

DON'T FORSAKE JESUS

FOLLOW JESUS – THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH OUR HOPE IS BUILT

➤ **READ HEBREWS 12:1-3**

SUMMARY: Look at Jesus, who gives us hope and serves as an example of suffering.

Discuss

1. Give examples of things that hinder us in our spiritual race; of sins that entangle us.
2. Describe perseverance in this context.
3. What did Jesus see that led him to endure the cross?
4. Verse 3 presents Jesus to us as an example. But he is more than that. What words in verse 2 describe the role Jesus plays in our faith?

Look

- “Great cloud of witnesses” (1) – A reference to the people the author has just spoken about in chapter 11
- “Race” (1) – This is a track and field idea – a course is laid out for us
- “Fix our eyes on Jesus” (2) – When we do this we remember the salvation he earned for us and see the example he left for us. In doing so, we cannot see all the distractions of this sinful world.
- “Endured the cross...scorned its shame...sat down at the right hand” (2) – In taking our shame upon himself, Jesus dealt with the “humiliation” of our death. Death is caused by sin – which causes shame.
- “Opposition from sinful men” (3) – The author specifically mentions this because his readers were going through similar temptations

➤ **READ HEBREWS 12:4-13**

SUMMARY: Do not despise God’s discipline, but treasure it as evidence of a loving God and submit to his discipline.

Discuss

5. Verse 5 tells us of two wrong reactions to the Lord's discipline. What are they?

6. Complete the following sentence. "We are often tempted to view hardship as _____." What does the writer want us to view it as?

7. Who alone does the Lord discipline? Why do we have trouble keeping this thought in mind?

8. Compare God's discipline with that of our human fathers as to (1) its perfection and (2) its purpose and result.
 - a. God's discipline is _____. Our fathers must rely on their _____, which is often faulty.
 - b. Our earthly father's goals are not necessarily directed to our _____.

God's discipline always has an _____ in mind.

9. How does the Lord increase our righteousness and peace through the persecution (crosses) he allows in our lives?

Look

- "Not yet...[shed] your blood" (4) – He writes this, not to shame them, but to remind them that it may end this way. Encouragement to not give up even though it looks like martyrdom is a very real possibility.
- "Don't lose heart" (5) – Don't give up being corrected
- "Discipline" (5) – This word was used for the informal and formal education of boys. It involved the exercise of discipline by getting students to practice what they had been taught, as well as by correcting them when they made mistakes – whether by rebuking, reproving, or chastising them.
- "Punishes" (6) – This word literally means "whip, flog, scourge." The emphasis in this word is that discipline, reproving, or chastisement may be painful. The emphasis is not a punishment for **sins**, but a punishment for **righteousness**.
- "Father" (7) – Not that mothers don't discipline, but God's word speaks of fathers as the head of the household
- "Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees" (12) – We do this through the gospel. Through "spiritual breathing"

Who of us hasn't tasted God's discipline? Sometimes it comes in sharp and swift doses, almost taking our breath away. Other times it comes in slow and steady waves, almost wearing us out. When it comes, who of us hasn't asked, "Why"? Strangely enough, we can tell our children not to ask why when we discipline them, only to throw that same question at our heavenly Father. Our children are to accept our wisdom as infallible, while we feel free to question the ways of the Almighty.

Not why but what is the proper question when discipline comes. The why we have been told often enough, and the author of Hebrews has repeated it for us again. It is because our Father loves us and wants to mature us for heaven. The what he will show us if we give him time as he strengthens our faith and uses us to strengthen others. Nor will his discipline go on forever. The day will come when he on whom we fix our eyes in faith will return. (Hebrews People's Bible)

➤ **READ HEBREWS 12:14-17**

SUMMARY: Avoid the entanglement of sin found in worldliness and inattention to the Word.

Discuss

10. What are some of the sins listed in these verses that can entangle us?
11. How does the account of Esau selling his birthright provide a warning for the Hebrew Christians...Christians of all ages?
12. When we experience difficulty as a result of another person's actions, we often react by fighting back. How can we overcome that temptation? *(Name some ways of pursuing peace with your fellow Christians)*

Look

- *"Misses the grace of God" (15)* – A reminder of how serious the end result of being entangled in sin is
- *"Sexually immoral...godless" (16)* – The Greek actually connects both of these to Esau
- *"He could bring about no change of mind" (17)* – Means he could not get back the firstborn's blessing. It does not mean he could not repent and trust in Jacob's descendant – Jesus – for forgiveness of sins

➤ **READ HEBREWS 12:18-24**

SUMMARY: By faith we live on Mount Zion, citizens of the new Jerusalem. Why choose the first mountain over the second?

Discuss

13. What are the two mountains being compared?

14. Explain this statement: Either Christ's blood or Abel's blood will speak about you on the Last Day."

Look

- *"The sight was so terrifying" (21) – A negative kind of picture – and this is what the readers were contemplating going back to!!!!!!!*

Is [this] what the readers wanted? Did they really want to return to Judaism with its old covenant of the Law? The Law with its thunder and trumpets can provide no pardon for sin-troubled hearts or peace for sin-torn consciences. All it offers is the awesome revelation of God's righteous requirements and the horrible fear of his just punishment over infractions. All it can do is point out the impassable and impossible distance sin puts between man and God, but the law can offer nothing to bridge the gap.

There is no future at Mount Sinai, no access to God, no acceptance by God, no eternity with God. And yet men try! Misled by the devil, misguided by their own conceit, even misinformed by their churches, they dare to think they can approach a holy God by means of what they do. What a tragedy to try and touch a holy God in this way, only to receive eternal death in hell! (Hebrews People's Bible)

- *"Heavenly Jerusalem" (22) – Someday God will dwell with his people forever in a new and perfect city*
- *"City of the living God" (22) – This is a place where we will behold God and live with him into eternity*
- *"Angels in joyful assembly" (22) – We will be with the angels who now are God's servants to guard and protect us*
- *"Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (23) – We will live with all those who have shared our faith*
- *"God, the judge of all men" (23) – God will judge us innocent, vindicate our faith, and comfort us eternally*
- *"Spirits of righteous men made perfect" (23) – We will be made perfect so that we can live in the presence of our perfect Lord*
- *"Mediator of the new covenant" (24) – Jesus, our Great High Priest, will be there*
- *"The sprinkled blood" (24) – Jesus' blood will cleanse us forever*

➤ **READ HEBREWS 12:25-29**

SUMMARY: Greater privilege involves greater responsibility, so always set your feet firmly on the foundation that cannot be shaken.

Discuss

15. The greater the message, the greater the punishment if the message is rejected.” Apply that truth to these verses.

Endure

16. Sometimes we are tempted to make up our own “shoulds” and “should nots” rather than to live purely by the grace of God. Why is it unnecessary and harmful to make up rules for running the race?

SUMMARY

What a treasure God has given us in the Gospel of Christ! It is a treasure that, while often unappreciated in this world, causes all of the treasure of this world to be insignificant by comparison. And yet, how many pass by the heavenly treasure and eagerly fight over the cheap and crumbling treasures that seem to glint and gleam in this world.

Christians, don't be taken in by this eager grasping around you! See that the treasure God has placed in your hands is infinitely more precious and long lasting! Don't trade it away for the worthless goods of this world, which offer only a momentary pleasure that soon turns to bitterness. You have a kingdom that lasts, that is unshakable. Hold on to that unshakable kingdom!

Responsive Closing Prayer

L: Dear Father in heaven, running the Christian race is hard. It takes training. It takes discipline from you. It takes self-discipline.

G: We must admit that at times we have resented your discipline or the pain involved in the process.

L: Yet we know that behind it is your love and your desire that we persevere in the race you have laid out for us.

G: Thank you for your Word, which encourages us.

L: Thank you for your sacraments, which strengthen us.

G: Thank you for the assurance that, as we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, we will overcome and obtain the victory

L: by your love and through the forgiving blood of Jesus, we will reach heaven and there experience an eternal peace with you.

G: Amen.