

Heb 12:1-4
Perseverance

Our message today is the result of questions raised by a live-stream viewer of our worship service last Sunday. I asked this young lady if it would be okay for her thoughts to be the energy behind my sermon today? She said yes. She wrote the following:

“My question lately has been: How do I keep pressing forward when I feel like certain energies are holding me back? I keep praying and meditating and thanking God for all of my blessings, but feel like unfinished business has been hindering my path. Do I keep addressing the obstacles? Or just give it to God and let the outcome be whatever He intended it to be?”

As I considered her inquiry, which I was very thankful for, the word that eventually came to my heart was perseverance. It is defined as follows: persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. Or stated this way. A refusal to throw in the towel; refusal to be deterred by outside influences, whether negative or positive; a determined focus regarding the task at hand. Perseverance. To be sure it is a biblical idea. **Romans 5:3-4** “³And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Perseverance. This is the short answer to her question. However, this answer raises an additional question, “How does one persevere?”. I believe our text provides the answer. So, with this young lady’s words in mind four things

from the text we can employ in effort to forge ahead or persevere.

First, we draw motivation from the goldy example of the saints who have preceded us. Those saints who show us what it means to live by faith. Individuals who had far less to work with than we, in the way of the promised they hoped for. That promise being Jesus Christ. A promise we have realized. **V12** “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,”. Church, we are to take the great faith stories of the bible literally and seriously. This is not simply good fodder; the power of these stories lies in the application of the principles we draw from them in our own lives. The “so great cloud of witness” teaches us that there is no greater component to our perseverance than faith. Faith, unwavering trust in God despite the odds, despite external and internal forces.

Psalm 23:4, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

2 Cor 5:6-7 “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.” Church, without faith we are subject to become weary and discouraged.

Second, we must get rid of the unnecessary stuff. **V12**, “let us lay aside every weight, and sin which so easily snares us”. The writer, after recounting chapter 11 the witness of individuals like Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Rehab, and others who exercised great faith in God charges his listeners to join the race. That race being

belief in Jesus Christ. And to do so by laying aside everything that was holding them back. Weight and sin. To be understood as unnecessary stuff and unbelief. For these Hebrews the unnecessary stuff was the Levitical system. A sacrificial system no longer necessary due to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But they would not let it go. The sin was unbelief in Jesus Christ as God's complete satisfaction for sin. What are you carrying that is weighing you down that you simply need to cast off? Failure, disappointment, unrealistic expectations, an unhealthy relationship, legalism? What sin has you trapped limiting your mobility? Is it need for control, doubt, unbelief, fear? Church, get rid of the unnecessary stuff. There is no room for it on this race. It will only hold you back.

Ecc 3:6 “⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;”

Luke 10:2-4 “²And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.”

Third, we must acknowledge that our course has been set by God and not chosen by us. V12, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Why is it necessary we see it this way? Well, it changes how we respond to everything we encounter on the journey. Maybe the obstacles that we so badly want to avoid or rid ourselves of are actually necessary. Maybe they have been placed there by God for a specific purpose. God's glory and our strengthening. I believe one of the great opportunities for the

church in America is to rid ourselves of a gospel that does not entail suffering. I'm certainly like most, if I can avoid hardship I certainly will but I recognize testing of our faith is par for the course. And nothing tests us like discomfort, unpleasantries, or obstacles we did not plan for. Maybe that thing you desperately want God to move is part of your course. Maybe it is necessary. For these Hebrews to abandon the tradition would be costly, even dangerous. It certainly would result in alienation from the larger Jewish community who continued to hold to the Levitical system. But if one was to follow Jesus Christ it could not be avoided. The race has been set before us and all we can do is run it, trusting that what may come Christ will see us through.

Matt 16:24 “²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Phil 4:12-13 “¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Finally, we must put what we face on this journey in proper perspective by always considering the example of Jesus Christ.

The chief example. V2-4 “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” In other words, the writer is saying to the Hebrews and us get off your soap box and

get on with. Jesus, your Lord and Savior, persevered and so will you. You have not been hung to a cross, literally. Your faith has not cost you your life, yet. It could be worst. Now, this sounds insensitive, but when we truly consider what Jesus endured, we realize it is not. How unwilling we are to enduring any suffering for our faith. How petty we have become in what we describe as hardship in these United States. As disciples of Jesus Christ have we yet to believe the words of Paul in **Romans 8:28**, “²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Do we not believe that Jesus is with us as he promises in **Matt 28:20**, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Sister, how do you keep pressing forward? Perseverance. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.