

Running Toward Jesus Hebrews 12:1-3

Hebrews 12:1-3 Introduction

- Most of us have heard of Eric Liddell.
- He was the Olympic athlete whose religious convictions would not let him compete on Sunday.
- This forced him to abandon the 100 meters for which he had usually trained.
- His story was later immortalized in the movie *Chariots of Fire*.
- Upon learning the Paris schedule for 1924, he was forced to switch to the longer 200 and 400-meter events.
- He won a bronze medal in the 200 meters that year.
- In the 400 meters he won gold, setting a world record in the process.

- He might have done more in athletics, but Eric knew he had a more important race to run.
- Eric Liddell was born in China, the son of Scottish missionaries.
- He decided that his future was there and not in world-class competitive sports.
- So the following year, in 1925, he went to China where he served the Lord for the rest of his life.

- Few people have the ability to make it to the Olympics.
- But every Christian has a race to run for Jesus and we need to run it well.
- Read Hebrews 12:1-3

Hebrews 12:1-3 Outline

1. Lay aside sin. 12:1a
2. Run with endurance. 12:1b
3. Look firmly at Jesus. 12:2-3

To finish our race well we have to lay aside sin, run with endurance, and look firmly at Jesus till the end.

Lay aside sin. 12:1a

- 12:1 Therefore, we also
- Our rabbi wants us all to join him, identifying with all the heroes we read about in Ch. 11.
- Cloud The Greek word was used for literal clouds, but also for a “large dense multitude” or “throng.” (Thayer)

- 12:1 Witnesses This does not likely mean that all these people are actually watching us like cheering spectators.
- We do know that these witnesses (from a word related to “martyrs”) lived lives that bear witness to the absolute faithfulness of God.
- Many people just like us have run this race already. Their lives verify that we can run it just as well as they once did.

- 12:1 lay aside every weight
- You’ve no doubt noticed that Olympic runners don’t wear a lot of heavy equipment.
- A light shirt, shorts and running shoes are about all they ever have on.
- Almost anything else can hinder their progress down the track.
- They also tend to be pretty lean physically.

- Many things can be considered “weights” in the Christian life.
 - These things may not be evil in and of themselves, but they can slow us down if we give them too high a priority.
 - Or they may divert us into the *Rat Race* – a race that none of us ever has to win.
- For me it was once music, which had become something of a “household idol” to me.
 - In a strange combination of struggle and relief, it eventually had to go.
 - It has not dominated my life since that time.
 - Music is not evil – far from it – but it was holding me back in my specific race. It had begun to slow me down.
- Career can be like this, especially for men.
 - Our house, family or possessions can also fit into this category – though they are clearly good things in and of themselves.
 - A certain love of comfort, security or status – all good in their own way – may stand between us and intimate fellowship with God.
- Almost anything can do it.
 - If something in your life slows you down in your race for Jesus, then you may need to reprioritize.
 - This takes self-examination; self examination takes time.
 - Overall too-busy-ness might be the “weight” for you – no time to even see what’s wrong.
- 12:1 and the “easily entangling sin”
 - That is how it sounds in the original.
 - Some things are not purely sinful, but still must be dealt with. Other things are sinful.
 - We cannot give these any room at all or we will get tangled up in them – trapped – and our lives will be corrupted.
 - One of the crying needs in the church right now is for holiness, which this chapter emphasizes.
- Holiness has become a rare quality – even among believers in Jesus, who are called “saints” in the Bible, or “holy ones.”
 - This is partly because we don’t care, which is terrifying when you think about it.
 - It can also be because we settle for a painted-on, “whitewashed tomb” kind of holiness that looks good outwardly, but inside is full of rotting corpses, bones, stench and death.
- Let’s join Jesus in hating this fake variety of holiness, otherwise known as “hypocrisy.”
 - Sometimes it helps just to think about your sin and learn to hate it.
 - Then think about Jesus and the love He showed us by going to the cross.
 - Then think about how thankful you are and how much you love Him for doing that.
- Let’s work on that now:
 - Think about your sin and decide right now to hate it – intensely – as much as God does, if that were only possible.
 - Think about Jesus and the love he showed us by going to the cross – that wonderful cross.
 - Finally, thank Him – and think about how much you love Him for dying – dying to take away the sin that you and He both hate so intensely.

- Once again, more slowly.
- Think about your sin and decide right now to hate it – intensely – as much as God does, if that were only possible.
- (Take some time to do this silently.)
- Think about Jesus and the love he showed us by going to the cross – that wonderful cross.
- (Take some time to do this too.)
- Finally, thank Him – and think about how much you love Him for dying – dying to take away the sin that you and He both hate so intensely.
- (And take some time to do this. We will review this again before closing.)

To finish our race well we have to lay aside sin, run with endurance, and look firmly at Jesus till the end.

Run with endurance. 12:1b

- 12:1 endurance = perseverance (NIV)
- James Strong described this quality as “cheerful endurance” or “patient continuance.”
- We can’t expect to run this race quickly and get it over with.
- It is more like a marathon than a sprint.
- At times it can seem like a marathon through an obstacle course.
- The rabbi told us that we needed endurance back in 10:36.
- We see how Jesus endured here in 12:2 & 3.
- The Bible is full of passages that encourage us to endure or persevere.
- Check these out:
 - Acts 20:22-24
 - Romans 5:3-4

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- Look firmly at Jesus. 12:2-3
- 12:2 looking = “looking away”
- “to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something” (Thayer)
- “The word used here ... indicates the action of one who, aware of rival attractions, deliberately looks away from other things.” (Raymond Brown)
- “looking away from all else, looking at that which fills the heart” (John Phillips)
- More from John Phillips:
- *“We are going to run, not because of the prize at the end and not because so many illustrious saints have run the course in the past and have been gloriously crowned, but because the vision of Jesus fills the soul.”*
- *“We are to run this race with no eyes for anyone or anything except Jesus.” (Leon Morris)*
- 12:2 the author and finisher of our faith
- Jesus is the one who initiates and completes our faith – the Alpha and Omega, beginning and the end – of our faith in this case.

- He is also our leader, the one who has gone before us.
 - We are following Him through the course of this life, knowing that He has travelled the path first, to the very end, and marked it out for us.
 - Our faith is not a leap in the dark, but a well-marked, well-travelled course.
 - And it leads to Jesus, who is there already.
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- 12:2 for the joy ... endured the cross
 - While He was on earth, Jesus never used His divine powers for personal advantage.
 - He got hungry, tired and so on, using only natural human means to relieve His misery.
 - So what gave Him the inner strength He needed to go through the horrible agonies of the cross?
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- He focused exclusively on “the joy that was set before Him.”
 - See Psalm 16:8-11.
 - For Jesus, the finish line was on the other side of the cross.
 - And He refused to let His sufferings deter Him from reaching the end.
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- 12:2 despising the shame
 - It is difficult for us to appreciate the shame associated with the cross at the time of Jesus and the apostles.
 - The cross was more than a form of execution, though its victims certainly died.
 - It was more than a means of torture, though it was probably the cruelest form of torture ever devised.
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- The cross was designed to humiliate the victim to the greatest degree possible.
 - Naked, weakened and bleeding profusely, the victim of the cross was exposed to complete public degradation.
 - Slowly and *excruciatingly*, Jesus died while being mocked by His enemies.
 - But the glory of reigning at the Father’s right hand was far better than anything He might have gained without suffering.
 - The salvation He secured for us by bearing our sins was more important to our Lord
 - Jesus decided that the worst possible death ever devised by human beings was no big deal in comparison with the glories to follow.
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- We can do what Jesus did in the face of our sufferings.
 - As we look toward Jesus, we can realize that the glory of eternity is of a greater kind than the sufferings that we endure now.
 - Paul explained it well in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.
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- We probably spend too little of our time considering Jesus.
 - If we considered Him more, we might better appreciate what He endured and why He endured it.
 - That would make the correct response to His love come more naturally to us – and help us to endure as we run our own race.
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- 12:3 weary and discouraged
 - Also weary and fainthearted (ESV)
 - The second word can also mean “relaxed.”

- These two words were apparently used by Aristotle speaking “of an athlete who flings himself on the ground in panting relaxation and collapse *after* he has surged past the winning post of the race.” (Barclay)
- Our rabbi is trying to encourage us not to give up too soon.
- It is not yet the time to relax in our Christian commitment.
- Our race isn’t over yet.
- Consider Jesus and finish it well.

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Hebrews 12:1-3 Conclusions

- Holiness:
- When we think of “God’s will for our lives,” especially while we are young, we often think in terms of details about the future.
- We wonder, “what should I do now?”
- “Where should I live or work?”
- “Will I ever get married – and who will my spouse be?”
- These are the kind of things we might ask of a horoscope or a fortune teller.
- The Bible frowns miserably upon horoscopes and fortune telling.
- God knows it all, and will happily reveal things as we need to know them.
- Or, as we are ready.
- The main issue is that we are not usually prepared, nor are we eager to get there.
- We have a tendency to jump the gun and ignore many vital points that might prepare us for the best possible outcome in our race.
- We disdain holiness – or pay it lip service while falling fatally short in passion for God.
- A major lesson in our quest for holiness is found in today’s lesson.
- We lay aside sin.
- We run with endurance.
- We look firmly at Jesus until the end.
- Let’s go back and review that little exercise we tried earlier.
- Think about your sin and decide right now to hate it – intensely – as much as God does, if that were only possible.
- Think about Jesus and the love he showed us by going to the cross – that wonderful cross.
- Finally, thank Him – and think about how much you love Him for dying – dying to take away the sin that you and He both hate so intensely.
- And let’s close with a little encouragement from the life of Eric Liddell.
- Again, the most important race of his life was not the one in which he set a world record – the one for which he received the gold medal at the 1924 Paris Olympics.
- His most important race was the one he ran for Jesus.

- At end of the movie *Chariots of Fire* there is a final word about the outcome of Eric Liddell's life. It reads:
 - Eric Liddell, missionary,*
 - died in occupied China*
 - at the end of World War II*
 - All of Scotland mourned.*
- Eric Liddell went on to be a missionary in China where he served until 1945.
- After the Japanese invaded, they rounded up foreign missionaries and put them in camps.
- And so he lived the last years of his life with 1800 others, in a camp that measured 150 by 200 yards.
- The Olympic stadium in Paris probably enclosed more area than that.
- Separated from his own wife and children, Eric's job in the camp was to teach the children of other missionaries.
- These children, in turn, were separated from their own parents.
- And he taught until he died of a brain tumor in 1945, a few months before the war's end.
- These closing words are from a devotional book he wrote that was published later.
- *"The Christian life should be a life of growth. I believe the secret of growth is to develop the devotional life. This involves setting aside each day a time for prayer and Bible study. The time need not be long, but it should be unhurried. We should come to it in an honest spirit, prepared to face the challenge of God's word as it lays down a way of life, and prepared to face any inconsistencies in our lives which make them un-Christlike."*
 - Eric Liddell, *The Disciplines of the Christian Life*

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