

A. Introduction

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B. Running the Race

12:1-3

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12:4-13

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D. Conclusion – How Then Should We Live?

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<sup>A</sup> Hebrews 11:37-39

<sup>B</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

<sup>C</sup> Ephesians 6:15; 1 Timothy 6:17

<sup>D</sup> John 8:46; Deuteronomy 21:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21

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<sup>E</sup> Psalms 119:67

A. Introduction

1. Through the Gallery

- a. as you enter a sports arena or stadium
- b. it is not uncommon to pass by statues or pictures of former heroes of the team playing there
- c. it's close to 50 years since I was in Maple Leaf Gardens, and that was what I remember from there
- d. in our high school halls there were pictures of our various past teams, our football teams in particular – a few years before I began attending there they had been the Toronto district high school champions with some of the players going on the further fame
- e. we have just come through chapter 11 of Hebrews
- f. it is the Hero's Gallery
  - (A) like these latter day gladiators in the arena and stadia
  - (B) these were men and women who had been put to the test
  - (C) tried in the crucible of fire and had passed the test
  - (D) we walked past their names: Abel, Noah, Abraham
  - (E) some of their exploits were recounted
  - (F) of some, their names were blurred
  - (G) but their exploits of faith were nevertheless remembered and duly recorded for all to remember: "37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised," (Hebrews 11:37-39)
- g. now it is time for us to leave the gallery, and ourselves to go out

2. Onto the Field

- a. the first couple of verses of Hebrews 12 could equally well have been included as part of chapter 11 – but then we would have been still another week in that chapter – not that there is anything wrong with that for I remember from my teens a dear Brethren expositor who spent a year of Wednesday evenings in that chapter
- b. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, ..." (Hebrews 12:1
- c. like those teams as they head to the ice or the turf, who can look at those former stars and heroes, so now we are called from our reverie of what these heroes of faith did, to go out and take our place among them ... it is

time for us, too, to enter the race; as Paul said,

- d. "24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)
- e. certainly the language of these verses in Hebrews 12 is filled with allusions to the games; indeed, almost as it were, the Heroes of Faith people the stands of the stadium to encourage us on by their witness

B. Running the Race . . . . . Hebrews 12:1-3

1. Prepared . . . . . 12:1

- a. Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us – these witnesses lay all around us on every side
- b. to follow them we need to get ready: "and having shod Your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;" (Ephesians 6:15)
  - (A) last spring I had to spend a fair amount of time out in our yard, felling and cutting up limbs that had broken in the ice storm
  - (B) for this job I had to wear my heavy, reinforced steel-toe, boots
  - (C) after working in them for a few hours, there were several pounds of mud had stuck to them ... then they were really heavy
  - (D) I doubt whether I could have run twenty paces in them
- c. if you are going to be in a race
  - (A) the word here is 'agona' – a contest – you need to get prepared
  - (B) in the ancient Olympic games, clothing was less than minimal
  - (C) everything that entangles you must be cast aside
- d. there are lots of things in life that you and I can enjoy
  - (A) there is nothing wrong in those things in themselves
  - (B) in fact, we accept such things with thanksgiving: 1 Timothy 6:17 tells us of "God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." but at the same time warns of the uncertainty of such riches
  - (C) but Jesus in the gospels, and the writers of the epistles, tell us that many such things can become encumbrances; bulky weights; mud clinging to our boots; impediments to our service of Jesus Christ
- e. if that were our only problem in preparation, it might not be too hard
  - (A) but there is a second garment that we are wearing that needs to be taken off – it's that attractive, billowing

- robe, called sin
- (B) if we but attempt to run with it still clad and clinging around us we shall catch our feet in its hem and go sprawling to the ground
- (C) for some, this could be a particular habit or vice that is nurtured in the secret of the heart and desires; for others it could be the carelessness that allows things and people to take the place of the importance of God in our lives
- (D) whatever it be we need to get rid of it (again and again – funny how it keeps sneaking out of the wardrobe onto us!)
- f. the final preparation for the race is to learn endurance
  - (A) Andrew was quite involved in cross-country running
  - (B) you do not just decide to go into a cross-country race
  - (C) you have to build up your stamina and technique
  - (D) nor can you practice for the particular type of terrain you like – someone else sets the course
  - (E) so your practice has to include all types of ground: level, hilly
  - (F) in the race of faith, every short sprint is a test for the marathon ahead of us: God is preparing you for your particular course

## 2. Focussed

12:2

- a. [fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.](#)
- b. have you seen it – watching the Olympics or the winter games
  - (A) it may be cross country skiing; or rowing; or running
  - (B) an athlete turns to see behind him or her, and in that instant – loses a step, a stroke, a pace ... and is passed by
  - (C) our Coach is standing at the finish line, waiting for our arrival, encouraging us on – how easy, like Peter outside the boat, for our faith to waiver for an instant and turn and look at all the dangers round about us, rather than keep our eyes on the Coach for His directions
- c. whether it be racing, hockey, baseball, tennis, golf – what makes a good coach? ... someone who has been through it all before you
- d. and that is Jesus Christ
  - (A) He is the author – initiator, pioneer, leader – of faith
  - (B) in point of fact, all those OT heroes were only that because of Him – Abraham saw Jesus' day and was glad

(John 8:56)

- (C) indeed, Jesus was the ultimate object, the Promise, of their faith
  - (D) He is the perfecter – finisher, completer – of faith
  - (E) when every cast of reason would be to give up, by faith He would say in the garden of Gethsemane, '**not my will, but thine be done**'
  - (F) even in the loneliness in which He cried, '**my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me**', yet by faith He ended His life with the words, '**Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.**'
  - (G) He is the ultimate faith-example, trusting at all costs in God
- e. what was it that enabled Him who was both God and man, to overcome to the end?
- (A) He looked beyond the cross for the joy that would result
  - (B) we can only begin to understand the physical torture of the cross
  - (C) by statute, no Roman citizen could ever be executed on the cross – that is how terribly shameful it was viewed; by Jews likewise, for such are cursed by God, Deuteronomy 21:23.
  - (D) but the spiritual torture is beyond our minds: that God "... **made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf**" (2 Corinthians 5:21)
  - (E) Jesus foresaw that He was going to the Father through this ordeal
- f. on Him, on His life and faithfulness we should focus, if we are to be ...

### 3. Encouraged

12:3

- a. **For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**
- b. '**Consider**' – that's a good accounting word – it means go up and down the columns and take the totals and check the result
  - (A) Jesus went through it all – and worse – check it out!
  - (B) do we ever come even close to the rejection He experienced?
  - (C) over 3 years of going through the land of Judah and Galilee, doing good: healing the sick; making the blind to see; enabling the lame to walk; raising the dead
  - (D) and it all ended on the cross
    - (1) with the crowd mocking even His faith: '**He trusted in God**'
    - (2) betrayed by one of His chosen band
    - (3) His disciples all scattered
    - (4) only a few women standing, watching, afar off

- c. if, through all that, Jesus remained faithful to the end, how can we under so much less provocation become faint, weary – rather we should sing that old chorus: 'Are we downhearted? No! No! No! ... We trust in Jesus, come weal or woe...'

C. The Place of Discipline . . . . . Hebrews 12:4-13

1. The Need for Discipline is Coming 12:4

- a. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;
- b. we have already read in Hebrews 10 of the great conflict of sufferings that the readers of the book had experienced – bad as that had been, it had not been to such an extreme that the OT heroes had reached – let alone Jesus Christ – that in the conflict they had yet to face death
- c. by the way, that word, 'striving' is just another of those terms that came from the arena: agonising, wrestling against sin
- d. this is the sin against which we come face to face in our lives; the time would come when the temptation would be to deny Christ in order to preserve their own lives – for this they must now be prepared – and the point is now to be made that their present suffering is intended by God to prepare them for that time, to overcome in the evil day

2. Discipline Shows God's Love 12:5-6

- a. 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by him; 6 for those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives."
- b. sometimes our present worries, problems and concerns so overwhelm us that we forget our having sung so glibly, 'He's still working on me'
- c. how quickly God's truth can be driven out of our thoughts
- d. so we have to learn the hard way, as did the Psalmist: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word." (Psalms 119:67)
- e. a practical comment should be given here: not every affliction that falls upon us is the result of our having gone astray in some fashion. The history of Job is proof of that. If it is because of some unforgiven sin, then the Holy Spirit makes that abundantly clear to the Christian, bringing conviction until that sin has been dealt with before God.
- f. but all affliction is permitted by God to accomplish His divine plan for our lives, to 'work all things together for good to those that love him.'

### 3. Discipline Proves Sonship

12:7-10

- a. **7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.**
- b. it seems rather revolting to us, with our Christian heritage, but in the ancient – even the Jewish – world (and even in some of this present world) the man could have a child by his slave or concubine – but that child did not count as a son; it was considered illegitimate
  - (A) the father took no further interest in it, its upbringing, training
  - (B) he had no responsibility for its discipline
  - (C) it became merely another household member, a servant
  - (D) discipline by the father was a privilege of a true son
- c. that is the picture behind these words
  - (A) discipline is an intrinsic part of the Christian life
  - (B) as natural as it is between an earthly father and his child, so it is between our spiritual Father and us
  - (C) as I prepared this message, my own heart was touched with how often I failed to meet the ideal of fatherly discipline – in one way or another – I think that every father will confess that to be the case; the period we have is so short; we can only do what we think best with our limited understanding
- d. But God’s discipline is always for our good: it is essential to the work of sanctification conducted by the Holy Spirit – making us holy
  - (A) how slow that process is! O Lord, hurry!
  - (B) but could we go at any faster pace?
  - (C) Our legs are too short to keep up

### 4. Our Discipline Helps Ourselves and Others

12:11-13

- a. **11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.**
- b. the coach has the team out on the ice, skating from one end to the other, braking and then coming back the

other way; over and over

- (A) it isn't fun
  - (B) after an hour you ache in every muscle and joint
  - (C) but it accomplishes a purpose: it builds up the body for the rigours of an actual game, prepares the reflexes for the contest
- c. that is the training spoken of here – literally, the time in the gym
- (A) the conflict of discipline is tough; but there is a peaceful harvest that comes out of it: that of practical righteousness
  - (B) facing difficulties, spiritual reflexes are trained, so that as testing comes it becomes easier to respond as God would have us do
- d. so this affects our own lives, but also that of others
- (A) in this pilgrimage, we are all at different stages
  - (B) and how we live will affect – for good or bad – others on the road
  - (C) make sure that your choices do not adversely affect others – set your path straight as an example to others, that they, too, grow strong and go in the right way

#### D. Conclusion

##### 1. How, Then Should We Live?

- a. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.



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- Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh  
BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870  
EBC – *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan  
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