. Of course, we try that with our parents – don’t we? “Oh mom, the class bombed that test. At least I got a 65. I know some kids that didn’t even get a 50. One of the dangers of that is not simply that we are believing a lie about what the standard is, but we fail to understand the very nature of sin itself. Sin is toxic. Sin is a defiling, beguiling and subtle deception that is more dangerous than any germ, infection, or contaminant that you know.

b. God says sin “clings so closely” while our hearts say that we can stop whenever we want.

We have had a number of people in our church who have had joints replaced. The greatest challenge in that process is not getting an infection. Artificial joints can be helpful, but once an infection, like staph or it's really nasty sister MRSA, takes hold, it is a monstrous challenge to get rid of. Two people in our church have had to have their artificial joints removed because infection took hold and it was so tenacious. Sin is worse. Sin is tenacious. It hides. It masks its presence under good things. It pretends. It disguises itself. It waits for a weak moment. It is relentless. But our hearts tell us that we can stop it anytime what we want. As soon as we listen to that stinkin' thinkin' we are toast because we fail to consider the true nature of what we are dealing with. That is why:

c. God says get rid of it, while our hearts say that we can handle it.

Our hearts want to have a meeting and discuss how we can all get along. Can't we all just get along? NO! We can't. Sin is sworn to your destruction while it pretends to be your friend. There is no compromise, negotiation, discussion or debate. You cannot live with self-righteousness it will rot you out. You cannot tolerate arrogance; it will infect your entire being. You cannot give room to self-pity or indulge lust, or bitterness or an unforgiving spirit. You cannot pretend that laziness or gossip, or anger, or envy or jealousy can be overlooked for a while because you can handle it. You cannot handle it. But we are tempted to think we can.

d. God says that it will stop you from running while our hearts say that it hasn't hurt us yet.

It's like the guy who was drunk and made it home without getting into an accident. We are like the guy who smokes and does not have lung cancer – yet. We assume that we are entitled to a little bit of sin; after all, we are still standing. Whatever your sin, whatever your idol, if you do not deal with it, it will deal with you. It may not be immediately noticeable, but little by little sin will drain all of the joy out of your heart. Are you on edge? Are you rough and crusty? Are you cynical and harsh? Are you quick to find fault, quick to judge, quick to pull the trigger of intimidating words? Quick to let others know that they don't measure up? What I have just described is heart that has had the joy drained out. Sin puts holes in your heart so that the joy drains out.

If sin is so serious and so tenacious and so pervasive and relentless and so debilitating to our run, how then can we ever hope to finish? We have to preach to ourselves and warn ourselves about the nature of sin, make no excuses for it, make no room for it, and make no compromises. But, we cannot win this battle through self-talk. We have to rely upon Christ. We have to look to Christ.

3. By looking to Jesus. (2)

Looking to Jesus is something that we have to do every day. What does that mean? How do you look to Jesus? Does this mean that you get a necklace or an icon or a picture that you carry around? Should you get a bracelet or some object to put in your purse, or keychain or pocket? NO! It means to rely upon by giving careful consideration to all that Christ has done and is doing. Now, here is where the author of Hebrews is building on a truth that he has already established. Go back to chapter 2.10-18. Here he is showing why he went into such theological depth at the beginning of this book. Here is why it is so very important that you grasp rich truth and discipline your mind to think deep about Christ.

Through these nine verses, we see that Christ is an incredible priest right now. This is punctuated by this heart-grabbing truth: You belong to Christ. Christ belongs to you. Notice the language of identification in these verses. Christ is the “son of man” (v.6) and we are the “sons” that he is bringing to glory (v.10). We are called “brothers” (11, 12) and “the children” that God has given to Christ (13). V.14, “He himself likewise partook of the same things” (referring to the fact that we share in the same flesh and blood). V.17, “He had to be made like his brothers in every respect.” And like us, he suffered, and like us he was tempted (v.18). You are so deeply rooted in Christ that you are forever one of his. Now, look again at verse 10. “For whom and by whom all things exist (that is who we are dealing with!), in bringing many sons to glory (that is what he is doing and he is not going to be denied! If you have trusted in Christ, you are a son of God and a brother of Christ and he is going to bring you to glory and since he is the one for whom and by whom all things exist, he will not be denied. But in order for that to become a reality, Christ had to accomplish your salvation. That is what he did) should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.”

Verse 11 then begins with a connecting word “for”. The argument, I believe, goes back to the solidarity that is between man and our representative, the “son of man” (v.6), who perfectly obeyed the mission that he was given by the Father which now secured and guarantees that our mission will be successfully completed as well. “*For he who sanctifies* (Christ who makes holy) *and those who are sanctified* (believers who are set apart) *all have one source* (God). (ESV footnote – all are of one; NIV – “of the same family”) God gave you a mission and God gave his Son a mission. His Son’s mission was to guarantee that you would complete your mission and since the Son completed his mission, all of his children will do the same! “*That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying...*”

When we go back to 12.2 we read again that Christ is the founder and the perfecter of our faith. The author of Hebrews is using this truth to compel us to press on and run with endurance. So now, think with me. How does this motivate us? What exactly does it mean to look to Jesus? Well, I am going to come back next week and unpack the rest of this glorious verse, but for today, I want you to marinate on this. Looking to Jesus means to consider what he has done as it relates to our running with endurance. Since Christ is the founder and perfecter of our faith, since Christ accomplished the plan that guarantees

the bringing of many sons to glory, that means that the verdict is sealed, the results are guaranteed, you, child of God, sibling of Christ are going to make it home! You are going to make it. The wind is in your face, but you are going to make it. The adversity is tough, but you are going to make it. Your own heart is full of doubt and your strength seems weak, but Christ has guaranteed your salvation. You are going to make it. So, since you are going to make it, press on. Keep going. Get rid of those hindrances, lay aside those sins, get your head up, your gaze on the lights of that city and pick up the pace. And not only that, but look around you. Your brothers and sisters are going to make it too. And they need to hear you tell them. They need for you to remind them of that. Your faithfulness does, just that. Don't give up on them.