

WINNING THE RACE OF FAITH

Heb 12:1 – 3

INTRO

- On **Dec 17, 2011** ~ @ **430** Sabbaths ago ~ I first stood before this congregation
 - Today ... *on my last Sabbath as the Auburn pastor* ... want us to consider living a life of **commitment** ~ and thereby Winning the Race of Faith
- Recently we've been looking at the lives of the heroes of faith recorded in Hebrews 11
 - **Scripture Reading** helps us see how to **apply** the *principles* they teach
 - Interesting - the first word of Hebrews Chpt 12 is **therefore**
 - In Scripture ... this word is most often used as a connector ... pointing back to what was already been written
 - In this case: back to Heb Chpt 11 ~ Faith's Hall of Fame
- To encourage us to live a life of faith and please God ~ the author of Hebrews compares a life of faith to running a race ~ **Heb 12:1**
 - For this passage is to encourage us ~ there are **four** things we must do ...

FIRST - WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE SCENE -- *it's a race*

- I want us to think about a large stadium ... where a race concludes ...
 - **Bolder Boulder** w/ 50K runners @ Univ of Colorado's football stadium (**PP**)
- The runners in this race are the original readers of the Epistle of Hebrews ... and all of us who've since become members of God's Kingdom
 - The word **"race"** in V 1 translates the Greek Word [A-gon] ... the word from which we get the English word: **agony**
 - It refers to a long ~ excruciating ~ marathon type race
- Some runners {Christians} are **sprinters** ~ who peter-out before the race is finished
 - Maybe they heard a good sermon and started running the Race of Faith ...
 - But in a month (a year) some **drop out** and don't finish the race → →

- A **faith** which fizzles before the **finish** ... had a **flaw** from the **first**
 - Believers who want to complete the race ~ must hold on to the Word of God
 - Let's notice the words of Jesus: **John 8:31** (abide = continue **w/o** fading)
 - The "race" described in Hebrews 12 isn't a sprint ... it's like a marathon filled w/ agony ... from **Auburn to Athens**
 - Our Christian journey is measured in years - 40, 60, 80 ...
- To finish this endurance race ~ we're told in **Heb 12:1** to: **throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles**
 - In the Olympics ... only one person receives the Gold Medal
 - But in the **Race of Faith** ~ every one of us can get the gold
 - We don't compete against each other ~ it's not a race of **works** ...
 - It's purely a race of **FAITH**
- What are the things which hinder us ... what sin so easily entangles us: **1 John 2:16**
 - **World** = the evil world system which **Satan** presides over
 - **Lust of the flesh** = refers to anything that appeals to our appetites
 - Temptations to ... indulgence (our) appetite possess a power which can be overcome **only** by the help that God can impart. But with every temptation we have the promise of God that there shall be a way of escape. Why, then, are so many overcome? **It is because they do not put their trust in God.** They do not avail themselves of the means provided for their safety. The excuses offered for the gratification of perverted appetite, are therefore of no (significance to) God. **Counsel on Diet and Food/154**
 - **Lust of the eyes** = the evil one tries to pervert God's gifts by influencing us to read/watch things which are in conflict with God's teachings
 - **Pride of life** = our pride leads us to do things simply to impress
- **Key point** ~ we face the very same hindrances and entanglement as those "**heroes**" of Faith described in Hebrews Chpt 11
 - Every hindrance we face today falls into one of these three categories

- But **God** gives us what's needed to **win the race of faith**: **1 Corth 10:12, 13**
 - God doesn't want us to think the conditions in which we're expected to run the race are exceptional ... we have the same challenges as those before us
 - Let's remember God's Word is **true** ~ if He permits temptations to come upon us ... He knows we can deal with them – in His strength
 - For every particular temptation ... God makes a precise provision for our escape
 - If God allows the trial/temptation to come ~ He'll also have ready the means whereby we may gain the victory
 - **Jesus** ~ **our example** ... found the "way out" in the written Word of God
 - **Luke 4:4, 8, 12**

To win the race of faith ~ we must understand the **scene** of **Heb 12:1, 2** ... and:

SECOND - WE MUST REMEMBER THE SPECTATORS

- The spectators are a great cloud of witnesses ... which fill the stadium
 - They're the prior runners who've completed their Race of Faith
 - Their success in the race can inspire us when we **"hit the wall"**
- **For example:**
 - When we face family opposition to our walk with God ~ we can think of **Abel** who was killed by his brother
 - When we have to separate ourselves from our family/friends ~ we can think of **Abraham** who left his home ... not knowing where he was going
 - When someone hurts us or treats us unfairly ~ we can remember **Joseph** who was sold into slavery by his brothers
 - When we face a situation where sticking to God's Word is "costly" - remember **Moses** ... running the race of faith cost him: prestige, power, and possessions
 - Desmond Doss
- When the race gets challenging and we begin to lose courage ~ consider: **Rom 15:4**

- When we feel like dropping out of our race of faith ... let's remember the great cloud of **witnesses** recorded in the Bible for our encouragement
 - All of them were just ordinary people - **like us** - who decided to hold on to their faith ~ **to finish their race** ~ even when things seemed most difficult ...
 - English theologian **Thomas Fuller (1650)** appears to be the first person to share the notion: 'the darkest hour is just before the dawn'

To win the race of faith we must understand the **scene** - remember the **spectators** of **Heb 12:1, 2** ... and:

THIRD - WE MUST HAVE STAMINA

- Real secret of winning the race of faith isn't speed; it's endurance and determination
 - ~~Heb 12:1-2~~ from **Clear Word**: *Let's run with courage and persistence the race which God has set before us*
 - Holy Spirit is encouraging us to continue in the race of faith when there are so many things to hold us back and/or discourage us
 - **Last finisher of the 1989 Charlotte Marathon**
- When we win the race of faith and cross the finish line ... Jesus leads us to Heaven ...
 - Then we can say the words of satisfaction that Paul recorded in **2 Tim 4:7, 8**
 - **Delayed gratification** is the process of resisting the temptation of a perceived immediate gift ~~ in preference for a later, sure, reward
 - **Phil 4:13** tells us ~~ we can do all things through Christ
- God wants us to continue running the race of faith which He's marked out before us
 - He has a **specific plan** for our lives ~~ which is different at least to some degree ~ from all other runners
 - We each have an assigned lane we must run in to fulfill **God's Will**
 - *I can't run in your lane ... you can't successfully race in mine*

To win the race of faith we must understand the **Scene**; remember the **Spectators**; of **Heb 12:1, 2** ~ have **Stamina** ... and:

FOURTH - WE MUST FOCUS ON OUR **SAVIOR**

- In running ... as with most sports ... what we **FOCUS** on is very important
 - For example ~ looking down at your feet or at others around you when racing ~ often causes you to lose their stride and slow down
 - **Heb 12:2 a** ~ we're strongly encouraged us to fix our eyes on **Jesus** ... the **Author** and **Finisher** of our faith
 - If we fix our eyes on anyone [anything] else ~ we'll be distracted and slowdown in our race of faith
 - *When there is a continual reliance upon God, a continual practice of self-denial, the workers will **not** sink into discouragement **Colpt Min/114** { We'll **win** the Race of Faith }*
- **Jesus** [**Author** and **Finisher** of our faith] ... **serves as our example**
 - During His day ... nothing was more despicable than being nailed to a cross
 - So why was Jesus willing to die on the cross: **Heb 12:2 b**
 - ... it was for the **joy** set before Him
- Am aware of only once in Scripture where Jesus is recorded as full of **joy**: Luke 10
 - It was after He sent out the 72 to proclaim the Kingdom of God is near
 - When they returned rejoicing @ their successful evangelistic effort let's notice the reaction of Jesus - **Luke 10:21**
- This incident reveals what makes Jesus happy ~~ when God's Children **evangelize** others for Him ... and when they get excited when someone joins God's Kingdom
 - To win the race of faith and make Jesus happy ... we need to heed: **Heb 12:3**
 - Let's be honest ... **Satan** tries to makes the race discouraging
 - *But we know this beforehand: **2 Tim 3:12***
- Winning the race of faith involves some pain and sacrifice – for **Satan** is a creative foe

- God knows regardless of who we are or where we go this coming week ...
 - ... it'll be a challenge to live the Christian life
 - That's why He gave His Children **the Bible**
- When we start thinking it's too hard to run the race of faith ... let's consider Jesus
 - He endured the cross and intense opposition from sinful men
 - He was brutally beaten ~ humiliated ~ tortured ~ and finally killed
 - This should give us a supernatural burst of encouragement
- **Perhaps you've been like me** ...
 - ... you've started the race of faith; but, you've taken your eyes off Jesus ~ stumbled and **dropped out** because of discouragement { [SSgt Jack Brown](#) }

THERE'S GREAT NEWS FOR US ... we can get **back in** the race

- Make a mental list of God's Children in Scripture who stumbled and briefly fell out of the **Race of Faith**: start with Abraham, King David, and Peter
 - You'll see many saints have at some point along the way have "**dropped out**"
 - All of **us** who have ~~ can take comfort in: **Psm 37:23, 24**

To **Win the race of faith** we must do four things:

1. Understand the scene
 2. Remember the spectators
 3. Have stamina
 4. Focus on the Savior
- When we win the race of faith ... we can look forward to hearing Jesus say:
Well done, good and faithful servant

Reagan's [40] final radio address - **1/14/89**: "*My Saturdays will never be the same*"
Perhaps Love after closing prayer