

THAT'S FROM THE BIBLE



Sermon 1 - Hebrews 12:1-3 "Run the race set before us..."

1. Which leg of the triathlon would you have the best chance of completing? What would you find most challenging about competing in such a competition?
2. What insights have you gained from Gavin or Ruth's talk? Did the talk raise questions for you?
3. Why do you think the writer of this Epistle to the Hebrews chose the metaphor of a race to describe the Christian life?
4. Who are the witness the writer describes and what exactly are they witnessing?
5. What were the challenges for those to whom he was writing? (See Hebrews 10:32-36)

Let us throw off everything that hinders

6. What are some of things that might hinder us in running the race which is the Christian life?
7. What is it about the nature of sin, that the writer says that it can 'so easily entangle'?
8. How do we go about *throwing off* everything that hinders along with entangling sin?

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us

9. *How* are we to go about persevering? And what are some of the temptations to avoid in order to persevere?
10. It is increasingly clear to me (Mark) that the Bible expects that we will face opposition to the Christian message and as a result, will suffer in some way for following Jesus. What are you going to do when serving Jesus brings a cost? How can we prepare ourselves in advance for such challenges?

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith

11. What might it mean for us to 'fix our eyes on Jesus', seeing that he is not here for us to see!?
12. Explore and discuss the meaning of the two words used in this exhortation - 'pioneer' or 'author' and 'perfecter'.
13. How was it that Jesus could endure the cross? How will this help us as we suffer for Jesus?
14. How might the example of others in our church, who have been persevering for many years, help us? How might we cultivate a deeper relationship across the levels of Christian maturity in our church, so that the godly and clear example of mature and faithful Christians might inspire and encourage us?

Pray that we might have courage to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that entangles.

Pray that we will work out in practical terms, what it means to 'fix our eyes on Jesus', so that his example of perseverance through suffering, might help us persevere through suffering.

Sermon by Gavin Crossley 3rd and 4th November 2018

“Let us run the race set before us...”

The Text:

Hebrews 12:1-3

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,

- let us **throw off** everything that **hinders** and the **sin** that so easily entangles.
- And let us **run with perseverance** the race marked out for us,
- ² Let us **fix our eyes on Jesus**,
the **pioneer** and **perfecter** of faith.

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, **so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

Intro: Sunday the Noosa Triathlon

Swim 1.5km - Bike 40km - Run 10km

I thought about entering. I could easily perform the registration. But I seriously doubt that I could finish ANY of the parts, let alone them all. Along the way, I know there would be many points where the competitors must feel like giving up. For me that would be 30 seconds into the race. But they have to go on.

Finishing the race is what counts. Don't know if you have ever seen T-shirts, "I finished such and such a marathon" or not. There are none that say, "I started". Finishing is what matters.

Christian life can be compared to many things:

- Being part of a family
- Being part of a building
- Being part of a body
- Being a wife
- Being at war
- But it can also be described as a race

Comparison to races

- It's not a sprint, it's a marathon
- It's tough, demanding even grueling
- It takes discipline and training, single-mindedness
- Starting doesn't count for anything.
- Finishing is what matters
- Requires great perseverance

Context:

- Hebrews had been Jews then become Christians
- They had received persecution as Christians
- At first they endured persecution well.
- But here's the thing - it didn't stop.
- **SLIDE: Hebrews 10:32-36**

³⁶ Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and

lasting possessions. ³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

- I think all of us could endure a short wave of trouble. But what if it just kept going, and going, and going?
- How would we fare?
- This passage is written to encourage these Christians to keep going with Jesus. Don't stop being a Christian just because it's hard.

The passage starts with the word "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses", so before we get to the first point, we just need to look at the reason behind this.

These witnesses, who are they and what are they saying?

All the saints he has listed in chapter 11.

SLIDE: Hebrews 11:13-16

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

What were these saints of old witnesses too? That we don't belong here.

The nature of Christianity is that it's all about the future. It's about what God has promised us in the next life.

Saying "Pie in the sky when you die". Meant as criticism of Christianity, that we have no concern for this world. Of course, it's not true.

- It's not a pie - it's a new heavens and a new earth!
- It's not in the sky - it's a physical new creation!
- It's not when you die, it's when we are resurrected!

However, the point is that the nature of our faith is forward looking. That is why it's called faith. Because we don't currently enjoy the things that God has promised. We have to wait for them.

And all these OT saints are, as it were running alongside us in the race and saying, "keep going. It's worth it. Yes, it's hard, but keep going. Just a little further and the prize will be yours".

So, since we are surrounded by this great cloud of Old Testament witnesses

Three lettuces:

1: Verse 1: "let us **throw off** everything that **hinders** (Literally "weight, burden") and the **sin** that so easily entangles."

- Seems to me that there are two things here: there are burdens which weigh you down and there are sins which entangle.
- Neither of these are good.
- I'm not an expert at running, but I'm pretty sure you don't want to be carrying additional weight, and certainly not to be entangled in anything.
- There are things in the Christian life that can do that.
- Some of them may not necessarily be sinful, but they are a weight. They slow you down. They make the going tougher than it needs to be. I can think of many things like that.

- Others are sinful. They are entanglements. Sin is like that. One leads to another and to another and before you know it you are completely entangled in a great and horrible mess.

Illustrate:

- Moving countries with all our possessions compared to travelling alone and only carry-on.
- All of us are migrating. But here's the thing. Customs where we are going is very strict. No baggage from this life is going to be allowed through, none whatsoever.

Apply:

- Some of us are considering joining the race.
 - o You will need to leave sinful entanglements behind.
- Some of us are in the race already
 - o Is there something that you know is making the Christian life harder for you?
 - o Throw it off. Now! Get rid of it.
 - o If there is even the slightest chance that you might not make it to the end of the race because of some sinful entanglement or some unnecessary burden, hurl it out of your life immediately!

2 State: Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us

Explain:

- The Christian life is a race and it has limits
- Those limits are doctrinal and moral
- We are not at liberty to change the race course
- In the case of the Hebrews, they were changing the doctrine
- They were saying, let's go back to being Jewish and pretend that Jesus isn't important.
- You can't do that.
- Others want to change the moral demands of the Christian life
- They say, look this traditional Christian morality is out of date.
- Let's modernize Jesus and get him to approve of the way that we want to live.
- You can't do that. You can't change the faith to make it easier. You have to persevere.
- *If time allows:* segway into the relationship between election and perseverance

Illustrate:

- Anita Carcone
- Boasted that she finished #12 in her division, only 3 minutes behind the top male contestant.
- But after checking the GPS on her bike, they found that she had taken a 5.5 mile short-cut on the bike portion.
- She was disqualified.

Apply:

- The course mapped out for us is one of suffering. Persecution
- It's obvious to me that the time when Christianity was accepted by our society is over. The public discourse around our faith is now hostile and the state is pushing an increasingly secular agenda, driven by very ambitious lobbyists and vocal minorities.
- What are you going to do when being a Christian bears a cost?
- It could be financial
 - o (I lost job once because of a moral position that I had to take because of my faith)
 - o Choosing not to avoid paying tax
- It might be social, being ostracized
- It might be physical, losing your life
- Don't change the course. Don't try to find a short cut.
- Don't be disqualified.
- Persevere.

3 STATE: ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Explain:

There are not that many places where the New Testament calls upon us to emulate Jesus. As far as I can remember, there are usually two injunctions: 1) to love each other as Jesus has loved us, and 2) endure suffering as Jesus did.

However, it's not simply that we should emulate what Jesus did here, though that is in mind. It's considering who Jesus is.

- He is the author (arche, the founder) of our faith
- He is the perfecter of our faith (the telos, the end goal).

Jesus is not just someone who had faith that we should look to. He is the substance, the content, the goal of our faith.

- We believe in Jesus because He designed belief!
- We believe in Jesus to participate in the new creation of which He is the head!
- Everything in the universe is heading towards a glorious new future under in Christ.
- That was his motivation in enduring the cross

³ **For the joy set before him** he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

You could say that Jesus was fully focused on the prize and that's what gave him motivation to endure that short term pain. He knew that the end game was to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God – that's the position of authority over all of God's creation – and so he was able to endure the shame of the cross fully knowing that it was only temporary.

However, it's not just that Jesus had a good game plan and we should take a leaf from his hat and develop a good game plan too. No. His game plan IS our game plan.

We are in the same race as Jesus. He has already completed it in advance. We are not competing for our own glory, we are enduring for a share in HIS glory. If we are to share in his glory then we will share in his sufferings. It's a package deal.

Illustrate:

- Team Sky won the 2018 Tour de France.
- It was a team effort and all of them worked at different stages in different ways to get Geraint Thomas (in the yellow jersey) over the line to win
- This is nothing like Christianity
- In our case Jesus has already crossed the line, won the victory and received the prize.
- Now, for us, it's not a question of winning or not.
- It's only a question of whether we have the stamina to make it over the finish line.
- The course of this marathon goes straight through suffering. Jesus has paved the way.
- There are a cloud of witnesses surrounding us. All the Old Testament saints who are testifying: "It's worth it! Keep going! You can do it!"

Conclusions:

Some of us are preparing to set out on this race. Give it careful consideration. The Christian life is a call to partake in both the sufferings and the glory of Jesus. You will need to persevere all the way to the end. Don't be tricked by soft versions of "Christianity lite" which are all about comfort, self esteem, prosperity or whatever. It's a marathon. There will be pain. But if you endure to the end then there will be a place in the Kingdom of Christ, eternal life and the glory of God.

Some of us may have been running for a while then unexpectedly became entangled in some sin. Or perhaps accidentally drifted into something that became a great burden, making the race much harder than it needs to be. We may be feeling weary and tired. That is not the way it is supposed to be. Whatever it is, get rid of it.

I'm also conscious that there are many, many people here who are great example of me to what it looks like to persevere, and to persevere well. Keep going. Keep a watchful eye out for potential burdens and entanglements and avoid them like the plague! Keep a light load. Don't collect anything which is going to make the race harder and no luggage which isn't going to clear customs!

The Lord Jesus Christ has gone before us. The race is won. We only need to run with perseverance the race set before us. We can do it!