

Title: Finishing the Race
Text: Hebrews 12: 1-3
Date: April 18, 2013
Place: SGBC, New Jersey

There was a service held today in Boston for the families of those killed and injured in the Boston Marathon bombing. Many leaders, religious and civil, spoke.

When our president stood to speak, he opened his speech quoting from Hebrews 12: 1. He said, “The scriptures say, ‘let us run with patience the race that is set before us.’” I waited but he did not finish the sentence.

I decided then to save what I had prepared for another time and to preach tonight from Hebrews 12: 1-3.

Hebrews 12: 1: Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3: For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

I realize the president was trying to comfort and strengthen those who are suffering, as well as the whole country who was watching, while trying not to offend anyone.

Obviously, the president’s speech writers picked this verse of scripture because the bombing occurred during the running of the Boston Marathon.

Indeed, “running a race” is a good analogy of the race believers run. The apostle Paul uses “racing analogies” in several places in scripture.

Indeed, what we saw on Monday at the Boston Marathon is a good analogy of this race believers run. We live in a sin-cursed world, full of sinners, therefore the race believers run is a marathon full of bombs.

Bombs that come when we least expect them; bombs that cause great suffering and great sorrow.

But true comfort and true strength and true refuge is found only in him whom the speech writers left out—in Christ Jesus the Son of God.

So tonight, I want to preach what I wish I had heard someone say today in that service. If I could speak to the victims and their families, this is what I would say to them. If it was my eight year old son that just died, this is what I would want someone to remind me of.

Proposition: It is by the grace of God that we enter the race of faith so it shall be by the grace of God that we are kept till we cross the finish line. His grace is only in Christ Jesus. Therefore, believers must run the race set before us looking only to Jesus the Author and Finisher of *our* faith.

Hebrews 12: 1: Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses...

The “cloud of witnesses” are found in chapter 11 where the Spirit of God gives us a list of men and women who long ago ran this race in faith unto the end. The sufferings they each faced differed but they all suffered. Yet, they all finished the race the same way, believing Christ, because they all entered the race the same way—by the grace of God.

I. IT IS SOLELY BY THE GRACE OF GOD, THAT SINNERS ENTER THE RACE OF FAITH IN THE FIRST PLACE.

Sovereign and Free Grace

Illustration: When we own something, we do with our own what we will. So does God. Matthew 20:15: Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

The true and living God created everything and everything belongs to him. God is God. God can do what he pleases with his own. It is his sovereign right. Therefore, it was his “sovereign grace” by which he chose whom he would in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Application: When God truly revealed himself in this sinner’s heart, he made me realize that God was not obligated to choose me. It causes the sinner both, to submit to God in reverent obedience and to praise God in gratitude for his grace. Believer, let the bombs blast! It our constant comfort and assurance that the same sovereign power with which God choose us, God shall keep his child of grace. What comfort!

Illustration: With the Boston Marathon, only those who meet a qualifying time for their age group get to actually run the race.

Free Grace

God’s grace is also free grace. That means God did not choose us because we met certain qualifying factors. Free grace means his choosing us was not based on anything good or evil us, it was freely by his grace.

Romans 9: 16: So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that RUNNETH, but of God that sheweth mercy.

Application: Believer, though the sufferings of this life often cause us to doubt, though we are yet plagued with the sin of these bodies of death, if free grace chose me, free grace will keep me. What comfort.

Saving Grace

The text says that Christ came ran the race set before him “for the joy that was set before him.” First, it was the joy of glorifying his Father, God our Father. By the work Christ accomplished he declared God just and the Justifier of all who believe in Christ. (Romans 3: 24-26) Secondly, it was the joy of his children. “He shall see the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.” (Isaiah 53: 11) When a woman travails in child birth she is satisfied when she sees the child she has brought forth. Christ’s people are his inheritance, the joy set before him. Thirdly, the joy set before our Redeemer was the joy of having the glory he had with the Father as the GodMan. Christ prayed, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” (John 17: 4-5) He had that glory before he came as God the Son, now he has it as the GodMan.

Then our text says that Christ “endured the cross.” He went to the cross and was made sin for his people—in our room and stead—that he might make us the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5: 21) Christ was “made a curse for us” and by his finished work he “redeemed us from the curse of the law.” (Galatians 3: 13)

Furthermore, our text says that Christ did so “despising the shame.” The outward things that you and I can see were indeed shameful things. But the greatest shame was being made sin in place of his people and being forsaken of God in justice. But because endured that cross for his people, now we have the good news that atonement has been made for us. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Paul said, “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” (Romans 5: 9-11)

Now, our text says, Christ Jesus “is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” “When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Hebrews 1: 3) “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Hebrews 10: 14) So we see that it is by this saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we enter this race of faith.

Effectual and Irresistible Grace

We enter the race by God’s effectual, irresistible grace. It is the Spirit of God who births us a second time in regeneration, giving us faith to believe then we enter the race of faith. The new birth is a must.

John 3: 3: Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

A sinner is not born-again, called or converted by his own will or by the work of his own flesh.

Application: We’ve heard a lot of talk of the goodness of man because of those who rushed to help the victims. It was a good thing to do, what men ought to do for one another. But that does not make us good before God.

Our flesh, our natural man, the way we are born the first time, is dead in trespasses and in sins. We are born again, called and converted solely by the effectual grace of God.

John 6:63: It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

Effectual grace or irresistible grace, we mean God the Holy Spirit gets the job done.

Psalm 110:3: Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power,...

This power and grace is worked in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel in spirit and in truth. Not just any preaching, the preaching of truth.

James 1: 18: Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

1 Peter 1:23: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever....25: And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

1 Corinthians 4:15: For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

Application: When God reveals his grace in the heart of his child it is the most comforting thing there is. The race of faith is a race full of suffering throughout our lives. We are often troubled by current events like those that occurred Monday afternoon. My heart truly breaks for the family of that 8 year old child, as well as the families of the others who died on Monday. I thought, if that happened to my child, the only way I could possibly go on in this race were that to happen to me is by God’s grace. Our own sin troubles us greatly. Persecutors who hate our God and our gospel trouble us. But the believer’s greatest comfort is knowing that since it was by God’s sovereign, free, effectual grace that we entered the race of faith so it shall be by God’s sovereign, free, effectual grace that we finish the race. That is the message of comfort and what a comfort it is: eternal comfort, saving comfort, lasting comfort—the comfort of God.

II. BELIEVERS MUST LAY ASIDE EVERYTHING THAT WILL HINDER US FROM RUNNING THIS RACE—V1:...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Illustration: One thing I noticed as I watched the videos of the runners this week is that they were only carrying what was essential—nothing extra.

Lay Aside Every Weight

There are many weights we must lay aside in order to run this race of faith. Chiefly, the Hebrew letter deals with our number one problem—trying to carry the weight of the law. It is impossible to look to the law and to Christ as you run this race. You can't look in two different directions and run straight ahead. It hindered the Galatians. Paul said,

Galatians 5:7: Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?

One of two things happens when we turn from Christ back to the law. Either our constant failure to meet the law's requirements weight us down or swelling pride and self-righteousness from vainly imagining we are meeting the law's requirements will weight us down. We must run by faith "and the law is not of faith." That is the main point of this entire Hebrew epistle.

Paul said, "let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" (Heb 6: 1-2) When we look at the various "baptisms" in the old testament, instead of bringing ourselves under the law, let us learn the spiritual meaning in how those laws glorify Christ who was baptized—immersed—into the judgment and wrath of God in place of his people and thereby washed away the sins of his people. When we look at the "laying on of hands" under the law, let us not return to doing those things literally, let us go on to learn of how those laws picture the imputation of our sin to Christ and of Christ's righteousness to those for whom he died. Our rest is Christ, not a day.

Hebrews 4: 10: For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. 11: Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Let us go on to learn to digest strong meat such as "of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment", which things are sure in Christ the Firstborn who bore the judgment of sin in place of his people.

Hebrews 7: 18: For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. 19: For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

Another weight is loved ones. Mom or dad, sister or brother, son or daughter may not believe the gospel. But our dearest loved ones must be laid aside if they come between us and Christ.

Matthew 10: 37: He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Another weight is, you may have many cares in this life. Perhaps you are concerned for riches. Or maybe you enjoy the pleasures this world offers. They must all be laid aside if we will run the race of faith looking only to Christ. In our Master's parable of the various kinds of ground where seed was sown, he said of those among thorns,

Luke 8: 14...they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

Luke 18:25: For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

The Sin Which Doth So Easily Beset Us

Believers must lay aside all sin.

James 1: 21: Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Ephesians 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; 23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Especially lay aside the sin of unbelief. If one of God's people suffers like those on Monday or when we see suffering like that, I know that doubts sometimes come rushing in. But our suffering is no reason to doubt God. God our Father and his Son Christ Jesus is faithful. "He hath said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." (Heb 13: 5) Christ is our Consolation and our Comfort. Our suffering is reason to draw nearer to Christ and cling to him more. That is where God will bring his child when we suffer.

Run With Patience

We are to persevere in this race of faith as verse 1 says, "and let us run with patience the race." "Patience" means "cheerful, hopeful, endurance, constancy, and waiting."

Hebrews 6: 12: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who THROUGH FAITH and PATIENCE inherit the promises. 13: For when God made promise to Abraham, [it was Christ the Angel of God speaking to Abraham] because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, 14: Saying, Surely blessing I WILL BLESS THEE, and multiplying I WILL MULTIPLY THEE. 15: And so, after he had PATIENTLY ENDURED, he obtained the promise.

Application: Today, before it was over, the president had the people on their feet applauding. His message was one of persevering. But nothing he said was sure because it was all, "We will." Our strength to persevere is not "we will" it is Christ our Savior promising to us, "he will." When we suffer, it may appear Christ is not going to bless us—just wait on him—he promises his child, "I will bless thee." It may appear Christ will not turn it to our good, that we are being diminished by it—just wait—he promises his child, "I will multiply thee." It may appear the race is long, that Christ has been a long time returning—just wait—"after that Abraham patiently endured, he obtained the promise." So shall we.

The Race is Set before Us

Here is another great comfort in this race, our all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present God set the race before us, in verse 1, "the race that is SET before us."

Illustration: The runners in the Boston Marathon were handed a course to run. The race was set before them. All they had to concern themselves with was putting one foot in front of the other.

Believer, God our heavenly Father, has set our course before us: every mountain, every valley, every hurdle, every obstacle, the length and the finish line. And the same God who set the course will supply us the grace to run it. The same predestinating hand that rules everything in the course will give us the endurance to run the race.

III. THIS IS MOST IMPORTANT, THIS IS THE PART THE PRESIDENT LEFT OUT. RUN THE RACE—V2: 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Faith is spiritual sight—"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11: 1) We run the race by faith looking to Christ the author and finisher of faith. Faith is the gift of God and God gives it for us to be looking only to Christ at all times as we run the race set before us.

Application: Hear this precious word, believer, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Therefore, seek those things which are above, where Christ our All and in All sits on God's right hand. (Col 3: 1-3)

The Author and Finisher of Faith

Christ is the Author and Finisher of *our* faith. Christ Jesus our Lord is the first—the Author and Pioneer—the only Man who has run the race of faith in perfection and he is our perfection before God. The word "Finisher" means Perfector. And his faithfulness is for us.

Hebrews 6: 20:...the forerunner is FOR US entered, *even* Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

It is by the faith of Christ that we run this race. Paul said,

Galatians 2:20: I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Christ is the joy set before us even as his Father and his children were the joy set before him. Remember, the joy set before him.

First it was the joy of glorifying his Father for which he endured the cross.

John 12: 27...for this cause came I unto this hour. 28: Father, glorify thy name.

Brethren, likewise, the joy set before us is to glorify God our Father and his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, it was for the joy of bringing forth his children Christ endured the cross.

Isaiah 53: 11: He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied:

Likewise, the joy set before us is that as we suffer now in this cause of setting forth his gospel, through us setting forth this gospel, the Spirit of God shall birth his children to newness of life.

Thirdly, it was for the joy of eternal glory with the Father he suffered.

John 17: 5: And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

Likewise, the joy set before us is that we shall one day enjoy that same eternal glory with the Father and with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, let's go home remembering these things. We shall suffer. There will be persecution, there will be a uniting of every religion together against the Lord's true church, and there will be more bombs. But when you find yourself becoming weary in the race, the Spirit of God says this in verse 3, "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Therefore, lay aside every weight and every sin and run looking to Christ in faith:

- For justification from all our sins we must have
- For the Righteousness of the law we must have

- For sanctification from this world and from sin we must have
- For redemption from all captivity of every kind we must have
- For preservation and strength to run the race we must have
- For eternal glorification in the end we must have

Run perseveringly with endurance.

1 Corinthians 9:24: Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

Philippians 3: 14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Be always considering Christ. Christ will be our strength. David said

Psalm 23: 3: He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5: Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Christ said, "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne" (Revelation 3:21.)

Amen!