

Looking To Jesus

Introduction. Hebrews 12 is a delightful chapter to contemplate. The eleventh chapter is the most well-known in Hebrews because of all the men and women of faith who are listed. They are the “witnesses” which “compass” or surround us.

“Witness” can mean “spectator,” but it is not likely used this way in Hebrews 12:1. That would suggest they are now “looking down” on us from heaven. But there is no indication the dead know what occurs on earth (Ecclesiastes 9:5). While they may have memory of their time on earth (Luke 16:28), their attention is focused on their present condition (Revelation 7:9-17). The word can also refer to those who “bear witness.” By their lives, they have borne witness to the value of faith. By their exemplary lives, they encourage us in running the race of faith and in enduring discipline from the Lord.

In this lesson, we will investigate the first eleven verses of chapter 12 and look at the rest of the verses in tonight's lesson.

I. Running The Faithful Race

- A. Others have to lay hindrances aside.
 - 1. The runner who wants to win will lose as much weight as possible without hurting performance, and will wear clothing that is light and allows freedom of movement.
 - 2. Excess weight, confining clothing, etc., can be the difference between victory or defeat.
- B. We too must lay some hindrances aside.
 - 1. “Every weight.”
 - a) These are elements which slow down our spiritual progress (Luke 21:34-36; Colossians 3:8; 1 Peter 2:1-2; James 1:21).
 - b) These make “running the race of faith” difficult, if not impossible.
 - 2. “The sin which so easily ensnares us.”
 - a) From the context, the sin is the “sin of unbelief.”
 - (1) The epistle was written to encourage faithfulness to Christ.
 - (2) They have been warned against unbelief (Hebrews 3:12-13).
 - (3) When one no longer believes, the race is lost (Hebrews 10:26-39).
 - b) But all sin should be laid aside (“mortify,” Colossians 3:5).
- C. We need endurance.
 - 1. The “race of faith” is a marathon, not a sprint.
 - a) It does not require a quick burst of energy, in which the race is soon over.
 - b) This “race” requires a sustained effort over a long period of time.
 - 2. Endurance is a necessary quality.
 - a) Jesus taught His disciples about the need for endurance or patience (Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Luke 8:12).
 - b) The writer had stressed this virtue earlier.
 - (1) In which he appealed to the example of Abraham (Hebrews 6:11-15).
 - (2) In which he quoted from Habakkuk (Hebrews 10:38).

- c) We can develop the same patience with the help of the scriptures (Romans 15:4).
 - (1) As we read of the faithfulness of God who fulfills His promises.
 - (2) As we read of the ultimate end of those who faithfully persevered.
- D. We need to focus on Jesus.
 - 1. We must “look unto Jesus.”
 - a) Our focus has to be on the Lord as we “run the race.”
 - (1) We might “glance” at others (Hebrews 11:1-40).
 - (2) But we are to “gaze” on the Lord and Savior.
 - (3) The successful runner is not easily distracted.
 - b) For Jesus is “the author and finisher of our faith” (cp. Hebrews 2:10).
 - (1) He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1:8, 11).
 - (2) He has blazed the trail for us by having run the race Himself and now helps us to finish it (Hebrews 6:20; 7:25).
 - c) He succeeded in running the race by looking at “the joy set before Him.”
 - (1) The “joy” that inspired Him was likely the privilege of being seated at God's right hand (Psalm 16:9-11; Acts 2:25-31; Hebrews 1:3).
 - (2) With the anticipation of such “joy,” Jesus “endured the cross” (the physical pain) and “despised the shame” (the emotional and spiritual agony). We look to Jesus just as He looked at the joy set before Him.
 - 2. We must “consider Him.”
 - a) We consider how He endured, not only on the cross, but even before.
 - (1) He “endured such hostility from sinners against himself.”
 - (2) This hostility was frequent (Luke 4:28-29; 11:15-16, 53-54; 16:14).
 - b) Meditating on our Lord will prevent us from becoming “wearied and faint in your minds.”
 - (1) We cannot run with endurance if we become weary and discouraged (cp. Isaiah 40:31).
 - (2) The implication is that, if the readers make an accurate reckoning, they will not collapse on the track before the race is finished.

II. The Chastening Of The Lord

- A. The certainty of the Lord's chastening.
 - 1. What does “chasten” mean?
 - a) The Greek word is *paideia* and in the KJV, it is variously translated as “chastening, nurture, instruction, or chastisement.”
 - b) The word is “the whole training and education of children (which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose now commands and admonitions, now reproof and punishment),” “whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing passions,” and “instruction which aims at increasing virtue.”
 - 2. Some deny the chastening of the Lord.
 - a) They believe a loving God would never bring suffering to His children.
 - b) They believe that suffering is due only to the influence of Satan.

- (1) However, the book of Job teaches that Satan himself could not do anything unless God allowed it (1:12; 2:6).
 - (2) Therefore, the case can be made that God had a part in Job's adversity (Job 42:11).
 3. The Bible clearly teaches the chastening of the Lord.
 - a) In the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverbs 3:11-12).
 - b) In the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:30-32; Revelation 3:19).
- B. How the Lord chastens us.
1. Instructive discipline.
 - a) Instructive discipline is seen most often in the form of teaching including warnings and admonitions (John 15:1-2).
 - b) But instructive discipline can also be in the form of tribulation.
 - (1) With Job, his suffering was not because he needed correction (Job 1:1, 8). But God allowed it, knowing it would make him stronger (Job 13:15; 23:10).
 - (2) The early Christians considered persecution as a form of chastisement (Hebrews 12:4-6). Their persecution for the cause of Christ was not because they were wicked. But God allowed it, knowing it would make them stronger (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 5:8-10).
 2. Corrective discipline.
 - a) When instructive discipline is not heeded, corrective discipline follows.
 - b) The example of Judah and Israel:
 - (1) Failure to listen would bring judgment on Judah (Amos 2:4-5).
 - (2) God made repeated efforts to bring Israel back to Him (Amos 4:6-12).
 - (a) Such efforts included famine, drought, pestilence, plague, war, and earthquakes.
 - (b) These were not miraculous or supernatural events, but were acts of nature brought on by the providential working of God.
 - (3) Some understood the value of this affliction (Psalm 119:67, 71).
 - c) What about corrective discipline today?
 - (1) If God would use providence to encourage Israel to repent before it was too late, would not the same God use providence to chastise His erring children today?
 - (2) I know of no scriptural reason why God would not use His providence to bring about events in our lives which serve to wake us up, to cause us to reflect on our lives and our relationship to Him, and to encourage us to repent and turn back to Him if we are straying (cp. Revelation 2:20-23).
- C. Why the Lord chastens us.
1. It is not because He delights in chastening.
 - a) God found it necessary to bring judgment on Israel (Lamentations 1:3-5).
 - b) But it was not something He wanted to do (Lamentations 3:31-33).
 2. When necessary, it is for our good.
 - a) To correct us (Hebrews 12:9).
 - (1) Our human fathers do so, and we respect them for it.

- (2) Should we not expect the same from the “Father of spirits”?
- b) That we may be partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12:10).
 - (1) Our human fathers do it because it seems best to them.
 - (2) Our divine Father does it for a reason that excels any earthly purpose.
- c) That we may yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).
 - (1) In the short term, the experience is unpleasant.
 - (2) But in the long term, we benefit from this training (Proverbs 29:15).

Conclusion. Running the race of faith requires both negative and positive elements. Negatively, we lay aside what hinders us, and positively, we keep our focus on Jesus who has made our salvation possible. Have you lost your endurance? Have you grown weary in running the race?

Also, remember that the Lord’s chastisement is always for our good even though it may be grievous; it will produce “the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Corrective chastisement can mostly be avoided by correcting ourselves when we hear and learn God’s word.