

Our Gratitude for His Kingdom Hebrews 12

The writer of Hebrews, after teaching us and illustrating what biblical faith really is, he wants to now inspire us to “go and do likewise.”

... and what better way of doing this than giving us the example of Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus is not only the perfecter of faith He is the ultimate example.

1. The example of Jesus is God’s Cure for discouragement.

(Heb. 12:1-3) 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,² 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. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

Hebrews 12 revolves around 2 very powerful images: athletics (the first 13 verses) and citizenship (verses 14-29).

This was probably because these two things were so deeply connected in the Roman world.

... The Greeks and Romans were known for their obsession with physical fitness and athletic contests—this is where the Olympics come from.

... and it was the law of the land that no one could take part in official games unless they were a Roman citizen.

... so, these two images/themes were very connected in the Roman mind.

The author is writing to people who are weary and about to lose heart.

- **Christ example re-alter our view of self. (v.1-4)**

It is our sinful nature that makes us proud and causes us to be ego driven ...

... our default is to make everything about me so the first thing the writer of Hebrews tells us to do is to get our eyes off of ourselves ...

... consider the “cloud of witnesses” mentioned and do like them—fix your eyes on Jesus.

Here is why this is so important.

There are three verb phrases in the text:

- Let us run
- Let us lay aside
- Let us fix our eyes

However, the main verb phrase is “let us run” and the other two are dependent upon it.

In the literal sense the author is saying two things:

- Let us run by laying aside
- Let us run by fixing our eyes on Jesus

In both cases the means for running is by laying aside the encumbrances that hinder us and fixing our eyes on Jesus.

When you do this, you realize that your sins are not inconsequential!

The glory of Christ puts everything in proper focus ... even our own sins and weaknesses!

... this is how we are able to run with endurance!

I need to make it very clear, because this text is often mis-interpreted...

... the heroes of chapter 11 are all good, but we are not supposed to model our lives after them...

Jesus is the “author” and “perfector” of faith ...

In fact, you will not find this title “perfector” used anywhere else in scripture!

... Jesus is the source of faith **by virtue of his death and resurrection!**

... Jesus is the model of faith evidenced **by his total obedience to the Father in the work of atonement!**

... 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.

- In light of the prospective joy of being exalted to God’s right hand, Jesus endured the cross
- In the hope of OUR REDEMPTION Jesus thought very little of the shame He would have to endure.
- Jesus bore it all, endured it all, and finished it all!!
- And as the Greek says, Jesus sat down on the throne at God’s right hand!

You and I need to **consider all the powerful implications** and the reality of this!

... and when you do it changes everything!

The author of Hebrews says you and I need to do this ... so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.

He goes on to say:

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

Here the author moves from the imagery of a race to that of a boxing match.

When he says “to the point of shedding blood” he doesn’t mean death, he means brutal combat...

To paraphrase: You have not resisted to the point where it has actually cost you something.

Jesus obedience to the Father for your redemption cost Him ... what has your obedience cost you?

For Jesus the road to joy went through the cross – and the same is true for us!

Left to our own devices and desires we would choose to avoid all sorrow and suffering ...

... but now consider Jesus, He willingly took what you and I would do anything to avoid!

... all because of His love!

When we really look at and focus on Christ’s example, it re-alter our view of self ...

... but not only that ...

- Christ example transforms our view of life. (v. 5-13)

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 REPROVED BY HIM; ⁶ FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." 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. 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. (Heb. 12:1-13)

These Hebrew Christians that the author is writing to have become weary!

... they are being persecuted, misrepresented, and marginalized

... they are dealing with suffering, adversity, hardships

... and they are discouraged, I think you can understand that.

However, the problem is that THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND ...

... they are misinterpreting, misunderstanding what they are experiencing.

Notice the word “discipline” or “disciplines” in verses 5 and 6.

... This is the word *paidea* which can mean anything from “training” to “corporal punishment.”

This is not punitive punishment for wrongdoing

This is non-punitive discipline for instruction and training!

... this Old Testament quote is from Proverbs 3 which speaks of a father training his son.

They were discouraged because they were thinking, “*after all the good I’m trying to do, everything is still hard and difficult for me.*”

However, when you look at Christ and all He endured...

This means we also must endure some things ...

God does not leave us the way he found us ...

As the Psalmist wrote:

⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes. (Ps. 119:71)

Suffering, hardship, trials ... they bring clarity ...

... they force us to answer the question “What do I really believe?”

... “What really matters to me?”

Suffering drives us to Jesus.

Trouble and trials push us to our knees and into the arms of our Savior!

The author of Hebrews is saying, “Look at what is really happening and why it is really happening!”

... notice that no matter what the circumstances are the end result is that it *yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*.

... This is the kind of Father we have.

... His never-ending faithfulness not only gives us hope, it strengthens our own faith!

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. (Heb. 12:1-13)

Listen, no discipline seems pleasant when you are going through it ...

... but it is necessary.

God is not passive; He is actively involved in the lives of His children ...

... He loves us too much to stay on the fringes of our lives

God is the potter we are the clay and He fully intends to use whatever forces are necessary to mold us into a vessel that brings glory to Him!

2. Who We Worship Declares To Whom We Belong.

A. W. Tozer wrote:

“I remind you that there are churches so completely out of the hands of God that if the Holy Spirit withdrew from them, they wouldn’t find it out for many months. ...The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshiping men. This she has not done deliberately, but little by little ...”

Everyone is worshiping someone or something...

...When all of time has ended the ultimate question will not be “IF” we worshipped but “WHOM” we worshipped.

... and notice how I worded this point “who WE worship declares whom WE belong to.”

There is no such thing as “lone ranger” Christianity ...

... God never intended for us to live this life of faith alone so here the author of Hebrews transitions from the imagery of athletics to the imagery of citizenship.

- We belong to **EACH OTHER** (v. 14-17)

¹⁴ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶ that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (Hebrews 12:14-17)

When it comes to citizenship in the family of God the author of Hebrews instructs us about 4 important things we need to remember.

- We should be **at peace** with each other.

Peace does not happen by accident... it requires mutual submission.

Too many churches are filled with clique's, divisions, powerbrokers, pity parties, and grudge matches...

We used to call this room a sanctuary but when we turned the church into a **circus side show** ...

... when exchanged the worship of God for the entertainment of people, we started calling it an auditorium.

"Apart from our union with Christ, every effort to imitate Christ, no matter how noble and inspired inevitably leads to legalism if we do not understand the doctrine of union with Christ and unity with one another. You see, God doesn't ask us to attain to what we're not He only calls us to accomplish what already is." -John Murray

- We are warned against the root of bitterness
- We are warned about immorality.
- Using Esau as an example:
 - we are encouraged to value our family and never betray our birthright.
 - We should always be repentant

When we, like Esau, entertain hateful or envious thoughts about our brothers and sisters it not only divides people, it specifically isolates the one who has those thoughts.

... that is exactly what happened to Esau.

Unlike Esau we need to remember that this glorious spiritual family is one of God's greatest gifts to help us live in victory for Him ...

... and we need to do anything and everything we can to protect its peace and unity.

- We belong **TO GOD** (v. 18-29)

¹⁸ For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, ¹⁹ and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." ²¹ And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling." ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the

righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. ²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.²⁶ And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." ²⁷ This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.²⁸ Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:18-29)

This race we are in is to be run with community and for God.

We are not just a citizen with each other ... we are the citizens of Heaven under the authority of King Jesus.

Here the author of Hebrews wants us to look back, remember the worship at Mt. Sinai (the law of Moses) and see how that leads to the worship of Jesus Christ ... or Mt. Zion.

This is considered to be the climactic point that the author has been building toward over the last 11 chapters.

... they were warned that not even the beasts were allowed to touch Mt. Sinai or they would be stoned!

... They saw Mt. Sinai as a place of judgment.

... all they could do is tremble when God spoke from Mt. Sinai.

Mt. Sinai represented the law and bondage!

But there is another Mt ... Mt. Zion!

God's people are no longer bound by the place where the Law was given, but with the place where God's law has been fulfilled.

Because of what Jesus has done we belong to God and WE MUST NEVER RETURN TO THE LAW OF JUDGMENT AND FEAR!

Finally, I want to end by looking at that phrase in **verse 28**:

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude...

We aren't just citizens and subjects ... we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken!

- The world may think they can shake it with their politics and persecution.
- Hollywood may think it can cause it to tremble with its visualized evil and debauchery.
- The social media influencers may flaunt their wealth and declare they matter more than God...

But I will remind you that Revelation 21:25 says that the gates of heaven will never be closed!

... as he says, "That which cannot be shaken will remain!"

This kingdom is eternally solid, stable, and secure!

God's kingdom will never tremble, falter, stumble, decline... or diminish even in the most infinitesimal way!

God's kingdom is forever!

... and if anybody is thinking anything different, I will also remind you ...

... our God is a consuming fire, and He will never back down!