

Hebrews 12:1-3

The passage begins...Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses... All these people are to inspire us. The writer is setting up a stadium idea, you are down on the track about to race and all these people are in the stands cheering you on!!

Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham **sing What a Man, Abraham**

Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Hebrews through the Red Sea, Joshua at Jericho, Rahab (Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets)

Others from the Bible....

Others through History...

Others we know who have been an inspiration to us...

Pray

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

All these people are to inspire us. Have you been to watch any athletics, races like this? I went to Super Saturday at London 2012- I saw Usain Bolt run the 100m and Jessica Ennis run 400m I think!? And we were the crowd cheering them on

- well our crowd is all these people. And they are an even better crowd because they are all former competitors (or current, further on in the race). They know what it is like to run. They are witnesses to the fact that the life faith is worth it- however hard, whatever trials may come, however persecuted, even through physical attack, it is worth it! We CAN and we MUST trust God in everything.

Hopefully as we have looked at these examples these past weeks you have been encouraged and inspired to keep on in your walk of faith. But now it gets a bit more practical. We can be inspired by others, but we still have to run our race ourselves...

And as his great cloud of witnesses cheers us on we must do three things. Three Rs (well 2.5!)

Reject, Run, Really Focus!!

Reject

v1b Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

We are to reject, to throw off everything that might stop us running our best. It is a clear illustration isn't it!?

You can picture the runners at the start of a race...

Dressed in Lycra, but only enough to cover the essentials bits! Streamline shoes, hair tied back.

Next to them is a runner who has a large backpack on, filled with rocks, big heavy jeans, boots that are slightly too big for them, and a rope tied round their waste and other end tied to the starting blocks!!

Who is going to win? Even if the second runner was just as fit and supple as the first, he can never win carrying all that stuff. He must throw it off, he must reject the bag of rocks. He must reject the big boots and reject the rope that is tying him to the start!

In fact, a serious runner goes even further than that! He doesn't just reject the obvious stuff. My friend Adam, who competed in the Olympics at Skeleton, would spend hours in wind tunnel, designing the outfit and the equipment. Choose one material rather than the other because at a minute level, one helmet causes more drag than the other- they throw off even tiny details that will hold them back!

So what do we need to reject? What holds us back in our race of faith? Well, anything that will cause doubt. That might be untruth that we have learned in the past- we must reject it, ignore it, have nothing to do with it. It might be a person- someone who is simply unhelpful when it comes to our walk with God, a bad influence maybe? It might be a job? If your job is stopping you praise God, stopping you keep the commitments that you know are necessary for your Christian walk of faith, then reject it! It might be a TV programme that encourages gossip or lust- STOP watching it! Reject It!

And, of course, the writer goes on to name the biggest of these- SIN! If you are a follower of Jesus then you know how Sin holds you back. There will be many, some you don't even notice, but before we even get to them, you are thinking right now of a recurring sin, we all have them, that you know is hindering your walk of faith. That stops you doing what you should or leads you to do what you shouldn't. You have tried to tolerate it, or accept it or resign yourself to it, but here God says that He wants you to reject it! To throw it off.

Today is the day to deal with it. Repent- say sorry to God for it, and say sorry to the others that it has affected- and trust in His forgiveness for it. Then do whatever you can to avoid it in future.

It might help to talk to someone about it? Your buddy maybe? Your spouse? Today is the day to sort it out, to reject it.

Pray.

Run

V1c And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...

Run!- How are we to run!?! With perseverance, or endurance that could be translated.

Run! Faith is active! Can you remember how I summarised it a few weeks ago? Faith is an active trust in God. Whether you are at a time in your life that you are taking big strides and leaps or whether you are struggling to put one foot in front of the other, a faithful life is active, it is doing something in response to God and His promises, something you wouldn't otherwise do!

Secondly, tells us is that our life of faith will be tough! You don't need endurance or perseverance for something easy, do you? You need perseverance when something is long, when you need a reason to keep going, or when it is difficult; when you have lots of reasons to stop. What are some of the difficulties the writer has already referred to in previous chapters, that the original readers were facing?

Persecution, prison, attacks, doubts. And they are all things we saw happening to examples of faithful people, those standing with us as witnesses that it is worth it! We should expect no less suffering and difficulties and we should endure the hardships and persevere in the race.

The same word translated persevere, hypomones, is also in v2 where we are told that Jesus 'endured' the cross. That is bar. We are to persevere, to endure, to keep going even when faced the torture and shame of being killed on cross for something that we didn't do! That is a sobering, thought isn't it?

Next time you are struggling and feel like giving up on following Jesus think of this. Is my situation as bad as Jesus on the cross? No, then I CAN keep going. It is worth it!

And we can keep going with confidence because the race has been marked out before us. God had a plan for you.

For a start, in Ephesians 2:10 tell we are told...

we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Now, this isn't here to tell us to try and find out the plan, to look and work out what God has planned for us, it is here to encourage us that whatever our situation it is God's plan. He doesn't make mistakes. Therefore we can endure the suffering, in the confidence that we are exactly where God wants us, fulfilling His purposes, and there are not higher purposes to fulfil. We can endure the personal sacrifice that it takes to be part of church family, putting others needs before our own desires.

We Reject and we Run, and we Really focus!

Really Focus!

v2 ..fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Forgive me for another Skeleton illustration, but that is really my only experience of races like this!

Kasahiro Koshi, was a Japanese slider, and I think the oldest competitor in Skeleton. And before the race he gets into position and then points down the track. He tells himself, that is the direction I am going- he fixes his eyes on the end of the race then shoots out, following that direction!

So it might be helpful for us to do that each day, as we start the race each day. Get out of bed and point to Jesus! If the first thing you do each day is check your phone then who knows what direction you'll set off in!!? If the first thing you do when you get up is read God's Word then you will be pointed to Jesus!!

We fix our eyes on Him because only He is **the Pioneer!**

We may be surrounded by witnesses who have run the race before us, but they were all following the one who blazed the trail, the One who designed the race in the first place, the one who initiated our faith in the first place- Jesus!

It has always been Him leading the people of God onward but even more so for us as we have his example described for us. As well as saving us from Hell, His life and death is a primary example for us to follow. It is the perfect life of faith and the best example of persecution and suffering! And he is the only one who can lead us into heaven, where we really want to go!

But we also fix our eyes on Him because he is **the Perfecter** of our faith! One commentator put it like this...

"Our moral integrity is essential, but that cannot bring our faith to completion. Our devoted service is valuable, but that cannot perfect our faith. Our spiritual experiences can be inspiring and illuminating, but Jesus is faith's only consummator."

It is only Jesus that can bring the perfection that is necessary for us to be with God for eternity, we fix our eyes on Him like a scared child running, open armed to their parents because only there will they be safe! Only in Christ is our beginnings of faith made perfect and fit for heaven!

We fix our eyes on Jesus because Only He truly finds joy in us!

Look at the next part of the verse... **For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross!** He was willing to go through all His suffering for the joy set before him- for the people that His death would save- for you!

There may be times when we fix our eyes on other people, our spouse our children, our boss because we long for their approval, acceptance, affection and love, and we get it from them- but what about when we don't!!? If our eyes are focussed on them what happened when we displease them? What reason do we have to continue then? Jesus is the only One who loves us, knowing just how bad we are, know just how much we have and will rebel, yet loves us anyway- so fix your eyes on Him!!

We fix our eyes on Jesus because He is our **Great High Priest!**

That verse tells us that He did it because He loves us, but what He did was provide the necessary blood sacrifice to pay our debt, to wash away our shame and to bring us to God. He is the Only One who can bring forgiveness of Sin and acceptance by God.

If it is Sin holding us back then looking to Jesus reminds that Sin is defeated, it has no power over us, we can reject it! When the devil reminds us of who terrible we are we look to Jesus to remember that it is all paid for- we are children of God!

We fix our eyes on Jesus because He is the **ruling King!**

Many of these first readers were about to face the Lordship of Caesar and it was going to hurt! We may have to face the treatment of our ruling authorities who oppose God and His Word, but they and us are comforted to remember that those are merely appointed by God and the ultimate authority in this world is King Jesus, our head, our brother, who loves us and will protect us! Like soldiers boosted by the sight of the King's Standard flying at the head of the army, we are encourage to endure any hardship by the sweet face of our Lord as we fix our eyes on Him!

And finally, we must fix our eyes on Jesus right until the end.

The phrases 'growing weary' and 'losing heart' may be a but misleading. It is though that these phrases are actually taken from some famous writing about the ancient Olympic games and they are what the exhausted athlete does at the end of the race, after crossing the finish line they collapse in a heap of exhaustion (grow weary) and stop (lose heart); give up- because the race is finished. We mustn't collapse and give up yet- we are still in the race, so we fix our eyes on Jesus remembering what it cost Him and we keep going- looking forward to a day when we will be able to stop and collapse- but till then, we persevere!

So Reject, Run and Really Focus on our Pioneer, our Perfector, our Joy Giver, Our Great High Priest, Our King. And we keep running right until the end!

Fix Your Eyes Upon Jesus